

Gender Biases in Professions

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Despite improvements in the positions of women at work Gender biases still exist in professions, some are assigned high and some low status. High status profession usually attracts high pay and status. The aim of this research was to study and identify gender biases in professions. The following hypotheses were formulated; 1- The professions that are assigned high status are associated with men as compared to women. 2- The professions that are assigned low status are associated more with women as compared to men. 3- Men are more biased against women than men. 4. Women are more biased against men than men. A sample of 100 men and 100 women professionals and non professional participants with ages 20-35 years were randomly selected from various institutions of Karachi. In addition to the demographic information collected from the participants, a gender bias Questionnaire was developed by the author to measure the perceived association of gender with different professions. To rate the professions as high or low status a list of 10 professions i.e., physician, lawyer, engineer, architect, psychotherapist, receptionist, secretary, sales person, teacher, and librarian was used. This list was prepared from a pool of 35 professions after doing a pilot study to select high and low status professions. The status and gender associated with each profession is rated on a 7 point rating scale. The results showed a strong positive correlation between male gender and high status profession, which provides an evidence for biases, exists for women at work places. The t-test analyses further highlighted that women were biased more against women as compared to men. The study concludes that even though women are entering into various high status professions, the gender discrimination still exists.

Keywords: Professions, Gender Biases

Most of what has been traditionally labeled as the sexual division of labor is in fact a gender division of labor. In this way, opinions vary in terms of which attributes constitute biological differences (sex) and which are socially determined (gender). The notion of biological difference is often used to justify discriminatory beliefs about women and men's relative intelligence, emotional behavior or suitability to certain jobs (Haq, 2000).

When examining gender bias, it is important to define and understand the term. The American Heritage Dictionary defines gender as "classification of sex". According to the same source, bias is defined as "preference or inclination that inhibits impartial judgment, or an unfair act or policy stemming from prejudice" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). Thus gender bias is separation of gender in a way, which prefers one sex to the other. Gender bias in occupation refers to preference for or favoring of one sex over the other at workplace. Gender biases are deeply rooted in our society, with some jobs deemed totally inappropriate for members of the opposite sex. Such stereotypes are even more pronounced in many foreign cultures.

Gender stereotypes of occupations are manifested in the belief that certain occupations (e.g., nurse, teacher, secretary, etc.) are "women's" occupations and others (e.g., automotive mechanic, engineer, and medical doctor) are "men's." A number of studies (Shepard & Hess, 1975; Shinar, 1975; Rush & Greenwalt, 1977; White, Kruczek, Brown, & White, 1989; Freedman, Podsakoff, & Mackenzie, 1993; St. Pierre, Herendeen, Moore, & Nagle, 1994) have previously examined gender-stereotyping in occupations. Each of these studies concluded that gender stereotypes of occupations do exist. According to Guirdham (2002), women managers are more inclined than men to try to act as good examples, which places them under extra pressure to perform, ingratiate and possibly to supplicate. These self-presentations in turn reinforce gender stereotypes of women as weak and dependent, leading to the impression that they lack some of the abilities required for higher level positions.

Much of the workplace is divided into "women's work" and "men's work" (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). In fact, occupational gender segregation is so pervasive that researchers project that 53% of workers (women or men) would have to change occupations in order to achieve full gender integration (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). This uneven distribution of women and men into occupations both reflects and reinforces stereotypes about the gender-typing of occupations.

The representation of women in leadership positions in academic institutions, scientific and professional institutions and societies, and honorary organizations is low relative to the number of women qualified to hold these positions. It is not lack of talent, but unintentional biases and outmoded institutional structures that are hindering the access and advancement of women (Alessio & Andrzejski, 2000).

At times the social pressures regarding the gender roles are so intense that women and men are afraid to select *new careers, out of fear* of rejection and ridicule by the society. It is supported by the findings of the study carried out by Cherry and Deaux (1978), in which both women and men rated both women and men targets negatively when they succeeded in nontraditional occupations. It could be speculated that if such fears persist till date, these could influence occupational pursuits such that women and men avoid nontraditional occupations, ultimately maintaining the status quo of occupational segregation. It has been observed that whenever someone tries to deviate from the gender roles assigned to them, they face rejection and ridicule from the society. The same is projected in case of women when they opt for a job which is considered to be masculine in description.

Research on reactions to competent women found that such women were socially (Hagen & Kahn, 1975) and professionally (Hodson & Pryor, 1984) rejected. Most interestingly, women and men rated a target woman as least attractive as a work partner when she combined competence with high career orientation and masculine preferences (Shaffer & Wegley, 1974).

Another research by Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1993) also reflected biased attitude. According to the findings of their study, performances of the most highly successful women managers were less likely to be attributed to ability than those of their comparable male counterparts.

Gender segregation of occupations refers to the employment of men and women in separate occupations, whether at the occupational, industry, or organizational level (Perry, Davis-Blake' & Kulik, 1994). Reskin and Hartmann (1994) assert that gender segregation in occupations has been a tradition in the U.S. work force for decades and that the degree of gender segregation in the work force has not changed much since the early nineties. In 1985, occupations which comprised at least 70 percent women employed greater than two-thirds of all working women (Jacobs, 1989). Moreover, gender segregation in occupations according to Jacobsen (1994) exhibited somewhat a downward trend

during the period between 1960 and 1990. This trend was remarkably slow, leaving quite high levels of segregation. He further asserts that without drastic social change, little movement in desegregation is likely by the turn of the century. In addition to segregation in occupations, where both genders do share the same job titles in some occupations across organizations, rarely do they share the same job titles within an organization (Bielby & Baron, 1986). Field studies have shown that gender segregation at the organizational and industry level are also common, even for occupations which seem to be integrated across organizations or industries (Bielby & Baron, 1984 to 1986; Reskin & Hartmann, 1986; Baron, Mittman, & Newman, 1991). Indeed, many believe that such gender segregation of occupations is the foundation for gender differences in labor market outcomes. (Reskin, 1984; Deaux, 1985; Bielby & Baron, 1986). Such differences include disparities in wages and salaries, benefits (including training opportunities), promotions, prestige, and power (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Several field studies have shown that male-dominated organizations are more segregated by occupation than organizations which employ a large percentage of women (Bielby & Baron, 1984).

Although women constitute about 45% of the labor force in the United States, they are concentrated at the lower end of the status hierarchy. Women tend to hold jobs such as of secretary or receptionist, which provide relatively low income and primarily men hold prestige such as of lawyer and physician. Some employers still prefer to hire men for jobs requiring technical and managerial skills based on the gender role stereotypes that men are more competent at such tasks (Gerdes & Garber, 1983). The job opportunities for women have improved since 1970's with considerably more women moving into such lucrative jobs as lawyers, physicians and engineer. But the dark side of the issue is that women still almost exclusively fill the low paying and the low prestige jobs.

Women always had lower status than men, but the extent of the gap between genders varies across cultures and time (some arguing that it is inversely related to social evolution). In 1980, the United Nations summed up the burden of this inequality: "Women, who comprise half the world's population, do two thirds of the world's work, earn one tenth of the world's income and own one hundredth of the world's property".

According to Phillips (1998) it is of interest to note that girls have caught up with boys in math and science achievement and that the gender gap has been closed. Women are filling the ranks of the professions and

entering high status, high salary jobs. Although the gifted male in college has not given up his math and science interests, he is in danger of giving up something much more important: his opportunity to choose a career based on his most deeply held values. Most gifted men, no matter how strong their interests in creative arts, languages, humanities or literature, have given up these interests because they do not seem lucrative or perhaps manly enough (Colangelo & Kerr, 1993).

In the light of above literature review the following hypotheses were formulated

- 1- The high status professions are related more to males as compared to women.
- 2- The low status professions are associated more with females as compared to men.
- 3- Men are more biased against women as compared to men.
- 4- Women are more biased against males as compared to men.

Method

Research design

The design of the study was a 2 x 2 factorial design crossing target gender with occupational gender bias, high status /low status professions.

Sample

A sample of 200 men and women with at least graduation were randomly selected from various institutions of Karachi (both professionals and non professionals) with age ranged from 20 -35 years. Most of them were bilingual and some multilingual. All of them had complete orientation with English language as it was the requirement of the research.

Measures

Gender matching with occupation list. The list was prepared by the author. 100 undergraduate student volunteers (50 men and 50 women) enrolled in business institutions at Karachi were asked to rate each occupation at high status or low status on a 7 point rating scale. The mean rating for status (high/low) were calculated separately for each occupation. Out of 35 only 5 were highly rated for low status and 5 were rated high for high status. From among the 10 occupations, physician, lawyer, engineer, architect, psychotherapist were rated as high status and on the other hand receptionist, secretary, sales person, teacher, and

librarian were rated as low status professions. This final list of 10 professions was used to measure occupation considered as high and low status. Each occupation was rated on a 7 point rating scale, where rating of "1" showed low status, "4" showed neutral and "7" showed high status of that occupation.

Gender bias questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed by the author to identify the existing gender biases in both high and low status professions. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of projective technique. It appeared to the participants a test of English grammar but actually it tapped their biases on the unconscious level. For example, one of its items is, 1- After a detailed checkup, the physician prescribed patient some medicines (His/her). The response given as "his" shows inclination towards male and "her" would show inclination towards females. Highest ratings as "his" showed male bias against females and highest ratings showed as 'her' reflect female bias against males.

A demographic questionnaire. This was prepared by the author containing important information about the participant regarding age, gender, education, occupation and some other information like command on English language, views of opposite gender regarding their professional abilities etc.

Procedure

First the permission from the heads of various professional and non-professional institutions, (which come under the domain of Karachi University), was sought to collect data from their institute/organization. They were told about the nature and purpose of the research. After their permission, participants were approached. Rationale of the study was not revealed to the participants. Anonymity as well as confidentiality of their responses was assured. After taking some personal and demographic information, each participant was asked to rate the status of the occupations on the 7 point rating scale according to the standard instructions provided. In the end participants were asked to complete the questionnaire measuring gender biases in occupations. After the data collection, the participants of the research were informed about the actual rationale and aim of the study and were reassured of confidentiality regarding their identity and results.

Results

Table 1

Percentages of the participants in assigning high & low status to professions (N=200)

Occupations	Professional Status			
	High n=200		Low n= 200	
	f	%	f	%
Phys	178	89	22	11
Eng	164	82	36	18
Law	144	72	56	28
Arc	146	73	54	27
Psy	158	79	42	21
Sec	6	3	194	97
Recep	2	1	196	99
Teach	80	40	120	60
Lib	40	20	160	80
S P	22	11	178	89

Note: Phy= Physician, Eng= Engineer, Law=Lawyer, Arc=Architecture, Pys= Psychotherapist, Sec= Secretary, Psy=Psychotherapist, Recep= Receptionist, Teach= Teacher, Lib= librarian, Sp= Sales Person.

Table 1 shows how the majority of the participants perceived and rated physicians, engineers, lawyers, architects and psychotherapist as high status professions, whereas, secretary, receptionist, teacher, librarian and sales person were perceived and rated as belonging to low status professions.

Table 2

Percentage of both men and women participants in assigning high & low status to all the 10 professions.

Occupations	Professional Status			
	Men n=100		Women n= 100	
	High %	Low %	High%	Low%
Phys	76	24	88	12
Eng	72	28	79	21
Law	70	30	81	19
Arc	81	19	76	24
Psy	80	20	82	18
Sec	13	87	30	70
Recep	11	89	32	68
Teach	35	65	23	77
Lib	31	69	30	70
S P	24	76	22	78

Note: Phy= Physician, Eng= Engineer, Law=Lawyer, Arc=Architecture, Pys= Psychotherapist, Sec= Secretary, Psy=Psychotherapist, Recep= Receptionist, Teach= Teacher, Lib= librarian, Sp= Sales Person.

Table 2 looks at higher and low ratings of professions by men and women. Trend of rating by both genders is similar to what was observed for the total sample in table 1.

Table 3

Correlation between perceptions of participants about professions (rated as low) with its perceived association with gender. (N=200).

Occupations	Gender	r
Secretary	M	-0.52 (n.s)
	F	0.71**
Receptionist	M	0.24**
	F	0.60**
Teacher	M	0.41**
	F	0.82**
Librarian	M	0.32**
	F	0.69**
Sales person	M	0.54**
	F	0.56**

Note= M= Male, F=Female, (n.s) =non significant, ** P<0.01

Table 3 shows that both male and female perceived the professions like secretary, receptionist, teacher, librarian and sales person to be low and how they associated and related more with the females.

Table 4

Correlation between perceptions of participants about professions (rated as high) with its perceived association with gender. (N=200).

Occupations	Gender	r
Secretary	M	0.83**
	F	0.64**
Receptionist	M	0.62**
	F	-0.65**
Teacher	M	0.72**
	F	0.21**
Librarian	M	0.76**
	F	-0.59**
Sales person	M	0.81**
	F	0.41**

Note: **= P<0.01. M=Male, F= Female

Table 4 shows that professions perceived and rated as high were associated more with men especially engineering and architecture.

Table 5

Gender differences in assigning high status professions to the other gender (N=200)

Groups	M	SD	df	t
Men	8.89	3.0	198	2.66*
Women	7.67	2.9		

Note: * = p < .05

Table 5 explains that perceived high status professions were more frequently associated to men as compared to women. This unfolds the gender biased thinking pattern as was assumed.

Table 6

Gender differences in assigning low status professions to the other gender (N=200).

Groups	M	SD	df	t
Male	7.11	3.41	1.98	3.16*
Female	8.21	2.97		

Note= * = P<0.05,

Table 6 explains that women are more frequently associated with low status professions as compared to men. This again reveals a biased and sex discrimination approach as hypothesized.

Table 7

Percentages of males and females participants showing biased responses towards opposite sex. (n=100 in each group)

Gender	Biased Responses Against	
	Males %	Females %
Male	35	65
Female	42	58

Table 7 reveals that existing social thinking pattern that not only biased against women but even women do not spare their own gender and lash them with their biased approach.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to see the gender differences in various high and low status professions. It became quite evident by the results that gender biases do exist till date in Pakistani society. The first hypothesis "The high status professions will be related to males as compared to females" was accepted and the results are in line with what was found by Cejka and Eagly (1999) that gender biases exist in those occupations which have given higher prestige and attract high earnings and prejudice against women persist worldwide. This would not be unexpected in societies in which men have traditionally been considered the bread winners, and in which women have only relatively recently entered the workforce in significant numbers (Herz & Wootton, 1996). In fact, author of this study suspects that in these societies work-itself may be stereotyped as masculine due to gender bias. Moreover, as business

organizations have traditionally possessed "masculine" cultures, it could be suspected that people are more likely to "default" to a masculine stereotype for high status professions.

The organizational status refers to the socially defined position and rank given to an occupation based on power, high pay, preferred work schedules and so on (Niakao & Treas, 1993). Hence the status of the professions is determined by position of power, high pay scale and high level of prestige attached with them. Results of the present study also show that participants rated those professions as having 'high status' which according to social perception had an element of prestige and good salary package attached with it. Even in rating the status of a profession there was some gender differences observed.

There was a strong positive relation found between Male gender and high status of profession. On the other hand the second hypothesis "The low status professions will be associated more with females as compared to males" was also supported as most of the professions which were low in status were highly rated for female gender. The results reflect that gender biases are deeply rooted in our work culture and society. It cuts a sorry figure that even though Pakistan has nuclear technology but still is unable to change stigmatization way of thinking against women. According to some of the researches the low status and less prestigious professions are till date associated with females. Women are more frequently offered lowest paid manual and non manual occupations (Cejka & Eagly, 1999).

Even today, less prestigious and least paid career of nursing is frequently taken up by women as men consider it less prestigious for their gender. It is evident from enrollments in nursing schools in different time periods where it remained stable (Digest of Education Statistics, 1992).

The third hypothesis that "The Males participants will be more biased against females in assigning them a high status professions as compared to when assigning them to males also stands confirmed. It is a male dominating society the men were more biased against women and keeping in view the gender stereotypical roles even the women were biased against women as they felt that women should come only in those professions which are female oriented. Dovidio and Gaertner (1986) proposed a theory of "aversive racism" whereby seemingly egalitarian people avoid overt forms of discrimination yet persistently engage in more subtle forms of differential treatment & exhibit subtle biases when the probes for stereotypic responses are less direct. It also is conceivable

that the gender and gender-role attitudes of individual raters will influence their responses.

The profession of physician was more or less rated equally for both genders by the participants. One of the reasons is that the gender roles are changing and are learned behaviors in a given society because of economic crisis and increasing educational levels. This is further supported by the gender composition of medical school that has changed substantially from 13% women in the mid-1970s (Taeuber, 1991) to 33% in 1990s (Reis & Stone, 1992).

Exploring the relative impact of job content, employees' personality, and gender ratios on occupational stereotyping, Krefting, Berger, and Wallace (1978) concluded that gender imbalances signal prospective employees that a job is or is not suitable for their own gender category. In other words, what made medical school masculine in the 1970s was not the tasks physicians did (job content) and not the personal characteristics of doctors (personality), but simply the basic demographic fact that most medical practitioners were men

On the other hand the fourth hypothesis stated that "females participants will be more biased against males in assigning them a high status profession as compared to when assigning them to females" was rejected as the results not only males are biased in assigning a high status profession to females but even females think that women lack the abilities to hold high status designations. Hence not only the female participants rated their gender to be less suitable for high status jobs but also preferred them to be more suitable for low status jobs.

The attitudes are slowly changing as in the present study, two out of five high status professions were equally rated for women which shows an attitude change coming in the society. Regarding changes in attitudes, Gallup polls conducted in 1975 reported that 37% of women and 43% of men agreed that a woman with the same ability as a man would have an equal chance of becoming an executive and 27% of women and 32% of men would prefer equally a woman or man boss (Simon & Landis, 1989). The same questions asked in 1987 showed stronger support for women in nontraditional roles of managers and bosses. 46% of women and 50% of men agreed that women would have equal opportunities to be a manager and 39% of women and 57% of men expressed equal preferences for women and men bosses. These opinions reflect significant attitudinal changes across 1980s.

Limitations, Suggestions and implications

The present study takes a step forward in helping to understand the nature of gender-stereotyping and gender segregation of occupations. However, further investigation is needed to confirm the findings reported above especially keeping in view the limitation of the research which catered either high status occupations or low status professions and did not consider the mediocre status professions.

Future research paradigms should also include "gender-neutral" occupations along with strongly masculine-typed and feminine-typed occupations as part of the designs. Moreover, these studies could go a step further by asking subjects to assign salaries to the occupations after rating them. This would shed additional light on the perceived worth of masculine-typed versus feminine-typed occupations.

Finally, future research should also consider the use of a more heterogeneous sample of subjects. For example, including subjects other than college students, such as college graduates and non-college-educated persons, would lend reinforcement to the generalizability of the present study. In addition, it might be interesting to include persons who are employed in organizations similar to the ones described in the study.

If the current study can be replicated on the organizational sample, there could be meaningful implications for the training of recruiters and managers who work in gender-typed organizations. For instance, those who recruit and hire in masculine-typed organizations might receive training aimed at helping them shed gender biased perceptions that high status professions possess certain "masculine" qualities and only men can be employed for such posts.

There are also potential implications for organizations related to the recruitment of women. For example, the job description should be gender neutral more likely to convince women applicants that both high & low status positions within the organization are not "gender-biased" for them.

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