**Compensation and Advancement Disparities**

Meagan Frances Ayers

21 October 2009

**THE STUDY**

*Introduction*

The study Differing Workplace Perceptions of Female Graduates was conducted by F.J. DeCasperis and D.A. Lonnstrom of Sienna College in Loudonville New York. It consists of female students under the age of 25 receiving a bachelor’s degree from the university (traditional female students) and assesses their perceptions of job advancement and compensation following graduation.

*Research Question*

The main question of this study was: how do female graduates of the study perceive their advancement and compensation opportunities (ability to be successful) following graduation as compared to other women and men they work with.

To tackle this question the following questions were asked of each female student under the age of 25 graduating with a bachelor from the university:

1. “Did the graduates indicate an increase in their general knowledge base and skill levels?
2. Would the graduates recommend the institution to others?
3. Did the graduates acquire specific knowledge and skills applicable to a career?
4. Did the graduates gain access to professional career opportunities and did they experience job satisfaction within those careers?
5. Did the graduates feel they were able to advance successfully within their chosen career?" (DeCasperis & Lonnstrom, 2008, p.167)

*Research Methodology*

The study seems to have been conducted within a feminist methodology. The reason for this statement is because according to DeVault and Gross (p.174) those who claim feminist methodology require “going to the people… and to promote justice and well-being of all women.” The study was conducted in a manner that sheds light to the fact that while women are earning the same degrees as men and the educated workforce is split 50/50 amongst men and women, men still hold a higher percentage of superior paying jobs and have much better advancement opportunities within the workplace than qualified women. “Usual median weekly earnings are about 81% of men” according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (DeCasperis & Lonnstrom, 2008, p.172).

For this reason, it seems apparent that this article is focused on making public the disparities between men and women in the workforce and subsequently is aimed at “promoting justice and the well-being of women.”

*Research Methods*

The only method used to conduct this study was the method of questionnaire. The questionnaire allowed “subjects to respond with varying degrees of intensity using the five category range of very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, no opinion, satisfied and very satisfied” and allowed “sufficient opportunity for respondent comments. The questionnaire surveys were delivered to all 2443 females who were under 25 years of age when they graduated and a total of 777 surveys were returned, representing a 31.8% return rate” (DeCasperis & Lonnstrom, 2008, p.168).

*Social/Cultural Assumptions*

The study was based purely on the perceptions of workers rather than including actual compensation rates and advancement opportunities. This can be a very dangerous route considering the fact that many people may feel they deserve more (compensation or opportunities) than the person sitting next to them. As the study’s findings are consistent with statistics concerning wage disparities among men and women in the United States, it is safe to assume these perceptions can be actual accounts of employment gaps between men and women. However, statistics are very important to prove these perceptions relevant.

*Framework*

One thing the study made a point to stress is that “women have lower median weekly earnings than men at all levels, even for those with a professional degree” and during the 80’s and 90’s women of all economic backgrounds were making a steady increase to meet the same advancement and compensation levels as men. Since that time however, progress has ceased and rather it may be heading in the opposite direction with regards to educated women in the workplace as compared to men (DeCasperis & Lonnstrom, 2008, p.170).

*Findings*

The study found that overall, 87.1% of women are satisfied with their *advancement* opportunities versus other women and yet only 72.4% of women are satisfied with their advancement opportunities as compared to men (a 14.7% inconsistency). It was also found that 85.5% of women are satisfied with their *compensation* versus other women and yet only an astounding 64.1% of women are satisfied with their compensation as compared to men (a 21.4% disparity). (DeCasperis & Lonnstrom, 2008)

**FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY**

*Conservative Standpoint Theory*

Under this theory, one analyzing this information might try to uncover the reasons behind these disparities with the assumption that everyone has the same opportunities and “individual talent, initiative and hard work” are what drive these statistics and consequently there must be some kind of skills deficiency among those who are incapable of making it as far as they have the potential to.

While conservatives are aware of the differences among men and women when it comes to compensation and advancement opportunities, they are not convinced the source of the problem rests within discrimination. Many operating under this theory believe the reason for these disparities are due to the fact that some people lack the qualifications for these jobs and since everyone has the same opportunities as the traditional theory of Americanism suggests, then the blame/fault of the disparity must lie within the individuals themselves and therefore they are ultimately responsible for the problem due to their personal choices. (Hawkesworth , 2006, pp.179-182)

The Problem

If this theory were true, the disparity would lie between under qualified women and qualified men. However, this study compares men and women with the same educational backgrounds (four-year college degree) and opportunities and yet we are still seeing a huge difference among gender.

*Post-Modern Standpoint Theory*

Those who are looking at this study from a post-modernist standpoint might see an issue with the method used and information obtained. “Postmodern feminists insist that we must attend to who speaks for whom as much as what is said” (Hawkesworth , 2006, pp.189-191); meaning you cannot speak for everyone as a generalized category (ex. Women vs. African American Women, Caucasian Women, Asian Women, disabled women, etc...).

This community of people would analyze this study and immediately ask themselves (as I did) what about women of minorities and underprivileged women? This study does not distinguish between women but it rather generalizes women into one category. However, if you single out a category of women, you may find that the numbers would be even worse than we are seeing here. For example, had there been the categories of Caucasian women, Asian women and African American women, while the original study stated there was very little dissatisfaction as compared to other women, had there been a category solely for African American women, this number may have been much lower than the 87.1% we saw. However, this is something we would never know until a study has been conducted to show these disparities.

**STUDY SUGGESTION**

If I were given the chance to conduct a study, I would be more quantitative oriented and provide for a more thorough analysis of the workplace. The first thing I would do is provide a controlled group which would consist of two groups, men and women with the same educational backgrounds and qualifications. Once the control groups were established, my next step would be to break the findings into sub-categories according to race.

The study would consist of three main focuses:

1. What is your position if you have one (if not, what is the reason for not having a job currently)? What is your salary?
2. Do you feel valued within your workplace with the opportunity to advance?
3. If you do not feel that there is an opportunity for advancement, what are the reasons for this?

Once all this information was obtained from a very diverse group of individuals from all geographic areas of the country, ethnic backgrounds and economic status’ I would then compare the information to determine what the disparities are among:

1. Men versus women, and
2. Among races and ethnicities

The information provided via question number three might also be very useful in trying to determine what the problem is. The reason for this is because without determining the problem, you are not able to attempt to create a solution which is ultimately the purpose of the study.

While this will be very time consuming, it will contain valuable information taking into consideration the voices of many and would be a reliable and unbiased way to get pure raw data to blatantly see the disparities.

**CITATIONS**

DeCasperis, F. J., Lonnstrom, D. A. (2008). Differing Workplace Perceptions of Female Graduates. Review of Business Research, 8(5), 167-173. Retrieved From http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.ohiolink.edu

DeVault, M. L., Gross, G. (2007). Feminist Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge. Handbook of Feminist Research, 173-197.

Hawkesworth, Mary. (2006). Feminist Standpoint Theory as Analytical Tool. Feminist Inquiry, 176-206.