

An Action Research: Gender In the Workplace

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Abstract: Among the many factors that affect women's career development, gender segregation is particularly striking. Based on social conflict theory, this study takes five female workers as the research subjects and conducts online or face-to-face interviews with them to understand women's career situation and coping strategies, and further explores the phenomenon of gender segregation in the workplace and proposes solutions based on social conflict theory.

Keywords: gender, gender segregation, social conflict

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Global Gender Gap Index 2021 published by the Global Economic Forum points out that the gap in economic dimensions is mainly caused by the labor market participation rates of women and men: among 15-64 years old, the labor market participation rates of women and men are 52.6% and 80%, respectively. Among the many factors affecting women's career development, organizational gender bias is particularly striking. This high concentration of people of one gender in one or some occupations, creating a state of occupational segregation from the population of the other gender, is known as occupational gender segregation.

1.2 Related Theories

The term occupational gender segregation was first introduced by Edward Gross in a paper in 1968 (Edward Gross, 1968), meaning that workers in the labor market are assigned and concentrated in different occupational categories and occupy jobs of different nature depending on their gender. Occupational segregation between men and women can generally be understood as discrimination against women in their career development, it in essence constitutes the sex labeling of occupations gender inequality in the labor market (Nie Chunlei & Zhao Jian, 2018). This article focuses on the social conflict theory, which is the basis for the study of occupational gender segregation. Using the social conflict theory as a starting point, the stereotypical study proposes relevant strategies to alleviate gender conflict in the workplace.

Social conflict theory is represented by L.A. Coser and Ralf G. Dahrendorf, focusing on the causes, forms, constraints and effects of social conflict, and is proposed as a reflection and antithesis of structural functionalist theory. The theory became popular in the United States and Western European countries in the late 1960s, and has caused a great repercussion in Western sociology, penetrating into the empirical studies of various branches of sociology. Modern conflict theory emphasizes the "positive" function of social conflict and is more constructive than functionalism. It argues that conflict not only leads to social disharmony, but also has a social integrative role, and that its interest lies in the mechanisms through which conflict promotes change and prevents the ossification of social systems.

2. Methods/Procedure

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with five professional women. The main contents of the interviews included: the interviewees' main work experiences and related backgrounds, the interviewees' observations and feelings about gender segregation in the workplace, the interviewees' perceptions of the "male culture" in the workplace, and the conflict between family and work. The interview data were then analyzed and processed in an inductive manner.

Table 1 Profile of Interviewer

Name	Age	Career	Years of experience	Academic qualifications	Marital Status	Fertility status
Rita	36	Teacher in university	12	Doctor's degree	Married	No

Ms. Yang	32	Screenwriter	8	Master's degree	Married	One child
Ms. Feng	33	Management	13	Master's degree	Married	No
Ms. Li	33	Teacher in university	9	Master's degree	Married	One child
Ms. Ao	36	Administrater	10	Bachelor's degree	Married	One child

3. Results

After the interviews, all five women had received different degrees of gender discrimination in the workplace, including the glass ceiling effect, stereotypes, maternity treatment, salary treatment, and interviews.

Table 2 Perceived gender segregation in the workplace

Name	The glass ceiling effect	Stereotypes	Marriage and Relationships	Salary treatments	Maternity benefits	Promotions	Interviews
Rita		√	√				
Ms. Yang	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Ms. Feng		√	√				
Ms. Li		√	√		√	√	
Ms. Ao	√	√	√	√	√		√

Through Table 2, we can see that stereotypes, marital situation and fertility situation are the categories of gender discrimination that all five women have experienced.

3.1 Fertility issues

Ms. Yang said, after I got pregnant, the company reduced my workload to a certain extent, which is basically the same as not assigning tasks to me anymore, and the salary aspect also stopped. After I gave birth, I was reimbursed for maternity benefits, which are required by the state, but for some reasons, I didn't end up getting the money.

Without a series of supporting measures to protect the rights and interests of women of working age, some women of working age will give up childbirth, or even if they return to their families from the workplace, the lack of sufficient supporting measures for protection will directly create new challenges to women's life course and career development (Huo Mengjun & Li Chao, 2011). In most cases, women who have given birth have fewer opportunities for vocational training or promotion in the organization than their male counterparts. Women who have children are affected by childbirth, and employers cut the pay or benefits they should have received out of concern for the time and money costs they incurred during maternity leave, which has seriously violated the workplace equality rights of women who have children. (Luo Ya & Mi Xiao, 2019)

3.2 Stereotypes

Ms. Ao says: When negotiating or approaching clients, we often negotiate at the dinner table, but I dislike some specific table benefits. For example, if a woman is asked to go and have a drink with a client, the woman is responsible for pouring the drink. I work in administration and I'm female, so I'm often the one doing the pouring duties, but I resent that. I want to quit, but my parents think it's normal. And at times like this I need to wear makeup and dress nicely, and it's a tiring life.

Chinese scholar Bu Wei defines "stereotype" as "an oversimplified, lagging, and generalized view of a social group". Some scholars believe that people develop gender stereotypes in their minds as children, which cause them to think and act in a way that is consistent with gender stereotypes later in life and in adulthood (Liu Ni, 2007). These stereotypes often unconsciously influence people's attitudes and behaviors. It is commonly believed that men have highly masculine characteristics, such as being independent and aggressive, while women have highly feminine characteristics, such as being dependent and passive. One of the reasons most recognized by scholars for differences in the evaluation of the sexes in the workplace, including hiring, promotion, development, and evaluation of employees, is the persistence of gender stereotypes.

3.3 The glass ceiling phenomenon

Rita says, I've been working at the school for many years, but I've never been promoted. I'm convinced that I'm well qualified to get a

better position, but every time I've been involved in a promotion, it hasn't worked out. It was always the male who got the opportunity and I felt he wasn't as good as I was and I was still working on it and I was upset about it.

The famous "glass ceiling" theory is due to gender differences, women's career options and promotions are blocked by a layer of glass, out of reach. This is an invisible and artificial difficulty, which is a very big invisible obstacle that many women face when they want to be promoted to a certain position, making their career stay at a calm stage for a long time without a breakthrough.

The five interviewees who encountered occupational gender segregation usually resorted to accommodation and avoidance measures. Many women will make self-sacrifice, give up their own interests, willing to put the interests of the other party or the company's interests above their own, and comply with the views of others, so as to maintain a mutually friendly relationship and avoid further expansion of the conflict.

4. Discussion

From the interviews we learned that sexism still exists to a greater or lesser extent in the modern workplace. This workplace discrimination is difficult to change in the short term, from the point of view of women themselves, how to deal with these problems reasonably.

Firstly, few women are cooperative and rarely talk to men about sexism. In fact, leaders can set common goals for both men and women, and setting a higher level of common goals for both sides of the conflict can facilitate cooperation.

Secondly, adequate communication through negotiation is an important way to deepen understanding and find conflict resolution. I fully understand your needs, and you are fully aware of my needs. Women and men need to respect and trust each other and, while considering and defending their own requirements and interests, they should also fully consider and defend the interests of the other party.

Thirdly, competition is an effective tool. Both sides are unwilling to sacrifice their interests and must go all out for it. This time will break out some arguments, quarrels and head-on confrontation. Generally, to this situation, in order to get to win the result, both sides will not be too concerned about the possible consequences of the conflict.

How to protect the interests of women in the workplace? Cultivate the concept of gender equality in society Popularize the law of gender equality in the compulsory education stage and arrange it into the necessary contents of national education, so that the whole society can form the concept and legal awareness of gender equality.

The government needs to formulate relevant policies and measures to support the employment of women groups in a targeted manner. (Cai Yi, 2011).The Government should establish and improve a diversified dispute resolution mechanism for gender discrimination in employment. Examples include gender equality committees and legal aid mechanisms for employment discrimination. Assisting women in anti-discrimination litigation or rights defense activities while supervising and guaranteeing the implementation of gender equality work is both an after-the-fact remedy for women's employment discrimination and an ex-ante preventive measure against employment discrimination.

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