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Abstract
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GENDER BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

By

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ABSTRACT

Gender bias remains a serious problem in the workplace. In order to begin addressing this complex issue, we must isolate the factors that influence these inequalities. Is one such factor political ideology? If so, how does it relate to these inequalities? Research methods used in previous and relevant studies were modified in order to explore this issue. The current research used fictional samples of applicant information and mock interview transcripts in order to simulate a hiring process (Hoyt, 2011). In order to show differences in attitudes, both the sex of the applicant and their prospective occupations were manipulated. More specifically, each participant was randomly assigned to read through one of the four possible applicant transcripts. Then, applicant hireability (Rudman & Glick, 1999) and participant political ideology (Liu & Latane, 1998) were assessed. The hypothesis is that, when compared to liberals, conservatives would be less likely to hire men and women for gender atypical positions than gender stereotypical positions. Results were contrary to this hypothesis, however. Implications are discussed.

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Introduction

Although American culture has progressed considerably in terms of civil rights, unjustified differences in employment pay and other benefits still threaten the potential of our society. Discrimination in the workplace based on gender, race, and other factors serve to maintain the status quo, leaving individuals within certain demographic categories behind. For example, women only made up 22% of the workforce within STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) in 2008 (Fried & MacCleave, 2009). Even for the women that are able to obtain these positions, pay differences are another means of discrimination that exists. However, these differences in pay are not exclusive to the STEM field. In one study, when combining all ranks and types of institutions of higher education, female faculty members earned, on average, 80 percent of the salary of men (Okpara, 2005). Overall, the median earnings of women in the United States in 2007 were 77.5% of men’s earnings (Bishaw & Semega, 2008). In order to reduce discrimination in the workplace, employers and the employed must be aware of the factors that contribute to these unjustified differences in pay and other benefits. The current research looks at political ideology as a possible factor for gender discrimination in the workplace.

Workplace Gender Bias

There is sufficient empirical evidence supporting the notion that workplace prejudice based on sex exists, and can affect employment and hiring decisions. Largely, this prejudice comes from a mixed perception of workplace gender roles, and the employers’ expectations of gender role stereotypicality (Eagly, 2004). This is certainly problematic, as many organizations have loose criteria for hiring processes, and are often
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not held accountable for their decisions (Powell & Graves, 2003). Overall, hiring
decisions are largely unstructured, relying primarily on the impressions received by the
interviewer. Additionally, when applicants present ambiguous credentials or background
history, stereotypes are used to complete the unavailable information (Darley & Gross,
1983). This leaves the door open for a wide range of influential factors on this process.
Interviewers can receive ample opportunity to confirm or deny a number of traits or
characteristics about the interviewee, including the extent to which an interviewee
conforms to the stereotypes perceived by the interviewer. Stereotypes play an integral
role in how we perceive others. Whether we are aware of it or not, they influence
decisions in the workplace.

Workplace discrimination based on sex can disadvantage both men and women,
as both are penalized when successful in areas that are not consistent with their respective
gender stereotypic role (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005). Those who exhibit counte-
stereotypical behavior often arouse disapproval and are subject to penalties or
punishments (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). One study found that men who excel at a job that
is stereotypically associated with females are less respected and perceived as a less
effective employee than women who excel in the same position (Heilman & Wallen,
2010). This study also found that women who excel at a job that is stereotypically
associated with males are consistently more disparaged and less liked than women with
jobs that are more stereotypical for women. Although men and women are disadvantaged
in different ways, because these disadvantages exist, everyone would benefit from less
discrimination while at work. Because women are stereotyped to be the nicer of the two
sexes, there can be backlash from behavior that is inconsistent with this gender role.
Gender Bias in the Workplace (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994). Most people would probably agree that work environments, at least sometimes, require other characteristics than niceness, like assertiveness, determinism, and directness, to be effective. Qualities such as these, while potentially being more effective for leadership, can act against women, depending on the perception of stereotypes by others in the workplace. One study found that the attributes we attach to women, including inclusiveness, warmth, and niceness, tend to be inconsistent with the characteristics that are needed for success in the workplace (Schein, 2001). Alternatively, masculine traits such as independence and dominance are positively evaluated in these environments (Aries, 1996). Women that attempt dominance or assertiveness when expressing their own views often have a hard time achieving success (Carli, 2001). This can certainly be seen as a barrier for women, as they try to work around the paradox of both being successful without the repercussions of breaking gender roles. However, this problem does not appear to be currently perpetuated by a single sex. Research shows that even when work performance is presented as equal, men and women tend to rate men more favorably for completing gender neutral tasks, such as color matching or pattern recognition. (Cleveland, Stockdale & Murphy, 2000). This allows women to be unfairly judged, and more likely to be perceived as incompetent or illogical, even when performing similarly to their male counterpart.

Not only are men and women treated differently in the workplace, they also have different expectations for domestic responsibilities. Although weakening, society in the United States still represents traditional gender assignment to the division of labor: Men are the primary financial providers, and women are the primary domestic laborers. Although women are becoming a larger part of the workforce, they still maintain the
majority of the unpaid domestic labor (Belkin, 2008). This traditional expectation for domesticity is a likely a barrier for women, especially for those who are in pursuit of non-conventional employment roles. When attempting to better understand gender bias in the workplace, one must consider possible factors that can create a predisposition to cause biased decision-making. Because of the differences in attitudes towards tradition and the status quo among liberals and conservatives, the current research looks to political ideology as one possible factor.

**Political Ideology**

Political ideology is generally represented on a single left-right dimension. While those on the left (liberals) tend to support social change and reject inequality, those on the right (conservatives) tend to support tradition and accept inequality within society (Bobbio, 1996). While it is difficult to completely define all the components of what makes someone liberal or conservative, research by Jost, Nosek, and Gosling (2008) found political ideologues to exhibit “Implicit as well as explicit preferences for tradition, conformity, order, stability, traditional values, and hierarchy—versus those for progress, rebelliousness, chaos, flexibility, feminism, and equality—are associated with conservatism and liberalism, respectively” (p. 126). While liberals are more likely to support alteration of the status quo, conservatives are more likely to support tradition in society (Kerlinger, 1984). Conservatives are also more likely to support policies and attitudes that work to maintain current social order, while establishing that the very structure of society is comprised of equal opportunities (Glaser, 2005; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). One could see how this justification could exacerbate inequality, effectively limiting or blocking any new policies that may emerge to provide more
opportunities to underrepresented demographics in society. Although those who hold conservative beliefs tend to value tradition, does this attitude toward tradition affect the perception of gender roles in the workplace? In one study (Hoyt, 2011), participants were asked to assume the role of an employer, assessing the qualifications of a hypothetical job candidate. In order to show differences in attitudes towards women, the sex of the fictional job applicant was manipulated through pronouns and full names (either Ben or Sarah Williams). The results showed that liberals’ more positive evaluations and conservatives’ more negative evaluations of the job candidate were driven by their denunciation of or support of traditional female roles.

The Current Research

This research is in response to a previous study (Hoyt, 2011), in which undergraduates were asked to evaluate a fictional job applicant for a position in middle management. This was accomplished by having participants read through background information and mock interview transcripts of the applicant. The sex of the applicant was manipulated in this study, as participants were randomly assigned to evaluate a male or female applicant. Following this information, participant perception of the candidate was assessed by a hireability measure. This, combined with a political ideology measure, was used to investigate differences in attitudes towards women among the participants. The results of this experiment confirmed the hypothesis that political ideology influences evaluations of female job candidates, as conservative participants were associated with less positive evaluations of female candidates than liberal participants.

The current study seeks to extend these findings. While there is ample research suggesting that there are biases against women in the workplace, are these biases
completely a function of mixed perceptions of workplace gender roles? Would men also be discriminated against on the basis of nonconformity to gender typical positions, such as administrative assistants? The current research looks at these questions by manipulating not only the gender of the applicant, but the stereotypicality of the position as well, for a total of four unique profiles for participants to respond to: Male applying for a gender stereotypic occupation, male applying for a gender counterstereotypic occupation, female applying for a gender stereotypic occupation, and female applying for a gender counterstereotypic occupation. The results may be able to provide further transparency in the expectations for workplace gender roles of men and women, and the differences in expectations, if any, between liberals and conservatives. Due to conservatives' support of tradition in society, the prediction is that when compared to liberals, conservatives will be less likely to hire men and women for gender atypical positions than gender stereotypical positions. If the results are as predicted, the current research would not only show that men, as well as women, are discriminated against for gender atypical workplace positions, but also that conservatives are more likely to adhere to this discrimination.

METHOD

Participants

A total of two hundred and twenty four participants (a mix of 42 business professionals and 182 undergraduates, 72% female, median age=21; range 19-60) were recruited to volunteer in this study. Undergraduate participants received extra credit for participating, and all other participants were entered into a drawing. Eight participants were randomly selected to receive a cash award of either twenty-five or fifty dollars.
Measures

Participants in the current research were asked to assume the role of an employer, imagining that they in charge of filling a middle management position. To do so, they will be randomly assigned to read through one of four profiles containing fictional applicant information and mock interview transcripts, specifically created for this experiment. These four profiles each represent a specific condition in this experiment: Male applying for a gender stereotypic occupation, male applying for a gender counterstereotypic occupation, female applying for a gender stereotypic occupation, and female applying for a gender counterstereotypic occupation. After reading these materials, participants were asked to complete a survey that contains a hireability scale and a political ideology scale. The hireability scale was eighteen questions, assessing one's likelihood to hire a candidate. Sample items include: “Many people would have respect for this applicant,” “The applicant would likely be hired for this job,” and “I would entrust this candidate with important projects.” This scale was identical to the scale used in Hoyt’s 2011 study to assess hireability of the applicant. The political ideology scale was a three-item scale developed by James Liu and Bibb Latane in 1998.

Procedure

Participants were recruited to complete an online survey. Upon prompting the online survey, the participants were subjected to a two-page consent form highlighting the purpose, format, expected risks, benefits, and compensation of the study. Participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time. This was followed with demographic questions, a political ideology scale, a randomly selected mock interview transcript and resume, and a hireability scale. The survey was estimated
to take about twenty-five to thirty minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey, participants were introduced to a debriefing page, illustrating the intent of the survey and providing contact information for those who wanted it. Participants were then linked to another survey in order to provide contact information to be entered in the prize drawing.

RESULTS

The hypothesis stated that when compared to liberals, conservatives would be less likely to hire men and women for gender atypical positions than gender stereotypical positions. In order to test if political ideology was an influential factor when hiring for stereotypic and counterstereotypic occupations, a two-way ANOVA was performed. This test showed that there was not a significant interaction among one’s political ideology and job stereotypicality when determining hireability of the applicant ($F(1, 152) = .451, p = .503$). Means were calculated for liberals and conservatives within hireability for both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical positions. Conservatives ($M = 6.54$) were not less significantly likely than liberals ($M = 6.8$) to hire men or women for counter-stereotypical positions. The means for stereotypical positions were also similar, as conservatives ($M = 6.57$) were not significantly more or less likely to hire men and women for more gender traditional occupations than liberals ($M = 6.48$). Hireability did not seem to be affected by any of the conditions in this experiment.

DISCUSSION

Is workplace gender bias a function of political ideology? The current research addressed workplace perceptions of men and women with respect to positions that were both typical and atypical for their gender. According to the results from the current research, when compared to liberals, conservatives were not less likely to hire men and
women for gender atypical positions than gender stereotypical positions. More specifically, liberals and conservatives were no more or less likely to hire men or women for either position (middle-management position or administrative assistant). While prior research has clearly demonstrated the existence of workplace gender bias and its effect on hiring decisions, determining political ideology as a factor of these biases has been less direct. Although the results in the present research are inconsistent with previous workplace prejudice studies, there may be an explanation.

One possible reason for the results not supporting the hypothesis may be due to the occupations of the participants for the current research. While the participants were a mix of undergraduates and business professionals, only forty-two workers were surveyed, compared to one hundred and eighty-two undergraduates. Although a more balanced mix of students and business people may or may not have produced data that supported the hypothesis, the results would have certainly been more reflective of workplace attitudes and beliefs. It is also possible that undergraduates, as they are typically just beginning adulthood, may not be as politically educated as those who are currently employed in business professional environments. As such, more diversity within political ideology among participants may have also contributed to data more supportive of the hypothesis. Not only were there significantly fewer participants that identified conservatively, they were also more moderate in their conservatism than their liberal counterparts were liberal. Finally, political ideology as a factor of gender bias in the workplace may not exist altogether. While there is some research that supports the existence of this phenomenon, evidence that workplace prejudice as a function of political ideology is largely undiscovered.
Limitations

If the current study were to be replicated or expanded upon within workplace gender bias and political ideology, a few items may be potentially limiting to the efficacy of the study. Firstly, political ideology is difficult to define. While it is most commonly represented on a single left-right dimension, mixed perceptions of political ideology make it difficult for researchers to establish a true consensus for what is considered liberal or conservative. However, the two items that most consistently separate liberals and conservatives are differences in beliefs towards tradition and equality. For this reason, the only methodology used in the current research to ascertain participant political ideology was “What political party do you best identify with,” “In terms of economic issues (e.g., taxes, trade, labor), how would you describe yourself,” and “In terms of social issues (e.g., health, welfare), how would you describe yourself,” allowing the participants to select from a spectrum of “Very Liberal” to “Very Conservative.” While this methodology has been used in previous research to isolate supporters of these two key issues, depending on participants’ political knowledge and experience, it may have been less representative to an undergraduate population. This is particularly important to the current research, as undergraduates were the vast majority of the sample used. Future studies may want consider assessing participants’ knowledge and experience with political ideology in order to gather data that is more indicative of the political ideology being represented. Secondly, although participants were assessed in how liberal or conservative they align politically, they were not prompted to reveal general attitudes towards politics. Although a participant might report alignment towards a particular political ideology, they may not necessarily feel conviction toward such a belief. Would
this difference in political attitude be significant to the results of this experiment? Lastly, were the gender stereotypes sufficiently prevalent in the methodology of the current research? If the gender stereotypicality of the fictional applicant were not made salient enough, the participants’ responses may have not been affect by differences in the gender stereotypicality of the applicants.

Future Research

A few questions have been raised from the analysis of the current research. First, are conservative political attitudes an influential factor for priming gender stereotypes within hiring situations? Would utilization of a different sample, yet similar methodology to the current research, produce significantly different results? It is possible that a sample more heavily drawn from working professionals might produce significantly different results. Second, little research has investigated the influence religiosity has on gender roles for business decisions. Do the values set by one’s religion affect the willingness to conform to gender stereotypes at work? Does religious affiliation affect hiring decisions within the workplace? What other influences exist? The more of these factors we can isolate, the better we can understand the barriers that exist for gender equality in the workplace.

Conclusion

In summation, when compared to liberals, conservatives were not any less or more likely to hire men and women for gender atypical positions than gender stereotypical positions. The results of the current study did not support the original hypothesis previously established, possibly due to limitations in undergraduate sampling or vague methodology. It is also possible that political ideology is not a consistent factor
within workplace gender bias. Political ideology is complex, and often difficult to clearly define. While political ideologies do not seem to firmly affect workplace gender bias, hopefully this study points future research in a direction that will isolate such factors.
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