

Despite Legislation for Equal Opportunities, sexism is still in evidence in the workplace.

Sexism is a particular concern for society when considering its effect in the workplace. Sexism has always been a particular problem in the labour market especially with the formation of capitalism. In the last half of the 20th century this has been especially highlighted due to the increase of women entering the labour market. This aroused the need for a legislation for equal opportunity for both sexes to be passed in 1975. It stated that discrimination of a person's sex whether male or female was unlawful in employment, union membership, education, provision of goods, services, advertisements and pay.

In this essay the discussion will cover subjects such as why women hold a large percentage of the work force in companies but hardly any seem to have any power. Obstacles in the way of women in careers, if women prefer different jobs to men, equal pay for both sexes and what's changed since the law was made an Act of Parliament. This essay will only concentrate on the problem of sex discrimination in the U.K.

Sex discrimination means that a person gets treated in a less favorable manner because of their sex. A good example of this is to take two fictional characters, Mr. and Mrs. Jones. The Joneses want to go swimming, they get to the swimming baths where they find that Mrs. Jones is charged an O.A.P. price while Mr. Jones has to pay the full price even though they are both the same age. This is because women become pensioners at the age of sixty while men cannot gain the benefits until they are sixty five.

Sex discrimination is not only present within the older generation but is also evident throughout the entire age range. Before legislation was passed in the 1960's most young girls left school after O-levels to receive a strong social message that their careers were already set up for them as marriage and motherhood (Pascall 1995: 2). The only jobs they would be getting were tedious low paid jobs (a Secretary) and be only looking forward to when they would meet a man, have a family and settle down. Statistics show that in 1971, 51% of married women did not work compared to 29% in 1993 (Pascall 1995: 3). Women now hold 46% of the labor work force, with young women seeing housework more of a part-time rather than a full time job. This is an enormous social change for the family giving women less dependence on marriages which are increasingly falling apart day by day and a greater command over the increasing area of technology and resources. With more women getting jobs, it encourages other women who were reluctant to move into the labour market to do the same and become more career minded.

Although women now make up 46% of the English work force only 3% of women hold chief executive positions. This has only increased by 2% in the last 20 years (Mildrew 1992: 17). A point to be raised here is that as the hierarchy of management positions increases, the amount of women in these positions decreases. This quite clearly means that women do not hold the prestige and influence that men do, as their sector of high ranking jobs is so small. We've all heard men say at some point, "I just don't understand women", yet there are only 5 women High Court Judges out of 91 men and 28 women circuit judges out of 496 men in the Judiciary in 1993 (Pascall 1995: 2).

Thanks to media attention women do have access to careers. In 1980 women

made up 12-14% of professional and managerial jobs. In 1990 the figure had raised to 32% managers/administrators and 40% professionals. On the other hand women seem to fall into different sectors to men, they make up 62% of teachers and librarianship but only 25% of business and financial professionals and shockingly only 5% of engineers and technologists. Teaching is a qualified position, 90% of primary school teachers and 60% of secondary teachers are women but 50% primary and 80% secondary school heads are men. This is the same right the way across the spectrum, in university only 5% of professors are women (Pascall 1995: 3).

This segregation of gender in different jobs can be separated into two dimensions, vertical and horizontal. Vertical segregation is the segregation of gender in the hierarchy of power in a certain job. Women tend to be found at the low end of vertical segregation in professional occupations. Horizontal segregation is the segregation of gender in the spread of different occupations. Women are usually found dominating teaching while men dominate engineering. Data from the Eurostat Labour survey shows when women break horizontal segregation by increasing their presence in a particular occupation, vertical segregation becomes securely established. This is shown by the fact that 3 per cent of all clerks and typists in 1911 were women. By 1971 the situation had reversed and women dominated this area. As soon as the number of women increased, office work was down graded and became a low paid dead end job by deskilling. The activities were broken down to suit what was thought as women's abilities (Mildrew 1992: 12).

Educational qualifications are a must for anyone who wants a career (man or woman). 20 years ago girls would have left education at the end of their O-levels being norm. In the 1991/92 GCSE results 42.7% of girls compared with 34.1% of boys received 5 or more A-C grades and 16.1% compared with 14.4% of boys received 3 or more passes at A-Level. The number of women students at university has tripled in the last 21 years which is almost twice the increase for male, making up 48% of the student population. At degree level 46-48% of medicine/business and financial students are women but only 12% take engineering or technology. These men / woman dominated areas are clearly seen, simply by looking in classrooms at secondary or university education. 91% of sociology classes are female dominated and about 90% of computer science / physics, classes are male dominated (Pascall 1995: 4).

The Sex Discrimination Act is in power to help women in a number of ways and lets them into previously closed doors. However due to the fact that most legal institutions are male dominated it is not quite as clear cut as it may seem on the outside. The law is often interpreted restrictively meaning a woman may have to fight an unequal battle with her employer and even if they come out victorious little compensation is received and she may be victimized at work in the aftermath.

A major need for the discrimination act is to try to help break down the presence of what is known as the 'glass ceiling'. This is where men get promoted and go further up the managerial hierarchy while women get to a certain position and can not climb any further. Although they can see the men climbing further up the company they cannot break the glass ceiling themselves (Gregg 1991: 8).

A study called 'Indsco' in a large industrial conglomerate led by Rosabeth Moss Kanter (A management professor at Harvard) in 1977, recognized that people who work in large organizations have a tendency to hire and promote those who resemble themselves (Mildrew 1992: 17).

Unfortunately some men feel uncomfortable with women being their equals and since men dominate managerial levels they have much more control over people's careers beneath them. If men do not recognize women as their equals,

then women are overlooked for transfer or promotion, find themselves directed into female' job areas and are not offered a challenge. Men use strategies to cope with women such as patronizing them, not listening to them seriously, being over protective and shielding them from dangerous situations so they never have the knowledge of how to cope (Allen 1993 p26).

The Employment Act 1978 gives women going through pregnancy and child birth the right to have time off with no loss of position. This is only given however to woman who have a career involving full time and continuous employment and stops just 29 weeks after childbirth (Pascall 1995: 4). Parental leave, flexible hours and care of the child in sickness and health is left for the employer and employee to discuss.

This is a very complex problem because once a child is born it must have the proper care and attention. Nursery provisions for women who want to go back to work are appalling. Only 2% of work places have nursery facilities and the male dominated government seem to think that the problem doesn't exist! Shocking statistics show that for every 14 females that work full time there is only one which has children between the ages of 0 and 15 years old. i.e. There is 4,200,000 woman with no children in full time work and only 300,000 woman with children between the age of 0 to 15 (Pascall 1995: 4). Taking into account that most woman would like to have at least one baby, there is going to be a lot of woman in low paid jobs. Professions such as medicine which require an intensive course of work to build up the knowledge for the career has actually implied a ban on woman with children. Even traditional woman's jobs such as nursing do not have a career that can comfortably take on board a woman with her off-spring.

Since for most women all this is a bit to much they will most certainly turn to part-time employment which will be punished by lower grading and pay.

In 1975 the equal pay act came into power. This made it illegal to offer different wages for the same work on the grounds of sex. Men's full time wages over woman's fell drastically. The gap has been narrowing ever since. The New Earnings Survey (NES) shows that in 1980, men's pay stood 40% more on average over women's and in 1992 that gap had narrowed to 25%. Woman in low paid jobs, where before were paid much less then men now have leveled up to the same wage or sometimes higher. However in high flying jobs there still is a large wage difference. The NES showed that woman's hourly earnings where on an average 70.9% of men's in 1990. The problem being is that since woman go into different areas of work than men it may be very difficult to compare the skills and amount of work they do to claim equal pay.

We can see that even with the law, there are many loop holes that clever employees can seek. This isn't the only thing that stands in the way of woman who want a career, there are many other obstacles. Society is a very powerful instrument, people get molded by the society they are in. It changes the way people think and act. Also (From personal experiance) many children are directed to appropriate traditional' subjects by their secondary socialization in schools particularly by old fashioned' teachers.

Unfortunately the law is not beneficial to everyone. It is not allowed to be broken, but there are numerous ways of stretching it! A good example of this is D.Quinnen vs Mr. J.H. Hovell. Mr. Hovell hired 2 woman and 1 man to work in his store at Christmas time. The 2 woman got paid more than the man. Mr. Quinnen complained and was dismissed, he claimed equal pay and sex discrimination.

Mr. Quinnen took this case to the industrial tribunal (I.T.). At a preliminary

hearing the tribunal dismissed Mr. Quinnens claims on the grounds that he was not employed by Mr. Hovell as the definition of employment was that there was a 'contract of service' which Mr. Quinnens did not have. Mr. Quinnens actually then took his case to the Employment Appeal Tribunal which awarded him £530 (E.O.C 1989: 63), but most people would not take the case this far after getting turned away by the I.T. A useful rule for woman is that the

law works on the rule of precedent, where if a woman has won a case before almost in the same position as the woman who may want to go to court now, the previous case will be used as a base for the prevailing case. With this in mind woman can almost see what the outcome of the case will be before even going to court, saving themselves victimization from male counterparts.

From what we have seen it appears that male dominance is to be blamed for women's under achievement in the work place. However this may be a one sided view. Once a woman gets a job in power she may adopt the 'I had to work hard to get where I am so why shouldn't others' attitude and will discourage other woman from taking responsibility. Woman also tend to be more cautious than men, a survey by British Gas showed that when a opportunity came up in their company for a job with more power the women would only apply for it if they fitted the whole job criteria unlike men who applied for it even if they didn't fill half the description (Allen 1993: 30). The

other obstacle that woman would seem to set up for themselves is their own confidence. A study taped seven university faculty meetings and found that men's contributions before someone broke in ranged from 11 to 17 seconds while woman's were 3 to 10 seconds. Women also use deferential tag lines like "Don't you think?" and "Isn't it?" far more often than men and are reluctant to delegate work so they overload themselves (Mildrew 1992: 18).

In reflection to the examples given evidence shows that the effectiveness of introducing the numerous acts of parliament have not been entirely successful on implementation. Trends show that through out education females have been directed towards traditional feminine subjects. Lack of fundamental education needed to back up university courses have reflected women's immobility to achieve positions of high status in the whole range of occupations. Mature woman share this problem as lack of qualifications in appropriate subjects prevents them from achieving powerful positions.

Clearly, it can be seen that women are getting the same wage as men in low paying jobs since the Sexual Discrimination act was passed in 1975 but there is still a long way to go until woman in managerial jobs get an equal wage to their counterparts. The fact that women are entering different job areas to men e.g. Teaching / Social working, means that even if a woman takes a company to court because she believes she is not getting paid as much as a male employee, even though she is using the same skills and has the same work load, this is very hard to prove if the two employees are not doing the same job.

With most woman wanting babies, and leaving full time work to have a child and probably only taking up part-time work after it is born, it gives directors of companies a very bad opinion of women in powerful jobs as they believe that as soon as the woman has worked her way up she will leave the company due to maternity leave and never be able to keep up the same quality of work as before. Women tend to naturally set obstacles in their own way and it seems that the only way to get a powerful, influential, prestigious job is to never have a baby and are never get married.

The law is not much use for woman in power as there is so many males above them in any company. The usefulness of the law can be seen however in the fact of 'precedent' where any previous case of a woman taking a company to court for sexual discrimination or equal pay and winning may be considered in a similar court case.

The glass ceiling is a major obstacle preventing woman from achieving high status professions. However since the law has been in power I believe that the glass ceiling is cracking but it's going to take a lot more years to see any kind of noticeable improvements in woman's careers.