



Overcoming Gender Segregation: How Women Can Succeed in Male-Dominated Fields

Dr. Shraddha Wilfred

Sessional Lecturer

University of Toronto

Email: grace.wilfred@utoronto.ca

Canada

Dr. Irameet Kaur

Sessional Lecturer

Conestoga College

Email: irameetkr@gmail.com

Canada

Dr. Rebecca Wason

Adjunct Professor

Algoma University

Email: rwason@algomabrampton.ca

Canada

ABSTRACT

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (dei) initiatives worldwide have opened many new doors for women employees in all spheres of work. More companies now acknowledge the value of women in the workplace and are taking advantage of opportunities that have been created by digitalization and the latest advancements in technology. This has also attracted the attention of researchers who are actively focusing their research on the benefits of having more women workforce and the relationship between performance and profit. The digital era presents unlimited pathways for employees to develop themselves and explore new avenues for advancement. However, women are still facing various challenges overlaid with long-established ones. This paper aims to identify occupations with a higher gender gap and outline strategies through which these gaps can be minimized. The paper attempts to demystify the avenues for women, whether entrepreneurship or employment, and discuss the possibilities of stepping into non-traditional job roles.

Research has confirmed that along with the apparent benefit of doubling the size of their talent pool, having more women in the company can also improve performance. Women in the workplace (and gender diversity in general) and profit go hand-in-hand. For example, fortune 500 companies with more women on boards do better financially, while higher sales and profits are synonymous with gender-diverse teams (do companies with female executives perform better? N.d.). These are just a few examples of the benefits of more women within an organization. This era of artificial intelligence (ai) technologies offers many new job opportunities and avenues for advancement to employees of all genders. However, women face new challenges overlaid with long-established ones. This paper will discuss how and how women can utilize the opportunities and break through the taboo of being incapable of working in specific sectors. We will demystify the avenues for women, whether entrepreneurship or employment, and discuss the probable possibilities of stepping into newer job roles.

KEYWORDS: Workplace, Gender Segregation, Inclusion, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

The progress of the contemporary women's movement over the past fifty years has led to significant advancements in gender equality in the U.S. workforce and economy. Women are now employed in nearly all occupations, including many leadership roles in business and government that men once dominated. However, sex segregation in the workplace remains a significant issue that distorts labor markets, depresses wages, and hinders business innovation and productivity.

Despite the initial successes of women in professional and service jobs that require a college education, there is still a significant gender disparity, particularly at the highest levels of these occupations. Moreover, technical and manual blue-collar jobs have seen little to no integration since the 1970s. Researchers have found that desegregation has slowed considerably in recent decades, irrespective of the education level required for a job.

This slow progress in occupational integration can be attributed to persistent social norms and stereotypes that continue to influence the occupational choices of both men and women. Women are often discouraged from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). At the same time, men face social pressure to avoid jobs traditionally associated with women, such as nursing or teaching. (Frincine D. Blau, et.al, 2012)

Efforts to promote gender diversity in the workforce are essential to addressing occupational segregation and its negative consequences. Encouraging women to pursue careers where they are currently underrepresented, promoting diversity in leadership positions, and combating gender stereotypes are all critical steps in achieving greater gender equality in the workplace.



Challenges faced by women employees leading to Gender Segregation

Jessica Pan's research shows that men are more likely to leave a profession when the proportion of women in that profession reaches a certain point, which she refers to as a "tipping point." This suggests that men are responding to social pressure and stigmatization associated with working in a female-dominated profession, rather than to any inherent differences in skills between men and women. (Jessica Pan, 2015) This finding contradicts the traditional economic theory that levels of occupational segregation are determined solely by individual preferences and skills, and highlights the role of social norms and discrimination in perpetuating gender segregation in the workplace.

Goldin's "pollution theory of discrimination" suggests that gender discrimination in the labor market can be considered a type of pollution, in which gender biases and stereotypes are spread through social interactions and organizational practices. This leads to a situation in which women are undervalued and underrepresented in certain occupations, reinforcing gender segregation in the labor market. The theory suggests that policies and interventions aimed at reducing discrimination and promoting diversity and inclusion can be considered a "clean-up" effort to reduce the negative effects of discrimination and increase opportunities for women in the workforce (Goldin 2002).

Akerlof and Kranton's (2007) theory of social identity suggests that people's identities are shaped by their characteristics and the groups to which they belong. They argue that individuals in male-dominated professions may view their profession as a part of their identity and resist changes that threaten their profession's identity. In this context, the inclusion of women may be perceived as a threat to the identity of the male-dominated profession, and men may resist this inclusion to maintain the status quo.

Similarly, Darity, W. et al. (2015) theory of stratification economics suggests that the dominant group in society uses various mechanisms, such as discrimination and prejudice, to maintain its position of power and privilege. They argue that these mechanisms create and reinforce economic, political, and social inequalities and that this leads to perpetuating the dominance of the privileged group. In the context of gender segregation in the labor market, this theory suggests that men may be motivated to maintain their dominance in certain professions and resist the inclusion of women.

This new form of gender essentialism can also contribute to the devaluation of work traditionally associated with women, such as caregiving and other forms of emotional labor. These jobs are often undervalued and underpaid, perpetuating gender-based income inequality. Additionally, the expectation that women will prioritize family responsibilities can lead to discrimination in hiring and promotion, as employers may assume that women will not be as committed to their careers as men.

To address these issues, researchers suggest that policies that promote work-life balance and support caregiving

responsibilities can help break down gender barriers in the workforce. Additionally, efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and unconscious biases can help promote equal opportunities for men and women in all jobs. Addressing gender discrimination in the workforce requires a concerted effort from individuals, employers, and policymakers alike (Davis, P.J., 2012).

Research has shown that inflexible work schedules and lack of support for caregiving responsibilities are significant barriers to women's retention and advancement in male-dominated fields. The expectation that employees work long hours and prioritize work over family responsibilities is particularly detrimental to women's career advancement, as women are still the primary caregivers in most families.

Studies have also shown that workplace cultures in male-dominated fields often involve behaviors that make women feel unwelcome or excluded. (Natividad, E., & Bond, M., 2022) These behaviors can range from overt sexism and harassment to subtler forms of exclusion, such as excluding women from social events or interrupting them during meetings.

Researchers have suggested several solutions to address these issues and increase women's participation and success in male-dominated fields. These include implementing flexible work arrangements, promoting work-life balance, and creating more inclusive workplace cultures. Additionally, efforts to increase the representation of women in leadership positions and to address implicit biases in hiring and promotion processes can help to create a more level playing field for women in these fields.

Hostile work environments can take many forms, including overt sexual harassment and subtler forms of discrimination and exclusion. Research has shown that women in male-dominated fields are more likely to experience sexual harassment, which can negatively impact their career prospects and job satisfaction. In addition, subtle forms of discrimination, such as the tendency of male colleagues to socialize with and promote each other, can create barriers to women's advancement and reinforce gender segregation in the workplace (Blau, F. D., et al., 2012). These factors can contribute to a hostile work environment for women and make it difficult for them to succeed in male-dominated professions.

Gender Segregation in different occupations

Industries with low female representation have more difficulty attracting and promoting women into leadership roles. In addition, women in leadership positions tend to be concentrated in specific industries, such as education and social services. This concentration may reflect the persistence of gender stereotypes that associate women with nurturing and caregiving roles and may contribute to gender segregation in the labor market. The fact that some industries, such as Energy, Manufacturing, and Infrastructure, have very low levels of female representation in leadership is particularly concerning, as these industries tend to be high-paying and offer opportunities for career advancement. This suggests that efforts to increase gender diversity in leadership positions must be targeted and intentional, and may



require structural changes within organizations and industries to address systemic barriers to women's advancement.

Political representation

This is a positive trend, but it is important to note that progress toward gender parity in political leadership remains slow, with women still significantly underrepresented in these positions. As of 2022, only 25 countries had a female head of state or government. Moreover, the distribution of women in political leadership roles is unequal across countries, with some regions lagging behind others (Dayton, D., 2020). For example, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of women in parliament at 24.5%, while the Middle East and North Africa have the lowest at 16.9%. There is still much work to ensure that women are proportionally represented in political leadership positions globally (I.L.O, 2019).

STEM

It's important to note that the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields and overrepresentation in education and health and welfare degrees can have implications for gender inequality in the workforce, as STEM fields often offer higher paying and more highly valued jobs. The lack of gender diversity in STEM fields can also limit innovation and creativity, as research has shown that diverse teams produce better outcomes. However, the increase in women's online skilling provides an opportunity for women to gain skills and access to fields that they may have been excluded from in the past.

Civil Services

It is concerning to hear that the gender pay gap in the civil service has widened for the first time in six years, especially given the progress made in reducing it over the past 14 years. Unfortunately, the gap is growing, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address gender inequality in the workplace. Organizations must ensure that all employees, regardless of gender, are given equal opportunities for career progression, and that pay is based on merit rather than gender. It will be interesting to see the civil service's measures to address the widening gender pay gap and work toward gender equality (Wool, M., 2021).

Construction

It is true that the construction industry has historically been male-dominated and continues to lag in terms of gender equality. According to the National Women's Law Center, as of 2021, women made up only 10.3% of workers in the construction industry. This is significantly lower than the overall percentage of women in the workforce, around 47% (I.L.O, 2019).

Several factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in construction jobs. One significant barrier is the perception that construction work is physically demanding and, therefore, better suited for men (WEF, 2022). There are also challenges regarding workplace culture and the lack of female role models or mentors in the industry.

Efforts are being made to improve gender equality in the construction industry, including initiatives to encourage girls and women to consider careers in construction and efforts to create a

more inclusive workplace culture. However, progress has been slow, and more needs to be done to ensure that women have equal access to job opportunities and can thrive in the construction industry.

Firefighters

The fire service faces a significant gender gap, with women representing only a tiny percentage of firefighters in the United States. This can be attributed to several factors, including the physical demands of firefighting, the perception that the job is traditionally male-dominated, and the lack of female role models and mentors in the industry.

However, as Smith B (2020) notes, it is crucial to show women that there is a place for them in the fire service and to work towards creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Firefighters play a critical role in serving their communities and having a workforce that reflects the diversity of those communities can help improve the quality of service provided (Deng z, 2021).

Efforts are being made to address the gender gap in the fire service, including initiatives to encourage more women to consider firefighting as a career and to create a more inclusive workplace culture. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve true gender equality in the industry, and continued efforts will be needed to progress in this area.

Steps to minimize the Gender Segregation

1. Educate staff on unconscious gender biases

1. Provide training for employees to raise awareness about and mitigate unconscious gender biases.
2. Develop resources such as handbooks, workshops, or seminars to educate employees about unconscious gender bias and how to avoid it.
3. Encourage open discussions and feedback sessions to increase understanding and reduce the impact of unconscious biases.

2. Appoint diverse interviewers and implement longer shortlists to hire more women in top positions

1. Create a hiring committee that includes a diverse group of interviewers to help ensure that the hiring process is inclusive and free from bias.
2. Develop a long list of candidates to consider for top positions, including a range of qualified women and underrepresented individuals.
3. Use objective criteria to evaluate candidates and ensure the interview process is standardized and transparent.

3. Conduct an audit and make salaries transparent

1. Conduct a comprehensive analysis of salaries to identify any gender-based pay disparities that may exist within the organization.
2. Implement a pay transparency policy, whereby employees are informed about the salaries of their colleagues and how their pay compares.
3. Regularly review and update compensation packages to ensure that they are equitable and fair and that they are in line with industry standards.



4. Give employees the flexibility to work when and where works for them

1. To accommodate employees' personal and professional needs, offer flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or flexible hours.
2. Create a culture that values productivity and output over time spent in the office, to encourage employees to work in a way that suits them best.
3. Provide the necessary resources and tools to support remote employees, such as technology and communication platforms.

5. Provide development opportunities to enable women to transition to higher-skilled roles

1. Offer training and development programs specifically targeted at women to help them acquire the skills needed to transition to higher-skilled roles.
2. Develop clear career paths and progression plans for employees, emphasizing promoting women into leadership roles.
3. Provide mentorship or sponsorship programs to support women's career growth and development.

6. Empower women through coaching sessions

1. Offer coaching sessions or mentorship programs to support women's professional development and help them overcome any barriers to success.
2. Provide access to leadership coaching to help women build the skills and confidence needed to succeed in leadership roles.
3. Offer coaching or training programs focused on helping women negotiate salary and other aspects of their compensation package.

7. Provide resources to improve well-being and mental health

1. Offer employees mental health resources and support, including access to counseling or therapy services.
2. Develop a culture that values work-life balance and prioritizes employee well-being.
3. Provide wellness programs, such as yoga or meditation classes, to support employees in maintaining good mental and physical health.

8. Offer at least 4 months of paid parental leave

1. Develop a comprehensive parental leave policy that provides at least 4 months of paid leave for all parents, regardless of gender.
2. Ensure that the policy is communicated clearly to all employees and that there is a clear process for applying for and taking parental leave.
3. Provide support and resources to employees returning from parental leave, such as flexible work arrangements or childcare assistance.

9. Participate in DEIB initiatives at your organization

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy that includes specific initiatives and goals for gender equity.
2. Ensure all employees are trained on DEI topics, and that the organization has a clear reporting and accountability structure.
3. Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the DEI strategy and make adjustments as needed.

10. Call out instances of gender discrimination or biases

1. Develop a zero-tolerance policy for gender discrimination or biases and communicate it clearly to all employees.
2. Provide resources and support for employees who experience or witness gender discrimination or biases, including a clear reporting and investigation process.
3. Ensure leaders are accountable for addressing gender discrimination or biases within their teams.

11. Provide honest feedback to leaders on their gender inequality initiatives

1. Develop a feedback system that allows employees to provide honest feedback on the organization's gender inequality initiatives and strategies.
2. Use the feedback to improve and refine the organization's gender equity efforts continuously.
3. Communicate the feedback and any resulting changes or actions taken to all employees to demonstrate the organization's commitment to gender equity.

12. Become a mentor to women and women of color

1. Offer mentorship programs that pair experienced leaders with women and women of color to support their career growth and development.
2. Ensure mentors are trained and equipped to provide effective mentorship and support to their mentees.
3. Encourage all employees, particularly leaders, to become mentors to women and women of color as a way of promoting gender equity and supporting career advancement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender segregation is a real problem in many male-dominated sectors. It limits opportunities for women to advance their careers and contribute to the growth of these sectors. However, women have opportunities in fields like technology, engineering, construction, and finance. Companies and organizations must continue prioritizing diversity and inclusion to ensure women have equal access to these opportunities. By breaking down gender barriers, we can create a more equitable and prosperous workforce for all. Society needs to recognize and address the societal norms and biases that contribute to gender segregation to ensure that everyone can pursue their passions and achieve their goals regardless of gender.



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