The Opaque Glass Ceiling: Five Forces Affecting the Progress of Professional Female Workers in the U.S.

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This paper summarizes five forces limiting the advancement of U.S. female careers through secondary data analyses of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the Current Population Survey (CPS), the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), and business, trade and academic presses. Taking an interdisciplinary approach from Management, Health Care and Economics, this paper examines how paid parental leave, promotion prospects, on-the-job training, pay inequality and health care disproportionately disadvantage U.S. women's careers. This paper theorizes that all of the five forces must be simultaneously addressed to eliminate the inherent disadvantages U.S. women face in the development of their professional careers.

BACKGROUND

In a 2015 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report highlighting women's earnings in 2014, women's median earnings were 83 percent of those of male full-time wage and salary workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Elsewhere in this report, education and occupation variables produced wider disparities in median earnings between men and women and, particularly, between men and women of color.

This report underscored the influence of the U.S. government's inability to remediate earnings disparities among professional female workers. In April, 2014, President Obama introduced the Paycheck Fairness Act which, in part, instructed the Labor Department to collect statistics on pay from federal contractors (Baker, 2014). However, this Act received little support and wasn't enacted. Since then, wage equality legislation has been defeated.

Although progress has occurred, pay and promotion potential have stalled. The labor force was 46% female in 1994 and women's full-time annual earnings were 76% of men's; in 2001, the females' percentage was 77% (Cohen, 2013). While women now earn a majority of academic degrees, Cohen attributes their lack of economic progress since the 1990s to factors such as a failure to develop work-family policies and affordable child care that would increase opportunities for upward mobility.

In the extensive multidisciplinary literature review presented herein, this paper finds that no specific discipline explains or resolves the socioeconomic problems that inhibit women's progress. This paper identifies five interdependent forces that, when operationalized together, form a compelling approach to achieving gender equity. These forces are compensation, leadership, parental leave, on-the-job training, and healthcare. The main hypothesis is that these forces must be addressed simultaneously as each influences all of the others in a positive manner as displayed in Figure 1 at the end of this paper. For example, improved promotion prospects for women should result in greater compensation and opportunities for training. Greater investments in training will likely result in longer employment relationships, larger investments in the talent that is retained, and more generous benefits that include paid parental leave, all of which may reduce work-life stress and improve health.

THE FIVE FORCES

Compensation

Analyzing all full-time working women, the National Partnership for Women & Families found that nationally and on average, women of color are the most disadvantaged, with African-American women earning 60 cents and Latinas earning 55 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Among state-by-state findings, Latinas in California earn 43 cents on the dollar; in Texas, 44 cents on the dollar; and in New Jersey, 43 cents on the dollar compared to all white, non-Hispanic men (Dishman, 2015). While this analysis did not address professional and educated women of color, it illustrated how wage discrimination nonetheless exacerbates income levels inhibiting upward mobility. However, according to BLS data analyzed by Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, (2012), the gender wage gap has improved for women who reported receiving an advanced degree. Between 1973 and 2011, the gender wage gap became smaller for those with advanced degrees from 70 cents to 77 cents on the dollar versus what white males received. Among those with college degrees, the wage gap improved from 54 cents to 69 cents on the dollar compared with white males.

Professional employment sectors that once were virtually closed to women have opened, yet compensation remains stagnated. In academic medicine, two studies and an editorial published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) concluded that top U.S. academic medical facilities still favor men (Anonymous, 2015). The accompanying editorial in JAMA stressed the need for more transparency in hiring, promotions, and increased approvals for research grants lead-authored by women.

Modern Healthcare's 2014 list of the 100 most influential people in healthcare included only two white women in the top 10 executives and, among the top 10 earners – a separate category – there were no women (Combs, 2014). Another longitudinal study measuring gender disparities in pay among nurses revealed that pay gaps have not narrowed within various workplace settings and specialties from 1988 to 2013. Male cardiology nurses were paid $6,000 more per year than women and male chronic care nurses were paid $3,800 more. Pay disparity was greatest among male nurse anesthetists, 40% of whom were paid $17,290 more on average per year than their female counterparts (Saint Louis, 2015). The study could not specify reasons for earnings gaps but these findings were surprising since nursing has long been viewed as a female-dominated profession.

In higher echelons, women have not fared well within the financial or federal government sectors. Oliver Wyman, a global management consulting firm, examined staffing patterns of over 150 financial services firms and found that 11 percent of executives leading a business unit or region were women, and only four percent were CEOs. In only one role, head of human resources, women outnumbered men (59% vs. 41%); the second greatest number of females appeared in the head of marketing role (43% vs. 57%) (Otani, 2014). This report concluded that the dearth of women in profit and loss (P&L) positions inhibits diversity among top leadership roles. The U.S. federal government also shows a lower number of women in top positions. According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), for over 20 years, the pay gap for federal white-collar positions fell from 30 percent to 13 percent, and women hold only one-third of the

Senior Executive Service (SES) positions and not much more of the top General Schedule (GS14 and GS15) positions (Davidson, 2014).

Glassdoor, a salary and company ratings database firm, examined how compensation and employee satisfaction compared between men and women in a sample of 25 of the largest technology companies. While certain companies paid women more than men in the same role, women expressed satisfaction with their jobs at only four of the 25 firms (Glassdoor Team, 2014). Helgesen (2015) posits that mentoring programs and women's networks cannot ameliorate dissatisfaction if the broader culture of a technology company is one that women view as alienating and unrewarding.

Arguably, compensation data gleaned from these and other industries pale by comparison with the number of female billionaires. In its 2015 ranking of the world's 200 richest people, *Bloomberg* sorted its findings by industry, citizenship, gender, age, and sources of wealth (self-made or inherited). Seventeen women were cited. Seven of them were U.S. citizens who inherited their wealth and none were under the age of 50 (Bloomberg Businessweek, 2015).

In addition to mentoring programs, efforts to eliminate mentoring bias among faculty at business schools (Vedantam, 2014), public reportage of gender pay gaps (Lipman, 2015), and the redistribution of unpaid work between married couples (Cain Miller, 2016) can promote pay equity. However, these authors offer evidence that correcting compensation will not sufficiently address equally important forces affecting professional women.

Leadership

Various studies indicate that increasing the number of women in high-ranking jobs has stagnated. In a 2013 census of the 500 largest companies in the U.S., Catalyst found that women held 16.9 percent of board seats and 14.6 percent of executive positions (Cain Miller, 2014). Building on its 2012 study, McKinsey & Company found that women are underrepresented at every level but more so at senior leadership levels (McKinsey & Company, 2015). Similarly, a 2015 analysis of S&P 500 companies, CNNMoney identified 24 female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and examined the next four executive positions – Chief Operating Officers and Chief Financial Officers among them – to determine the pipeline of talent behind the top spot. Women held 16.5 percent of these positions. According to Rita McGrath, if women are not in the pipeline, they are not going to get the top job (Egan, 2015).

Research studies indicate that both external male and female CEOs with a short tenure are more likely to be dismissed by their firms (Kim, 2014; Dillard & Lipschitz, 2014). This absence of a female pipeline was reiterated in Booz & Company's 14th annual *Chief Executive Study*. In its examination of the world's 2,500 largest public companies, 38 percent of female CEOs versus 27 percent of male CEOs were terminated due to performance rather than other reasons such as retirements or mergers. Tellingly, 35 percent of these females came from other companies, compared with 22 percent of these men (McGregor, 2014). Gary Neilson, a co-author of this study, observed that companies can't find women inside their own companies, or they are recruited from another company (Ibid, 2014). He also noted that many companies still lack enough female senior executives who are ready to be promoted.

Often, this "pipeline" effect is used to explain the dearth of female executives. It argues that women are latecomers to the competition and hence are underrepresented in boardrooms because they haven't been promoted. This explanation does not reflect reality. According to Gwen Moran (2015), women now comprise 40 percent of all students in top tier MBA programs. As the number of female MBA holders increased dramatically over the past 30 years, numbers of female executives and board members should be ballooning, not slightly increasing or stagnating.

Professional women have been urged to secure memberships on corporate boards of directors as a pathway to senior leadership positions. Germany passed a law requiring public companies to allocate 30 percent of board seats to women. The response from Catalyst was that the U.S. lags many countries with advanced economies in this category, including those without government quotas, and the spillover effect could spread to the U.S. (Cain Miller, 2015). Progress has been slow; in 2011, Catalyst reported that women occupied 16.1 percent of board seats of *Fortune 500* companies and three years later, that number increased by only two percentage points (Drexler, 2014).

Some researchers studying international firms question the utility of quotas for securing and retaining women on boards. A research study found that non-binding societal factors such as substantial maternity leave and corporate governance codes are more effective than mandated legislation (Anderson, 2015). Although it did not include U.S. firms, another study examining the effects of women on European boards on firm value, financial performance, and compliance with ethical and social principles adopted by a firm found no evidence that higher female representation on a board directly affects a firm's value, but the *indirect* [authors' emphasis] effects related to financial performance and ethical and social compliance were positively related with firm value (Isidro and Sobral, 2015). Today, it is specious to favor voluntary ethical, social and financial compliance measures over enforced legislation, but the broader question is whether U.S. firms are willing to commit to and abide by these forms of self-regulation.

One might believe that an education from an Ivy League university is an advantageous differentiator for female executives. A survey of more than 25,000 graduates of MBA, DBA, PhD and Executive Education programs representing 25 percent of 12,000 alumnae and a stratified random sample of approximately 14,000 men (Ely, Stone & Ammerman, 2014) did not explain reasons for gender disparities in senior management. Men were more likely to have direct reports, P&L responsibility and more senior management positions, and the majority of women who took maternity leave left their companies due to unfulfilling roles with dim prospects for advancement. In an analysis of this study, another writer noted that these findings were as strong among Harvard graduates in their 20s as they were among earlier generations (Cain Miller, 2014).

Another argument is that women are underrepresented in executive positions due to work-life balance issues. Bertrand, Goldin and Katz (2010) observed that much of the gender earnings differential 10-16 years after graduation from a prestigious MBA program can be explained by women experiencing shorter tenures and more numerous career interruptions. This correlates with the issue of paid parental leave discussed below whereby the absence of this benefit causes women to experience greater job changes. Also, with lower expected tenure, there will be less job training, lower skill accumulation and, hence, fewer promotions.

Blau, Ferber & Winkler (2010) state that if pipeline and work-life balance effects do not explain the underrepresentation of women in executive positions, underrepresentation must be attributed to discrimination that may not be overt and detectable from outside the organization, and subtle and hard to prove or document. Several surveys show that more people prefer male versus female bosses. For example, Eagly and Karau (2002) observed that women are viewed less favorably than men when they assume identical leadership roles.

Only recently have female executives been linked with corporate profitability. A study of approximately 22,000 publicly traded companies in 91 countries projected that an increase in the share of female CEOs from zero to 30 percent would be associated with a 15 percent rise in profitability (Victor, 2016). This study did not differentiate U.S. female CEOs from others across the globe. Interestingly, the study found no correlation between more female leadership with mandated maternity leave, the next force described here.

Parental Leave

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was a well-intentioned and overdue piece of legislation. The FMLA's exceptions – namely, the exclusion of all part-time workers, workers who have not been with their company for at least a year, and anyone working for a company with fewer than 50 workers – have inhibited the Act's efficacy. In addition, the FMLA grants only unpaid versus paid parental leave. Unpaid leave, although better than no guaranteed leave, still causes higher rates of job separation due to the loss in income from foregone wages while absent from work. Some women may prefer to quit their job and find a new one after childbirth if they are guaranteed neither paid leave in their absence nor a desirable duration of paid leave. Consequently, a policy of paid parental leave could increase female retention leading to increases in job training, promotional opportunities, greater compensation, fewer work-life balance conflicts, and improved health outcomes for women and their children. Since the FMLA was passed, the federal government has not revised it but some individual states have taken action, paying for the benefit with small tax on wages. California's law was criticized with harsh skepticism and fierce opposition by businesses that labeled it a "job killer;" however, "businesses in California don't seem to be reporting a strong negative effect. I haven't seen evidence of a significant downside" (Suddath, 2015, p. 57). Although there are numerous reasons for accepting or rejecting paid parental leave as a critical workforce benefit, the following management issues provide reasons for its acceptance.

It is commonly known that most U.S. working women return to work sooner than they'd like to do so, and sometimes just weeks or days after having a baby. One author says, "Just how soon they're going back [to work] is difficult to determine. We know that most employers don't offer paid leave, but no federal agency collects regular statistics on how much post-childbirth time off, paid or unpaid, women are actually taking" (Lerner, 2015, p. 2). BLS evidence reveals that the incidence of paid family leave varies widely among occupations but remains relatively rare. This is especially true of the most rapidly growing occupations such as service and sales.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services' Maternal and Child Health Bureau, in 2006-2010, 66.0 percent of women reported being employed during their last pregnancy, of whom 69.7 percent reported taking maternity leave. Thus, nearly one-third of employed women did not report taking any maternity leave (30.3 percent). Women with at least a college degree were more likely to have taken leave than those who had attended college but not graduated (80.0 versus 71.6 percent, respectively) while less than half of women without a high school degree reported having taken leave. Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black women were less likely to report having taken maternity leave than non-Hispanic White women (62.5 and 64.3 percent, respectively, versus 72.2 percent). When taken, the average length of maternity leave was 10.0 weeks (HRSA U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Maternal and Child Health: Maternity Leave: Women's Health USA, 2013). One contributor to this study observed that many women cannot afford to take unpaid leave and usually use a combination of short-term disability, sick leave, vacation, and personal days to have some portion of their maternity leave paid (Institute for Women's Policy Research Fact Sheet: Maternity, Paternity, and Adoption Leave in the United States, 2011).

The aforementioned study is instructive. First, one-third of its sample did not report taking *any* maternity leave, and one reason may include the absence of pay as shown in the "patch-working" of other benefits that provide some financial relief. One author noted that even women in high-income positions have trouble figuring out how this patchwork of policies applies to them (Suddath, 2015). Secondly, college educated women may have more financial resources such as more stable jobs and higher pay than non-college educated women who may be employed in jobs that do not offer job security or, for that matter, any benefits at all. A third and most troubling factor is the absence of more recent data within the literature since 2011. The Great Recession financially decimated millions of people across the country and, not incidentally, caused many people to not only lose their jobs but also resort to work that made them underemployed. Many employers scaled back on replacing the lost, well-paying jobs and created a larger temporary workforce entitled to no benefits whatsoever (Skiba & O'Halloran, 2013; O'Halloran & Skiba, 2014). According to Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz (2012), the incidence of "good jobs," those paying at least $18.50 per hour and providing health and pension benefits, has been steadily declining for men from 37% in 1979 to 28% as of 2010. For women, the incidence of "good jobs" is lower than for men and has held relatively steady at 20% since the 2000s (Ibid, 2012).

Employers would think that modest financial contributions to parental leave would be more than offset by increased productivity gains and lowered expenses. Speaking about the need for both paid parental leave and the federal government's need to recruit and retain good workers, House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer said, "We are at risk of not being able to recruit the top talent that America needs, that Americans need and that our federal government needs to do the complex and challenging jobs of making sure the American people are served well" (Katz, E., 2015, p. 1). In addition to saving recruitment and selection costs, the federal government and private industry also would benefit from paid parental leave by avoiding costs associated with turnover, such as the training and development of replacement workers.

As one writer commented, "when they [Google] decided to extend their maternity leave for new mothers to five months and made it paid, what do you think happened? That's right, more women started coming back after maternity leave. That means they saved money by not having to find and train new talented workers to replace the women who decided not to come back after maternity leave. And replacing smart, dedicated and trained personnel is not cheap and it's not easy" (Skyrm, 2015, p. 1). Although hardly conclusive, this example is instructive.

Very few studies in the literature have examined how men use or do not use parental leave, and whether it is paid or unpaid. Within certain management disciplines, paternity leave is a small subset of the "work-life balance" literature. For example, over a five-year timeframe, Groysberg and Abrahams (2014) interviewed approximately 4,000 executives worldwide and surveyed 82 executives in a Harvard Business School leadership course. Among other findings, student interviewers noted that, almost universally, "the leaders [we] spoke with dispensed valuable advice about how to maintain both a career and a family" and, as one reported, "all [respondents] acknowledged making sacrifices and concessions at times but emphasized the important role that supportive spouses and families played." Nevertheless, the authors acknowledged that "many students [interviewers] are alarmed at how much leaders sacrifice at home and how little headway the business world has made in adapting to families' needs" (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014, online edition).

Bluntly stated by one business journalist, "…ample evidence suggests that traditional definitions of gender roles persist, and businesses, for the most part, still expect their employees to remain fully focused on their professional duties despite their parental obligations. However, compared with the abundance of research on the challenges facing working mothers, relatively little attention has been paid to how professional fathers juggle their twin roles as employee and dad – and whether their companies help or hinder their efforts to achieve the right mix" (Palmquist, 2015, p. 68).

On-the-job Training

From the Human Capital perspective, OJT is a joint investment between the employer and employee who mutually benefit from gains in productivity arising upon its completion. OJT can be either generalized or firm-specific. General OJT, such as mastering a foreign language, is training applied to any current and future potential employer. Firm-specific OJT, such as familiarization with a company's hierarchy, is only applicable to one's current employer. However, these joint investments will only occur if both parties expect the employment relationship to last long enough to recoup investment costs. If either party expects the employment relationship to be short lived, these mutually beneficial investments will not occur.

If females are more likely to experience job turnover or greater absenteeism than males, a firm may be less inclined to invest in training since the employer may not expect the employment relationship to last sufficiently long enough to recoup training costs. Moreover, if women expect a brief tenure with an employer, they may be less inclined to pursue positions associated with high levels of required OJT. According to Human Capital Theory, there are two losses associated with career interruptions: the direct cost of the foregone earnings, and the indirect loss associated with the depreciation of skills that occurs when one is not employed. Additionally, there will be a further loss in the firm-specific human capital if the worker obtains reemployment with a different employer. (For a more formal exposition of Human Capital Theory and gender differences in OJT in particular, see Blau, Ferber & Winkler [2013] and Mincer & Polachek [1974]).

Prior evidence finds that women typically do experience less OJT than men, and while females experience a higher incidence of formal OJT, what they do receive is of shorter duration (O'Halloran, 2008; Altonji and Spletzer, 1991; Barron, Black and Loewenstein, 1993). As expected, OJT of longer duration typically represents a greater investment in employee training than OJT of shorter duration. Additionally, one would expect that the greater frequency of OJT among females would be associated with more frequent job change as most of the job training a worker typically receives is at the start of the employment relationship. Indeed, some of the economics literature sees gender differences in the receipt of OJT as a major factor in the determination of the gender wage gap (Olsen and Sexton, 1996), and lower levels of OJT have been associated with lower rates of promotion and corresponding pay increases that are typically associated with promotion, enlarging the gender wage gap further (Gjerde, 2002).

Gender differences in the receipt of OJT are also associated with a lack of paid maternity leave. Women who become pregnant and lack paid maternity leave benefits are much more likely to change employers after childbirth. This implies that women planning to have children may be less inclined to seek jobs that require large investments in OJT. It also implies that employers may statistically discriminate against women who they expect will become pregnant and quit.

Statistical discrimination occurs when employers use a certain demographic stereotype as a predictor of future labor market outcomes. For example, if an employer hires a female and she quits her job to have children, the employer will be less likely to hire a female in the future, fearing that the next female will also eventually quit her job to have children. A lack of paid maternity leave also reduces the possibility of promotion as female workers receive less OJT, regardless of whether they intend to have children. The absence of paid sick leave may also reduce investments in OJT, as workers who lack this benefit do not show up for work and lose their jobs for failure to appear when ill, or experience family related issues requiring their absence from work. Research points to a reciprocal process whereby the provision of OJT is viewed as a gift from the employer, lowering absenteeism and job turnover (Kampkötter & Marggraf, 2015). However, the provision of OJT is likely highly correlated with other benefits such as paid leave, health benefits and promotional opportunities. Consequently, greater equity in the provision of OJT will improve women's compensation, promotion prospects and, potentially, lead more employers to offer paid paternity leave, leading to fewer work-life conflicts and better health.

Healthcare Issues

Unemployment, underemployment and stressful work environments have a disproportionately negative impact on women's health. Gender inequities related to what has heretofore been described are compounded and add to the challenges women face in the workplace. These complex issues can affect a woman's overall well-being and often lead to poor psychosocial and physical health outcomes.

Behavioral Science and Policy (2015a) highlights the extensive body of research showing that workplace stress is directly linked to anxiety, depression, hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Indirectly, people who are stressed are more likely to overeat, smoke and abuse alcohol and drugs. Stress profoundly affects mental and physical well-being and has been linked to chronic illness, increased mortality and the rising costs of healthcare. Fatal conditions resulting from job stress kill approximately 120,000 people a year (Goh, Pfeffer & Zenios, 2015b).

Extensive literature confirms that men and women experience and react differently to stress (Almeida et al, 2011). A recent study of adults 50 and older concluded that women tend to be more vulnerable to social stressors including work stress, and when job and financial stress were constant, women were more susceptible to depressive symptoms (Lin, Hsu & Chang, 2011). These and other factors may explain the sharp increases in many chronic illnesses among women.

In a policy brief, the *National Center for Health Statistics* (NCHS) revealed U.S. suicide rates increased 24% between 1999 and 2014, their highest level in 30 years. The report highlights the alarming rate at which women are committing suicide, higher than men in every age group for the period of time studied. NCHS reported that women between the ages of 45-64 had the highest rates of suicide in 2014, increasing 63% between 1999 and 2014 (Curtin, Warner & Hedegaard, 2016). *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine* further explored this disturbing trend among middle-aged adults. In a review of patterns and circumstances of suicide, distress about jobs, personal finances and legal issues were the most common in this demographic (Hempstead & Phillips, 2015).

To evaluate the extent to which work environments contribute to negative health outcomes, mortality and rising healthcare costs in the U.S., Harvard Business School's Joel Goh and Stanford University's Graduate School of Business's Jeffrey Pfeffer and Stefanos Zenios meta-analyzed epidemiological studies. They evaluated the relative risks of 10 common job stressors – layoffs and unemployment, lack of health insurance, shift work, long working hours, job insecurity, work-family conflict, low job control, high job demands, low social support at work, low organizational justice – on four health outcomes (death, the presence of a diagnosed medical condition and a person's perception of being in poor physical health, or poor mental health). Their results clarified that psychosocial factors such as work-family conflict can impact health as profoundly as other more concrete factors such as shift work. Results for the first health outcome, death, indicated that although having long working hours increased mortality by 20%, having no health insurance was the stressor that contributed most toward mortality. Lack of health insurance was associated with 50,000 excess deaths per year. For the second health outcome, physician diagnosed illnesses, they found that high job demands increased the likelihood of developing a medical condition by 35% while low organizational justice increased the chances of being diagnosed ill by 50%. Furthermore, nine out of the 10 work stressors were significantly associated with a diagnosed medical condition. Finally, the researchers reported that job insecurity increased the likelihood of poor physical and mental health by approximately 50% while work-family conflict increased poor physical and mental health by 90% (Goh, Pfeffer & Zenios, 2015b).

According to Parker (2015), in roughly half of all two-parent families today, both parents work full-time, and although there has been some improvement in male contributions to the household, most women still provide most of the childcare and housework despite both parents working full-time. While family structures continue to change, workplace policies and societal expectations of women have not. In this study, 42% of mothers took time from work to care for a child or family member compared to 28% of fathers. Women also reported being three times more likely than a man to quit a job in order to take care of a child or family member (Ibid, 2015). These statistics represented only married couples and did not account for single mothers who need time off from work, leave a job or adjust their lives due to childcare issues.

In one study, after a birth a woman's work week increased 21 hours. This included housework, childcare, and paid work. After a birth a man's work increased 12.5 hours but childcare was not factored in this increase. The authors suggested that the gender divide in the sharing of home responsibilities means additional and taxing work for women, work that eventually forces them out of the workforce. The authors discussed several ways in which parenthood interrupts a woman's ability to have a career, move forward professionally and be economically viable (Yavorsky, Kamp, Dush & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015).

Prior research cited numerous studies linking work-family conflict with depression, stress, hypertension, obesity, musculoskeletal problems, and alcohol and drug addiction. The authors summarized numerous challenges unique to working mothers and suggested that the effects of stressful working conditions may broaden and eventually impact children's health. In workplaces where women are exposed to physical or psychosocial stressors such as shift work, long hours, inflexibility, low pay and lack of benefits, not only is a woman's health at stake but also there is evidence that these stressors are likely to impact their children (Burgard & Lin, 2013).

In addition to being a wife and mother of two sons, Anne-Marie Slaughter was formerly the Dean of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, and Director of Policy Planning for the U.S. State Department. She observed that men seem more likely to choose their job at a cost to their family, while women seem more likely to choose their family at a cost to their job (Slaughter, 2012) and, in addition, to their overall health.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this examination of gender issues affecting U.S. female professional employees, this paper identified and described five forces associated with gender disparities within various workplace settings. These forces – namely, pay equality/compensation, promotion prospects, job training, health/healthcare, and paid parental leave – do not include a multitude of other factors that exacerbate any of them. For example, this paper does not examine legal ramifications, such as the ways in which "sex plus" discrimination cases are managed and settled. Legally, these cases may include the presence of one or more than one sex-based form of alleged discrimination such as age or ethnic origin or other protected classes identified under Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) laws. Another unexplored body of literature is the changing sociological landscape. For example, generational differences can redefine how women and men view the importance of their roles in the workplace and elsewhere in their lives.

Nevertheless, the patterns that appeared from the management, health studies and economics literature led to the emergence of these five forces, all of which are interconnected and interdependent. While each force independently demands attention, two of them are dominant and require serious improvements before the other three – let alone any other unidentified forces – can demonstrate genuine progress. These forces are pay equality/compensation and OJT.

Regarding pay equality/compensation, several professional employment sectors that heretofore were closed to women are now open, yet salary levels remain unequal. To further support this imbalance, one study (Levanon, England & Allison, 2009) that utilized U.S. census data covering five decades (from 1950 to 2000) found that when women moved into occupations in large numbers, those jobs began to pay less. One of the study's authors said, "It's not that women are always picking lesser things in terms of skill and importance. It's just that the employers are deciding to pay less" (Cain Miller, 2016, p. BU1). While acknowledging that men and women have converged across professional disciplines, professionals who work long and specific hours are disproportionately rewarded and women, more so than men, will opt to work in professions that offer greater flexibility to manage family responsibilities that are still predominantly under their purview (Goldin, 2016).

While this paper highlights the importance of OJT and how women are affected by it while they work *inside* organizations, a recent hearing within the EEOC showed that professional women who complete college and advanced degrees *before and during* employment inexplicably earn less than their male counterparts. According to Lisa M. Maatz, Vice President of Government Relations for the American Association of University Women (AAUW), "women were paid 82 percent of what their similarly educated and experienced male counterparts were paid" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016, online access). She also explained that the gap increased to 69% ten years after graduation, stating that this difference was not fully explained by differences in choice of major or job as well as many other measurable characteristics still leaving a 7% pay gap and challenging men to accept the consequences of taking a 7% pay cut.

As mentioned, the pay gap to which Ms. Maatz refers is larger for women of color, women who are older, and women who are mothers. However, one of the AAUW's most startling findings was that at every level of academic achievement, women's median earnings are less than men's median earnings and, in some cases, the gap is wider at higher levels of education (Ibid, 2016; Sawhill, 2016).

Progress has been made yet much more must be done to create a productive and fulfilled U.S. workforce that includes and equitably rewards women for their work. Many ideas expressed in this paper echo an article written over forty years ago entitled "Sex bias: Still in business." Presciently, (a) discrimination is both illegal and immoral as well as a waste of human resources; (b) recruitment and promotion decision making can serve as barriers to entry into higher career development; and, (c) companies need specific policies to ensure gender equality in employment outcomes (Bennett, 1976, online access).

This paper's main position is that both structural and cultural barriers to gender disparities must be more seriously measured and corrected. It is common knowledge that organizational cultures are formed and endorsed by their leaders. Those in positions of authority must be made accountable for what is allowed and expected and, perhaps more importantly, what is deemed *legal* under their watch. In addition, and in terms of salaries and promotional requirements, more transparency is required. Although the transparency issue is improving, it is a common belief among businesspeople that, historically, salaries within most companies are the "best kept secrets." As long as this belief exists, men and women, in particular, may never learn how or why they are compensated at different rates of pay.

Many researchers have attempted to determine why certain forces affect gender equity. Underlying these efforts is the specter of subtle yet pervasive forms of gender bias that endure in the U.S. As the country increasingly becomes more diverse and multi-cultural, gender bias may become more difficult to eradicate. Regardless of these challenges, one must be hopeful that men and women in positions of authority and influence will interpret and apply the meaning of equity as "fairness" rather than "power." Our society will be improved if they do so.

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