

Inequality and its effects in the workplace

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



Inequality and its Effects in the Workplace Ashford University Contemporary Social Problems and the Workplace - SOC 402 July 19, 2010 ? Inequality and its Effects in the Workplace Gender, ethnicity, and race inequalities and the issues surrounding them in the workplace have been on the forefront of society's mind for decades. The problem of inequality in the workplace has become one of the most important and vital issues in our society today.

In order to understand fully the reasons for these inequalities, one must try to understand the factors that cause gender, ethnicity, and racial issues within the workplace, yet in this case, we will tend to focus mostly towards gender inequality in the workplace. One typically thinks locally in these situations, and Americans have fought hard for equality, yet over half of illiterate people throughout the world are females. Gender inequality is an issue that has been shaped by men from generations to generations.

Each man carrying down his own ideologies mixed in with the previous generation's to create this mold that women are expected to conform and fit into. In America, women have fought long and hard to have many of the same rights as men. Education, the right to vote, and career status are just a few examples of some of the many important things these women fought for. In other countries, women are not as fortunate to have such a voice to be heard, and thus their fight ends before it begins. On April 11, 1996, President Bill Clinton proclaimed " National Pay Inequality Awareness Day".

The goal of the government was to change and eliminate discrimination in the workplace in 1972 when the Equal Employment Opportunity Act was established. The heart of both of these acts was and is to protect the individual's rights as well as promote employment opportunities for everyone

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within the workplace. Obviously the government is aware and trying to prevent and protect the rights of these individuals through the passing of these acts; so the question remains what are the reasons why women, ethnic groups, and minority races still being treated unfairly at work?

The gendered income inequality can also be attributed in part to occupational segregation, where groups of people are distributed across occupations according to ascribed characteristics; in this case, gender. Occupational sex segregation can be understood to be made up of two directions. The first direction would be made up of occupational sex segregation and occurs as men and women are thought to possess different physical, emotional, and mental capacities. These different characteristics make the genders vary in the types of jobs they are suited for.

This can be specifically viewed with the gendered division between manual and non-manual labor. The second direction is made up when occupational sex segregation occurs as occupations are stratified according to the power, authority, income, and prestige associated with the occupation and women are excluded from holding such jobs. An example of this type of gender inequality includes women that obtain a role in the workplace that is assumed for a man. Women have celebrated obtaining such roles, but once occupied, have had to fight to keep them.

Caitlin Crawshaw interviewed Gail Powley for her article depicting workplace diversity and quickly learned Gail's success in such a role. Ms. Powley revealed that her secret was " It's all about attitude, so when they saw my attitude wasn't to make them change at all, but to find ways to work with them, they actually welcomed me" (2010, para. 2). Historically, inequality
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has favored white males relative to similarly qualified females, ethnic, and minorities especially in the workplace.

Wage discrimination is the discrepancy of wages between who groups due to a bias towards or against a specific trait with all or other characteristics of both groups being equivalent. In the case of gender inequality, wage discrimination exists between the male and female gender. Gender inequality wage discrimination can still be seen clearly today in specific organizations and careers, i. e. foodindustry. In the workplace, a female chef must work twice as hard as her male counterpart when competing for the same Executive Chef position.

If you were to ask any woman in that position, she would comply. She knows her challenge before it begins, so she must know in her heart how badly she wants the prize and be extremely confident in herself to achieve this position. If you were to ask her male counterpart, he would deny the accusation. He does not see her challenge however, that does not mean that it does not exist. The challenge in this same workplace would at least double if the female chef were African American, or Native American.

With or without the existence of this challenge, women have been gaining a steady foothold in the workplace. In fact, in America it has become a natural cultural trend for there to be dual incomes within the family and many families could not live the lifestyle that they do without the female's contributing income to the family. This is the new norm in our local society. The new roadblock that we face now is when it comes to a single-income family in which the breadwinner is the female. So now the question becomes, why?

Why is this idea so difficult for us to accept? Stay at home dads, aka; Mr. Mom's, are becoming more and more a trend of today. Some of the factors that go into a decision like this are things like benefits, childcare, and which earner has the bigger income. Kathleen Gerson (2007) offers her view on this social attitude by stating that, " We are all quite comfortable with the dual-earner household. It's become a cultural template, but for some reason we hit a roadblock when it comes to single-income households where the single earner is a woman" (para.). According to Gerson's research as well, the number of households where the wife is the primary earner of the home jumped from about 4. 1% in 1970 to 7% in 2000 (2007, para. 8). This statistic is hard to accept in our economy today because it is almost a necessity for the presence of a dual income to survive and adequately provide for the family. One study has shown that a marriage that has both husband and a wife providing for the family is more satisfying than a marriage with only one sole income.

Even though women struggle with keeping up with the men in the workplace, they also struggle with additional obstacles at home as well. What they experience here is a type of career discrimination because they, more than men will experience conflict between their work and home responsibilities. This conflict is intensified if the woman holds the primary responsibility for childcare because they naturally take on the role of the nurturer of the family. Other sacrifices that women will make in their career that men will not are things like maternity leave and extra sick days in order to take care of sick children.

Because of these factors, some women feel the intense pressure to choose between that of having a career or having a family. A study that Lauer and Lauer reported states that out of 51 women, “ faculty members reported that a higher proportion of younger faculty women chose to remain childless or to have fewer children than older faulty women, primarily because of the requirements of getting tenure and promotion” (2006, p. 200). The glass window effect is also considered a possible contributor to the gender income inequality.

This ideology suggests that significant disadvantages exist towards the top of the career ladder which becomes worse as a person’s career goes on. The term glass window indicates that there are invisible barriers that exist that prevent women from advancements in their careers and promotions. These barriers exist in spite of the achievements or qualifications of the women trying to achieve these positions. Even further, these barriers continue to exist when other job-relevant characteristics are achieved like experience, education, and abilities.

There are few women holding these higher-powered, high income positions due to this glass window effect. This effect also indicates the existence of limited chances of women for income raises, promotion, or advancement to more prestigious positions or jobs and increase over the course of a woman’s career. The gender income earnings ratio indicates the existence of an increase in women’s earnings comparative to men. Men’s wages reached a plateau in the late 1970’s which allowed for women’s incomes to gradually close in the ratio between the two.

Despite the smaller ratio between men and women's incomes, inequality continues to exist. Even more, this income gap varies widely within different races as well. Whites comparatively have the greatest income gap between the genders. Within the Caucasian race, women earn 78% of the wages that Caucasian men do. Comparatively, African American women earn 90% of the wages African American men do and Hispanic women earn 88% of the wages that Hispanic men do. There are some exceptions in which women earn more than men, although they are rare.

Other inequalities that women face, especially those women in the workplace with ethnic backgrounds is that of prejudged, preconceived ideologies held by others in leadership/management. Women of ethnic backgrounds in the workplace are primarily found in factory and service work. Primarily today, Americans are very conscious of illegal aliens and border issues and therefore tend to prejudge and develop social attitudes towards these ethnic groups. This is referred to as racial profiling. This makes career advancement in the workplace for these women especially hard to achieve.

Most ethnic women choose not to fight the uphill battle that this kind of discrimination presents and therefore they settle for the factory and service jobs previously mentioned. Arizona legislature recognized the rising potential for racial profiling and began to revise laws stating that " police may not consider race, color or national origin...except to the extent permitted by the United States or Arizona Constitution" (2010, para. 9). Racial profiling can be individually overcome, but honestly, some women do not see enough value in the rewards to pursue it.

Lori Latrice Martin addresses this same issue in her article concentrating mostly on African Americans when she stated that “ careful examinations of racial differences in the types of levels of asset ownership have painted a bleak picture of racial economic inequality in America” (2010, para. 2). Despite the awareness of gender inequality, there are still arguments about gender difference and assumptions that women and men are from different planets; women and men are still treated so differently in society.

The workplace still remains an unequal playground that is polluted by persistent sex segregation, income inequality, sex discrimination, and sexual harassment. Women and men work because they want to, and because they have to. Employers should not judge women as being any less dependable than men because that is simply not true. The truth is that family structure has changed drastically over the years. Today the family responsibilities are now being shared by both the mothers and the fathers.

In order to compensate for these changes, some companies have introduced flex time, job sharing, parental leave, on-site child care, and telecommuting just to name a few. Employers should accommodate a woman’s needs and therefore expand the gender diversity of their company. They may just find that positive outcomes will emerge from such a move. There was a time where the balance of respect and roles never existed between a husband and wife, but today, they are redefining themselves, their relationships, and their family units to accommodate what works for them and not what society says should work.

More importantly, women have successfully broken from the bondage of dependence on men. They no longer have to submit themselves to one main

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role in the family life solely as the mother. As for men, the need for dominancy has changed dramatically because for some men, they have been found to be the nurturing stay-at-home fathers for their family. As well, men and women have emerged to work together as a unit. ?

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