

Improvement of equality in workplace

Law



Experimental data demonstrate that we do not see other people simply as people; we see them as males or females. Once gender perceptions are invoked they work to disadvantage women by directing and skewing our perception, even in the case of objective characteristics like height. In one example (Biernat, Manis & Nelson, 1991), the experimenters exploited the fact that our schemas include the correct information that men are on average taller than women.

In this experiment, college students saw photographs of other students and estimated their height in feet and inches. The photos always contained a reference item, such as a desk or a doorway, so that height could be accurately estimated. Unbeknownst to the students who were doing the estimating, the experimenters had matched the photographs so that for every photograph of a male student of a given height was a female student of the same height. But the students were affected by their knowledge that men are on average taller than women.

They judged the women as shorter than they really were, and the men as taller. In this experiment, as is typically the case, there were no differences in how male and female observers perceived the others; we all have non-conscious hypotheses about males and females and we all use those hypotheses in perceiving and evaluating others. The important point about this study is that a genuinely objective characteristic, height, is not immune from the effects of gender perceptions.

For years, women's groups have alleged that women in workplaces encounter a glass ceiling, which refers to discriminatory practices that have

prevented women and other protected-class members from advancing to executive-level jobs. The extent of the problem is seen in the results of a survey of 825 large firms, in which women accounted for only 3.9% of the highest-paid executives, and only 1% of the firms had a female CEO (Lavelle, 2001). Similar problems exist for racial/minority individuals as well (Raimy, 2001).

In conjunction with the Civil Rights Act of 1991, a Glass Ceiling Commission conducted a study on how to shatter the glass ceiling encountered by women and other protected-class members. A number of recommendations were included in the commission's report (Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The results of inequality in workplace can be improved only by changing the gender perceptions. Individuals should be seen as individuals and not as male or female. A number of studies have shown that men tend to emerge in leadership positions in U. S.

culture because they are more likely than women to exhibit traits that are believed to "go hand-in-hand" with positions of authority. These traits include (1) more aggressive behaviors and tendencies; (2) initiation of more verbal interactions; (3) focusing of remarks on "output" (as opposed to "process") issues; (4) less willingness to reveal information and expose vulnerability; (5) a greater task (as opposed to social) orientation; and (6) less sensitivity, which presumably enables them to make tough choices quickly (Baird & Bradley, 1979).

Thus, cultural expectations may create a self-fulfilling prophecy, with individuals exhibiting the "female traits" of focusing on process, social

orientation, and so on more likely to be relegated to operational and subordinate roles. Women have to confront sexual harassment to a much greater extent than men do. Women have had to forfeit promising careers because they would not accept the sexual advances of men in positions of power and did not feel they had any recourse but to quit their jobs. Anita Hill's testimony at the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings in October 1991 was a national turning point on this issue.

Since the hearing, many more women have come forward with complaints about sexual harassment in the workplace (Carlson, 1999). Role of Human Resource Management As women, both natural born and foreign citizens become the dominant employees in the work force, Human Resource Management will have to change its practices. This means that organizations will have to make concerted efforts to attract and maintain a diversified work force (Joinson, 1995). This includes HRM offerings fall under the heading of the family-friendly organization (Moskowitz, 1997).

A family friendly organization is one that has flexible work schedules and provides such employee benefits as child care. Organizations that have made the greatest strides in successfully managing diversity tend to share a number of characteristics. These factors are a commitment from top management to valuing diversity, diversity training programs, employee support groups, accommodation of family needs, senior mentoring and apprenticeship programs, communication standards, organized special activities, diversity audits, and a policy of holding management responsible for the effectiveness of diversity efforts.