

Gender Equity in an Evolving Work Environment

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ABSTRACT

The United States ranks among the last in the world for supportive work-family policies like family leave, career breaks, childcare, and gender and pay equality all of which influence career progression (Chzhen, Gromada, & Rees, 2019). Companies leading the change by adopting policies that support women and families find they can increase loyalty, engagement, productivity, performance, and create a mutually beneficial relationship for employers and employees. Companies with gender-balanced teams have a higher return on equity than less diverse peers.

In 2020, women make up just under half of the workforce but only hold 25% of senior executive positions, and 5% of positions in S&P 500 companies. The wage gap provides similar statistics, decreasing by only \$0.07 since 2015. Women make \$0.81 for every dollar a man earns. The gap increases for minority groups, who earn \$0.75 for every dollar. As women progress in their career the difference widens to \$0.69 to every dollar. Men in STEM positions earn nearly 28% more than women and 39% more than Latina and Black women.

Due to the challenges of the 2020 pandemic, four times as many women as men dropped out of the labor force due to a lack of childcare. On the other hand, analysis of leader assessments between March and June of 2020, showed women in leadership roles were rated more positively than men, and perceived as more effective leaders.

This paper brings attention to issues faced by working women, particularly among Federal contractors in the aerospace and defense industry. It also addresses how the multiple challenges of 2020 have brought to light the needs of working women and their families and how addressing those can improve workforce performance and personal happiness. It presents recommendations for industry, I/ITSEC, and legislative solutions to improve gender equity.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

According to the International Monetary Fund, in 2021, women represent 51.1% of the United States population, and 50% of the world's working-age population (Dabla-Norris & Kochar, 2019). However, in the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), women represent only 34% of the civilian workforce, compared with 48% of all U.S. workers (Ketzer, Aaronson, & Juliano, 2019). Likewise, women are only about one-third of NASA's workforce (with only 16% in senior scientific roles) and hold 28% of senior executive leadership positions (Davenport, 2019). Consider this information on the aerospace and defense (A&D) industry and women leading original equipment manufacturers (OEMs):

Overall, one-quarter of executive-level positions at A&D companies were held by women in 2018, a much higher share than at most technology-heavy companies and roughly in line with the 22% share of women in the overall A&D workforce. That's a clear contrast with many other industries, where the share of women decreases—often dramatically—with rising seniority. Still, in absolute terms, a quarter share in the workforce and in the executive suite is far too small. In addition, many women in A&D work in support functions such as HR, legal, finance, and marketing, rather than in operational roles. For example, only about 15% of A&D engineers are women. These numbers have been relatively unchanged for the past two decades, despite the number of high-profile women now leading OEMs. As long as women are underrepresented in critical operational and engineering roles, the industry will be hard-pressed to meet its talent needs. (Ketzer, Aaronson, & Juliano, 2019)

This paper compiles information to bring attention to issues faced by working women, particularly among Federal contractors. It also addresses how the multiple challenges of 2020 have brought to light the needs of working women and their families and how addressing those can improve workforce performance and personal happiness. It presents recommendations for industry, IITSEC, and legislative solutions to improve gender equity.

GENDER EQUITY

While federal and state legislatures have passed some laws that influence gender equity, the past decade has not shown significant changes for inequity in the workplace (Taub, 2020). *The Global Gender Gap Report 2020* calculated that, based on the rate of change in the past twenty years, corporations won't approach true gender equity until approximately 2120 (World Economic Forum, 2019). However, that report was published before the COVID-19 pandemic, so the estimated rate of progress is likely much slower. In addition, Mary Lynne Dittmar, the president and CEO of the Coalition for Deep Space Exploration, an industry group, said "We haven't moved very much in the last 30 years in overall diversity. Aerospace is still heavily male and white, and we're not moving very quickly" (Davenport, 2019)

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic issues that followed have caused experts to express concern that without a doubling of effort toward gender equity in the workplace, another decade will need to be added to the timeline (Taub, 2020). Economic research indicates that women are disproportionately affected by slowdowns (World Economic Forum, 2019). This impact extends to legislative and policy disruption as gender equity topics are given a lower priority on government and corporate agendas (Froehlicher, Griek, Nematzadeh, Hall, & Stovall, 2021). While women represent 39% of the global workforce, they accounted for 54% of job losses as of May 2020. In part, this is because women are over-represented in sectors such as hospitality and food service which were hit most heavily by the pandemic (Status of Women in the United States, 2020). Intersectionality, the interconnected nature of social categorizations given individuals or groups, creates overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or

disadvantage based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability, sexuality, and other identity markers. This disproportionately affects certain groups of women (Froehlicher, Griek, Nematzadeh, Hall, & Stovall, 2021).

Mental health professionals and labor experts generally agree the COVID-19 crisis extracted a more significant toll on women than men (Coffey & Abrahamson, 2020), especially for women caregivers of minor children. Even in the normal times, many women bear the brunt of an unpaid workload that includes caring for children, cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, and myriad other tasks. They also carry a heavy “mental load”—the emotional and psychological burden of trying to be full-time employees, full-time parents, and full-time teachers. For millions of employed women, these obligations amount to multiple jobs that may or may not be carried out as “shift work.” “Even though men have certainly stepped up to the plate, whenever there's extra work to be done, it tends to fall on moms because we're caregivers, and we want to make sure that everyone is happy,” psychotherapist Dr. Robi Ludwig told *TODAY Parents*. “Women really do take on that dual role even when they're working outside of the house and especially when they're in the house” (Coffey & Abrahamson, 2020).

While many companies made efforts to support employees during the pandemic, few organizations have made any effort to adjust the norms and expectations that contribute to employee stress and burnout in the best of times. According to McKinsey & Company (2020), “Less than a third of companies have adjusted their performance review criteria to account for the challenges created by the pandemic, and only about half have updated employees on their plans for performance reviews or their productivity expectations during COVID-19” (p.12). That means parents and caregivers face the choice between falling short of performance goals that may now be unrealistic or pushing themselves to keep up an unsustainable pace. (McKinsey & Company, 2020)

According to Castle (2021), “Amid a workforce-revolutionizing pandemic that has seen nearly 3 million women drop out of the workforce to support their families better, the question of how much it matters to have other women to look to while navigating your career feels pressing. In 10 years, how gender diverse will our boards, our C-suites, and our leadership pipelines be if up-and-coming women can't find a North Star—a woman whose career path seems aspirational yet achievable—because she's simply not there?” (para. 4).

The consequences of the pandemic are layered on issues women have historically faced in the workplace: 42% say they have experienced one, or more, of the eight different kinds of gender discrimination in the workplace, including being treated as if they were not competent; repetitive microaggressions, sexual harassment; lack of mentorship, lack of recognition, and receiving less support from senior leaders than someone of the opposite sex who was doing the same job (Gramlich, 2017).

WAGE EQUITY

One especially stark gender gap involves income: Employed women are five times more likely than employed men (25% vs. 5%) to say they have earned less for doing the same job as someone of the other gender (Gramlich, 2017). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2021), the median weekly earnings of full-time workers were \$989 in the first quarter of 2021. Women had median weekly earnings of \$900, 82.6 percent of the \$1,089 median for men. Among the major occupational groups, persons employed full-time in management, professional, and related occupations had the highest median weekly earnings, \$1,615 for men and \$1,179 for women. Men and women employed in service occupations earned the least, \$741, and \$582, respectively.

This BLS statistic applies to men and women across different industries. An argument against the scope of the gender wage gap is based on data that women tend to pursue lower-paying careers than men. To counter the argument, BLS analyzed management, professional, and related occupations for gender pay gaps. Their findings show that men earned median weekly earnings of \$1,559 while women in management, professional, and related occupations earned \$1,100 in the first quarter of 2019 (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The BLS also identified pay gaps among college graduates with advanced degrees. The highest-earning 10% of males made \$4,350 or more per week. Their female counterparts earned \$2,882 or more.

Equal Pay Act

The gender wage gap is not new. In 1963, the Equal Pay Act (“EPA”) was passed under the Kennedy administration. The law was meant to ensure women would not be paid less for doing the same job as men. However, employers may skirt the law by justifying a man's higher salary for some non-sex reason such as seniority, merit, or productivity,

leaving leverage for the employer in a potential lawsuit. Even if a woman filed a case, the EPA only ensures plaintiffs will be paid up to two years of retroactive salary (Rose, 2021).

On its face, the EPA should have solved the pay disparities between men and women. However, in 2021, women's work is still priced at a “bargain.” More than 50 years after pay discrimination became illegal in the United States, the pay gap between men and women continues to harm individuals and the national economy. There are several reasons for this, but one of the most surprising is that 17% of women and 39% of men don't believe the gender wage gap still exists (Blakley-Gray, 2019).

Others agree that it exists but argue the wage gap can be explained by factors other than discrimination. The most common explanation is women take family leave to have children. Depending on the length of time they are off work, many believe they re-enter the workforce with less experience than men who did not take a similar break, and this is reflected in their salaries. These detractors also argue that when women re-enter the workforce after having a family, some will work fewer hours to accommodate their careers and caregiving duties.

The gap also reflects how women and men feel about approaching wage issues. Men are four times more likely to ask for a raise than women. When women request a raise, they generally ask for 30% less than men do. Men who ask for raises receive them 20% of the time, compared to women who only receive them 15% of the time (Blakley-Gray, 2019).

Cumulative Effects of the Starting Wage Gap

However, the wage gap starts much earlier in a woman's career, with employers not wanting to invest in a person because they expect her to step away in a few years to raise a family (Rose, 2021). In a study of students graduating from Carnegie Mellon University with their master's degrees, Ph.D. program director Linda Babcock looked exclusively at gender and discovered “only 7 percent of the female students had negotiated but 57 percent (eight times as many) of the men had asked for more money” despite the Career Services office advising them to negotiate their offers. Of the mostly male students who did negotiate, they increased “their starting salaries by 7.4 percent on average, or \$4,053—almost exactly the difference between men's and women's average starting pay. This suggests that the salary differences between the men and the women might have been eliminated if the women had negotiated their offers” (Babcock, 2007, p. 2).

Women, especially those of color, experience a significant cumulative wage gap over their lifetime. Based on the current wage gap data, women in the U.S. lose, on average, \$406,280 over a 40-year career compared to White men. These average losses are amplified when

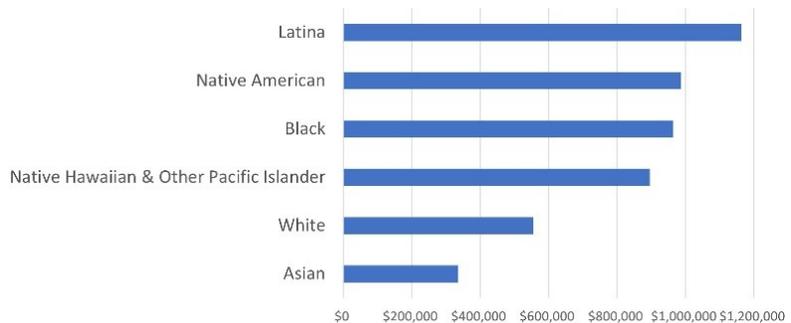


Figure 1: Lifetime Lost Income for Women by Race (Blakley-Gray, 2019)

comparing across racial and ethnic groups (Thomas et al., 2020). Figure 1 shows the lifetime lost income of women by race; Latina women earn nearly \$1.2 million less in their lifetime than White men.

The consequences of the wage gap extend beyond a wage earned over the course of a career. Though women now complete higher education programs more often than men, women also account for over 60% of the outstanding student debt in the United States (Baum & Looney, 2020). Because of the gender pay gap, women have a more challenging time repaying the loan. The pay gap even follows women into retirement: As a result of lower lifetime earnings, they receive less in Social Security and pensions. In terms of overall retirement income, women have only 70% of men's income.

OPPORTUNITY EQUITY

Despite gains for women in leadership, the “broken rung” was still a significant barrier in 2019. As the comment in Figure 2 shows, companies are making gains, but they are very slow. For the sixth year in a row, women continued to struggle with upward mobility. For every 100 men promoted to manager, only 85 women were promoted—and this gap was even more significant for women of color: only 58 Black women and 71 Latina women were promoted (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Many factors influence equity in opportunity—societal impressions of male and female professions, hiring and performance standards, mentorship, and parenting. Many people still generalize that men are drawn to how things work, and women tend to gravitate to people and relationships. A study of over 500,000 respondents supported that belief.

This might mean that occupations in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) are more likely to be filled by men because of the nature of people's preferences and interests (Rong & Rounds, 2009). Businesses that work from that assumption base their decisions on inconsistent outcomes. First, the societal norms that influence young people are often carried into adulthood. The school-age adage that “boys are good at math and girls are good at English” may discourage many young women from pursuing careers outside those boundaries. However, those norms are being challenged.

The rapid increase in the number of girls achieving very high scores on mathematics tests once thought to measure innate ability suggests that cultural factors are at work. Thirty years ago, there were 13 boys for every girl who scored above 700 on the SAT math exam at age 13; today, that ratio has shrunk to about 3:1. This increase in the number of girls identified as “mathematically gifted” suggests that education can and does make a difference at the highest levels of mathematical achievement. While biological gender differences, yet to be well understood, may play a role, they clearly are not the whole story (Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2020, p. xiv).

Currently, women employed in STEM fields make up only 28% of the workforce. They are also vastly outnumbered by men in most STEM fields in college. The gender gaps are exceptionally high in some of the fastest-growing and highest-paid jobs of the future, like computer science and engineering (AAUW, 2020). However, this does not mean businesses can extract gender-related inherent preferences from those ingrained by societal norms. The best course of action is for companies to avoid stereotypes and create space for individuals to display their preferences. Experts suggest it is likely these trends will change over time as societal and economic structures shift. There is an extensive history of women obtaining some of science's greatest achievements. They may have been the first, but they are unlikely to be the last.

As if the challenge of missing rungs on the ladder of success are not enough, many women find it challenging to find the right position. Amazon and Walmart are only two of the large corporations accused of gender bias in hiring. In August 2020, Walmart settled a \$20 million complaint filed by the EEOC on behalf of female applicants who applied for order-filling roles at Walmart's grocery distribution centers. The agency alleged that Walmart violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by using a physical abilities test that had a disparate impact on female applicants (Society for Human Resource Management, 2020). Amazon entered into litigation in March 2021 after being accused of hiring people of color “at lower levels” and promoting them less than white co-workers with similar qualifications (Larson, 2021).

Gender discrimination in hiring is not limited to large companies. A research study conducted in 2019 found hiring managers are 13% more likely to select a male applicant's resume. On average, women are 30% less likely to be called for an interview than men with the same qualifications. When the hiring manager is male, women have a 40% chance of being hired. When the hiring manager is a woman, that number rises to 50% (Blakley-Gray, 2019). Once hired, women are often held to higher performance standards than men to achieve the same level of success, and they may be more likely to take the blame for failure—so when the stakes are high, women could face higher criticism and harsher judgment (King, 2020).

~I have experienced some of these actions based on my gender more than 5-10 years ago. I've been with this Company for over 16 years and these things have not occurred in the past 5-6 years. I believe that this Company has made big efforts to change the environment and culture. While it has been slow to include more women in leadership positions, it is happening.

Figure 2: Female respondent to Gender Equity in Federal Contractors Survey

SENIOR-LEVEL WOMEN AND ROLE MODELS

For women in senior-level positions, the demand for a higher level of performance is even greater. Senior-level women are nearly twice as likely as women overall to be the only woman or one of just a few women in the room at work. Figure 3 shows free-form comments from women who responded to the Gender Equity and Inclusion in Federal Contracting survey conducted for this paper. Each of the comments alludes to a lack of diversity in senior leadership roles in the respondent's organization.

Senior-level women are more likely than women who work with other women to feel pressure to work more and to experience more microaggressions, including needing to provide additional evidence of their competence (LeanIn, 2018). Not surprisingly, senior-level women are significantly more likely than men at the same level to feel burned out, under pressure to work more, and "as though they have to be 'always on.'" Additionally, they are 1.5 times more likely than senior-level men to think about downshifting their role or leaving the workforce because of COVID-19. Almost three in four cite burnout as the main reason. (McKinsey & Company, 2020)

Seeing more women in specific industries and roles could open the door to other women. Eighty-four percent of women say it's important, or very important, to see women filling leadership roles where they work, and 78% of women say it's important or very important to see women performing the same work as they perform. Retention of junior-level female employees is highly correlated with the number of female supervisors. Only 54 % of women say they have a woman role model at work (InHerSight, 2021), and that number may be dropping as a result of COVID-19. When women see other women in roles they are interested in, they find it easier to imagine themselves in those roles and are more likely to put themselves forward. In addition, when they see women in leadership positions, they are more likely to speak up themselves.

Having more women in senior roles benefits companies and society at large. Not every woman (or person) wants to advance to the boardroom, but the opportunities must be there with the confidence that women will be treated fairly to be successful.

PREGNANCY AND PARENTHOOD

It's impossible to examine the challenges women face in opportunity equity without including pregnancy, parenting, and employment. For many women, parenting presents one of the biggest social and professional challenges they face. It starts with the conflicting societal norms that trap women in an impossible position. Comments like "You aren't going to keep working after the baby is born, are you?" and "You're going to let someone else raise your child while you work?" imply motherhood is more important to society than a woman's career.

Beyond the stigma and stereotype is the reality of the working mother. The labor force participation rate of mothers with children under 18 was 72.3% in 2019. For single, widowed, or divorced moms, the rate was 77.6% (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021b). Studies show that having children limits parents from advancing in their careers. About one in five working parents, including 23% of working moms and 15% of working dads, say they have turned down a promotion because they were balancing work and parenting responsibilities (Pew Research Center, 2019). Another study found that 17% say they have been passed over for an important assignment and 16% say they have been passed over for a promotion because they have children. Mothers are more likely than fathers to report each of these experiences (Pew Research Center, 2019). According to *ScienceX* (2019), "Women and men experience a 'large divergence' in their career paths in the years following childbirth, according to a study following more than 3,500 new parents. Only 27.8% of women are in full-time work or self-employed three years after childbirth, compared to 90%

~I don't see a lot of diversity in upper management... In my own business group/team I feel we are doing somewhat better but we are the ones deciding who is getting hired into our team so that may be why.

~My company talks about diversity and inclusion, but does not go far enough to elicit real change. There is little diversity at the executive level.

~The board of directors is pretty much white male.

~I think they are trying to be inclusive on the surface... The fact that all the Sr. Leaders of my organization are male (except for the single HR female) says something different.

~Overall, I feel that the Company is trying to be more inclusive... however, I still don't see a lot of women or people of color in leadership positions.

~While Senior Leadership is not as diverse as I would like, I believe that my company is very diverse and inclusive.

Figure 3: Comments from women respondents to Gender Equity and Inclusion in Federal Contracting survey

of new fathers. And while 26% of men have been promoted or moved to a better job in the five years following childbirth, the figure is just 13% for women” (para. 1).

Statistics from several countries reveal a strong correlation between the length of time new mothers are away from work and the diminished likelihood of them being promoted, moved into management, or receiving a pay raise once their leave is over. They are also at greater risk of being fired or demoted (Petrongolo, 2017). The length of leave that a woman takes can influence the perceptions of coworkers as well. The unsupported belief is that women who take longer leaves are less committed to their jobs than women who take much shorter leaves. This trade-off undercuts a major goal of legislating national parental leave policies (Hideg, 2018).

To compare corporate considerations for women, the authors looked at the maternity and paid leave policies offered by federal contractors. When it comes to creating a culture that recognizes women’s realities, seven of the 100 top federal contractors in the U.S. made the 2020 list of *Best Companies* (Working Mother, 2021). Five of these companies are consultancies who also work in the private sector rather than the typical OEMs we think of in the aerospace and defense industry. The companies on the Best Companies list share several things: A higher than average number of women executives, extensive gender-neutral paid leave for new parents and birth mothers, and care for sick children. In addition, most of these companies have remained on the Best Companies list for years.

Table 1. Top 100 Federal Contractors Rated as Best Companies by Working Woman (Washington Technology 2020 Top 100, 2021)

Contractor & Rank	Total Women	Women Executives	Summary of Maternity/Paid Leave Benefit
#8 Booz Allen Hamilton	37%	27%	8 weeks paid for birth mothers; 4 weeks paid gender-neutral; on-demand, unlimited parental support via phone or online, expanded Employee Assistance Program, and emergency backup childcare
#13 Accenture	38%	26%	8 weeks paid for birth mothers; 8 weeks paid gender-neutral; during COVID-19 tripled dependent-care hours and offered caregivers reimbursement for in-home care (up to \$100 per day for up to 30 days)
#19 Deloitte	44%	27%	8 weeks paid for birth mothers; 16 weeks paid gender-neutral
#20 Verizon	34%	35%	8 weeks paid maternity, sick childcare, fertility benefits for employees or partners (including same-sex partners) for in-vitro fertilization, egg freezing and other fertility procedures. Adoption and surrogacy benefits now provide up to \$10,000 reimbursement for full-time employees and \$5,000 for part-time employees
#30 IBM	33%	8%	12 weeks paid for birth mothers; 12 weeks paid gender-neutral; during COVID-19, IBM’s <i>Work from Home Pledge</i> , a set of guidelines for IBMers to support each other, put family first and ensure flexibility
#67 Ernst & Young	45%	36%	16 weeks paid gender-neutral; plus 2 weeks for birth mothers
#70 KPMG	45%	22%	10 weeks of paid maternity; 6 weeks paid gender-neutral

The top five federal contractors offer less paid maternity leave than the companies featured in the *Best Companies* list with #1 Leidos offering four weeks of paid leave (Pay and Benefits, 2021), #2 General Dynamics, Mission System Division offering six weeks of paid leave for birth or adoption (General Dynamics Mission Systems 2021 Benefits , 2021), #3 Northrup Grumman offering up to two weeks of paid time off (My Work/Life, 2021), #4 Raytheon Technologies offering three weeks of paid parental leave (Benefits Work/Life, 2021), and #5 Lockheed Martin offering eight weeks of paid maternity leave and four weeks of paid paternity leave (Lockheed Martin Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Performance Data*, 2021). The authors’ employer, #34 Serco, offers only short-term disability (two-thirds of salary) for six weeks running concurrently with the Family Medical Leave Act 12-week job protection allowance. For federal contractors wanting to attract and retain women, much work remains.

In February of 2016, DoD changed its policies related to parental leave. All Services grant 10 days of paid paternal leave following the birth of a child. The Air Force and Army grant up to 12 weeks of paid maternity leave, and the Navy and Marine Corps grant up to 18 weeks of paid maternity leave (Defense, 2021). This DoD policy offer

significantly more paid parental leave than the federal contractors who support DoD programs. This paper addresses pending legislation for parental leave in DoD later.

When women return to work following childbirth, they face yet another challenge: Childcare. Difficulty finding childcare was reported by 50% of families, and women report making decisions based on childcare considerations rather than their financial situation or career goals (Schochet, 2019). Slightly more than half of the respondents who identified as homemakers said that they would “look for a job” if they had access to more affordable childcare. And a third of parents in part-time jobs said they would work more hours to have more affordable and reliable childcare (Halpin, Agne, & Omero, 2018).

With the cost of childcare being exorbitant in most areas, many women leave the workforce because it is not cost effective to pay for childcare on their salary. “Infant toddler care here in Pennsylvania is something like \$16,000 a year. Many families have two children under the age of five... You’re talking about \$16,000 for an infant toddler and maybe another \$12,000 for a 3- or 4-year-old.” (Skidmore, 2021)

When you don’t have women in the workforce, you’re losing a particular perspective. You’re losing a particular set of skills. You’re losing all that talent. ...If you don’t have that perspective at the decision-making table, at the creation table, at the caregiving table, we’re missing out on those skills, and that puts us at jeopardy as a society (Skidmore, 2021).

About 43% of women workers reported having at least one year with no wages, a figure that is twice the rate of gaps in wages experienced by men (Rose & Hartmann, 2018). The penalties for taking time out of the workforce are high: Women who took just one year off from work had annual earnings 39% lower than women who worked all 15 years between 2001 and 2015 (Rose & Hartmann, 2018).

MALE ALLIES AS ROLE MODELS

Often, when referring to male allies in the workplace, the implication is the men who mentor and sponsor women and advocate for women's fair treatment. This is an integral part of being an ally, but these men can also serve as role models and spokespersons for other men, encouraging them to follow the same behavior patterns.

A Catalyst study of women executives and CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies looked at women's advancement into senior levels of leadership to understand the organizational barriers to advancement they experienced, and the strategies used to overcome them (Catalyst, 2021). In discussing male allies, several women executives noted that having both male and female mentors provided them with an opportunity to view the different strengths each has in a mentoring relationship. Male mentors are more influential in organizations, providing access to inner power circles, while female mentors were better at identifying and providing empathy regarding barriers to advancement (Catalyst, 2021).

A study conducted through a midwestern university found that women in male-dominated industries experience more success from a mentoring relationship with a senior male mentor in terms of compensation and career progression satisfaction (Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Weithoff, 2010). The researchers also indicate that women in these industries need sponsorship from senior male mentors to a higher degree than their male counterparts. They suggest that mentorship is of greater value when senior males voluntarily select female protégés for informal mentoring relationships rather than being paired through a formal mentoring program.

To understand the role that male allies have in championing women, particularly when it comes to addressing inequities head-on, it is important to realize that when men challenge prejudiced responses, the man who is confronted is likely to feel more guilt and less uneasiness than if confronted by a woman. One study found that male allies confronting sexism are taken more seriously than women, are less likely to experience social costs, such as derogatory remarks, and are generally more persuasive in convincing other men that sexism exists and is unacceptable (Good, Woodzicka, Bourne, & Moss-Racusin, 2019). Men are taken more seriously because confronting sexism does not benefit them directly. Alternatively, when women confront sexism, they may be seen as acting out of self-interest.

While companies are developing male-ally programs and encouraging male advocates to work alongside women in promoting gender equity, it may be some time before the actual results are considered the norm. The process can be amplified by visible support from senior leadership, which adds credibility to the work of male allies and provides

essential recognition for those who participate. While the participation of women in changing the corporate culture is important, allies should avoid delegating the responsibility for action to senior women. Women did not create gender discrimination, and it is unfair to expect them to dismantle it. Both men and women leaders should encourage common-cause messaging to promote solidarity on the issue of gender equity. However, this message resonates more for men when championed by male leaders.

GENDER EQUITY AND INCLUSION SURVEY IN FEDERAL CONTRACTING

With the permission from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the authors customized a 2021 NIST survey for federal contractors (Theofanos, 2021). The customization included changing language from “at NIST” to “at my company.” The survey was sent electronically to friends, colleagues, and coworkers at federal contractors including the authors’ employer. Survey recipients were asked to forward the survey to others they who also work for federal contractors. Many respondents are also active in the Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation, and Education (IITSEC) Conference. There were 123 respondents, 73 women and 50 men ranging in age from 20 to over 70. Sixty-seven percent of respondents were between 40 and 59 years old and 50% had a master’s degree or higher level of education.

Given the non-probabilistic nature of the sampling methodology and the low number of respondents for an industry sector that employs hundreds of thousands of people, the authors opted to report some outcomes rather than perform statistical analysis. In addition, the authors heard from several respondents that the survey was difficult for them to answer since it only pertained to their *current* company, not their overall work or industry experience. In addition, like the NIST survey, this survey excluded a neutral or middle response option on the Likert scale and this resulted in additional complaints. The authors included free-form comments from survey respondents that reinforced trends from the research. The authors also included some interesting comparative results that show the different perceptions of men and women working at Federal contractors. Those are reported in Table 2 and Figure 4.

Table 2. Responses to select gender treatment survey items

Respondents who said “YES” to the items below	Women		Men	
	More than once	At least once	More than once	At least once
I believe I have been treated differently based on my gender.	28%	19%	6%	10%
I have witnessed women and men being treated differently.	37%	19%	14%	18%
I have experienced harassment because of my gender	6%	13%	0%	4%
I am aware of others who have experienced harassment because of their gender	18%	8%	4%	21%

In general, the data from this survey reflects the research cited in this paper. In the survey, both women and men reported being aware of others who have experienced harassment because of their gender at least once, and 47% of women said they have been treated differently based on their gender at their current company at least once, while only 16% of men reported this. However, there is a disparity in the perceptions of men and women in the workplace. On a positive note, among the federal contractors responding to the gender equity survey, respondents feel that work-life balance is being supported for both men and women, though their perceptions about compensation being fair vary significantly as shown in Figure 4.

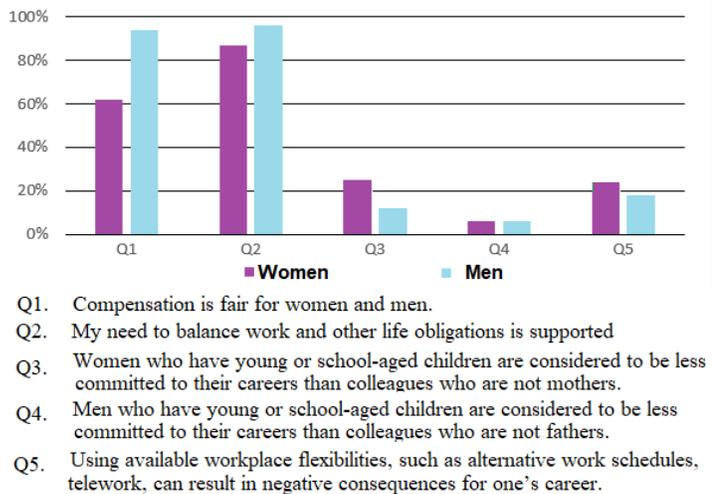


Figure 4: Perceptions by gender; combined for “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”

Because the survey was designed to assess the overall performance of one organization on gender and inclusion issues, the authors plan to create a new survey more targeted at analyzing gender equity across organizations for future work. The authors also hope to coordinate with the National Training and Simulation Association (NTSA), National Defense Industrial Association, and corporate HR departments of Federal contractors to disseminate the study for IITSEC 2022 to reach a broader range and larger number of Federal contractors.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Federal contractors must begin to understand the strains women are under and provide more flexibility and transparency in their structures. This may require companies to confront ingrained paradigm levels of effort, hours worked, and productivity. According to psychologist Adam Grant (2019), “We live in a culture obsessed with personal productivity. We devour books on getting things done and dream of four-hour workweeks. We worship at the altar of hustle and boast about being busy. But after two decades of studying productivity, I’ve become convinced that how we manage time is not a solution—it’s actually part of the problem” (para. 3-4).

The standard remedy for most forms of discrimination requires the impacted individual to rectify the situation independently, rather than the organization working to change the culture that created the inequity. The wage gap is only one example. Too often, women are expected to find a way to pull themselves out of the gap, forcing them to correct a problem they did not create. This quote from a female respondent to the survey summarizes the situation many organizations find themselves in: “I think our company wants to have an inclusive and diverse workforce but doesn’t really get what to do to achieve it.” There are few easy, short-term, and low-cost solutions to the problems presented in this paper. Some, like paid parental leave, can be costly up-front, but generally reap rewards with increased loyalty and higher long-term employee retention. Gender equity requires industry accountability, nonprofit partnerships and advocacy, and legislative action. The following sections attempt to define some actionable solutions for both.

Industry Responsibilities

Creating policies that mitigate gender inequity for women benefits companies in recruitment, retention, and profitability. As an industry, federal contractors who want to attract and retain women must reflect the benefits and policies that companies on the *Best Companies* list provide to attract and retain the best talent from the entire labor pool. In a survey by Boston Consulting Group, 47% of female respondents, including aerospace and defense companies, said

...they have personally experienced discrimination, compared with 38% of women in all industries. Even when such discrimination is not deliberate or overt, male-dominated cultures can produce unfair situations that build up over time and make work feel like a struggle rather than an environment where women can thrive. This is not an easy problem to solve, but it is entirely within a company’s control. (Ketzer, Aaronson, & Juliano, 2019)

According to a report from the Global Center for Gender Equality at Stanford University “61% of women look at the gender diversity of the employer’s leadership team when deciding where to work.” Likewise, “companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 21% more likely to outperform on profitability and 27% more likely to have superior value creation” (Global Center for Gender Equality at Stanford University, 2021). There are two ways to achieve this: intentional actions and building a culture that recognizes women’s realities. The Global Center for Gender Equality recommends adopting intentional gender equity policies that (2021, p.10):

- Clarify what gender equity means for the company and its goals.
- Define a gender equity vision with specific targets and measure data on those targets.
- Address gaps in gender equity identified during data collected.
- Identify and use champions to promote gender equity across the company.
- Communicate the criticality of gender equity with staff and the board frequently.
- Evaluate progress against target goals and improvise efforts on a periodic basis.

Another intentional action is conducting a pay audit to ensure wage equity. This is a way for organizations to evaluate pay gaps or document that gaps don't exist. According to Blakley-Gray (2019), the audit should include:

- Titles
- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Tenure
- Pay
- Evaluation scores
- Hours worked
- Experience

There are some easy culture-based actions companies can take to improve gender equity and the overall workplace experience for women. One high-visibility way to show women are valued is by making “the physical workplace more accommodating to pregnant women through features such as lactation rooms and dedicated parking spaces” (Ketzer, Aaronson, & Juliano, 2019) Because of their visibility, these relatively low-cost benefits send a clear message that the company values women and parents.

Another lower cost option that can have a high impact on the workforce, particularly in a male-dominated environment like the Defense industry, is gender bias training. Gender bias is engrained in us from birth, and while most people claim they are not biased, research has shown they are. “Training leaders, managers, and employees to identify and mitigate gender bias needs to be comprehensive, continuing, and solution-oriented. The right degree of training requires ongoing investment and commitment” (Ketzer, Aaronson, & Juliano, 2019).

Managing meetings better is another easy way to have a high impact, since 45% of women say they have difficulty speaking up in meetings (Career Contessa, 2020). The author’s gender equity survey found that 39% of women said they had been interrupted in a meeting because of their gender more than once and 18% said it had happened at least once. Studies show men associate speaking up and taking the lead with success and that when men spoke with women, they interrupted 33% more than they did when speaking with other men. During a three-minute conversation, men in the study interrupted their female conversation partner an average of 2.1 times (Career Contessa, 2020). Creating processes to mindfully include everyone in the conversation makes it easier for women to take space; which ultimately means that men need to make space, leaders need to call people out for interruptions, and women should help each other when necessary (Connelly, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that remote working is a viable option for many employees who had been required to be onsite in the past. In a 2020 study conducted in the United Kingdom during the COVID lockdown, researchers found that of the mothers “who were working from home during the pandemic, 90% agreed that their managers were supportive of homeworking, a sharp rise from the 50% who believed this was the case before the pandemic” (Heejung Chung, 2021). By combining working from home, flexible schedules, shorter workweeks, and focusing on tasks more than time, companies can see a rise in productivity and profits.

Microsoft Japan tested a program that created four-day work weeks with a three-day weekend while providing a standard paycheck. The company says that the result was a productivity boost of 40% (Chappell, 2019). Four-day workweeks made headlines worldwide in the spring of 2018, when Perpetual Guardian, a New Zealand trust management company, announced a 20% gain in employee productivity and a 45% increase in employee work-life balance after a trial of paying people their regular salary for working four days (Roy, 2018). In October 2019, the company made the policy permanent. Making these changes is crucial on a societal level. Companies that follow their values and emphasize diversity are generally more profitable. The fastest way to implement positive cultural change in a company is to start speaking their language—numbers.

Recommendations for I/ITSEC

As an industry-focused nonprofit serving Federal contractors, NTSA and I/ITSEC could support gender equality in a variety of simple ways. NTSA should consider a survey asking women involved in I/ITSEC how they can better support and engage them through the conference and in their careers. Not all women involved with I/ITSEC are engineers or technologists, so also recognizing the breadth of experience women bring and can offer across organizations would help promote gender equity as well as career opportunity. In addition, increasing the visibility of women as keynote speakers and invited guests would improve perceptions about representation. Frequently, I/ITSEC relies on “applications” to present versus actively seeking out diversity in presenters. I/ITSEC conference committees should also seek even gender representation in subcommittee chair and member appointments. Serving on committees

and in leadership gives women additional exposure and experience for their careers and sets expectations for how the federal contracting workplace should look.

Another area where NTSA could encourage broader outreach for women is requiring participants in the Future Leader's Pavilion to include even representation of boys and girls in their K-12 STEM programming. If this is not possible, creating a specific competition category for girls would be the next step. This would ensure girls are exposed to federal contractor work and STEM careers earlier in life to help populate the STEM pipeline and given that 50% of employees in aerospace and defense companies are over 50 years old, "the demand for talent is virtually unprecedented" (Ketzer, Aaronson, & Juliano, 2019). NTSA and IITSEC leadership may also want to consider adding a workforce development subcommittee to give special attention to both the STEM pipeline in K-12 schools and the need for diversity of all types in the current federal contractor workforce.

Legislative Considerations

Legislation like the EPA and Paycheck Fairness Act provides resources to address gender equity but do not always reach the heart of the issue. Instead, legislation should focus on a culture shift, implementing policies that encourage employers to bear the burden of treating their employees equally, not simply tasking women with policing their employers.

Congress should require annual reporting on gender equity in the workplace. In the United Kingdom, companies must publish statistics regarding gender pay disparities. The government uses that information to publish an annual report. While the United Kingdom wage gap was documented at approximately 40% in 1960, just three years before the Equal Pay Act was passed, the gap now sits at 7.4%, down from 9.0% in April 2019 (Rose E., 2021). Publishing requirements, combined with policies to eliminate the gap, can be effective as they hold companies accountable for their discrepancies and reduce the hypocrisy of championing an environment that encourages diversity and inclusion without the data to back it up. More transparent data can also help employers looking for examples where wage gaps are low and mimicking successful policies from other businesses (Rose, 2021).

In addition to annual wage reporting, the U.S. can no longer wait for the private sector alone to address gender equity in the workplace. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) protects an employee's position for up to 12 weeks, but that leave is unpaid and too many working families cannot afford the loss of income for three months. Congress must pass standardized paid family and sick leave programs. Faced with choosing between their family and their career, women are leaving the workforce because of the absence of a paid family leave policy. Research has shown that paid family leave helps women to return to the workforce more quickly after childbirth, reducing the experience and opportunity discrepancies (Petrongolo, 2017). Additionally, giving tax credits to employers who adopt pro-family policies, such flexible work schedules, affordable childcare, and paid sick leave benefit both the employer and the employee (Jessen-Howard, Malik, & Falgout, 2020). Creating gender-neutral policies for paid family leave also allows men to take advantage of the time off and sets the stage for a more active role in caretaking tasks, thus reducing the overall burden working women face while caregiving when they return to full-time work.

For the U.S. military, legislation is pending to improve parental leave for Servicemembers. On May 11, 2021, Senator Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, a combat Veteran and parent, introduced Senate bill 1571 with bipartisan support. Among other benefits, the Servicemember Parental Leave Equity Act would increase parental leave for servicemembers acting as primary caregivers from 6 weeks to 12 weeks for birth or adoption of a child (in addition to 6 weeks of convalescent leave for childbirth) and give secondary caregivers 12 weeks in the case of birth or adoption of a child. It also requires the Secretary of Defense to issue guidance to the services about the use of convalescent leave for miscarriages, stillbirth and infant death, establish a uniform post-birth deferral policy for temporary duty, physically demanding training, body composition and physical fitness testing across the services, and, report to Congress annually the use of primary and secondary caregiver leave, so Congress understands trends in implementation and servicemember election to take leave. (News, 2021)

This legislation would dramatically change parental leave policies and establish positive changes for the parents serving our country. Representative Speier, Chair of the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee said "Our bill modernizes the military's parental leave policies, will improve the health of mothers and children, and will make the armed services a more welcoming and supportive place for parents, something all Americans understand and that there is strong support for across party lines" (News, 2021). If this legislation is approved, Federal contractors, and Defense contractors in particular, may follow suit and institute similar policies reflective of DoD.

SUMMARY

The issues faced by women in the workforce are significant and complicated; this paper barely scratches the surface. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 exacerbated those issues in many cases with tens of thousands of women leaving the workforce to care for family members and educate their children. In some cases, companies rose to the challenge and instituted family-first policies to ensure women could both work and care for their families; however, much work remains to improve workforce performance and personal happiness among women. This paper presented recommendations for industry, accountability, nonprofit partnerships and advocacy, and legislative action that should help promote gender equity in the federal contracting workforce, thereby improving corporate performance. However, these are not easy problems to solve, and having conversations about the topics addressed in this paper will be critical to corporate and legislative action.

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