
Studies Completed On Gender Discrimination In Workplace

Throughout the years there have been many studies completed on gender discrimination in the workplace. In a journal by Laurie Larwood et al, three such studies were looked at. These studies focused on the “rational-bias theory” of workplace discrimination. Rational bias theory conceives of discrimination as the consequence of self-interested managers making personnel decisions concerning subordinates in their journal they noted that in 1986 only 37% of executive, administrative and managerial positions were filled by women, and only one woman was a chief executive among the largest 500 US firms.

Study 1 observes management employing outside of management consulting firms and looks at the views of client firms and how they respond to managerial positioning. In this study 61 management consulting firms were observed. Larwood et al noticed that as the hierarchical level increased, the number of women in these positions decreased. Women held 91% of support roles, and only 4% of women were consulting partners. The owners of these firms explained how clients were less likely to listen and trust women, that women were unlikely to be able to deal with the types of problems faced by the clients, and that they had harder time trying to establish relationships with clients. Study 1 also surveyed 52 client firms, in order to get a rounded view of the reasoning behind the discrimination faced by women in these firms. All but three of the surveys handed out were completed by men, generally the chief executive or vice-president. On average, client firm executives stated that they would rather work with a man as they believed men would provide better advice, they would be quicker at gaining a rapport with clients and would be more credible. As a result of study 1, it was found that rational-bias did in fact exist in these firms, however the link between the discriminatory client attitudes and the actual discrimination against women in the workplace still had to be examined.

Studies 2 and 3 focused on students of a business school and how they believed management in a firm would make decisions of personnel advancement. As well as focusing on gender during these studies, they also brought in race as a second factor. This was included as studies before had found that white women were more consistently discriminated against in the workplace. The participants in this study undertook a computerized experiment which presented a hypothetical situation in which they would have to act as a manager of a firm. They were given two possible job candidates, both from the top MBA graduating classes, one male and one female. In study 2, the focus was on the gender of the candidates, while in study 3, both gender and race were being examined.

Questions were asked based on whether the participants felt as though the firm would be benefited or hurt by selecting a woman for an assignment. As a result, participants felt that the firm would be more likely to choose a male subordinate for larger contracts, and a female for smaller contracts. They also answered that they would be more likely to send a male themselves for a larger contract rather than a female. Results from both study 2 and 3 found that male subordinates were much more preferred on important assignments.

Although the above three studies do not prove that rational-bias theory exists, they give a clear indication into how it works and how it has been used by many managers in firms when promoting or hiring new staff members.

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