

Perspectives on Gender Equity Issues

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### **Perspectives on Gender Equity Issues**

In the *New York Times* [Special section] on Sunday, September 30, 2012, we are reminded in the article, *The Myth of Male Decline* (Coontz), that gender equity issues still exist in the workforce especially in the area of salary. Men still earn more than women who hold identical positions and have the same preparation. However, Coontz clearly emphasizes that societal expectations for men's and women's careers remain segregated. Women continue to control employment in fields that are thought of as female-dominated, for example, teaching, nursing, and social work and men continue to greatly excel in areas such as technology and finance.

Although women can now claim 60% of the undergraduate graduation rate (Coontz, 2012), it is perceived as necessary to compete in today's competitive workforce. This statistic is consistent with the fact that careers in medicine and law have increased for women over 20% in the last 30 years from fourteen to 36% (Coontz, 2012). The only other career that has increased more for women in the last 30 years is that of mail carrier. Advances in technology--the fastest growing and most lucrative business in the last 10 years--has had no impact on the employment of women.

A focus on STEM education for women is a much needed one. In a study by Vale, Davidson, Davies, Hooley, Loton, and Weaven (2011), gender inequality in mathematics achievement continues to exist in Australia. According to the most recent PISA and TIMMS international assessment studies, gender differences favoring males at all educational levels has remained unchanged since the 1980's.

In the study by Vale et al. (2011), the findings indicate the achievement gap continues to widen especially in the primary years. The research found that numeracy intervention programs recorded growth for both boys and girls at the secondary level but not at the primary level. The study reasons that differentiated tasks are not enough to close the achievement gap in mathematics between boys and girls. Researchers must delve deeper and educational policies must increase regarding gender equity issues in schools. Strategies and targets for achieving gender equity must be established that include transformative pedagogies that connect with students' cultures, involve reciprocal learning and develop respect (Vale et al., 2011). Vale et al. (2011), conclude that the inclusion of a socio-constructivist perspective is necessary to affect gender differences in achievement, especially in the area of mathematics.

Does socio-constructivist theory apply to other areas of gender equity? Tannen (1994) explores gender differences in communication in the workplace in her book, *Talking from 9 to 5*. She emphasizes that differences in communication styles impacted by gender always receive additional scrutiny, even if subliminally. In 1994, when this book was written, corporate America was looking to place more women in managerial and executive positions but it was not happening quickly enough. The author was asked to help identify some of the obstacles.

As her research evolved so did the understanding that men and women communicate differently in the workplace. Much of this is due to how people in authoritative positions behave and how women in authoritative positions are perceived (p. 202). There is a so-called gap for women of authority between respect and being liked.

Tannen found for most women it was quite challenging to balance being respected, being liked, and how competent a woman is perceived by the way she communicates with her colleagues and subordinates.

Tannen's research found that gender differences in communication can be found as early as age two and a half. "Male children pay less attention to females of their own age than to other males. And the experience of women at meetings indicates the same is often true for adult men and women" (p. 288).

Janet Shibley-Hyde (2012) emphasizes in her research that nation-level indicators of gender inequality around the globe may be misinterpreted and misrepresented due to differences in methodological and theoretical practices and overall lack of empirical evidence. The issue of power and gender inequality of power are underresearched, however, when researchers add studies from additional nations, the results, although comparing uncorrelated variables, produce more significant results which are reported as such.

Else-Quest and Grabe (2012) have deconstructed international gender equality indicators and have been able to produce more specific, process-based ones. Researchers can now conduct more theory-driven or hypothesis-driven analyses using distinct and well-defined understandings of what contributes to gender inequality. The new nation-level gender equity indicators will provide more detailed data of what the indicators do and do not measure. More accurate indicators and measures will lead to a greater understanding of why gender inequity issues exist within certain constructs.

In their research, Barry, Berg, and Chandler (2012), confirm that in higher education in England and Sweden, managerial reform is necessary because gender inequity still exists. Their question centers around the similarities between a social movement and a reform. This includes the perception of how feminists are viewed, how they view themselves, and the impact on managerial positions at the university level.

Barry, Berg, and Chandler (2012), argue that changes that have occurred regarding gender inequalities have been based around a specific moment in time and are not sustained. The adoption of a social movement framework would lead to more concise changes that would be more easily understood and therefore more systemically sustainable. Social movements tend to challenge existing power structures (Barry, Berg, & Chandler, 2012).

As one continues to research gender inequality, even in 2012, it is quite evident that it still exists. Women have made salary and career gains but at an alarmingly slow rate. However, when one explores the inequities of men and women within a family construct, there has been a societal shift in the number of men who request family leave, engaging in traditionally female behaviors. According to Coontz (2012), “Men who request family leave are often perceived as weak or uncompetitive and face a greater risk of being demoted or downsized.” She further discusses that when controlling for standard effects such as race, age, and education, men whose masculinity is questioned earn significantly less. Unfortunately, what appears to remain consistent today, regardless of the perspective, is that women or anything perceived as feminine do have less value than men and masculine stereotypes.

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