

Women In The Workplace

Grace Youngers

CRM_J 403: Violence Toward Women

Professor Lutze

May 3, 2021

As a woman pursuing a career in the business field, I felt strongly compelled to speak upon the topic of women being underrepresented in positions of power within corporations and in the workforce. There is inequality in the field of business that cannot go unnoticed and should be brought to light in order to allow women the opportunities that are so easily given to men. The solution to this problem however is not so easily identified. There are multiple influences to this issue such as lack of self-confidence which in turn delays access to leadership positions, glass ceiling effects, previously engrained societal norms, and more. Personally, I would hate to enter the workforce only to find limited options or growth caps due to my gender, especially if I am equally as academically qualified. Studies have found several known barriers to women's access to leadership positions, the difficulties women face moving within corporations, and how diversifying decision-making positions makes for a more gender equal staff. There are several explanations that contribute to why women face such a difficult time excelling in the industry of business and in high powerful positions of authority. Strategies from *Sex & World Peace*, written by Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, & Chad F. Emmett, reveal ideas that are applicable to how we can fight for change on the ways women are treated in the managerial and corporate world (Hudson et al., 2012).

Article 1: Unlocking women's sustainability leadership potential: Perceptions of contributions and challenges for women in sustainable development

In the first study, researchers interviewed 120 men and women who participate in sustainable development, in order to gather their insights on the topic of women becoming leaders. They loosely define sustainable development as ranging from local hands-on projects, to higher level negotiations or global businesses, research, or education (Shinbrot et al., 2019). Globally, women are the representation of natural resources and make up over 40% of

agricultural workers, gathering food for consumption that provides basic nutrition. Knowing their contribution to this industry, they are still underrepresented in leadership positions as well as environment management and development. It is a daunting task attempting to change gender inequality while living in a patriarchal hierarchy where gender differences and gaps exist as normal, but we still can fight. There's a lack of resources for women within institutional structures where they do not feel as though they have a voice and often feel scared to be heard in public meetings unless they feel represented by their gender (which they often aren't).

Leadership qualities such as confidence, delegation, and assertiveness are all seen to be possessed by men, whereas women who are successful leaders are seen as less liked, cold, or belittled. There is a double standard within the role of a leader when it comes to being a woman.

Why should there be a difference at all whether it is a man or a woman telling you to do your job in the exact same way? The theory of gendered organization explains that the workplace is not gender neutral, but instead has previously identified divisions of gender where men receive privilege and women are at a disadvantage. Other research suggests a hiring phenomenon that takes place where companies tend to hire employees that are similar to them, causing a chain of unfair reproduction. Because of ingrained stereotypes, women can often feel discouraged and begin to question their abilities which only hinders their leadership ability. The results of their study on the selected participants showed that many viewed the women's perspective as valuable due to their worldly views and ability to connect things with a humble and spiritual manner.

They found, at least in the field of sustainable development, that women's diverse opinions opened doors to ideas they had never been thought of before. Another noted that typically a woman's nurturing personality makes them more dedicated and passionate about topics they believe in. Women are often better at social connections and networking, building their

community naturally in a unique position of social leadership. As for the challenges, many respondents noted that our world is male dominated in values, power, education, politics and institutions which poses a struggle for female leadership. There is also mention of women being discriminated against often, or not being taken seriously which creates another barrier. One states that gender imbalance exists on the corporate and policy level; where women's voices are rarely heard. A lack of respect enforces the lack of confidence that women already experience when trying to make it in the corporate world. People within the workforce are well aware of the barriers and challenges awaiting women who attempt to break through the glass ceiling, men and women alike. Authors stress the importance of male allyship, and the use of the male voice in order to advocate for women's equality in the workforce. This could be a useful strategy in combatting women's inequality not only for working women, but women everywhere.

Article 2: The Gender Gap in Business Leadership: Exploring an Affect Control Theory Explanation

The Affect Control Theory (ACT) is utilized in the second study to model the dynamics that both men and women business executives undergo in the workplace, and how those dynamics affect the gender gap that lies within leadership. As we know, women are underrepresented in American businesses positions of power, specifically higher level managerial positions, however they make up 52% of the workforce (Kroska et al., 2019). All statistics for female CEO positions, executive, and senior/middle level management positions are well under 50%, somewhere between 21 and 37 percent. It is an extremely upsetting ratio when comparing the percentage of employees in the workforce that are women, to those that hold positions of power within companies and institutions. Some contributing factors to the gender

gap are higher performance standards for raises/promotions, preferences among superiors, hiring those similar to previous position holders, discriminatory preconceptions of women in leadership roles, limited access to networking, and more. Previous research shows that women are viewed as more friendly and helpful (communal), while men are viewed as more agentic, showing traits of competitiveness and dominance. This is challenged when women receive backlash or retaliation for violating the gender norm by acting in agentic and non communal ways, making it extremely difficult for women to receive higher positions. Researchers in this study used computer simulations to determine executives' vulnerability to gender-norm violations by modeling reactions to gender deviance in multiple scenarios. The results suggest that women executives are more likely to face gender deviant situations than men, giving male executives more lateral access. Overall the simulations show how gendered identities cause a dynamic that puts female executives at risk when displaying certain behaviors that may be controversial against gender norms. This means for women that again they are placed in an impossible situation where choices are limited, yet unlimited for men.

Article 3: Women and Top Leadership Positions: Towards an Institutional Analysis

Because of women's severe underrepresentation in top positions, we are left to assume the glass ceiling obviously exists creating a discriminatory male bias in the business world. Though this underrepresentation can be discouraging, it is not impossible for women to succeed, and there is still hope. Women hold about 16% of top leadership positions in large corporations and over 5% of large companies have women CEOs, proving that while disappointing, still very much possible with the right strategies (Cook & Glass, 2019). Some believe that women leaders can attest their top positions to abnormal reasons such as exceptional training, or are less likely

to marry and have children than other women, but in my opinion, these are just excuses used by men as to why these noble woman were able to surpass them. In a study done on women executives, one respondent quoted that she adopted a strategy in order to interact with her male colleagues; she took up reading the Wall Street Journal and talking about sports or politics in order to keep up and survive the odds of acquiring a high level position. The glass *cliff* institutional theory suggests that women are actually more likely than men to be appointed to top leadership positions if, the organization is struggling, in crisis, or at risk for failure. One reason for this is the stereotype that women have a greater emotional sensitivity and interpersonal skill making them highly valuable to a firm that is facing difficult personnel decisions. Another is their capability to handle failure and take the blame for poor performance. Women's likelihood of being promoted to CEO or manager of a declining company hinders chance of success and possible tenure. This is where the “saviour effect” comes into play, as typically men are the traditional leader sent in to replace female CEOs when the firm is failing. Because of this theory, we can predict the diminishing of women's leadership roles over time if they are unable to reverse poor business trends which can sometimes be seemingly impossible. There is importance in “decision-maker diversity” which allows both men and women to assume roles of decision making in order to avoid men only hiring men. It is also evident that the integration of women on decision making in the board of directors will improve the likelihood of women CEOs. The study using these three theories showed minimal support for the savior effect thesis, evidence that decision-maker diversity is effective in balancing gender equality in CEO positions, and little evidence that women are more likely to be promoted to CEO of struggling firms. Though not all theories can be applicable, they are present and relevant in the business world and in companies across the globe.

Strategies for change

Because VAWA is more so targeted toward domestic violence and sexual assault and not as specified toward the workplace, I found a more relevant strategy for change from the book *Sex & World Peace* (Hudson et al., 2012). Authors highlight a couple strategies that could be relevant to the lack of women in leadership positions. They stress the importance of women in decision making roles and how it changes attitudes about women and their capabilities. One of my favorite parts is the mentioning of an ideal form of government where each position is held by a man and a woman, with a male-female team as president. This idea is compared to being a bird soaring with two strong wings, and if one half of that team is missing or not being represented, that bird won't be able to fly. Society desperately needs the voice of women and the diverse knowledge and capabilities we bring to the table. An example of a creative strategy the book mentions is from a group of women in Saudi Arabia, a place where female employment is limited due to co-gender restrictions, who created a womens-only hotel that's completely managed and staffed by female employees. This exemplifies women empowerment in the sense that there is a role for women in society and in the workforce, and that they are just as capable as men.

An important strategy, also mentioned by researchers in the previous studies, is the use of male involvement in gender equality initiatives (Shinbrot et al., 2019). *Sex & World Peace* mentions that men are the power and voice within human societies, and it may be that men predominantly listen to other men. "Sometimes eminent men can provide an example that will be persuasive to other men, in a way that women cannot" meaning women alone cannot change the gender norms and may require the influential sway of male input. Applying this strategy to the business world could influence the amount of women in positions of power and allow them more

opportunities if the men hiring only men chain is broken. It may take tremendous effort to completely restructure the perceptions of gender when it comes to the business world or even the workforce, however business by business, corporation by corporation, changes can be made bottom-up that will work towards justice for working women. If men with power start encouraging equality for women in the workplace, men in lower positions will be taught that there is no gender assigned to a job description, and that the women who work among them are equally as capable and educated. Men need to stand up and preach for women's equality in the workplace just as women should as well, to work together against glass ceiling barriers and create equal opportunities. The use of scripts could also be applicable for this topic because they allow for certain patterns of behavior to be created, which in turn could persuade male perception to appreciate women more. Human resources seminars or workshops could implement a segment that mentions gender equality and provide an example of a healthy gender neutral work environment. There is also a notion to be instilled in young girls that they are capable of education, and to speak about themselves in terms of strength and confidence. Working from the bottom-up to save the future of our workfield system allowing women equal opportunities and creating a workplace mentality that sees no gender. Men and women need to work together in order to inspire change as it is one of the only ways society will fly evenly and in harmony.

The lack of women being represented in the business industry is overall disappointing, however we as women cannot let that discourage us from being as successful as we possibly can. Statistics show that women before us have accomplished their way to the top rightfully so, and in a competitive industry that favors males. This inspires young women, like me, pursuing goals in business to persevere and defy gender norms. Giving up is simply out of the question considering how far we've come in the fight for women's equality. The glass ceiling can be challenged,

confidence can be instilled, networks can be opened, decision-makers can be diversified, and equality in the workplace can be achieved. By gaining men as an ally, scripting or rescripting notions about gender in the workplace, and being creative while using our resources, women can fight for their rightful place in the corporate industry and gain the representation they deserve.

References

- Cook, Alison, & Glass, Christy. (2014). Women and Top Leadership Positions: Towards an Institutional Analysis. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 21(1), 91–103.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12018>
- Hudson, Valerie M, Ballif-Spanvill, Bonnie, Caprioli, Mary, Emmett, Chad F. (2012). *Sex & World Peace*. Columbia University Press
- Kroska, Amy, & Cason, Trent C. (2019). The Gender Gap in Business Leadership: Exploring an Affect Control Theory Explanation. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 82(1), 75–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272518806292>
- Shinbrot, Xoco A, Wilkins, Kate, Gretzel, Ulrike, & Bowser, Gillian. (2019). Unlocking Women's Sustainability Leadership Potential: Perceptions of Contributions and Challenges for Women in Sustainable Development. *World Development*, 119, 120–132.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.03.009>