

Account for the continued existence of gender inequalities at work

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Despite the laws and movements, women still do not enjoy equality in the workplace, in position or wages. In this essay I will discuss the origins of gender inequality in an effort to find out where this was first instigated. Initially I will talk about the historical motives of gender inequality and the work of the earlier women's movements and campaigns for equal rights in the early 1900's. I will then discuss various feminist theories of gender inequality, including recent government statistics.

Finally I will conclude with my own viewpoints on gender inequality in the workplace in an attempt to discover why it continues to exist today. Ann Oakley 1981 (cited in Haralambos and Holborn) gave a historical analysis of the changing role in society for women from before the industrial revolution in the 19th century to the 1970's housewife. Oakley says that men and women and also the children of the working class were employed in the factories. 1819 saw the beginning of the factory act that gradually restricted child labour.

From 1841 to 1914 (the beginning of World War 1) women were seen as a threat to men and their employment. In 1852 women's employment was greatly reduced by The Mines Act which banned women from working in the mines, tradition said women should be in the home as a housewife and mother. In 1851 only 1 in 4 women were in paid employment by 1911 it was 1 in 10. With the combination of these various acts passed and the growing restrictions on women's employment, more and more women began to stay at home but not by their own choice.

Harolambos and Holborn 2000 p. 144) World War I saw many women return to the workforce while men were away fighting in the war; the economy needed women in the workforce even though they were paid less than they were worth. In February of 1918 the representation of people's act gave 2 Women the right to vote for the first time. Under this act only women over 30 were allowed to vote if they were householders, wives of householders, paying annual rent over i?? 5, or graduates of British universities or women who were qualified although not graduates.

About eight and a half million women were able to vote in the 1918 election. Women also became eligible to stand as MPs. Several suffragette campaigners stood for Parliament in the 1918 election. None were successful. Between 1914 and 1950 many women returned to work, but their primary role was still seen as that of the housewife/ mother, the industrial revolution had initiated many significant changes for women. Men were not happy about this as seen in the words of Jack Tanner: " We, as an organisation are opposed to the introduction of women as a general principal. "(Cited in Walby 1987).

Braverman (1974) disagreed with Tanner saying there was a strong case for women being encouraged into the labour force, and that necessity for cheap unskilled labour was a requirement created by employers. Jack Tanner (at the time the leader of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in 1940) was doing his utmost to prevent women entering the male dominated workplace. The reason why men like Tanner should be so opposed to women to work in his male dominated union was not just because of their fear that women

would work for fewer wages than men it was more a system of patriarchal objections which women's employment threatened to disrupt. Walby 1987 p2-3) 1970 saw the Equal Pay Act, which meant that women were to receive equal pay to men if they were employed to do similar work of the same value.

In 1975 the SexDiscriminationAct was brought in to stop discrimination on the grounds of sex in employment, education and equal chances of promotion. Women in work i. e. paid employment have recently increased, between 1971 and 1997 (E. O. C. briefings, Work and Parenting) the percentage of women in work has increased so that women have now caught up with men in the labour market.

The main reason for this is that more and more married women are going outside the home to work, although lone mother's statistics have dropped. (Harolambos and Holborn) 3 Sylvia Walby in Gender Transformations (1997) agrees with these findings, saying that since the 1980's integration of women in the male dominated workplace has increased dramatically, the number of women occupying higher ranking positions mainly in the professional and managerial careers has risen by 155% as opposed to a 33% rise by men.

An increase in women's educational qualifications is seen as one of the main reasons for this remarkable boost to women's participation in higher ranking jobs. (Cited in Robinson and Richardson 1997) Norris (1987) says unquestionably women have always worked, but it is in caring for children

and the elderly and the preparation and serving of food and looking after a household, known as unpaid labour, this has constantly been invisible in official statistics.

One of the most significant changes for women in the labour force since the 1960's has been the percentage of women returning to the workforce and the decline of men's employment. Recently for every 6 men in paid employment there were 4 women, it has been predicted that these trends will continue to increase. However there are visible differences between some countries, in Scandinavia and North America, for example, women make up half the official labour force compared with less than a third in Spain, Ireland and America.

In countries such as Canada Portugal and Norway the number of women in paid employment doubled. However in countries such as France, Britain and Germany, Women have been known to leave the workforce to start a family only to return in later years, this is known as the 'M' curve. (Politics & Sexual Equality 1987) Women in work i. e. paid employment has recently increased, between 1971 and 1997 the percentage of women in work has increased so that women have now caught up with men in the labour market.

EOC briefings, work and parenting 1997) The main reason for this is that more and more married women are going outside the home to work, although lone mother's statistics have dropped (Hood 1997) 4. Barron and Norris (Haralambos and Holborn 2000) argued that there are 2 not 1 labour

market as outlined below: Primary labour market is made up from good salaries, job security, good working conditions and good promotion prospects; secondary labour market is made up from lower paid jobs, less job security, lower working conditions and less opportunities of job promotion.

These work side by side but it is near impossible for someone from the secondary labour market to be promoted to the primary labour market.

Primary sector workers include professionals and managerial, highly skilled manual workers, secondary include unskilled and semi skilled workers manual and non manual workers. Dual labour market results from employers using these methods to keep the type of labour they require so incentives are offered to keep highly skilled in the workplace, secondary sector are seen as dispensable, easily replaced, no incentives for high wages, job security, or promotions is offered to them.

The dual labour market can apply to both men and women but mainly women, who are seen as easy to replace and having no interest in learning new skills and less concerned with high wages. Men are still seen as the major bread winner and women's seen as having low status in society and not normally belonging to unions is one of the reasons why they are not as likely to aim for primary sector employment. Normally once a woman begins secondary employment there is little chance she will progress to the primary sector (Haralambos and Holborn 2000)

Gender divisions and inequality has been linked to feminist campaigners who have tried to put an end to sexual discrimination and inequality in the

workplace. The dominance of males throughout society is known as Patriarchy. Patriarchy explains gender and radical feminist explain male power. Radical feminists like Susan Walby in 1997 explains that 'Patriarchy is seen as the primary form of social inequality' the domestic area is not the only one that women participate in. She shows how the idea of patriarchy is useful in explaining the relationship between women's restriction's in 5 he private and public area by showing that they work equally to achieve this dependence as well as maintaining patriarchy. Walby explains that it is men who are to blame for women's oppression; women are treated unequal because of their unwaged position in society and also because of household commitments. (Robinson and Richardson 1997)

Recently in America there have been various discussions about the Glass Ceiling Syndrome and that there is a certain plateau that women can progress to in the workplace, then reach no further. Below are the three methods by which these are implemented; . Networking by word of mouth - most large companies fill vacancies through word of mouth connections, employees are sometimes identified and interviewed (at lunches, dinners or clubs) and then made an offer of employment outside normal working hours 2. Networking by Employee Referrals - an employee refers another employee from a group of (mostly) men mainly from within their own social group; this again does little for the promotional prospects of women. 3. Executive Search Firms - some companies use executive search firms to fill a large number of high ranking jobs.

Some companies have not made some of these firms aware of the equal opportunity obligations under the law. (www. theglassceiling.) One of the projects that the government has recently introduced is the Work track Programme; this was said to benefit long term unemployed and to help them gain new skills and also to help them back into the workforce. It was said to be particularly beneficial to single parents (mainly women) with children as the family credit top up could be claimed. The downside of this was that it only lasted for 6 months. It created a false feeling of wealth and it was short term, the after effects are longer lasting.

Personally I participated in this programme and although I thoroughly enjoyed my work experience it was very difficult to go back to income support. Many other non Work track jobs I applied for were not as flexible, wages were a lot lower and childcare was not as easily accessible, and there was also no follow on programme 7 either which would have been very helpful. On completing this Programme participants are informed that they will be ineligible to partake in any other Worktrack courses for the next three years.

Personally I believe this is very unfair, on one hand the government is giving long term unemployed the opportunity to get a taste of what it is like to get back into the labour market, many of the women in this project had not worked for a long time either because they had stayed at home to raise a family or because of lack of skills or educational qualifications and just when they believe they are getting out of the poverty trap the government takes it away from them. Basically it looks to me like another way for the

government rigging the unemployment benefit statistics to look as though there are more women in employment than there actually is.

Unfortunately I can only account here for some of the reasons I believe exist for the continued gender inequality in the workplace today, in my remit of 2000 words it would be impossible to cover everything. It is, I feel significant and ironic that it had to be a woman, Ann Oakley, who undertook the first ever study on women and housework, she was incidentally told by her boss (probably a man) 'to go away and come back with a proper topic'.

(Harolambos and Holborn 2000))

In my research for this assignment I have to confess to feeling at times more than a little angry at the blatant and visible discrimination of women in the workplace down through the years. Gender equality in the workplace is still a myth that I personally believe will not be solved in the immediate future, although it has certainly improved in past few decades. I acknowledge that men have been somewhat discriminated against also but nowhere near the same level that women have been and not for such a long period of time. In an ideal world men and women would share equal rights, equal pay and equal status in all societies.