

POLS S3245  
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### Issue Brief: Public Opinion and Women/Gender Issues

*Key Words:* Women, Glass-Ceiling, Workplace

*Description:* What women do to disenfranchise themselves and other women in the interest of self-promotion in their own workplace.

*Key Points:*

- 1. Discrimination against women in the workplace is a largely unspoken prejudice.
- 2. Often, women ignore or flatly deny discrimination against themselves and other women in the workplace to appear congenial and easier to work with.
- 3. Perceptions of female superiority revolve around individualized traits while male superiority is viewed more broadly such as roles and positions.
- 4. What might be perceived as discrimination is many times attributed to uncompetitive credentials but still categorized as discrimination.

*Issue Brief:*

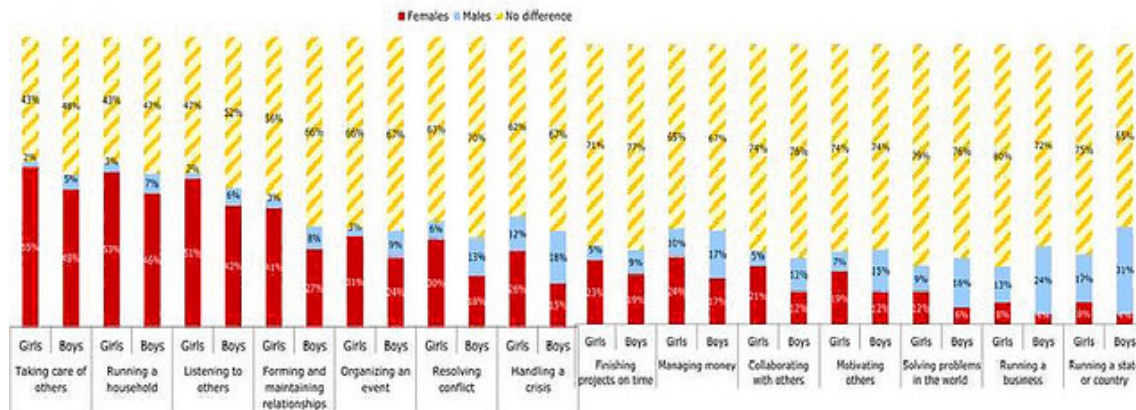
Despite having been outlawed by way of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, sexual discrimination in the modern U.S. work place persists. While historically this phenomenon was more pervasive and conspicuous a shift has occurred where in a modern context, women in the workplace are victims of opinion, even their own, as well as opposing self-interest which subvert them, arguably, to a greater extent.

Many women in corporate America, as well as government, hold executive posts but it seems as though many powerful women, whether in the interest of self-advancement or otherwise, hinder the advancement of women by allowing the social disparity to become the proverbial elephant in the corporate room. These actions do not appear to be in the interest of maintaining ones competitive advantage in the work place, but rather to allow ones self to appear more mainstream and accepting of the status quo. One example of this is former Hewlett-

Packard Chief Executive and 2010 California Senatorial candidate, Carly Fiorina who, in 1999 famously said, "I hope we're at the point that everyone has figured out that there is no glass ceiling." Shortly after resigning from her post at HP in early 2005, Fiorina declared this statement was a "Dumb thing to say."

While in the past, workplace injustices directed at women were products of arrogant and naïve chauvinism, the impetus behind modern day chauvinism and its perpetuations are veiled as pragmatism. Remarks by Simon Murray, the recently appointed chairman of Glencore International, one of the world's largest and most successful mining and commodities trading companies, sent the corporate human relations world stirring when Murray declared: "[Women] have a tendency not to be so involved quite often and they're not so ambitious in business as men because they've got better things to do..." such as "bringing up their children" and getting married. Comments like Murray's exhibit the uncalculated acceptance of stereotypes, and often aligning what are inherent biological processes, of women with their expected performance in the work place, an argument further supported by the poll results below. According to the results, women are preferred to men in areas such as conflict resolution, crisis management, money management and collaborating with others; all abilities crucially pertinent to running a business or heading a state or government, yet two areas where men were preferred over women were running a business and running a state or country. This proves that perception presides over practice.

**Who do you believe is generally better at the following types of things?**



Source:

A report from the Girl Scout research institute, girl scouts of the USA, March 2008

While there is no denying that such discrimination exists, it could be argued that many times, what is perceived by an individual as discrimination is actually exclusion based on that persons own perceptions and characteristics and having very little, if anything, to do with macro perceptions of the employer. There is an immense difference between acknowledging and recognizing such exclusionary practices and constantly thinking ones self is perpetually the victim of such practices with parties falling into the latter category very likely at some point becoming a problem for an employer. These attitudes are very easily recognizable and surely refused by employers when a prospective applicant exhibits such characteristics. This suggestion falls in line with Robert K. Merton’s, noted American Sociologist and affiliate of Columbia University, notion of a “self-fulfilling prophecy” for which he describes as a situation where by, “in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the original false conception come 'true'. This specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.” This is not to argue that all women who are unable to succeed in the workplace do so because they think they will, or that they will because they will inevitably experience prejudice. It is to argue that many people in

general, women included, tend to look for justification in their situation, even more so when that situation results in a negative outcome and the solution which relieves one of responsibility is always the easiest.

#### Works Cited

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