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Do You See It?: Perceived Gender Discrimination In The Workplace

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Abstract

Perceived gender discrimination refers to one's awareness regarding the discrimination that they are facing. The present study investigated the effect of gender and gender identity on perceived gender discrimination and how the perception is related to overall organizational commitment. In addition, the relationship between job satisfaction, job involvement, work conflict, and perceived gender discrimination was investigated. The findings suggested that overall neither gender nor gender identity had an effect on the perception of gender discrimination. Nevertheless, a negative relationship was found between job satisfaction, power and prestige in the job, and perceived discrimination against women.

Keywords: gender discrimination, perceived gender discrimination, job satisfaction, organizational commitment

Do you see it?: Perceived gender discrimination in the workplace

Introduction

The word “identity” is defined as characteristics, beliefs, or feelings that make someone or something different (Oxford Dictionary). When trying to narrow down this term, you will get categories such as “cultural identity”, “ethnic identity”, “gender identity”, “social identity” and much more.

The social identity theory assumes that certain behaviors within a social circle occur as we subconsciously create social hierarchies, by establishing status differences by comparing the different social groups (Foley, Ngo & Loi 2006). The lateral process of the social identity theory happens in three stages: social categorization, identification, and comparison. Social identity states that one's behavior is shaped by their belonging to social groups (gender, race, occupation) and a strong identification with their group can provide the basis of perceived discrimination.

When depicting gender identity, its definition has changed a lot over time, but the traditional understanding of the term would be a person's awareness of being male or female (Foley, Ngo & Loi 2006). It can also be understood as the practices that dictate men's and women's behavior in a way that is socially acceptable. The notion of femininity or masculinity with regards to gender behavior is associated with the sex assigned at birth (Barker, 2004). However, recently the definition of the terms has shifted more towards defining gender as social identity or construction. Suggesting that our actions and roles as male and female are shaped by nurture not nature. Furthermore, the words gender and sex are often confused together and used wrongly. Gender refers to the social and cultural differences between being a male or female, whereas sex refers to people being divided into male and female based on their biological and physiological characteristics (Foley, Ngo & Loi 2006).

Just like there are different groups that one can identify with, there are also different types of discrimination someone can face, based on their ethnicity, religion, gender, and much more. This

has become a big problem, where people are treated differently, denied job opportunities, or simply seen as less worthy because of their background and the specific group they identify with.

Discrimination, in general, is when one points out distinctive features of a person or object, furthermore, if two members of the same group, have certain characteristics that set them apart, and one points this out, this could be considered discrimination (Raza 2017). On the other hand, the primary meaning of the word “discrimination” also defines it as “making an unjust distinction of the people on the grounds of caste, color, creed, race, and sex and treating theirs differently”, which suggests that the member of one group have some type of advantage against the other (Raza 2017, p.93). The latter is morally wrong and has become a serious issue not only in society but also in the workplace. Thus, gender discrimination occurs, when the differentiating features are pointed out, however, doing so doesn’t have to be morally wrong. The problem ascends when these features are used to belittle an individual; portraying them as inferior to those of the opposing side.

In order to have a better understanding of the relationship between perceived discrimination and gender identity, a model developed by Branscombe (1999) called “The Rejection- Identification (R-I) Model”, which measures the correlations between personal discrimination and group identity and how it affects one's psychological well-being. This model has shown that people who experience discrimination, especially minority group members, exhibit signs of negative psychological well-being. However, a strong identification with their particular groups provides them with a way of coping with it (Foley, Ngo & Loi 2006) and as a consequence increases group identification. This happens because as people we like to belong somewhere and when we see that other members of our group face the same obstacles as we do it makes us feel less alone, and it also encourages us to fight the discrimination. Traditionally women- being the minority group- have faced more gender discrimination compared to men- being the majority group- from sexism to the gender pay gap, the glass ceiling, and generally organizations preferring to hire men in managerial positions.

Discrimination can be perceived by both the members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups, so men and women can both face discrimination, however, research and real-life examples have shown that on average women face much more discrimination in the workplace than their male

co-workers (Sharon, Ngo, Raymond, Xiaomin 2015). Discrimination is a more negative experience for women than it is for men.

There can also be seen a difference in how members of the privileged gender group perceive discrimination versus how members of disadvantaged gender groups perceive discrimination. The privileged groups, in this case, men, will downplay or dismiss the struggles women face in the workplace and in everyday life, because of gender discrimination, they tend to have this kind of perception in order to keep their own privilege (Kobryniewicz & Branscombe, 1997). On the other hand, the disadvantaged group, women, see discrimination as a way or form a more positive connect more with their group identity, and this way they can make sense of the discrimination, and also find support to fight it (Foley, Ngo & Loi 2006).

Generally speaking, the more one identifies with their gender group the more likely they are to perceive gender discrimination towards them (Foley, Ngo & Loi 2006). Another factor that plays a big role in perceived gender discrimination is the social comparison, just like the name suggests, it is the extent to which someone compares males and females in the workplace in aspects like pay opportunities or treatment. (Foley, Ngo & Loi 2006,) This strong identification with your gender group and the social comparison makes one more aware of “inequality and discrimination” and therefore show how gender identity and gender are related to perceived gender discrimination (Sharon, Ngo, Raymond, & Xiaomin 2015).

While people of discriminated groups face hardships in different fields of their life, the present study will explore how people perceive gender discrimination in the workplace. Work discrimination refers to a person or group of people being treated negatively because of their gender, ethnicity, sexual discrimination, or other defining traits in the workplace. Almost all countries have rules and legislation in place to try and prevent workplace discrimination. (Petrean 2018) However, regardless of these efforts for gender equality, gender discrimination remains one of the top issues in the workplace, and specifically, men holding women back either from the occupation of certain positions or making it very difficult for them to advance in their careers. Some issues that hold back the advancement of women could be sexism, gender pay gap, glass ceiling, etc.

Gender pay gap was first introduced as an issue in the workplace in the United States in 1860, under the “Equal Pay for Equal Work” (Daugherty 2022). This practice refers to women getting paid less than their male colleagues for the same job. According to the European Commission, the gender pay gap is “ the difference between the average hourly earnings of working men and working women”, in average women make 14.1% less than men, in other words for every euro that a man earns a woman 86 cents.

Furthermore, another issue caused by gender discrimination in the workplace is occupational segregation or occupational gender segregation. In general occupational segregation happens when members of different gender, race, religion,s, etc. have a tendency to work in different positions, while gender segregation refers only to the tendencies that men and women have in working in different positions. Usually referring to men occupying most of the managerial or higher positions, while for women it is nearly impossible to obtain those positions. This is also known as horizontal segregation, where women do different types of jobs compared, usually with less status and lower pay (“Be what you Want” n.d)

Method

The present study sought to measure the correlation between one's identification with their gender group and perceived gender discrimination and how that relationship affects organizational commitment. This leads to my hypothesis:

H1: Women perceive gender discrimination against women more than men do.

H2: Gender identity is positively related to gender discrimination.

H3: Perceived gender discrimination is negatively related to organizational commitment.

An instrument in the form of a survey was developed to measure different variables. It consisted of 17 items measuring the job related aspects and 14 items measuring the gender-related items. The gender item was converted into a dummy variable; with 1 being male and 2 being female.

Instrument. To measure the job related aspect, which overall included 17 items, they were adopted from the research done by Gutek et al.(1996). The items measured latent variables of power and prestige in the workplace with 5 items, work conflict was measured with a 4- item scale and job involvement had 5 items. To measure job satisfaction an individual item was included which was taken from Juan I. Sanches and Petra Brock (1996). In addition to this, two items were used to measure organizational commitment: *“I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization”* adopted from Sharon F. (2006), and *“I am proud to tell people who I work for”* adopted from Mathews et al., (2002). After conducting reliability tests job satisfaction and organizational commitment were grouped as one variable.

To measure gender identity and perceived gender discrimination, a set of 13 items total was used. Three sets of items were used to measure gender identity, they were adopted from Sharon F. (2006). From the same study, three items were adopted to measure perceived gender bias against women, which were grouped together with the items used to measure perceived gender discrimination. Two further items to measure this variable were taken from Gutek et al., (1996). To measure perceived gender discrimination against men three items were adopted from Sharon F. (2006) and two items adapted from Gutek et al., (1996). All the items in the survey were measured on a seven point Likert- scale, in which one stood for strongly disagree and 7 for strongly agree.

Participants. The survey was distributed to the participants through different social media platforms (Facebook & LinkedIn).In the pool of participants, RIT Croatia Alumni Network was used for a better reach of participants. In order to gain as many participants as possible, those who decided to complete the survey were asked to share it with their colleges, creating a snowball effect.

The only requirement for the participants was that they were actively employed during the time when the survey was distributed. Neither names of the participants nor the work organization were recorded, and participants were informed about the anonymity of the survey through an additional cover letter before filling out the survey.

Overall there were 101 participants. Most participants were employed in small businesses with around 25 years of overall work experience and 3 years of work experience in the current organization, Participants were of both genders male and female. The majority have completed their master's studies (43.6%) and live in Croatia followed by Albania (37.6%). The dominant industries were education (30%) and hospitality (15%).

Table 1. Scale Data

Scale	Source	Scale Data (source)	Adapted Scale Data (author's research)
Job Involvement	Gutek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996	4 items with a four-point Likert scale; $\alpha = .72$	5 items with a seven-point Likert scale; $\alpha = .62$
Work Conflict	Gutek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996	4 items with a four-point Likert scale; $\alpha = .78$	4 items with a seven-point Likert scale; $\alpha = .64$
Power& Prestige in job	Gutek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996	6 items with a four-point frequency Likert scale, $\alpha = .76$	Five items with a seven-point Likert scale, $\alpha = .79$

Organizational Commitment	Foley, Ngo, & Loi, 2006 Sanchez, & Brok, 1996	8-items Affirmative Commitment Scale; $\alpha=.85$ 9 items scale from Cook and Wall, Missing α	Two items with a seven-point Likert scale; $\alpha=.84$
Perceived Discrimination against men	Foley, Ngo, & Loi, 2006 Guttek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996	5- items with a six-point Likert scale $\alpha=.91$ 3- items with a four-point Likert scale $\alpha=.86$	Five items with a seven-point Likert scale $\alpha=.88$
Perceived Discrimination against women	Guttek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996	3- items with a four-point Likert scale $\alpha=.69$	Five items with a seven-point Likert scale $\alpha=.91$

Gender Identity	Foley, Ngo, & Loi, 2006	3 items with a six-point Likert scale; $\alpha = .81$	3 items with a seven-point Likert scale; $\alpha = .64$
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Results

Descriptives

On average, participants didn't report high gender identity association ($M=13.7$, $SD= 4.24$). No effect was recorded for the impact of gender on gender identity. Participants felt overall empowered in their job ($M= 27.07$, $SD= 5.09$). Results showed that participants were mostly involved in their job ($M= 21.59$, $SD= 4.48$). It showed that people were overall satisfied with their current job ($M= 16.08$, $SD= 3.96$).

When it comes to perceived gender discrimination against men participants reported that they do not perceive it ($M= 16.54$, $SD= 7.72$), the same goes for perceived discrimination against women ($M= 15.10$, $SD= 7.27$).

Table 2. Descriptives for gender-related latent variables

Variable ($n=$)	M	SD	Min	Max	Chronbach α
Perceived discrimination against men	16.54	7.72	2.93	3.52	.88
Perceived discrimination against women	15.10	7.27	2.93	3.16	.90
Gender Identity	13.70	4.24	4.26	4.84	.64

Table 3. Descriptives for work-related latent variables

Variable (<i>n</i> =)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Chronbach α
Job Involvement	21.59	4.48	2.56	5.97	.61
Work Conflict	16.27	4.87	3.82	4.27	.64
Prestige and power in job	27.07	5.09	4.56	5.89	.73
Job satisfaction	16.08	3.96	4.79	5.76	.83

Hypothesis 1

It was shown that gender had no effect on perceived gender discrimination. Men and women did not rate those items differently.

Hypothesis 2

There was a positive correlation between gender identity and perceived gender discrimination against men ($r = .208, p < .05$), but there was no correlation between gender identity and perceived discrimination against women.

Hypothesis 3

Power and prestige in the job ($r = -.206, p < .05$), as well as job satisfaction ($r = -.209, p < .05$), had a negative correlation with perceived gender discrimination against women. Lastly, perceived discrimination against men had a positive correlation with perceived discrimination against women ($r = .566, p < .001$).

Discussion

This research aimed to investigate how perceived gender discrimination affected organizational commitment, and whether this was under the effect of gender and gender identity. Gender refers

to one acting in a way that is socially acceptable to the sex they have been assigned at birth, so we viewed gender as something shaped by nature rather than nurture. Gender identity was measured as one's awareness of being female or male, and how strong was connected to their femininity or masculinity. Biologically men and women are different, but when those differences are used to mistreat one group and give favor to the other, that's when it turns into discrimination. For the longest time in history, there has been a strong division between males and females. Where men were viewed as the privileged gender group, while women and femininity were considered weak (Parillo 2008). This distinguishment that individuals faced based on gender are called gender discrimination. This type of discrimination does not show up only in our social life but in the workplace. Some common issues regarding gender that show up in the workplace can be sexism, gender pay gap, occupational segregation, glass ceiling, and sexual harassment (Maggie Wall, 2021).

The results gathered from this research did not support H1. It showed that gender had no real effect on the perception of gender discrimination. Where women and men alike reported they were not aware of the discrimination happening in their workplace. This could be explained by the fact that most participants were from the Balkan region where there is a very traditional notion as to what men's and women's roles in society are. The research done by Foley (2006) in Hong Kong, where the gender separation is similar to the Balkan region, showed the same results regarding people's awareness of gender discrimination. Regarding H2 results showed that gender identity, so one's connection with their femininity or masculinity, is only important when it comes to perceiving discrimination against men. Because men have been the privileged group for so long they might perceive the women's empowerment movements as a threat to their social status, thus creating what is called "reverse discrimination" (Cameron, 2002), where every attempt to gender equality is seen as an attack on them. On the other side, results showed that there was a relationship between men who perceive discrimination against men and perceived discrimination against women, this can be related to the men who understand the importance of gender equality.

There was no direct relation between perceived gender discrimination and organizational commitment, but data collected did prove that women who perceived gender discrimination felt underappreciated with their current organization and were not satisfied with their jobs. This

somewhat supports H3, because feeling underappreciated and dissatisfied could potentially lead to leaving their current position.

Overall, this research showed that the perception of gender discrimination in the workplace is as big of an issue as the actual gender discrimination.

Results

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