UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Men's place
The incomplete integration of women in workplace authority

Stojmenovska, D.

Publication date
2022

Citation for published version (APA):
Stojmenovska, D. (2022). *Men's place: The incomplete integration of women in workplace authority*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

6.   Conclusions

Globally, women held only 28 percent of managerial positions in 2019, a statistic that varies across countries but invariably points to men's disproportionate representation in positions of power and decision-making (United Nations 2020). This is the case in both the public and private sector of the economy, including industries numerically dominated by women. To address the gender gap in authority, a number of countries have moved toward legislation requiring a set quota of representation of women in some types of workplace authority, notably corporate boards. While the existence of an average gender gap in workplace authority is well established, important questions surrounding women's and men's representation in authority have remained unanswered.

Against the backdrop of the asymmetric move of women into traditionally men-dominated arenas like workplace authority, persistent cultural beliefs about gender and work, and the limited adaptation of workplace cultures to a changing workforce, the chapters in this dissertation addressed three main questions. What do women's authority jobs look like compared to those of men? Where do dominant work devotion norms leave us with regard to the gender gap in workplace authority when coupled with the fact that in heterosexual relationships, presently dominant in most cultures, women bear more responsibility than men for childcare? And how does the cultural view on men as more suitable for authority than women translate to men's disproportionate access to authority positions in organizations? I address these questions with quantitative analyses of data on large samples of employees and work organizations.

Summary of Findings

Authority Jobs Look Different for Women and Men
Women's authority jobs tend to differ from those of men, both in the tasks and job quality they entail. Chapter 2 showed variation in the size of the gender authority gap depending on the amount of authority and type of control over resources the position involves. The gender authority gap is largest in largely supervisory positions with control over organizational

resources and smallest in positions with control over human resources. The size of the gender difference in having a position with control over human resources is comparable to the gender gap in positions with only some supervisory tasks that likely entail the lowest amount of authority. Differences in authority-associated individual characteristics such as educational attainment, work experience, and tenure with the current employer, as well as job characteristics, notably hours worked and location within the structure of the economy, do not explain the variation in the gender authority gap across types of authority positions.

Chapter 3 additionally showed that women's authority jobs are also not identical to those of men in terms of job quality. While both women and men in authority on average have higher levels of job resources than individuals without authority, authority jobs are not necessarily better when it comes to job strains, especially not for women. Women in authority are more likely than women without authority to report experiences of sexual harassment, intimidation, and bullying at the workplace, and have higher probabilities of experiencing job burnout symptoms. In contrast to women, for men, having authority is associated with lower average probabilities of experiencing workplace bullying and burnout symptoms. While women in authority have the highest average probability of reporting negative interpersonal experiences at the workplace and job burnout symptoms of all women and men, men in authority, have the lowest probability of all of experiencing job burnout and workplace bullying. Gender differences in job quality also exist among individuals without authority, but are often exaggerated in positions involving authority.

The Gap is not Created at the Transition to Parenthood but Work Devotion Norms Matter

Contrary to popular belief (Belkin 2003; Ely, Stone, and Ammerman 2014), my research showed that the gender gap in workplace authority is not created at the transition to parenthood. Chapter 4 showed that the gender authority gap is already large years before the transition to parenthood; seven years before the birth of their first child, men's average predicted probabilities of having authority are about 11 percentage points higher than those of women. However, work devotion norms, shown to be especially strong in authority

positions (Blair-Loy 2005), do result in a differential effect of the transition to parenthood on having authority for women and men. While the birth of their first child has no effect on men's probabilities of having authority, the transition to parenthood moderately reduces women's probabilities of having workplace authority, an effect that is entirely explained by a reduction in women's work hours around the time of birth.

Organizational Variation in the Gap is Related to Women's and Men's Relative Power

Finally, following the finding that substantial gender authority gaps exist net of individual and job authority-associated characteristics (chapter 2), and that the transition to parenthood does not explain women's underrepresentation in authority (chapter 4), chapter 5 demonstrated the potential of relational power struggles over authority at the workplace for explaining the gender gap in having authority. The chapter showed considerable organizational variation in the gender authority gap, net of authority-associated individual characteristics of women and men. The size of the gap across organizations seems to be related to women's and men's relative power. Specifically, I find that the gender authority gap is larger in organizations with larger shares of men and organizations where men tend to have higher status relative to women in terms of other culturally or organizationally recognized status distinctions, for example in organizations where men tend to have permanent employment status and women tend to have temporary employment status.

Contributions

Altogether, this dissertation has provided a more comprehensive view on the gender gap in workplace authority and associated inequality. The variation in the gender authority gap across types of authority positions has consequences for gender differences in job quality. The higher average probability of reporting sexual harassment and job burnout symptoms among women in authority seems to be explained by the relatively higher concentration of women in positions lower on the authority hierarchy. The concentration of women in certain types of authority positions may also have consequences for their potential to influence broader inequality at work. A growing body

of literature has begun to examine the possible consequences of having more women represented in authority on work outcomes of employees in the general ranks such as pay and take up of part-time arrangements, although evidence on the association between these and the share of women in authority is mixed (Stojmenovska 2019; Devicienti et al. 2019; van Hek and van der Lippe 2019).

I also showed that having women better represented in positions of authority is not sufficient for achieving equality, or even reducing gender inequality—at least not in the current context of men's domination of authority jobs. More profound changes in the gender system should be paralleled by changes in prevailing workplace norms. The finding that the decrease in women's probability of having authority around the transition to parenthood is entirely explained by a reduction in work hours shows that work devotion narratives serve to exclude part-time workers, who are often women, from the exercise of authority. Coupled with uneven changes in support for gender equality in the public and private spheres (Scarborough, Sin, and Risman 2019; England 2010), and the finding of gendered evaluations of employees even when workplaces attempt to provide arrangements that facilitate combining work with other aspects of life (Chung and van der Lippe 2020), changing common workplace cultures has a long way to go.

I additionally make a number of theoretical and methodological contributions. My dissertation suggests that having the "neutral" worker (read: men) in mind, much of the social stratification literature has made erroneous assumptions about the relationship between having a high-status position and job quality. Even a quick scan of the introductory sections of published work on the gender gap in workplace authority will show that much of this work has assumed that women and men have comparable outcomes in authority. As shown in the chapters of this dissertation, this "add women and stir" approach to theorizing about work has not kept up to date with the diversification of the workforce in a way, perhaps, similar to the way the workplace itself has not kept up to date with these changes. Feminist perspectives on gender and work (Feree and Hall 1996; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1990) need a more central place in the study of social stratification.

Next to contributing to the more mainstream study of social stratification, I have also contributed to feminist theories of gender and power. The so-called "vulnerable victim" and "power threat" perspectives are seen as conflicting perspectives in this literature (Roscigno 2019). The former perspective suggests that women without authority are subject to greater harassment at the workplace than women without authority because they have less power in the organizational context and experience more work control by supervisors, who are often men; the latter perspective argues that women in authority experience more conflict than women without authority because unlike women in positions not entailing authority, they violate the hierarchical gender order (Berdahl 2007; West and Zimmerman 1987). Prior work using a dichotomous measure of workplace authority has found support for the latter perspective (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012). Based on analyses using a more detailed measure of workplace authority, I suggest that the relationship between having authority and workplace harassment might depend on the type of authority women have.

Finally, my dissertation contributes to the relational turn in the study of work inequality (Vallas and Cummins 2014; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019). While the call for "bringing the firms back in" (Baron and Bielby 1980) to the quantitative study of workplace inequality is not new, the increasing availability of data matching individuals to their workplaces has enabled a growing number of scholars to study inequality as a local accomplishment. The latter entails a move away from average estimates of inequality on the national level and toward a study of variation in inequality across organizations as the most proximate context where social relations producing work inequalities occur. In this dissertation I have made a first step toward exploring these ideas in the context of workplace authority.

More broadly, my studies contribute to the field by showing applications of the type of data currently seen as providing among the most promising avenues for the quantitative study of workplace inequality (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019)—linked survey and administrative data. Given that all my chapters involve analyses of non-linear outcomes, I also show applications of what are considered to be state-of-the-art techniques for addressing interpretation problems associated with regression analyses of categorical outcomes, including the KHB-method increasingly employed

by sociologists (Breen, Karlson, and Holm 2013, 2021) and predicted probabilities as the most intuitive way for summarizing results involving categorical outcomes (Mize 2019). Lastly, I contribute to discussions on how to best measure authority. In a review of this ongoing discussion, Smith (2002) writes that the conclusion depends on the research question. My dissertation suggests that measures of workplace authority that view authority as residing in the work activities of employees enable describing gender inequality in authority and associated outcomes in more detail.

A Way Forward

What is the way forward? While my research does not provide answers to this question, based on years of rumination on the manner and findings from other research, I can discuss some of the options. Ending individuals' tendency to categorize others—either with the gender frame or other culturally recognized frames in the background—seems like the least likely option. Even if we cannot get rid of categories, however, we could try to get rid of the meaning of categories by stripping the gender frame off its content. Education plays a crucial role here, and the good news is that we already have the knowledge to teach children and adults that, for starters, women are not less competent than men, that women and men have much more in common than they have differences, and that care work is just as important as any other type of work. Of course, this knowledge should also be institutionalized and reflected in laws and regulations.

Given that the hierarchical organization is a more modern invention than cultural ideas about gender and people's tendency to categorize (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019; Ridgeway 2011), changing organizational structures and practices is also a viable option. A general consensus in the literature on "what works" for reducing the effects of bias in work organizations is that programs designed to moderate bias like diversity trainings do not work. A meta-analysis of about a thousand studies conducted across multiple countries shows that raising awareness about bias can be ineffective, or even counter-effective (Bohnet 2016). What does work to reduce discrimination at work, according to this review of studies, can be small tweaks of organizational practices, like having musicians audition from

behind a screen in hiring for professional orchestras. In a systematic analysis of the efficacy of commonly used approaches to promoting diversity in management at 708 organizations over a period of 30 years, Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006) similarly find that diversity training programs have no effect at all and that holding relevant organizational actors accountable for diversity is the most efficient approach.

The ultimate justice project, perhaps, however, involves destabilizing status hierarchies. If there are no scarce resources to be distributed, the consideration of who is more worthy of having these resources also becomes less relevant. The question, then, is not how some women can get more positions of privilege, but how all individuals can share equal organizational citizenship and privileges at work.

Avenues for Future Research

Looking ahead, future research should explore the benefits of flatter organizations for disrupting the link between culturally meaningful categories and status-based inequalities; staying mindful of how such organizations can also be infused with gendered logics, however, is key (Ridgeway 2011). The ideal research design for this question likely consists of a combination of big quantitative data that allow exploiting organizational variation in hierarchies and qualitative data containing personal narratives of individuals across these organizations.

One of the central messages I have tried to convey in this dissertation is that average estimates obscure valuable information about variation in inequality across contexts and different groups of individuals. Gender status beliefs interact with status beliefs about categorically distinct individuals on other bases of signification such as race/ethnicity and migration status, an issue I touched upon in chapter 5. Studying experiences in authority at the intersection of these socially meaningful categories will further show the extent of heterogeneity of individuals' experiences at work. The handful of studies that have looked at multiplicate effects of social meanings find heterogeneity in the limited access to authority among women; white women's disadvantage relative to white men, for example, is smaller than

the disadvantage experienced by women of color (Shams and Tomaskovic-Devey 2019).

A study of heterogeneous experiences within categories of gender also involves expanding the study of inequality in workplace authority and work, more generally, to incorporate experiences of individuals with genderqueer identities. Given that virtually all secondary data available for quantitative research at the moment, including the ones used in this dissertation, preclude the possibility of doing so, better data collection efforts should lead the way. Administrative data offer a number of advantages over other types of observational data but do not seem a likely candidate for this project given that information about gender in these data are based on databases using sex categories. Linking administrative data to survey data that do collect information that captures the complexities of gender identity and expression might be a good way to combine the best of both worlds.