Madison Lockamy

Professor Moore

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Gender discrimination in the workplace

In this paper I will show that gender discrimination, the unequal treatment between men and women, in the workplace is not morally permissible and prevents females from rising to top management positions. I will provide a valid argument and thoroughly explain each premise and how it supports the conclusion. In addition, I will prove that the argument is sound and include any possible objections to the argument as well.

First, I further define gender discrimination in the workplace from a sociological perspective. I then provide two reasons as to why addressing gender discrimination in the workplace is considered important. I then explain and demonstrate how gender discrimination is prevalent in today’s age, specifically in China. Next, I provide a valid argument as to why gender discrimination in the workplace prevents success for women and is morally wrong. Then, I provide one counterargument based on the philosophical theory of cultural relativism. Next, I logically respond to the objection presented. Finally, I conclude that gender discrimination is immoral and prevents (specifically) women in the workplace from reaching their full potential.

Gender discrimination in the workplace is illustrated in sociology through a concept referred to as the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is defined sociologically as “the unofficial barrier that women and minorities face when trying to advance to the upper levels of an organization” (Korgen 168). Gender discrimination in the workplace is important because (1) “the lack of women in top management has recently become an ethical issue and makes the firms subject to pressures from stakeholders for more visible participation of women in corporate decision-makings” (Gao 683). Individuals who invest in businesses want to know that their investments are secure. If there are inequality issues and the chance of a lawsuit, individuals may withhold their investments which will result in a decline in profits for that business. (2) “reducing sex discrimination and promoting gender diversity in the workplace have gained considerable attention from the media and policy makers” (Gao 684). With this being said, having a general understanding of gender discrimination in the workplace and the lack of females in top management positions can improve businesses public image and can help maintain revenue. This issue is particularly relevant in China, largely due to the lack of legal protection for women and the widespread discrimination against women in the workplace that is still prevalent today. In addition to this, “China is the second largest economy in the world, thus understanding how corporate managers are selected in China is economically meaningful from a global perspective” (Gao 684). Furthermore, in China, there are an outstanding number of males born compared to females born. “Such a high sex ratio at birth in China is attributed to sex-selective abortions and infanticide due to a strong preference for sons” (Gao 684). This could contribute to the lack of females in high positions, especially because data found that businesses headquartered in provinces with a higher sex ratio at birth have a smaller proportion of females in top management positions. One specific example of gender discrimination in China that has been identified and is consistent in data is that businesses facing less product market competition are more likely to discriminate in the hiring process (specifically against women).

Here is the argument as presented in *Sex Discrimination and Female Top Managers - Evidence from China*:

(1) If sex discrimination in China doesn’t play a role in preventing females from reaching top management positions, then there should be a significant number of females in top management positions

(2) There are not a significant number of females in top management positions

(3) Therefore, sex discrimination in China must play a role in preventing females from reaching top management positions

(4) If (3) then China morally ought to change their hiring/promoting practices

(5) China morally ought to change their hiring/promoting practices

Rationale for premise (1): Without sex discrimination in the workplace impacting the hiring process, it really comes down to the individual’s abilities. Unless men are inherently smarter, more capable, better decision makers, and simply better at running a business, there’s little to no reason of significance as to why women aren’t in top management positions at least as much as men. In fact, one study cited in *Sex Discrimination and Female Top Managers - Evidence from China* found that “female corporate executives are usually found to be better decision makers (or at least no worse) than their male counterparts.” Given this information, if gender is not a factor in the hiring process, more women should be in top management positions.

Rationale for premise (2): In *Sex Discrimination and Female Top Managers - Evidence from China*, the data illustrates that there are 12.03% of female executives in the workplace in China. This percentage varies slightly from province to province. Data demonstrates that businesses in provinces with higher sex ratios at birth have fewer female executives than businesses in provinces with lower sex ratios at birth. But ultimately, 12.03% is not a high enough percentage to be considered significant, therefore there are not a significant number of females in top management positions.

Rationale for premise (4): If sex discrimination in China truly plays a role in preventing females from reaching top management positions, then China is morally obligated to level the playing field. Each individual deserves an equal chance to be promoted in their specific field of occupation. No singular individual should have an advantage solely based on one (biological) characteristic that a person can’t change about themselves.

One possible objection to this argument could be derived from the philosophical theory of cultural relativism directed at premise (1). Cultural relativism defines an act as morally right relative to society if and only if an action is permitted by the moral code of society at the time it’s performed. In China, it appears as though the majority of the population is male (due to sex selective abortions and infanticide). Therefore, if the majority of the population is male and males are benefiting from gender discrimination in the workplace, it’s safe to assume that this action (gender discrimination) is permitted by the moral code of society in China. Moreover, women in China face more severe discrimination due to social norms and weaker legal protection, therefore men have more power to control the moral code of society in important fields of occupation like politics or economics. With this being said, one could argue that sex discrimination in China has no relevance to the number of females in top management positions if sex discrimination is permitted by the moral code in China at the time.

Response to Objection: Job hiring and promotions should be conducted as though one is blind. One’s gender, race, ethnicity, or attractiveness should have nothing to do with whether they’re qualified for the job or not. No matter who is in power or control, equal opportunity should be their top priority. What if interviews were performed where the interviewer had to wear a blindfold? Would this change who gets hired? I think data and past experiments prove that it would in fact level the playing field and would be more moral than China’s current hiring process in respect to women.

To conclude, gender discrimination in the workplace (specifically in China) plays a role in preventing females from reaching top management positions. The data to support this claim comes from the low percentage of females in top management positions in China as of today. Because of this data, China has a moral obligation to change their hiring/promoting practices to provide a more equal opportunity for all individuals. In a broad perspective, this claim has implications of inequality in intellectual and strategical capabilities between males and females, which is immoral.

Works Cited

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