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FORMAL AND INFORMAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AT WORK

THE ROLE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES

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When asked to think about a hostile environment for women in the workplace, many of us would first envision overt instances of sexual harassment or blatant employment discrimination. These associations are certainly not astonishing: even in an age in which these behaviors are denounced and in large part illegal, such organizational misconduct seems almost commonplace. There have been many high-profile allegations of discrimination leveled against organizations within the last several years (Morris, Bonamici & Neering, 2005). For example, Morgan Stanley's investment banking business recently paid out \$54 million to over 300 female employees who claim to have been denied pay and promotions equal to those received by their male colleagues. Additionally, 1.6 million women who are currently, or were formerly, employed at Wal-Mart are eligible to participate in what is poised to become the largest-ever civil rights lawsuit: like the women of Morgan Stanley, they claim to have been victims of sex discrimination (Greenhouse, 2004). In fact, according to statistics from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, there has been no systematic decline over the last 12 years in the number of discrimination lawsuits filed, or the amount of monetary damages awarded to the plaintiffs of these suits (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2004).

Not all forms of workplace discrimination generate such attention, however. Current evidence suggests that gender discrimination is expressed in less visible ways as well. A series of recent studies revealed that many women in high-level positions in corporations and firms believe that social exclusion, not just overt discrimination, is a barrier to women's career advancement. Examples of this less visible bias include a lack of mentoring, being ostracized from informal networks of communication, and an inhospitable corporate culture (Catalyst, 1996, 2001, 2001b, 2004). Further demonstrating the subtlety of these barriers, they were not readily perceptible to everyone in the work environment: men were significantly less likely than women to believe that any of these factors hindered women's advancement in their companies and firms.

Indeed, research has shown that the ways that men and women are treated differently in the workplace can be nearly imperceptible at the level of the individual and emerge only when aggregated across individuals. Crosby (1984), for example, demonstrated that by and large, women do not acknowledge the ways that gender discrimination may have affected their own career experiences. They are more likely to assume personal responsibility for receiving fewer organizational resources than their male coworkers. These same women, however, believe that gender discrimination exists in the workplace and affects the resources that other women receive.

It has been argued that gender discrimination is difficult to perceive because it accounts for a small portion of variance in organizational decision-making (e.g., Barret & Morris, 1993). But this does not mean that discrimination does not have significant consequences for working women. Martell and colleagues provide one example of how the most subtle bias can influence the distribution of men and women within an organization. A computer simulation showed that if men and women are equally qualified for advancement, yet 5 percent of the variance in promotion decisions is due to a negative bias against women candidates, then the proportion of women can decrease from over 50 percent of the workforce at lower levels to 29 percent seven hierarchical levels further up in the organization (Martell, Lane & Emrich, 1996). Thus, an imperceptible expression of bias at the unit level can have a notable effect on top-level representation, perhaps explaining why we continue to see gross inequality between the sexes at the highest levels: 493 of the Fortune 500 CEOs are men, as are 84 percent of the corporate officers of these companies (Catalyst, 2002). However, we see gender parity within lower levels, where women account for just over 50 percent of employees occupying "managerial and professional specialty occupations" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003).

The continued expression of gender discrimination begs for redress within organizations, not only because it may affect the optimal movement of talent between organizational ranks, but also because it affects the quality of employees' organizational experiences. The presence of gender discrimination causes women to experience work environments as exclusive and difficult to navigate (Catalyst, 2001; Mor Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998). Indeed, the pressure of operating within such a work environment exacts a toll from women employees beyond the discrimination that they may experience there, engendering less-positive attitudes toward their jobs and less engagement in their work (e.g., Ensher, Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001).

Understanding the underlying dynamics of discrimination is necessary before organizations can take effective action to reduce it. In other words, we must educate the business community about the psychological processes that drive the attitudes, behaviors, and decisions that disparately affect men and women at work. Interventions that target root causes of these behaviors will inevitably prove more effective than those that target more surface-level indicators of disparate treatment.

This paper explores the psychological dynamics that drive the expression of discrimination in the workplace. We review research demonstrating that the unfavorable experiences of women in the workplace result from a basic social psychological process: stereotyping. Further, we propose that organizations, through their policies and practices, can moderate the extent to which these processes influence actual behaviors.

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

Social psychologists have spent several decades uncovering the cognitive heuristics and perceptual biases that, despite their functional components, can lead to faulty conclusions about social events and the actors involved in them. These information-processing techniques take a variety of forms and ultimately serve to reinforce and validate one's view of the social world and the people operating within it (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Within the workplace, views about how work is done, the characteristics required for success, and who ought to be doing the work are often at odds with views about what women are like and how they should behave.

Gender stereotypes lie at the heart of many of our perceptions of the workplace and the people that operate within it. The constellation of traits and attributes that are thought to uniquely describe men and women are called *descriptive* stereotypes. These stereotypes are applied to individuals that one encounters in work settings, and become the basis for inferring their internal, stable characteristics. Thus, even in situations in which person A may have very little knowledge about person B, he or she will infer a set of characteristics about B from the general category of *man* or *woman* to which person B belongs (Stangor, 1988). In contrast to descriptive stereotypes, *prescriptive* stereotypes refer to the set of attributes and characteristics that describe how men and women "should" be (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly, 1987; Heilman, 2001; Terborg, 1977). Perceptions of people are therefore guided simultaneously by cognitive representations of their category-based traits and attributes and their normative beliefs about what is appropriate and inappropriate for them to do, given their gender categories.

There is a rich body of research, much of which will be reviewed in this paper, showing that both descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes can undermine objective decision-making within organizations. Because of the inability of stereotype-based processing to accurately accommodate employees' true skills, attrib-

utes, and motives, they create a self-sustaining system of disparate treatment of women and men in the workplace. Understanding how stereotypes operate and how they guide, often inappropriately, key organizational decisions, can help explain why we still see gender inequality in the workplace, and why many organizations continue to struggle to create a workplace that is equally inclusive of both men and women.

Lack of fit between descriptive stereotypes of women and male gender-typed jobs

There is a seemingly irreconcilable difference between perceptions of what it takes to succeed in many work settings and the attributes that women are presumed to have. This discrepancy has been incorporated into a *lack of fit* model of gender discrimination (Heilman, 1983; 1995; 2001). On one side of the model lie perceptions of work. Jobs become gender-typed by virtue of both the number of men and women who occupy them and the attributes deemed necessary for successful performance. Numerically speaking, one sex is more highly represented than the other in many organizational roles and occupational categories (Bielby & Baron, 1986). For example, there are more women than men who are nurses and more men than women who are engineers (Lips, 2003). At the same time, successful performance in these jobs is viewed as requiring gendered traits, skills, and attributes. A successful manager, for example, is described as having stereotypically masculine, or agentic, traits (Heilman, Block, Martell & Simon, 1989), while a successful nurse may be expected to exhibit more feminine, or communal, traits (e.g., Glick, Wilk & Perreault, 1995). It follows that male gender-typed jobs are those that are typically male-dominated and are perceived as requiring traditionally masculine characteristics, while female gender-typed ones are primarily staffed by women and thought to require feminine attributes (Cejka & Eagly, 1999).

On the other side of the lack of fit model lie the descriptive stereotypes of women. Sex is a chronically salient category in our society; the attributes associated with male and female shape the way we view employees' skills and attributes. Men, more than women, are thought to harbor agentic traits, such as being decisive and task-oriented. Women, more so than men, are thought to harbor communal attributes, such as nurturance and relationship-orientation (Heilman, Martell & Simon, 1988). When the gender stereotypes of the individual fit with the gender-type of the job, they are thought to have what it takes to perform well. Equally as important, this congruence creates an expectation that the individual will succeed. But when there is a lack of fit, negative expectations result: the individual is thought to lack the essential skills and is therefore expected to be less effective.

The matching process works against women and in favor of men in employment settings that potentially have the most to offer. The jobs that confer the most power are—almost without exception—male gender-typed: those that are the most well-compensated and to which large numbers of both men and women aspire. Organizational leadership positions, for example, are not only overwhelmingly populated by men (Catalyst, 2002), but the successful occupants of these positions are often described in classically masculine ways. Research has shown that the successful manager is consistently described as more similar to the way men are viewed than to the way women are viewed (Heilman, Block, Martell & Simon, 1989; Schein, 1973). This is not only a U.S. phenomenon: in extensions of her 1973 work, Schein demonstrated that around the globe, the role of manager is viewed as more closely aligned with the characteristics ascribed to men than women: this was the case in China, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom (see Schein, 2001). Because of the perceived lack of fit between what women are like and the traits presumed to be necessary for success at many of the most prestigious jobs and occupations, women are viewed less favorably than their male colleagues. Stereotypes thus preclude the accurate assessment of men's and women's capabilities to do the job (Martell, Parker, Emrich & Crawford, 1998). This sets the

stage for bias in selection, placement, and performance evaluation. Thus, as will be described in later sections of this paper, these expectations provide the fuel for the disparate treatment of men and women in the workplace.

Lack of fit between the prescriptive stereotypes of women and the successful employee

Despite descriptive stereotypes of women as ill-suited for “men’s work,” sometimes they are undeniably competent and successful at male gender-typed jobs. Even then, there are problems for women that are driven by gender stereotypes. In this case, it is prescriptive stereotypes of women that are the driving force. Not only are there stereotypes about what women are like, but also about how they should behave (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001). These prescriptive stereotypes function as norms for acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Their content overlaps with that of descriptive gender stereotypes: that is, people not only believe that women are more communal than men (i.e., the descriptive stereotype), but that they *should* behave in nurturing, sympathetic ways, and show high concern for others. There are also prescriptions for what women should not do—namely, to act in an agentic, or stereotypically male, manner. Prescriptive stereotypes therefore prohibit women from being tough, aggressive and dominant. The violation of these prescriptions leads to disapproval, often taking the form of social penalties.

Successfully performing at male gender-typed jobs thus presents a conundrum for women employees: demonstrating the characteristics presumed to lead to effective performance means violating prescriptive norms for how they ought to behave. There is therefore a lack of fit between the prescriptive stereotypes of women and the characteristics associated with employees who are successful at male gender-typed activities. This lack of fit has been described in Eagly’s role incongruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002). According to the theory, men’s social roles—the culturally shared set of beliefs and expectations of how men should be—overlap with the domain of organizational leadership, but women’s roles do not. Like the violation of any social norm, women’s transgression of prescriptive norms by succeeding at male gender-typed work inspires negative reactions, largely in the form of social disapproval. A recent study by Heilman and colleagues demonstrated that women who succeeded at a male gender-typed job are penalized through negative evaluations of their personal traits. While they were seen as having the agentic qualities needed for successful performance, they were described as being downright interpersonally hostile: abrasive, pushy, manipulative, and generally unlikeable. In contrast, successful men and women who did not violate prescriptive stereotypes were rated as significantly more interpersonally pleasant (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins, 2004).

Follow-up research confirms that these negative ratings are the result of violating prescriptive stereotypes. In their first study, Heilman & Okimoto (2005) replicated the earlier research by showing that successful women in male gender-typed jobs were rated as interpersonally unpleasant. In a second study, subjects rated a successful woman manager who was either explicitly described as communal (i.e., caring, sensitive and understanding) or about whom no communal information was provided. Women managers were rated as far more likeable when they were explicitly described as communal. This demonstrates that women can be perceived both as likeable and as competent, but they have to prove that they embody the traits that are part of their prescriptive stereotypes. Without such proof, they are assumed to be interpersonally deficient.

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STEREOTYPE-DRIVEN DISCRIMINATION

In the current review, we argue that descriptive and prescriptive stereotyping exert significant impact on men's and women's organizational experiences. We focus here on the impact of stereotyping processes on two types of discrimination, formal and informal. This distinction is one that has been promoted in the burgeoning literature on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender employees (Welle & Button, 2004), but that holds promise for helping us to understand the experiences of other minority and disenfranchised groups within organizations (e.g., Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley, 1990). It is related to the language of the Title VII Civil Rights Act, which explicitly singles out overt discrimination—the use of sex, race/ethnicity, national origin, and religion as criteria for decision-making—as being illegal (Bell, McLaughlin & Sequeria, 2002). For the purposes of this review, formal discrimination refers to the biased allocation of organizational resources such as promotions, pay, and job responsibilities, while informal discrimination centers on the interactions that occur between employees and the quality of relationships that they form (Hebl, Bigazzi, Mannix & Dovidio, 2002; Levine & Leonard, 1984).

Formal Discrimination

Descriptive stereotyping shapes the perceptions and expectations people form about men and women in the workplace and provides the fuel for formal discrimination to occur. Adopting a stereotype-consistent view of women job applicants leads evaluators to conclude that they are less likely to have the skills necessary to succeed at male gender-typed jobs. Thus, research has demonstrated that even when the actual qualifications of men and women are equivalent, men are viewed as having higher performance ability, are expected to form better (Heilman, Martell & Simon, 1988), and are therefore favored over women in the selection process for male gender-typed jobs (Davison & Burke, 2000; Gerdes & Garber 1983; Glick, Zion & Nelson, 1988; Heilman, 1984). Similarly, Lyness & Judiesch (1999) collected data from a large organization and found that at higher levels within an organization, women received fewer promotions than men.

Performance is likewise evaluated differently for men and women. Sackett and colleagues, in an analysis of actual performance evaluation data, showed that women were systematically rated as performing less well than men even after controlling for ability and experience, and that the gender discrepancy in evaluations was greater in male gender-typed jobs. That is, as the proportion of women in the work group decreased, evaluations of them were more negative relative to men (Sackett, DuBois & Noe, 1991). Other research revealed that individuals who evidenced traditional stereotypes about women appraised women's true performance less accurately than those who did not express traditional stereotypes (Dobbins, Cardy & Truxillo, 1988). Given the link between performance evaluations and compensation, it should come as no surprise that women are also underpaid relative to equally performing men (Durden & Gaynor, 1998; Lips, 2003; Marini, 1989; Roth, 2003). This was recently demonstrated in a study of over 4,000 managers representing hundreds of organizations (Ostroff & Atwater, 2003). Women managers received significantly less compensation than did men even after controlling for a wide variety of human capital factors. The wage gap was greater at higher organizational levels occupied predominantly by men, supporting our view that gender discrimination is most likely to be expressed in male gender-typed environments.

Violating prescriptive stereotypes by being successful at male gender-typed jobs can also lead to discrimination against women in the allocation of formal organizational resources. A prime example of this inequality occurred in the case of Ann B. Hopkins, an employee of the consulting firm Price Waterhouse, who by all objective measures was extremely successful. Ms. Hopkins was denied promo-

tion to partner despite her success, due largely to her interpersonal style. In violation of women's prescriptive norms, her style was described as abrasive and aggressive. Although these traits may have in fact contributed to her success, and the very same traits in her male colleagues were deemed acceptable, they were used as the grounds to deny her promotion to partner at the firm (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux & Heilman, 1991). Ms. Hopkins went on to file a lawsuit against her employer that was ultimately considered by the U.S. Supreme Court, which sided in her favor.

Since this seminal case, research evidence has emerged showing how and why prescriptive norm violation leads to formal discrimination against women. In a systematic investigation, women who exhibited stereotypically masculine characteristics were less liked, and less likely to be considered for promotions or job opportunities, even though they were considered as competent as male employees (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkin, 2004). Violating prescriptive norms has also been shown to be associated with more negative evaluations of women leaders. When demonstrating a leadership style that is more consistent with masculine than with feminine characteristics, women are consistently evaluated to be less effective than men who use the same leadership style (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992).

Women who fail to exhibit the nurturing qualities associated with their gender prescriptions also face formal discrimination. A recent study showed that prescriptive stereotypes can create differential sets of expectations for in-role and out-of-role job behaviors for men and women. Altruistic behaviors, for example, are seen to be less optional for women employees to perform than men. In contrast to men, altruism on the part of women is viewed as fulfilling role expectations, not going above and beyond. Thus, in a work setting, men are given credit for performing altruistic behaviors—they are evaluated more positively and recommended more favorable rewards—while women are penalized for not performing them (Heilman & Chen, In Press).

Prescriptive stereotype violation can also inspire the withholding of job opportunities, and the willful sabotaging of women's work. Rudman (1998) demonstrated in a series of laboratory studies that women who presented themselves in a self-promotional manner were perceived to be more competent than those who were self-effacing (a more stereotypically consistent presentation style), but were less likely to be hired by the study participants. They were also more likely to have their opportunities sabotaged by those with control over their future opportunities (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

Informal Discrimination

Formal discrimination undoubtedly plays a role in limiting the career attainments of women employees, particularly in regard to their access to key jobs, advancement opportunities, compensation, and the evaluation of their performance. But although it may be more difficult for women to gain access to male gender-typed jobs and to be promoted into leadership positions, some of them are successful at gaining entry. Informal discrimination may confront them once they get there.

Descriptive stereotypes can indirectly contribute to informal discrimination: the negative expectations of women's abilities and skills may lead members of the organization to socially ostracize them, thereby keeping women from becoming central players within their organizations. Because their input may be deemed less valuable, they are more likely than men to be omitted from key discussions, overlooked when perspectives are being sought about important decisions, and left out of informal networks that provide the context for critical information-sharing. Others in the workplace are less likely to come to them for help precisely because they are viewed as lacking essential traits for success, thus creating a system where women are cut off from opportunities to exert influence.

Indeed, interaction patterns between many men and women in male gender-typed work environments are of a substantively different quality from those that occur between and among male employees. Research indicates that not only do women encounter more difficulty forming social connections at work than men do, but they reap fewer benefits from the relationships that they do form. Analyses of social networks reveal that men have more extensive social networks that include influential organizational members than do women (Ibarra, 1992). Working women also report more difficulty establishing mentoring relationships with male colleagues than do men (Ragins & Cotton, 1991). Even when women do find mentors and develop social networks, these relationships are less strongly associated with positive career outcomes such as promotions and compensation than are men's relationships (Eddleston, Baldrige & Veiga, 2004; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

Violating prescriptive stereotypes can also lead to informal discrimination against women. Those who express traditionally masculine characteristics are liked less than stereotype-consistent women, and are therefore more likely to be marginalized. The 2004 study by Heilman, et al. of successful women provides one example of this discrimination. In addition to being rated as interpersonally hostile, participants in these studies consistently expressed less liking for a successful woman in a male gender-typed job than a woman perceived as less competent. She was also rated as less likeable than an equivalently successful man. Given the negative assumptions about the successful woman's personal characteristics, it was not surprising that participants in these studies expressed less favorable attitudes about having her as their manager than either a man or an unsuccessful woman.

A series of studies of women's influence in task settings provides further evidence of the power of norm violation to shape women's work experiences. Carli (1990) found that women who spoke in counter-stereotypic ways, that is assertively, were less able to exert influence over others than those who spoke tentatively. Later research demonstrated that differences in influence were largely determined by liking: women who exhibited a dominant style were liked less than women with more normatively female styles, even though they were thought to be more competent (Carli, LaFleur & Loeber, 1996). Disliked women were less influential than women who were liked. This research program demonstrates the prescriptive double-bind women face: to be viewed as competent they must be assertive and dominant, but exhibiting these traits causes them to be disliked and less able to influence others.

Discrimination and the Work Environment for Women

The consequences of discrimination can extend beyond women's lack of access to formal and informal resources by influencing their experiences in, and perceptions of, their work environments. Many women who believe they have experienced discrimination, or have seen colleagues affected by it, show less engagement in their work. A study of employees across jobs and industries by Ensher and colleagues found that women and minority employees distinguished between three sources of discrimination: supervisors, coworkers, and organizations. The more strongly participants believed that their supervisors discriminated against them because of their gender or race, or that they had experienced organizational-level discrimination (defined as the belief that organizational policies and practices were discriminatory), the less satisfied they were with their jobs and the less committed they were to the organization. Furthermore, women were less likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors when they reported experiencing coworker discrimination (Ensher, Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001).

A study by Schaffer and colleagues (2000) showed that perceived gender-bias in organizational decision-making has negative effects across cultures. The more that women employees in the United States, Beijing, and Hong Kong believed they had experienced gender discrimination, the less satisfied they reported being with their jobs, the less affectively committed they were to their organizations, and the

stronger was their intention to leave their jobs. Moreover, in both the United States and abroad, reports of gender discrimination had an even more negative association with job attitudes and intentions than did experiences with sexual harassment.

Gender discrimination represents an organizational problem that looms larger than the effect it has on individual women who personally feel discriminated against. Women's perceptions that discrimination occurs within their work environments, regardless of their own personal experiences with it, can lead them to more negatively assess their organizations and organizational experiences than men do. Research has shown that women in general report their organizations as being less inclusive and less fair than do white men (Mor Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998). Moreover, while women are less likely to perceive themselves as victims of discriminatory treatment than they are to perceive that women as a group face discrimination (Crosby, 1984), they are still affected by its occurrence. Gutek, Cohen & Tsui (1996) found that the belief that women are disadvantaged relative to men within their organizations was associated with women's lowered feelings of power and prestige and reported reluctance to make the same career choices.

These studies demonstrate that discriminatory work environments can encourage the psychological disengagement of women from their work—they are less satisfied and committed when they believe that they, or other women, have been the target of discrimination. The full impact of gender discrimination is felt not only by women, however, but also by organizations that may be losing out on the skills women bring into the workplace as they leave at higher rates than they would if discrimination were eliminated. A recent survey of senior-level women in Fortune 1000 companies (vice-president level and above), for example, shows that women who feel informally excluded from the culture of their organizations (e.g., excluded from informal networks of communication or report that their behavioral style is different from the organization's norm) and feel that gender precludes their access to work opportunities are less satisfied with their jobs and intend to stay for a shorter length of time with their current employers than women who report greater levels of inclusion (Welle, 2004). However, these women are not reporting a desire to leave the workforce altogether—their intended age of retirement was no different from those who did not report being excluded from their organizational culture or work opportunities. We can conclude from this and related evidence that women who face discrimination are more likely to opt out of their current organizations in order to find more hospitable working environments. It may even be the case that the prevalence of discriminatory work environments motivates women to start their own businesses, which helps to explain why the number of women entrepreneurs is growing rapidly (Heilman & Chen, 2003).

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIONS TO IMPROVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS FOR WOMEN

Many organizations are attending to their work environments, striving to understand the different experiences of their men and women employees and taking action to remedy these differences. There are several motivating factors, or business cases, that guide the development and implementation of what are often termed “diversity programs.” The most obvious factor is a legal one: employment discrimination based on sex has been illegal since the passage of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; organizations must therefore ensure that their decisions are in compliance. Other motives move beyond the law and are grounded in the belief that having a gender-diverse workforce will improve business results through the addition of unique skills and perspectives (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

The goal of increasing diversity has thus become a salient one for organizations: a survey of Fortune 500 companies revealed that 75 percent of the responding organizations have a diversity program in place (Society for Human Resource Management, 1998). However, despite the shared interest in promoting diversity, the actual content of these programs varies from one company to the next. Also, they are not always well defined or linked to actual behaviors, objectives, and performance measurements. Less than one-half of the programs were tied to employees' performance evaluations or compensation. Similarly, approximately one-half of the respondents indicated that the effectiveness of the diversity programs in meeting their objectives was not measured.

There is a potentially even bigger problem than the lack of rigor in defining and measuring the effectiveness of diversity programs. The stereotyping literature indicates that ambiguity in human resource practices can create the conditions for gender stereotypes to flourish. This may especially be the case when the practices target particular members of demographic groups: not only does the program itself call attention to demographic categories, but these categories can become, in the minds of observers, a plausible reason for why certain decisions are made. Heilman & Welle (2004) recently showed that highlighting diversity-related goals can ultimately lead to negative impressions of women's work-related characteristics. In a series of studies, research participants were shown a photograph of a work group said to be brought together to complete a male gender-typed task. They then reviewed background information about two of the work group members and rated them on several dimensions. The rationale for assembling the group either reflected the organization's diversity objectives (i.e., to ensure that the demographic diversity within the organization was represented), or ensured that the best resources and expertise were represented. Results revealed that women associated with diversity objectives were rated in stereotype-consistent ways: they were viewed as less competent, less influential, and less likely to emerge as the group leader than women in the *merit* condition. In contrast, men were rated highly, regardless of the rationale given for the makeup of the group. The findings indicate that the label of *diversity* can sometimes be interpreted as entailing preferential treatment of women and racial minorities, calling into question their skills and abilities relative to white men.

This research demonstrates that even well intended efforts to increase the access of women to opportunities may maintain—or even exacerbate—negative impressions of women's abilities. We therefore argue that the most effective strategies to reducing formal discrimination will be those that provide accurate and objective information about organizational members, and then apply that information to decision-making processes. Following are recommendations to reduce discrimination and improve the work environment for women.

1. Base personnel decisions on accurate knowledge of the job

The lack of fit perspective of gender discrimination posits that gender bias occurs because women are stereotyped as feminine and male gender-typed jobs are stereotyped as masculine. While we know that stereotypes are not necessarily accurate descriptions of an individual's attributes, to what extent do the stereotypes of a job accurately reflect what it truly takes to succeed? A thorough job analysis should be conducted for male gender-typed jobs in order to (a) ensure that the characteristics presumed to be necessary for success are genuinely necessary, and (b) to ground the profile of the ideal job candidate in behaviors, skills, and past experiences rather than in vague personality characteristics that can be distorted to fit gender stereotypes.

We would like to emphasize here that we are suggesting that male gender-typed jobs be redefined based on actual contributions to successful job performance. This focus is quite different from arguing that we should re-conceptualize male gender-typed work as female gender-typed work. Rudman & Glick (1999)

investigated what happens when the job of manager is feminized, that is, defined as requiring the stereotypically feminine traits of being helpful, being sensitive to the needs of others, and listening carefully. Results show that discrimination against women still occurred, but against agentic women, not gender-typical ones. Thus, it is important to form accurate impressions of the job, just as it is necessary to accurately assess the individuals who work at it.

2. Use structured evaluation techniques

Unfortunately, the criteria used to make important organizational decisions are often unspecified. The assessment of employees' contributions to the organization can be mired in ambiguity, which makes accurate assessments difficult. These conditions create the fuel for gender-based decision-making. In order to reduce this ambiguity, evaluators rely on their descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes when deciding whom to hire or promote, or what an appropriate salary increase will be.

To reduce ambiguity, all formal personnel decisions should be guided by a structured program to ensure that men and women are being evaluated on the same criteria. There are at least two factors that are necessary for these programs to be effective. First, they must facilitate the accurate assessment of employees' contributions. Test performance, number of projects completed, amount of revenue generated, and other quantifiable indicators are relatively easy to collect and judge, and they are also more difficult to distort in gender-consistent ways than more subjective measures. Other indicators of success may not be so easily collected and analyzed, but formal evaluation tools that are grounded in an objective job analysis can help ensure that women and men are evaluated along the same dimensions. The second factor requires that explicit decision-making rules be defined. Since stereotypes can lead evaluators to pay more attention to different types of information for men and women, a formula should be devised to ensure that all information is used in the same way for men and women employees and job candidates. The formalization of information-collection and decision-making procedures should factor into policies ranging from job interviews to performance evaluations. This method will help to ensure that all individuals are being judged on the same criteria and leave little room for managers to improvise or customize.

3. Hold managers accountable for making bias-free decisions

Stereotyping research shows that while gender may be a useful and readily accessible way to categorize men and women in the work environment, people do not rely on it in every situation. Those who are motivated to form accurate impressions will forego stereotypes in lieu of more accurate, individuating information (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). So who is a "motivated" perceiver? In the workplace, those who have a personal stake in making accurate decisions have a stronger incentive to bypass their stereotyped impressions than those who will be personally unaffected by the decisions they make. Thus, a decision-maker whose own outcomes are dependent on the person they select and evaluate will be motivated to make decisions based on objective criteria. This effect was demonstrated in the studies conducted by Rudman (1998). She found that self-promoting women (i.e., prescriptive norm violators) were less likely to be hired unless the decision-makers actually had to work with the person selected and whose outcomes, therefore, were dependent on their partners' performance. In this situation, self-promoting women were more likely to be hired than self-effacing women. However, this interesting effect was only

“In the workplace, those who have a personal stake in making accurate decisions have a stronger incentive to bypass their stereotyped impressions than those who will be personally unaffected by the decisions they make.”

found for male subjects—women decision-makers were always more likely to hire a self-effacing woman, even when she was thought to be less competent.

It is not always the case that decision-makers in organizations can be outcome-dependent on those they are evaluating, hiring and promoting. Hiring decisions are often made by individuals who are not involved in a new employee's work. Also, multi-rater evaluation systems, such as 360 degree feedback, allow several people to evaluate a single individual. Organizations can play a role in creating accountability when more natural outcome-dependency is lacking. Managers who are required to justify the decisions they make and describe the criteria they use to hire, evaluate, and distribute job opportunities among individuals are less likely to discriminate against women. In other words, organizations that enforce a transparent decision-making process will encourage manager accountability for the decisions they make, thus reducing discrimination.

Research supports this recommendation. It has been shown that people show more complexity and greater accuracy in personality assessments when they anticipate having to justify their ratings (Tetlock & Kim, 1987). Likewise, a laboratory study showed that individuals who have to justify their decisions are much less likely to favor members of their ingroup when allocating valued resources than those who do not have to make justifications (Dobbs & Crano, 2001).

4. Create formal processes to build relationships

Reducing informal discrimination is a difficult task because it involves monitoring and regulating an *organic* process: the formation of social relationships. Social networks develop between people who feel comfortable with each other and who share common experiences, and the networks are not traditionally a byproduct of formal organizational policies. Organizations can institute formal networking and relationship-building activities, however, to help foster relationships in venues to which men and women have equal access.

Organizations might also consider exerting control over one of the most important workplace relationships: mentorship. Mentoring relationships often develop informally between two people with the goal that the more senior individual will give career guidance to the more junior one. But an increasing number of organizations are formally matching mentors in their organizations with protégés. Ragins and colleagues (Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000) conducted a survey of employees to assess their attitudes toward their mentoring experiences. Employees who were protégés in informal mentoring relationships reported higher levels of satisfaction with their mentoring experiences than those in the formal programs, but having a mentor, whether formally or informally assigned, was associated with more positive attitudes than having no mentor at all. Thus, sacrificing the chemistry of an informal relationship can be balanced by having a well-trained mentor who is assigned through a formal program.

5. Create explicit links between diversity programs and performance

Because diversity programs may be presumed to advantage some employees over others, organizations should take care to explicitly define their scope and content. Whether it is a mentoring program, diversity training, or a recruitment strategy, care should be taken to implement the program fairly and consistently for men and women. Communicating that these programs do not simply confer preferential treatment to women over men and adhere to the principles of fairness will increase acceptance of both the programs and those who benefit from them (e.g., Heilman, Battle, Keller & Lee, 1998).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The literature reviewed in this paper is a testament to the impact that gender has on the way we do our work, the quality and nature of the relationships we form, and the decisions we make. However, because stereotyping is a process that occurs largely without conscious awareness, we are unlikely to notice the ways that our attitudes are guiding our behaviors. And yet the effects of biased decision-making are plain to see: discrimination against women in male gender-typed jobs is expressed formally through the biased allocation of organizational resources and informally through the quality and nature of relationships that form between members of the organization. It also fosters a work environment that is experienced more negatively by women than men. A review of the existing literature indicates that perceived discrimination is associated with women's more negative evaluations of their work organizations, lowered commitment to the organization, and an increased desire to leave.

Cultural stereotypes about what women are like and how they should behave create the backdrop for a cycle of disparate treatment. On the one hand, women are presumed to lack the attributes necessary for successful task performance and are therefore more likely than men to be excluded from key work opportunities. But on the other, demonstrating that they are capable of successful performance prompts backlash that is expressed through both formal and informal discrimination, which can ultimately result in the marginalization of gender-atypical women. The exclusion of these women from full engagement in the workplace decreases their visibility, their capacity to act as role models, and precludes their ability to change the stereotype of who women are and what they can achieve (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

This cycle is therefore one that perpetuates organizational systems that make success more difficult for women to achieve than men. Indeed, negative performance expectations and norms around "acceptable" feminine behavior interact to create a precarious situation for women motivated to succeed. Two of the strategies that women cite as essential to achieving success within corporations and firms is "exceeding performance expectations" and simultaneously "adopting a style with which male managers are comfortable" (Catalyst, 2001, 2004). But striking the perfect balance between disproving negative performance stereotypes and adhering to prescriptive norms is difficult, if not impossible, for most women.

Fortunately, gender discrimination is recognized as a problem by organizations, all of which are obligated by law to reduce it, and many of which believe that doing so will have a positive impact on the bottom line of their businesses. There is still significant work that needs to be done to achieve the goal of a discrimination-free workplace. Current organizational practices vary widely from company to company and most of them are not evaluated for their effectiveness. In this paper we provided recommendations for applying stereotyping research to improve them.

Reducing gender discrimination will ultimately require that several simultaneous efforts be taken. First, individuals must be educated about discrimination: what it is, how it happens, and how they can prevent their own stereotypes from biasing their actions. Second, we must better understand the nature of jobs and the skills required for success. Can one really achieve success at male gender-typed jobs only by displaying a small set of masculine characteristics? We suspect that diversity in styles and approaches can actually be good for productivity, as a small but growing literature is beginning to illustrate (van Knippenberg, De Dreu & Homan, 2004). And finally, organizations must use the findings of gender-discrimination research to create better-structured programs to reduce ambiguity and encourage objective decision-making.

These efforts may have some short-run disadvantages. For example, with education, employees will be better able to recognize instances of discrimination, which might result in lowered commitment and satisfaction and an increased number of lawsuits. Adopting an objective view of the characteristics required for success at male gender-typed jobs, combined with more accurate assessments of abilities, means that the sub-group of employees, namely men with masculine characteristics, may no longer benefit from their positive gender stereotypes. Research has yet to determine how unbiased decision-making may have negative effects on those who have traditionally benefited from their group membership, but there may be implications for their self-esteem, job commitment, and other work attitudes and behaviors. And finally, increasing the structure of human resource programs may come at the expense of spontaneity and chemistry. But in the end, reducing discrimination will ensure not only that women are selected, promoted, compensated and included based on their abilities and attributes, but that organizations themselves will be capitalizing on the true talents of their women employees.

Note

This paper will appear as a chapter in Dirk Steiner, Stephen W. Gilliland & Dan Skarlicki (Eds.), Research in social issues in management: Managing social and ethical issues in organizations. Vol. 5. Westport, CT: Information Age Publishers. 2005.

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