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A Research Proposal: Does the Glass Ceiling Show Signs of Breaking in the 21st Century?

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A Research Proposal: Does the Glass Ceiling show signs of breaking
in the 21st Century?

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Abstract

Unfortunately, today women are still trying to prove themselves equal to men. Women are often over looked in many industries just due to the fact of being a woman. There are many negative assumptions regarding women. Some examples are: women cannot do a job meant for a man, women cannot work late hours due to children, women are too soft and don't represent a strong leader in a top level position. It's hard to even think that in the 21st century the glass ceiling is continuing to block women from entering and advancing in managerial and supervisory roles. Women have been able to move into top level positions by leaving the traditional agencies where men have dominated. Women have found that it's easier to move around the glass ceiling rather than trying to break through it. The aim of this research proposal is to validate whether the glass ceiling still occurs in the 21st century. If so, have women made strives to shrink the gap?

Keywords: Glass ceiling, women executives, invisible barrier, preferences for veterans compared to women, gender discrimination, human capital

Statement of the Problem

The Civil Rights Act barred sexual discrimination in the workplace over 50 years ago, and more women are in the workforce than ever before. Then why does the “glass ceiling” continue to block women from advancing to top level positions in companies and organizations? “A 2003 study by the General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office) found that women earned 79.7 percent of what men earned, even after controlling for occupation, industry, years of work experience, job tenure, number of work hours, time off for childbearing, race, marital status, and education. By comparison, women’s earnings in 1983 equaled 80.3 percent of men’s earnings an indication that the wage gap is not shrinking” (Alkadry & Tower, 2006).

The glass ceiling operates in both the public and the private sectors. Some studies show that while employment may no longer be denied to women based on sex alone, there might be other factors that contribute to preventing women from moving into the supervisory and management positions. Here is a list of the other factors that can contribute to blocking women from advancing: position segregation, agency segregation, and human capital.

Research questions:

Are more women choosing to move around the glass ceiling rather than breaking through it?

Does preference for veteran status play a role in veterans receiving a promotion over non-veterans and women?

Does the glass ceiling show a slight crack? If so, is it statistically significant?

Background Literature Related to the Problem

The United States workforce is still facing challenges even after the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963. We define the glass ceiling as an invisible barrier that prevents women from entering into executive positions. Federal laws include the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which guarantees equal pay for equal work, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits sex-based employment discrimination (e.g., hiring, firing, training, promotion, and wages). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces these two laws. “Despite years of equal opportunity and affirmative action efforts, women remain concentrated in certain lower-level positions. In a study of the federal senior service, Mani (1997) noted that women occupied 85 percent of all clerical positions but only 13 percent of the Senior Executive Services positions in federal public service” (Alkadry & Tower, 2006).

Alkadry and Tower (2006) reported that out of the 1,600 responses that were collected from an online national survey which included four groups of the public professionals, the wage gap between genders ranged from \$5,035 to \$9,577. This indicates that gender plays a major role in salaries of public officials in similar positions. Different employers and occupations have different sets of wages between men and women.

Human capital factors such as age, education, and length of service are connected with organizational barriers. There are many studies which only consider these factors as the major problem that prevent women from breaking through the glass ceiling. Educational differences or differences in work experience could cause a wage gap. Another major factor that can be attribute to the wage gap between women and men is the tenure in the workforce.

Alkadry’s and Tower’s (2006) study was preformed through an online survey which was sent in an email to all individuals who work in the National Institute for Government Procurement (NIGP) organization. The email message was sent to 6,747 members, a total of

1,673 individuals responded, resulting in a 28% response rate. The 28% represents the population. The results indicated female executives earned 86.5% of their male counterparts, female managers earned 87.3% of their male counterparts, female buyers earned 87.2% of their male counterparts and female technicians earned 86.6% of their male counterparts.

The Veterans' Preference Act of 1944, the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Acts of 1972 and 1974, and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 give veterans preference in employment. These policies were put in place to ensure that those who served in the armed forces would not be discriminated against. It also served the purpose of helping veterans ease back into the workforce. Mani wanted to study the effects of veterans' preferences on women's careers between 1975 and 1995. Mani (1999) reported that Keeton (1994) stated that promotions were not received due to veterans' preferences. If this is true, then what factors contribute to the disproportionate numbers of males and females in higher level positions? Both men and women are able to enter into the federal civil service positions. The problem is that many women cannot advance. Florida, Arizona, and Utah are states which recognize the traditional benefits for veterans; this is an advantage towards men rather than women. There are two states which males receive little or no benefits, Texas and California. Mani (1999) stated that the objective of the study is to analyze characteristics of the federal workforce. Mani (1999) wanted to be able to measure the characteristics of the effects that gender and veterans' preferences have on the promotional rate.

Mani (1999) reported the survey was mailed in 1994 which had a sample size of 411 male and female career Senior Executive Service (SES) members from all federal agencies. The survey aimed to allow SES members to give insight into the career development of men and women at the highest level of the federal civil services. The data

reflects social change; the numbers of veterans are dropping and the effect of veterans' preference is diminishing.

The progress made by women in the workforce has been impressive almost holding nearly half of the white collar jobs. Naff (1994) states that women still face gender discriminations in upper levels of government positions; there are only one in four supervisors and one in ten executives which are female. There are two dimensions of the glass ceiling, first is the nature barriers which hinder women from advancing and women's perception of treatment in the workplace. Another study from Department of Labor (DOL) which was done in 1990, reported the glass ceiling does exist in the form of informal policies and practices that have unintentionally prevented women from receiving top level jobs.

The first step to Naff's research was to conduct multiple focus groups of mid and senior level employees and senior executives. Employees were asked broad, open ended questions about their career advancement and whether there were differences in the treatment of men and women in the workplace. After receiving the answers, the second component was to create a survey questionnaire for a random sample of 13,000 white collars, executive branch employees. Eighty four hundred surveys were returned, which resulted in a 66 percent response rate. Naff (1994) reports that there is substantial evidence of a glass ceiling in the federal government and there are multiple assumptions associated with women in the workforce. Some assumptions regarding women are that women are less willing to relocate, particularly if they have children and they are also unwilling to work late. All these assumptions are evidence of stereotypes that cast doubt on women's abilities to perform in the workforce.

Bullard and Wright have discovered that many women have secured themselves top level position within organizations, but the progress has not been by breaking the glass ceiling

instead it was to avoid the ceiling all together. The Labor Department study showed 6.6 percent of the corporate executives were women while the Feminist Majority Foundation reported 2.6 percent of 6,500 corporate officers in the Fortune 500 companies were women. Women have been significantly more representative in the state local government rather than in the private sector.

Bullard and Wright (1993) reported that they analyzed the information that was received from mail questionnaire surveys, which was sent to the each state's heads of state government administrative agencies. Bullard and Wright's study was focused on the gender patterns at the peak administrative levels in all 50 states. The results from the survey show women are securing top level administrative positions. With new agencies being created this provides women a chance to avoid the glass ceiling at a traditional state agency. By changing companies women are able to move to the top positions. There are more women that are taking advantage of this opportunity.

Marlow, N., Marlow, E. and Arnold (1995) state even though the supply of women with high qualifications is growing and the education level has increased for women, it's still rare to see women in particular managerial and administrative ranks. "The Labor Department statistics stated in 1990, about 40 percent of women were in management positions, among them only a few held top leadership roles, mainly these positions are dominated by men. The Fortune 500 and Service 500 Companies did a study in 1990 indicating women accounted for only 3 percent of senior managers and 5.7 percent of the corporate directors" (Marlow, N., Marlow, E. & Arnold, 1995).

Many journals and articles talk about the glass ceiling and describe the subtle barriers that block the advancement of women and minorities. "Why have women apparently not received the same opportunities for career advancement as men? Why does the

advancement of women often stop just short of the general management level? Why is the problem still apparent despite several years of effort, represented by affirmative action and equal opportunity?" (Marlow, N., Marlow, E. & Arnold, 1995). Women are more likely to leave their jobs due to family obligations, such as marriage, pregnancy, children's or parents' needs, or to relocate due to husband's job. However turnover rates were greatly influenced by dissatisfaction with their opportunities for advancement not family obligations.

The sample method was a random questionnaire that was sent through the mail to 1,000 women in upper level management positions throughout the United States, the survey used a scale of 1 to 5; 5 meaning extremely important. The survey consisted of eighteen variables that would be considered important for career advancement in men and women. There were many areas where women and men had no statistical differences: ability to relocate, equally important in career counseling, networking, willingness to travel, ability to adopt values of superior, appropriate risk taking threshold, job related college major, and ability to change life patterns. Women were able to balance work/life better than men. The last list of criteria was more important for females than males: supportive corporate environment and supportive family member.

Method

Sample:

The sample will consist of 7,500 public employees in all 50 states. The list will be generated by the Fortune 500 and Service 500 Companies. A random sample will be selected from each of the 50 states to participate in an emailed, online survey. The email will have a hyperlink to the online survey. The survey will be sent to all 7,500 public employees.

Instrumentation:

The primary instrument used to collect data will be an online survey which will be emailed to all participants. The questionnaire survey will consist of 10 direct and clear questions. An open ended question will be listed directly after the 10th question. Right below the open ended question there will be a section to gather demographic information regarding sex, income, age, level of education, and size of family.

Data Collection:

There will be a scripted email message explaining all the details regarding the survey. To insure a high response rate, if the participants do not complete the survey after three weeks from the initial email, there will be an automatic email sent out to remind them. This will happen again after another three weeks from the second email. The 10 questions will be based on the five point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. To ensure a high response rate the survey will be open for 3 to 4 months for data collection.

Data Analysis:

A t-test will be used to determine differences between genders using charts and figures. All statistical tests will use the standard alpha level ($\alpha = .05$). There will be a detailed analysis of all data collected. Gathering information from several graphs, tables and charts will be used to determine if the glass ceiling still exists in the 21st century.

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