"Reconstructing the Workplace: Understanding the Effects of Gender Discrimination Within a Business"

An Honors Thesis

by

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Sexism is considered an attitude, action, or institutional structure that limits a person because of his or her gender (Koppelman, 210). It is a peculiar form of discrimination because opposing groups interact and are often in close relationships with one another. Mistreatment of a partner is difficult to identify because they are expected to care for one another. The presence of sexism in a relationship does not indicate the couple is flawed but shows that the oppression of a different gender is often overlooked or unnoticed altogether. This issue has been prevalent in America since the country was founded. Resolving these issues within a large society depends on understanding the root of the problem. History will always remain the same, but as society adapts to changes, new and old generations struggle to find common ground. Researching gender discrimination issues will diminish the problem of sexism in America by helping people understand underlying causes and accept each other based on abilities instead of outward appearance.

This study is based on the fact that men own 75% of all businesses (Johnson, 2018), and an opinion from a colleague that male-owned businesses are more successful than female-owned businesses. There are many theories as to why this may be true, but after analyzing data gathered from the Survey of Business Owners (2012), it is very unlikely that there is a significant difference at all. Therefore, it is important to research why people believe this to be true, and the effect of sexism in American culture.

Although men are sometimes the victims of sexism, the oppressed group is typically women because cultural norms have trained society to act this way (Koppelman, 210). Women have historically been viewed as inferior to men from the beginning of the country (Koppelman, 211). European colonists set the boundaries to own their wives and

daughters to control their lives. Chivalry taught them to respect, protect, and save their women when needed; instead, this norm taught men that women were a burden and could not live without a man by her side (Chen, 2013). Men went to work and left their wives safely at home to cook, clean, and nurture the children, thinking she could not handle anything else. Laws were very restrictive for women and encouraged the idea that men were superior. For example, any property owned, or any money earned by a woman was given to her husband. The law stated, "The husband and wife are one, and the husband is that one," which gave men permission to treat women with disrespect (Koppelman, 211). Other historical events have forced the laws to change and allow women more freedom and opportunities.

During war times, men were shipped outside their communities to fight while women were left behind to support their families. Despite not having any training to prepare them for work or independence in general, women continued with their normal duties, while successfully working their husbands' jobs as well (Koppelman 211). If these jobs had been neglected, the community would struggle, and the economy would fail. Beginning with the American Revolution and enduring every war after that, women have stepped up to support their families (Koppelman, 211). Some women would act as a teacher or babysitter for other children in the community, do laundry, or sew for the women who did not have time for those tasks anymore (Koppelman, 211). In the early 1800s, women increased textile production four times the amount manufactured by men (Koppelman, 212). Still, it took 30 years for some states to allow married women to keep their property and earnings, but many women continued to fight for their suffrage and temperance (Koppelman, 213).

Many states implemented laws granting women new rights over time, but women were still taken advantage of by their superiors (Koppelman, 212). Textile production increased, so factories employed more women, but neglected basic needs that were standard for male employees. These women would go on strike for fair pay, better working conditions, and respect that they deserved (Koppelman, 212). They never gave up and continued to push the limits with independence in their sights. Many women would accept employment opportunities that men were no longer interested in, such as teaching. Schools were unable to pay men the amount they were accustomed to, so women took over as educators. Their compensation was even lower than male teachers received, but women were happy to have a job (Koppelman, 212). Women were breaking down boundaries slowly but surely and dismissed ignorant comments on their progress. Koppelman (212) said that women who "spoke out," went on strike, or fought for their rights were considered unladylike, and "old maids" who had unattractive personal charm (Koppelman, 212).

Half of all college students were women by 1920, and one-third of federal government jobs were held by females (Koppelmen, 212). This was major, yet unexpected progress for gender equality, yet women were still unsatisfied. "Feminist" was a term coined for women who showed they supported equal rights for both genders (Koppelmen, 212). Many people called them lesbians because they showed signs of hatred towards men, but they were only searching for equality. 1920 was the year women gained the right to vote, but this victory was overshined by the Miss America Beauty Pageant, which was introduced a year later (Koppelman, 212). This almost seemed like a way to remind women that they were worth very little to men unless they were attractive

and could procreate (Koppelman 212). Regardless, women were still making progress up until the 1930s during the Great Depression. Men and women were both struggling to survive, and social issues became a thing of the past (Koppelman, 213). Not only was it a step in the wrong direction for the American Dream, but also for gender equality. Employers were more likely to hire men over women, if they could hire anyone at alltrg. One researcher doubted the abilities of these females and blamed menstruation for incompetence during the Great Depression (Koppelman, 213).

Large numbers of male workers were called to fight in World War II, and for the first time, women became the majority of the workforce (Koppelman, 213). Rosie the Riveter was introduced, and many women were praised for their work. This did not prohibit their employers from terminating female's employment when the men returned home, and over 800,000 women were fired within two months (Koppelman, 213). It was clear these women were being discriminated against but were overlooked because men wanted their jobs back. By 1946 three million women had lost well-paying jobs and America still refused to sign a statement of equality for women from the United Nations (Koppelman, 214). This was a huge setback for women, and it became even worse with the Baby Boomer generation because women were expected to stay home with their children, even when they were well enough following the pregnancy. An increase of women enrolling in college in the 1950s encouraged a study at Cornell which showed women were less likely to get married if they went to college (Koppelman, 214). These sexist cultural norms continued to degrade women and discourage them from reaching their full potential in their careers. Gender inequality prevents men and women from eliminating cultural norms at home, work, and everyday life (Koppelman, 210).

Women and men are biologically different which causes their behaviors to differ based on the different hormones in their bodies: estrogen in women, and testosterone in men. When evaluating business decisions of women and men, it is difficult to look past these differences. For example, women tend to be less aggressive than men, which insinuates a lack of confidence in their business ideas, refraining lenders from offering a reasonable loan (Coleman, 2016). When requesting loans from institutions, women often ask for less than they need, assuming the bank will turn them down if they ask for too much (Coleman, 2016). Although this may be true for a lot of women, all people accept challenges differently, and timid behavior is not always the reason for defeat.

According to Bohmer and Shinnenburg (2018) women are frequently the victims of implicit, or unconscious, gender bias. Throughout history, men have been considered superior to women and still are within some aspects (Koppelman, 217). Implicit bias exists in the generally accepted ideas that men stronger and smarter by nature (Koppelman, 8). Institutionalized discrimination is a result of implicit bias and causes workers at banks and other financial institutions to treat customers differently based on gender (Sommer, Liam, & MacDonald, 2015). Lack of beginning capital causes small businesses to start off slow, with an abysmal chance of progressing, but this may not be a factor of institutionalized discrimination. Biological differences affect both genders in business. According to Sommer, Liam, and MacDonald (2015), when requesting a loan for a new company, men meet the qualifications more often than women. However, this is frequently a result of biological differences between men and women. Women are less aggressive and often ask for less than they need because they do not expect to be granted the full amount (Sommer, Liam, & MacDonald, 2015). Men are often more confident

than women which encourages the bank to agree to a male's loan over a female's loan (Sommer, Liam, & MacDonald, 2015).

Differences in behaviors for men and women can also have a negative affect on businesses even after the company has been established. According to Coleman (2002) men often struggle with management due to a lack of compassion that women tend to have naturally. Of course, these trends do not hold true for every woman or every man, but Mandell (2014) found that employees were more satisfied having a female manager as opposed to male. Conversely, gender discrimination could prohibit men from obtaining and maintaining qualified workers. Managing a business is critical to its success, especially if the company plans to expand, and some of these natural instincts for men and women cause problems when managing employees (Mandell, 2014). Small business owners must work hard for their company to succeed, so it can be challenging to compare the success of small business owners based on gender, as opposed to ability, but it is critical to address the problem in order to find a solution.

As explained in Fair's analysis of the movie Athena (2018), men are stereotypically larger and have tendencies to be more aggressive. These attributes encourage the idea that men are more proficient in leadership positions, and women are weak and incapable (Fair, 2018). Not all men are stronger than women, but men are biologically better suited for growing muscle than women (Fair, 2018). Conversely, men physically cannot give birth to a child, only women have the hormones and internal environment for that. These examples prove that there are differences between genders that could affect their own decisions, as well as the decisions of outside parties in a position of power.

Wrolich and Zucco (2017) studied differences in pay between male- and female-dominated fields. The best paid professions in this analysis were entrepreneurs, company managers, engineers, and doctors, and are all male-dominated fields (Wrolich & Zucco, 2017). The highest paid professions dominated by women were nurse, stenographer, and teacher, which were found in the lower half of the list for salary (Wrolich & Zucco, 2017). Many factors besides gender affect the compensation of these professions, such as education, training required, and time put into the profession. For example, doctors are required to obtain a higher degree than kindergarten teachers, and their work is more serious, so they are paid much higher. The reason there is such a large pay gap between fields is because men and women tend to choose the field that is preferred for their respective gender.

The amount of work put into a company determines an entrepreneur's salary, so it is difficult to use it as an example of a gender-based pay gap. A study of small-business owners was conducted by using a T-Test analysis to determine if the gender of the owner was a significant variable in overall sales in 2012. 333 data sets of sales were compared for both men and women from the Survey of Business owners (2012). The "TTEST" input in excel was used and modified using a one-tailed test and a type 3 set of data, and then a two-tailed with a type 3 set of data. One-tailed test means that the data would likely reveal that men were significantly more successful than women in terms of sales, and a two-tailed test could reveal any result (Dash, 2016). A type three test explains that the means compared came from two different groups of data (men and women) and the variances differed (Dash, 2016). Since the result of the one-tailed test was insignificant at the 95% confidence level with a P-value of 0.08, the two-tailed test was also attempted

and still rendered insignificant. Data was used from a Survey of Business Owners in 2012 but has likely changed drastically over the last seven years, which could mislead results.

There may be minor obstacles for women when beginning their company or for men while managing the company, but the owners were able to overcome any set-backs.

Society relates certain competencies to men and women, such as productivity in gainful employment for men and compassion for women (Wrolich & Zucco, 2017). Nurses, midwives, and teachers are all fields that require patience and understanding with people. Many women likely feel called to these fields and are interested in helping others, but not all women are compassionate, and not all men lack compassion. Company managers require good decision-making skills and engineers require mathematical and technical skills, and both relate to society's view of male competency (Wrolich & Zucco, 2017). There are many women who excel in these professions, but society tends to push men and women away from jobs it associates with the opposite gender. Young adults are very impressionable and learn these norms from school, work, family, and the media. They tend to follow careers historically dominated in their respective gender, even if it is not what they wanted to pursue (Wrolich & Zucco, 2017). Therefore, male-dominated professions are not higher paying because gender is a factor, but because the training is often rigorous, the work is often complicated, and there is generally a lack of interest from the opposite gender (Wrolich & Zucco, 2017).

Similar to the pay gap between professions, pay gap between employees within the same profession is also based on history. In 1963 President Kennedy introduced the Equal Pay Act which banned gender-based pay discrimination (Watkins, 2018). This was a step in the right direction and gave employers no other option but to compensate

women with the same basis as men. However, the equal pay for equal work doctrine states that employers can make business decisions based on anything but gender (Watkins, 2018). Many employers used this as a loop hole to avoid increasing their employees' salaries. Watkins (2018) stated that her new employer took advantage of this rule by basing her new salary off of her previous salary. Her employer stayed in compliance with the law but was not properly compensating her for the work she was doing. In her fourth year as a teacher at that school, she learned that a male employee was making \$13,000 more than her as his starting salary (Watkins, 2018). The school district could not be held responsible because they were following protocol, and the new employee had been fortunate enough to gross a higher salary at his previous job.

Before the Equal Pay Act of 1963, men were paid more than women because they often had more education, more work experience, and proper training for their jobs, whereas women seldom had the opportunity to pursue any career (Watkins, 2018). Now, nearly an equal amount of men and women occupy the population of working Americans, women have proper education, and just as much as experience as their male counterparts, but still receive an average of 18.2% of a man's salary (Watkins, 2018). Although there have been a few acts put in place to avoid this problem and attempt to eliminate it all together, the pay gap is still relevant, especially among older employees (Watkins, 2018). The pay gap becomes wider as employees get older, but ageism likely is not a factor in this because most older employees typically have a lot of experience in their field. Instead, older employees previously received lower compensation that could be based on education, experience, or motivation. Therefore, young workers are the future for a lower pay gap within each profession.

The gender leadership gap explains that there are fewer female leaders than there are male leaders (Wrolich & Zucco, 2017). The pay gap may be explained by this as well because people in leadership positions earn more than those who work below them. Bohmer and Schinnenburg (2018) suggest that women are part of an underrepresented group in leadership positions, and although it is unprofessional, it is likely the impact of cultural norms. Although businesses cannot discriminate against someone for a leadership position, or higher pay, they may look for other reasons, such as education. attitude, or experience, to lessen the candidates' chances based on their gender (Bohmer & Shinnenburg, 2018). This theory attempts to explain the pay gap theory, even though there are laws to avoid this behavior, but also explains why women may not hold as many leadership positions as men. When searching for a leadership position, executives look for someone who is confident in their abilities. As mentioned before, women are often less confident than men (Sommer, Liam, & MacDonald, 2015). Still, this does not hold true for everyone as many women know they are capable of a challenging position and will not struggle in this aspect. Bohmer and Shinnenburg (2018) believe that this is implicit, or unconscious bias against women, and executives often look deeper for negative behavior for female candidates than males to eliminate them from the process. Executives may not believe they dislike women but would prefer a man based on his physical attributes (Bohmer & Shinnenburg, 2018). Training executives and leaders at companies to avoid implicit bias will help eliminate this issue (Lattal, 2016). If nothing else, leaders in the company must look further into complaints regarding discrimination in the workplace in order to make all employees feel comfortable (Lattal, 2016).

The natural argument suggests that people use biology as an excuse to discriminate against the opposite sex (Koppelman, 211). Although physical differences between men and women are found easily, American history and current media have taught that men are superior because they are stronger and smarter. Biology should not be an excuse for discrimination against the opposite gender because men and women can find equal success with education and wealth. This all depends on the personality of the individual. If women let degrading comments and mistreatment affect their motivation, they are letting men win. Similarly, if men continue to put down women who may surpass them, they will never find their own success. Although this could happen in a reverse effect, where men feel inferior and women put them down, children's culture has taught for a long time that the former is true.

Children's movies show that women are weak and less important than men. Although Disney and Nickelodeon are the most popular channels for kids to watch, gender stereotypes are portrayed across many more entertainment companies (Hare, 2016). Snow White and the Seven Dwarves (1938) was Disney's first movie, and it taught girls to wait for a man to save them. Snow White is kicked out of the castle by her evil step-mother who envies her beauty. Young girls may interpret this as jealousy among females for their appearance; if a peer is prettier, she should be banished, which encourages bullying in schools based on looks (Smith, 2014). Snow White is also safely hidden in a house where she takes care of seven small men (Cottrell & Hand, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs). The dwarves work very hard all day in a mine while Snow White cooks and cleans for them when they arrive home. This was a typical household in 1938, but the film left no room for young girls' imaginations. Showing Snow White cook and

clean for the men taught girls that even if you are not married to a man, you should still take care of him (Cottrell & Hand, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*). Although the dwarves worked hard all day, the movie should have portrayed Snow White as a dynamic, independent character who helped herself get out of a bad situation. This movie's target market is young girls but may be more inspirational to young boys. As a classic movie, it is still widely viewed among children and praised in the popular theme parks, Disney World and Disney Land.

Similarly, *Cinderella* (1950) was targeted to young girls in the 1950s but was not inspirational to the progress women were working towards. Comparable to Snow White, Cinderella was also punished by her step-mother and step-sisters for being beautiful and highly desired by the prince (Geronimi & Jackson, *Cinderella*). She was essentially punished for her beauty by being forced to complete ridiculous and extensive chores (Geronimi & Jackson, *Cinderella*). *Shrek* (2001) had a strong-female role and showed viewers that people are desired and liked even if they are unattractive like ogres (Adamson & Jenson, *Shrek*). However, most of the adventure involves male roles, and once the female characters are shown, they are portrayed as stupid (Adamson & Jenson, *Shrek*). Instead of creating movies that would support the movement and the idea that women could be on the same level as men, more movies were created with weak female roles and strong men to save them or had an overwhelming amount of male characters as opposed to female (Hare, 2016).

Many animated films for children have avoided damsel in distress roles for females, but still have a negative underlying message that is damaging to young girls' self-esteem. Hare (2016) found that male characters had 73.2% of speaking roles in

movies with a high amount almost 50 times more than the female roles. Furthermore, the entourages in many movies had more male roles than female (Hare, 2016). For example, *Toy Story* (1995), is a movie about friendship and does not have any obvious forms of stereotyping like other classic Disney movies. However, their entourage consists of 10 male characters that go on a treacherous journey (Lasseter, Toy Story). The underlying message is that girls are too weak to go on dangerous excursions and boys are there to save the day. *Toy Story* (1995) has a positive message of teamwork and acceptance of people who come from different places but the movie leaves females out of the positive side of the lesson (Lasseter, Toy Story).

Other movies include women in the main entourage on an adventure, but they fall in love at the end. An innocent movie such as *WALL-E* (2008) ended with a romantic relationship between two robots. It is beneficial for children to see female roles succeeding, human or robot, but romanticizing the relationship diminishes the strong role and message of equality. Almost 90% of protagonists in the movies analyzed were male roles (Hare, 2016). Children easily pick up on these stereotypes and recognize a lack of diversity in their main form of media and carry that with them in their understanding of culture.

Hare (2016) explained that the more TV children watched, girls' self-esteem decreased while boys' self-esteem increased. Furthermore, the more TV children watched, the more they followed gender stereotypes and spread their ideas to their peers (Hare, 2016). PBS is a TV station focused on inspiring and educating children (2017). Although these shows are much better for children, there is still almost 20% difference in different gender characters, with most shows favoring male roles (Hare, 2016). Whether

children see these messages directly or subconsciously, it affects their behaviors as they grow older, and may alter their capabilities (Hare, 2016). Young boys are more confident, which helps their growth, but can also negatively modify their respect for their female peers. TV shows and movies are frequently the basis of bullying between genders because kids admire the characters in the media, even though their behavior is sub-par (Smith, 2014). Despite parents' efforts to avoid gender stereotypes, children still learn these behaviors at school or other extracurricular activities from peers who are exposed to these ideas. As children grow up, their media is diluted with negative stereotypes for genders, races, religions, and others which makes it seem normal to behave in such ways (Hare, 2016). Although TV shows and movies have progressed with strong female roles and an increase of female roles, children still pick up behavior from others. Bad habits from parents, older siblings, teachers, and other leaders are passed on to the most impressionable people. Children are the future and should not be encouraged to follow stereotypes. Harmful jokes in the household or degrading someone's sister with the baseball team teach children this behavior, and the problem must be addressed among adults (Hare, 2016).

Although recognizing other factors than gender in differences in society is encouraging, there are still many steps that must be taken to ensure equality among peers. Implementing unconscious bias training within the workplace will help executives, leaders, and other workers avoid discrimination between genders (Lattal, 2016). Many people do not think they have prejudices, so highlighting behaviors in training will improve unconscious behavior that negatively affects others. Unconscious bias training also educates on how to understand and properly handle complaints regarding

discrimination (Lattal, 2016). Employees that feel uncomfortable in the workplace will not work there long, so making sure they feel welcome and unafraid in the office is essential to any organization.

Androgyny is the idea that men and women are similar and have similar traits that should be freely expressed for both genders, instead of allowing cultural norms to prevent certain traits from being expected from one gender more than the other (Koppelman, 219). Instead of highlighting the behaviors of women and men separately, society should recognize the talents of individuals based on ability. Employers should hold everyone to the same standards to avoid an uneven playing field (Koppelman, 219). When minorities are successful, the media highlights their physical attributes for their accomplishments, but this only further divides society (Kaufmann, 2019). Women and other minorities are impressive based on their individual personalities, not because they are historically weak or uneducated. Androgynous people respond based on true emotions, not what society and cultural norms suggest they should feel (Koppelman, 219).

In conclusion, there are many varying beliefs related to gender bias in American culture, most of which are frequently echoed throughout history. Social norms continue through the perceptions of different generations, although many perish due to a wide acceptance of changes from younger groups. There have been measures to avoid gender bias in the workplace, but implicit bias may still exist among different groups of people. It is difficult to pinpoint the problem because it all relates to the individual. Many people are able to avoid negative influences in their behaviors based on their differences from one another. However, others may not realize how their prejudice affects their actions. Success is not determined by being a man or a woman, but by one's abilities and actions.

Research is important when studying the oppression of any group because there are facts, opinions, and hearsay. For example, while there is a large wage difference between men and women, it is not as common as the media portrays. The Equal Pay Act ensured employers could not discriminate based on an employee's gender, which could happen for both men and women. Factors such as education, experience, and wage history effect a person's salary. Although there is still a possibility of implicit bias among employers, it is less common due to unconscious bias training recently implemented in the workplace. The wage gap is often misconstrued to appear as mistreatment toward women, but women statistically choose lower paying professions such as school teachers, nurses, and administrative assistants. Careers that need compassionate people, who are most commonly women, often pay much less than other jobs. The problem lies where society encourages women to fill these positions by portraying nurses in the media as all women and doctors as all men. Going against the norm and focusing on what the individual is truly passionate about is essential to breaking stereotypes and living harmoniously.

To expand this research, one may be interested in data used on page 9. Although the results in this paper found no significant difference between female- and male- owned companies, more research may reveal a different response, or can explain what actually causes a difference in the success of small businesses. Many factors were not fully available in the Survey of Business Owners (2012), so only a limited number of data sets were used. However, there are other factors that could affect the success of any company. Industry, location, and amount of beginning capital are just a few. Finding data would help develop new research from this paper and could offer a new conclusion based on

results from a more current year. Another study that would improve this research would relate to the wage gap in America. Collecting data and comparing real example would help shine a light into this gray area. Research could use factors such as education, experience, previous pay, location, and industry to compare the different salaries of men and women.

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