
ELIMINATING WORKPLACE GENDER SEGREGATION DOES NOT WORK

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Workplace gender segregation is the tendency for men and women to be employed in different positions, occupations, and sectors due to gender biases based on stereotypical social and biological differences between the two. There are two types of gender segregation: *horizontal segregation* and *vertical segregation*. Horizontal segregation in the workplace refers to the concentration of men and women in different kinds of jobs (Reeves 2010). For instance, horizontal segregation can be recognized in the construction industry where the majority of workers employed are men, whereas the majority of childcare workers employed are typically women. In contrast, vertical segregation refers to when opportunities to progress within a company are limited for a gender (i.e. women). This type of segregation results in the *glass ceiling* that many women encounter in their workplaces (Reeves 2010). For instance, in 2010, Eurofound published that whereas 22 percent of men are in supervisory roles at work, 13 percent of women are employed in such supervisory work (“Fifth European Working Conditions Survey” 2012). Many state that workplace gender segregation is the basis of most of the work-related problems that women face and that, if eliminated, all other work-related problems would also be eliminated (Kervin 2016a). However, eliminating gender segregation will not (and does not) eliminate *all* other work-related problems for women. This is because, even when women have the same positions as men, they still experience: (1) non-compliance issues from their subordinates; (2) gender harassment from their co-workers; (3) and lower compensation compared to their male counterparts. As a result, eliminating gender segregation is merely *a fraction* of the solution to eliminating gender inequality in the workplace.

NON-COMPLIANCE

To begin, often when women make their way into senior managerial positions, they experience non-compliance from their subordinates. Specifically, women in upper-level

positions find it difficult to exercise their authority because their male (and female) subordinates do not accept them as a superior—that is, subordinates resist or fail to comply to orders or instructions (Kervin 2016b). For instance, in one experimental study, two mixed sex groups were instructed to work on a problem. Each group consisted of one experimental confederate that led the group: either male or female. Both leaders used the same words, expressions, and gestures. However, the members in the male experimenter’s group responded more positively by paying attention. In contrast, the members in the female experimenter’s group frowned, looked away, and ignored suggestions. Thus, this study displayed that despite both confederates delivering the same leadership style, the female confederate was the target of negative emotions (Kervin 2016b). Although total non-compliance is rare (i.e. overt resistance), part-compliance with female superiors is quite prevalent (i.e. covert resistance). Part-compliance, for example, consists of subordinates taking long to complete a task or merely completing half of a task, or presenting excuses for not completing a task. Thus, the challenge with partial compliance is that it is hard to detect, and therefore, prove (Kervin 2016b).

There have been two explanations identified for why females in upper-management experience non-compliance. The first explanation discusses female leadership styles. When women get into leadership positions, they exercise consensual decision-making—that is, they prefer all employees coming to an agreement on matters (Kervin 2016b). This style of leadership is referred to as *transformational*. It consists of building relationships; communicating one-on-one with subordinates; and encouraging participation among subordinates by soliciting feedback and using words that suggest inclusiveness, such as “we” (Reeves 2010). As a result, women seldom exert authority over decision-making matters. Along with this, comes a concern for employees. For instance, female superiors may ask their employees, “Are you happy with this?”

The problem with this leadership style is that it invites disagreement, rejections, and non-compliance. In contrast, in authoritative leadership styles, there is no room for discussion (Kervin 2016b). However, even if women begin carrying out more autocratic leadership styles, they tend to suffer from poorer performance evaluations compared to men (Reeves 2010). Moreover, the second explanation discusses male resistance. Men are often reluctant or resistant to taking orders from a female superior, regardless of management style. Often this resistance takes the form of passive-aggressive behaviours—for instance, performing a task more slowly or less than expected. This results from many men holding biases against women in management positions; such men find it difficult to perceive and treat women as managers, and prefer to support *male primacy* (i.e. favouring men in management positions) (Kervin 2016b).

As a result, despite many women having made strides into senior-level or male-dominated positions, they still experience non-compliance from their male and female subordinates who do not accept them as their superior. Because of this, many women in upper-level positions find themselves having to perform a *balancing act*. That is, subordinates expect female managers to be not *too* strident, but not *too* soft; not *too* sexy, but not *too* sexless; or not *too* tough, but not *too* weak (Kervin 2016b). Thus, being a female manager is different than being a male manager, and therefore, eliminating gender segregation in the workplace does not work to combat unfair differences in treatment and expectations between male and female managers.

GENDER HARASSMENT

Second, in many occupations, despite women being employed in powerful senior-level positions and male dominated occupations, they still experience gender harassment from their male co-workers. Unlike *quid-pro-quo* harassment which is exercised by someone with more

power demanding sexual favours from someone with less power in exchange for work benefits, *hostile work environment* harassment is exercised by employees across all levels. Additionally, hostile work environments do not require employees to demand sexual favours from other employees in order for employment benefits to not be at risk. Rather, such harassment consists of creating an uncomfortable and offensive environment through sexual jokes; displays of inappropriate materials (e.g. sexual calendars); and persistent and unwanted interactions, such as requesting dates (Kervin 2016a). Regarding females in upper-management positions, lower-status males (along with equal status males) target higher-status females by taking part in passive-aggressive behaviours (e.g. displaying sexual calendars in their lockers). Such men perceive this distribution of power as wrong—that is, women should not have more power than men. Thus, in such situations, holding power for women does not play a direct role in receiving respect from her subordinates. However, male subordinates exercise indirect power—simply because they are men—by covertly protesting women in senior-level roles (Kervin 2016a).

One explanation of sexual harassment in the workplace is referred to as *sex-role spillover*. This suggests that a woman's gender role takes precedent over her work role. That is, being a woman spills over into her work role. This issue is more prevalent in male-dominated occupations where women are found to be working outside of their expected gender roles. Since women in such occupations are more outnumbered, their gender role is more emphasized rather than their work role, leaving them subordinate to men. For instance, a female firefighter may be treated as a woman first rather than a firefighter (Kervin 2016a). Furthermore, interestingly, in an experimental study, “male and female participants were less likely to perceive incidents of sexual coercion as harassment when a woman was in a non-traditional occupation” (Reeves 2010: 166).

The evaluation of whether sexual harassment has taken place in the workplace is also

problematic. For instance, in the United States, some courts utilize the “reasonable woman” standard. This consists of the court questioning whether a “reasonable woman” would deem the offensive behaviour as sexual harassment. One of the factors the reasonable woman standard recognizes is “that the environment determines what a woman might find reasonable” (Reeves 2010: 161). Here, other than looking at the type of work that a woman is employed in (e.g. strip club versus office work), another condition that courts examine is the alleged victim’s responses to the offensive behaviours (i.e. welcoming or unwelcoming responses). The reason this standard for determining the incidence of sexual harassment presents issues is because individuals respond differently to offensive behaviours. Some women may appear unbothered by sexual harassment; however, inside they may be finding it difficult to cope with the offensive behaviour (Reeves 2010).

Therefore, eliminating workplace gender segregation presents the illusion that men and women are being treated equally; however, in reality, it still fails to reduce any offensive treatment—such as sexual comments, gestures, or physical contact—that women may encounter in the workplace.

LOW COMPENSATION

Finally, often there is a difference in pay between men and women even when they are employed in the same position, displaying that the gender wage gap is still widespread despite the reduction of workplace gender segregation. For instance, in the United States, women living in liberal states tend to pursue higher-level or male-dominated occupations since women in such states are generally treated as equals to men. However, higher-level occupations tend to have bigger gender wage gaps (Sheth 2016). On a national scale, women in higher-level occupations are paid 74 cents for every dollar a man makes (Sheth 2016). Moreover, in the United States,

physicians and surgeons have a gender wage gap of 62.2 percent. Whereas men's median weekly earnings are \$2,002, women's median weekly earnings are \$1,246 (Sherman 2015). In Canada, data revealed that women earn 72 cents for every dollar a man makes doing the same work and working the same hours: full-time and full-year (Evans 2016). This reveals that even after women enter higher-level occupations or are equal to men, they still experience wage discrimination.

There are several theories for why women are paid less than men. First, one theory suggests that female professionals negotiate lower salaries than their male counterparts. Another suggests that women tend to avoid salary negotiation because they perceive it as distasteful and want to be "nice." This behaviour may be due to the fact that women are generally taught to be agreeable rather than aggressive by family, friends, and the media (Reeves 2010). One study found that new female college graduates do not negotiate their salary for their first job, and "because salary differences become compounded over time, by not negotiating their first salaries they sacrifice over half-a-million dollars over their lifetime (Reeves 2010: 87)." In addition, a sample of 21 studies on the outcomes of salary negotiation revealed that men negotiated better than women (Reeves 2010). However, it *could* be that men receive better monetary outcomes than women due to *sex discrimination*—a second theory for why women are paid less than men. That is, men do not negotiate better than women, rather when women enter corporations, they encounter barriers and glass ceilings because of their sex. Therefore, financial rewards may be limited if those in power exercise discrimination against women (e.g. perceiving women's contribution to a company as less important) (Reeves 2010). A third theory for women's low wages is that women's wages lower as they grow older and enter into child-bearing years. In

Australia, women receive a five percent wage penalty for one child, and a nine percent wage penalty for two or more children (Fox 2012). In the area of childcare, however:

Policymakers have the easiest and most effective tools at their disposal to close the wage gap, by advancing subsidized daycare programs which statistics indicate are more than worth their cost in terms of returns to the economy (Evans 2016).

A lack of childcare spaces keeps working mothers out of the workforce for longer which contributes to their lower wages over time (Kervin 2016a).

Therefore, although the decline of workplace gender segregation has allowed women to enter into higher-level positions and work alongside men, they still experience wage discrimination, possibly due to societal culture, sex discrimination, or the motherhood penalty, among a few reasons.

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that eliminating workplace gender segregation does not work to eliminate other work-related problems that women may face. Combating gender segregation acts to *define* women as equal to men, but fails to get women to be *treated* as equal to men. A deeper analysis into workplace issues for women suggests that despite women entering into higher-level positions and being employed in male-dominated occupations, they still experience non-compliance from their subordinates; gender harassment from their co-workers, including subordinate men; and pay discrimination. As a result, reducing workplace gender segregation, in a sense, is a formality—that is, it is done more for the *appearance* of a workplace rather than for the *inner workings* of a workplace. Ultimately, this paper also suggests that reducing gender segregation in the workplace may not work to encourage *more* women to enter higher-level positions since other work related issues have not been addressed. This is problematic because

countless studies have revealed that companies headed by female upper-management tend to perform far better than companies headed by men (Dubé 2016). Finally, the purpose of this paper was not to state that companies should not work to eliminate gender segregation. Rather the purpose was to display that eliminating workplace gender segregation is merely *one* step in a sequence of steps to ending workplace gender inequality. Another important step would be to address workplace gender segregation as well as issues of non-compliance, gender harassment, and low compensation for *women of colour*.

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