

The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Women in the Workplace

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Abstract: In recent years, although the protection of women's rights has made considerable progress in the workplace, it's still difficult for women to enter senior positions with typical "masculine characteristics", and they still suffer from unequal treatment compared with men. Gender discrimination is still relatively common in workplace. Among them, cognitive bias toward gender is one of the leading causes of gender discrimination in the workplace, and these cognitive biases are partly derived from gender stereotypes. These stereotypical expectations not only reflect existing differences but also profoundly influence the way men and women define themselves and are treated by others. Typical stereotypes about men and women are often widely shared daily. This paper studies the connotation, representation, and formation reasons for gender stereotypes, analyzes the adverse effects of gender stereotypes on women in the workplace, and puts forward suggestions for improving women's unequal treatment in the workplace from the perspective of gender stereotypes.

Keywords: gender stereotyping, female groups, gender discrimination, employment equality

1. Introduction

Price Waterhouse v. The Hopkins case is a typical case where the judgment constitutes gender discrimination from the perspective of gender stereotypes. In 1982, Ann Hopkins established herself as a top performer at Price Waterhouse, but her extraordinary achievements did not bring her opportunities for promotion. Her evaluator claimed that because her "brutish" personality made her have interpersonal problems, and therefore she didn't meet the promotion criteria. At the same time, Price Waterhouse also believes that if Ann Hopkins is more feminine and fits the femininity field, she will have the opportunity to be improved [1]. Ann Hopkins refused to accept it and filed a lawsuit against PwC. On May 1, 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that these remarks with obvious gender stereotypes constituted gender discrimination and violated the anti-sex discrimination law. In fact, Gender stereotypes surround everyone. It affects people's cognition, regulates people's behavior, makes people observe and evaluate others with colored glasses, and then influences the way of life of others. Therefore, it is very important to discuss the connotation, representation, and formation mechanism of gender stereotypes, analyze their adverse effects on women in the workplace, and study how to improve the adverse effects of gender stereotypes. This article follows this research idea, hoping that the research of this article can help to better understand the principles of women's gender discrimination in the workplace, and propose corresponding solutions.

2. The Connotation, Representation, and Formation Reasons of Gender Stereotypes

2.1. Connotation

Stereotype refers to the generalization and definition of all members of a certain group by identifying the typical characteristics and behavior of a representative person in the group. Stereotypes, which often lead people to overemphasize differences between groups and underestimate or ignore variation within groups. Not only can it reflect society's general expectations of members of a particular group, but it can also profoundly affect the way how group members define themselves and are treated by others [2]. Stereotypes are especially prominent in gender categories because gender is immediately perceived as one of the most obvious characteristics in identifying an individual. Gender is still viewed as a binary category today, despite numerous examples of gender distortion. In this category, women are compared to men, and any differences are attributed to the contrast between them. This is also one of the reasons for the formation and long-term solidification of gender stereotypes, which reinforce the perception of gender differences. It is undeniable that there are indeed differences in many fields between men and women, but the question is to what extent this difference can reflect the essence of men and women. However, gender stereotypes use an exaggerated way to reflect the opposition and differences between genders. While describing the typical characteristics of men and women, it also implicitly stipulates what kind of behavioral paradigms and personality traits women should show in their lives [2].

2.2. The Representation of Gender Stereotypes in the Work Field

Gender stereotypes are most common in the workplace. people are used to using the typical differences between genders as a reference to measure the value of their work and judge their ability. Gender stereotypes not only affect the way of thinking that women's and men's work, but also indirectly justify the division and unequal treatment of genders in the workplace.

First, affected by gender stereotypes, people will adopt different evaluation criteria according to the different characteristics between men and women. For example, people place more emphasis on task performance when evaluating a man's job, whereas a woman pays more attention to her social connections. Confidence and initiative are evaluation indicators for men, while kindness and patience are more evaluation criteria for women, etc. These different evaluation indicators will affect the occupational preferences of different gender groups, and eventually form occupational gender segregation [3].

Second, some jobs restrict or prohibit job opportunities for certain gender groups. For instance, when women are applying for a job, interviewers will ask questions about fertility and marriage, while men are rarely asked such questions. When deciding on final employment, interviewers usually consider the high cost of women's childbirth and refuse to hire, or directly or indirectly limit women's reproductive or marriage rights and even love rights. This is actually a disguised form of gender employment discrimination [4].

Finally, even with the same task performance, when evaluating individuals of different genders, different evaluation results will be produced according to their gender. This is especially evident in academia, where, for example, female researchers working in the sciences are less likely to be promoted than male researchers, even though they have the same number of scholarly publications, research discoveries, etc. But people usually think that male researchers have more potential and are more suitable for researching deeper fields [5]. These evaluation differences caused by gender stereotypes may have an important impact on women's career development and income levels, accumulating into serious gender inequality throughout their lives.

2.3. The Formation Reasons of Gender Stereotypes

2.3.1. Influenced by the Traditional Concept in Gender Personality

In people's common belief, men are more resolute and braver, while women are gentle and submissive. Men will be more confident, ambitious, and task-oriented when performing tasks, while women will show more caring when performing tasks, and will be more inclined to cooperate and handle work tasks in a friendly manner. Each has its own strengths. Women are considered to lack the agency of men, and men are considered to lack the sociality of women. These ideas about the personality of men and women ultimately had an important impact on people's thinking patterns. At the same time this descriptive stereotype creates an energy-saving device that enables the perceiver to react quickly to the unknown. Usually, this stereotype occurs automatically and unconsciously by the perceiver, which can help them make judgments easily [6].

2.3.2. Affected by Biological Differences Between Men and Women

It is not difficult to find through observation that there are some physiological differences between men and women. Men have stronger bodies and greater physical strength, while women's fertility may prevent them from engaging in more labor-intensive or energy-demanding physical activities. Under the guidance of this physiological difference, they will tend to engage in different types of work, and this concept is deeply ingrained in the brain during the process of biological evolution. However, according to new research, men and women's bodies produce the same hormone levels in the sixth month of a child's life. Although men's body and hormone levels are thought to be more aggressive, they can also elicit prosocial behavior and take on caring roles. And according to research, men and women are no different in many biological structures, and women can display the same high levels of performance and ambition as men. This also directly proves that gender stereotypes only reveal a small part of the gender differences and cannot explain the deeper inferences of the essential differences between men and women [2].

2.3.3. The Continuation of Traditional Backward Culture

In the history and culture of many countries, the tradition of the patrilineal system is continuing. Engels once said that "it is essential for men to obtain material information, while women's housework is irrelevant. The usefulness of social division of labor is not only reflected in economic interests but also reflected in the level of social hierarchy" [7]. Under the influence of this traditional thinking, the traditional social division of labor believes that men should focus on work, and women should focus on family. his different division of social roles creates different social expectations and role-playing for men and women, which also leads to women being considered only suitable for service positions in the work process, while men should be leaders and managers in the workplace.

2.3.4. Different Ways of Education

As the saying goes, "Men are from Venus, women are from Mars," people are taught gender stereotypes from a young age. According to research, when boys and girls are taught and raised differently, the idea of gender differences can form an implicit belief that affects them throughout their lives. At the same time, in the process of their growth, the physiological differences between men and women will serve as direct evidence to prove the correctness of this belief, deepen the concept of "men and women are different", and eventually form a fixed gender stereotype. For example, when girls are taught by their parents that they are not suitable for learning mathematics, their observation of the intuitive differences between men and women in the growth stage of

adolescence will deepen this concept in an auxiliary form, thinking that girls are less capable of learning mathematics than boys. Therefore, in the follow-up learning process, even if girls have the basic literacy of learning mathematics, they will not be able to achieve ideal results due to a lack of self-confidence. Even parents who claim not to treat boys and girls differently still implicitly influence their children's perceptions. For instance, When they read children's books with their children, they convey the behaviour and character of girls they consider appropriate by applauding images of children who engage in gender-stereotypical activities and criticizing images of children who are inappropriate [8].

3. The Adverse Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Women in the Workplace

3.1. Fewer Job Opportunities for Female Groups

The traditional concept of gender role division of labor is still accepted by people. When faced with conflicts between family and work, many women still need to take on more family responsibilities, while men are mainly responsible for earning money to support their families. However, with the transformation of society, female workers need to take on two important responsibilities of work and family at the same time. When work and family collide, many women will choose to quit the labor market voluntarily because of childbearing and caring for the elderly. This will also make it very difficult for women to re-employ [9]. At the same time, because many occupations with typical masculine characteristics do not match people's stereotypes of women, many positions do not favor recruiting women, limiting women's employment opportunities.

3.2. Increase the Difficulty of Women's Work

Affected by gender stereotypes, employers often place more demands on women, which puts women in a disadvantaged position in the workplace. For example, they require female employees to wear makeup, wear high heels, and speak softly. Compared with men, women tend to spend more time, energy, and money at work to conform to the typical image of women in people's minds. For example, when facing customers, employers are more inclined to choose female employees with a good appearance and image, which leads to female employees needing to buy a lot of cosmetics and clothing to decorate themselves to please customers, which virtually increases the difficulty of work for the female group. In addition to "appearance cost," there is also "education cost". According to the data, the number of working-age women is increasing year by year. There are more women than men in college graduates, but companies choose men more often when recruiting employees. With the increasingly fierce competition in the market environment, the academic requirements for female groups have also increased, and female groups will also choose to continue their education to alleviate employment pressure [7].

3.3. Unequal Treatment after Joining the Job

Due to gender stereotypes, women are considered unable to succeed in top positions, they do not have the corresponding qualities and abilities. These high-level management and executive positions are often seen as traditionally male occupations, requiring traits that do not match those typical of women, who are considered unequipped to handle these more aggressive jobs. Negative expectations of women's performance can lead to women being fixed in unimportant or undervalued positions, and even if selected, women are not given high-performance ratings. In the end, women in the workplace have shown great inequality in terms of training opportunities, promotions, and evaluations.

3.4. Obstructing Women's Sense of Identity with Their Profession

In fact, women whose behaviour conformed to stereotypes received more positive evaluations than those who appeared to challenge gender stereotype expectations. Gender stereotypes enable groups of women to excel in plausible jobs, but prevent excellence in anti-stereotyped fields. According to research, the ability of an individual's prefrontal cortex to process information can be impaired by physiological stress due to counterstereotypes. In this situation, the individual cannot fully engage in the task. As part of their brain is taken up by monitoring their own performance and social inclusion, additional efforts are required to suppress negative thoughts and emotions, which ultimately hinders women's sense of identity with their work performance [10].

4. Suggestions to Improve Gender Stereotypes in the Workplace

4.1. Establishment of Women's Labor Fairness Protection Law

Although many legal systems around the world have established relevant laws and regulations on equal employment rights, they are too general and scattered, the concept of gender discrimination in employment is vague, and the practicality and operability of judges in case judgments are not strong. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a labor fairness protection law specifically aimed at female groups to ensure that women enjoy equal basic rights with men in the process of work [11].

4.2. Establish an Individual Assessment System

It is undeniable that men and women do have physical differences, which will lead to a gap in workability, but due to individual differences, women's physical fitness is also different, and some women's physical functions are no less than men's. Therefore, it is necessary to establish individualized assessments of all aspects of physical fitness, qualitatively and quantitatively analyse whether the woman is suitable for high-intensity labor and break traditional concepts while alleviating employers' concerns.

4.3. Strengthen the Ideological Education of All Walks of Life

Awareness of pervasive gender stereotypes and their cognitive and influencing functions is a critical step in combating gender stereotypes. Increasing the education of people from all walks of life to understand that stereotypes are descriptive and normative, recognizing that we are all shaped by gender expectations that can affect our judgments about individuals, makes correcting such biases possible.

4.4. Reduce the Content of Media Propaganda about Gender Stereotypes

"The media promote the world of experience they perceive, and the public understands the world through the knowledge and images constructed by the media." Now mass media is the fastest medium for human information dissemination and it affects people through public opinion. According to research, when some media and the Internet convey gender stereotypes, they will also subtly affect people's cognition and affect their views on the definition of their own nature [12]. Therefore, the mass media should correct their thinking, correctly treat the differences between men and women, and actively promote the correct values of gender cognition.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, recognizing and learning gender stereotypes is an important part of protecting women from being harmed by gender discrimination in the workplace. Gender stereotypes affect how women are treated and the number of opportunities in the workplace, but also how women see themselves, determining what is desirable behaviour for women and what is an appropriate life aspiration. These gender cognitive biases have largely contributed to the inequality of women in the workplace, causing serious harm to the female group. Therefore, we should deeply understand the role and influence mechanism of gender stereotypes on us, prevent the recurrence of gender stereotypes, protect women from being persecuted by gender stereotypes, and establish a harmonious and stable social system.

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