

Gender Inequality in Higher Education

Teona TALIKADZE*

Abstract

The paper deals with issues concerning to gender inequality. The article demonstrates problems of equity in American social life and higher education system. Women are underrepresented in American colleges and universities. They are practically excluded from the STEM fields due to lots of barriers or biases existing in American society. Women employment and pay gap clearly reveal unequal treatments of people. The problem is a global challenge so lots of international organizations are involved to eliminate the problem and advance more women. Universities are also actively working to create inclusive environment on their campus, through division of students on the basis of gender is a fact.

Keywords: Equality, gender segregation, gender gap

* Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Education and Humanities, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia. E-mail: teona.talikadze@gmail.com

SUPERVISOR: Irina BAKHTADZE, Affiliated Prof. Dr., Faculty of Education and Humanities, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia. E-mail: ibakhtadze@ibsu.edu.ge

Introduction

Since the first women were admitted to enroll in American colleges and universities, a lot of movements have happened. Higher education has become more accessible for women. Every year, more and more women get degrees and actively get involved in different fields of education. However, men traditionally dominate in some fields of education. Women are practically excluded from

Concept of Equality

The terms “equality” (Gr. *isotes*, Lat. *aequitas*, *aequalitas*, Fr. *égalité*, Ger. *Gleichheit*), “equal,” and “equally” signify a qualitative relationship. ‘Equality’ (or ‘equal’) signifies correspondence between a group of different objects, persons, processes or circumstances that have the same qualities in at least one respect, but not all respects, i.e., regarding one specific feature, with differences in other features. Equality implies similarity rather than ‘sameness’ (Gosepath, 2001).

As for gender equality, equality between men and women, it entails the concept that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices.

Gender equality means that the different behavior, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different, but which is

leadership positions and the fields of STEM. Some stereotypes and barriers prevent women from pursuing their career in business, science or technology. Nowadays, we live in a modern society that lacks of equitable environment. Women are underrepresented in colleges and universities. Recent years, the number of graduate women has risen but gender disparity has not been overcome yet. As a result, gender equality remains one of the greatest challenges of the time.

considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities (Bot, 2018).

According to social division of gender, people in society are divided into two categories: men and women that have two different identities and social roles. In other words, men and women are expected to think and act in certain different ways. As in almost all societies, men’s roles are valued more than are women’s roles, gender also serves as a social status. Sociologists define gender inequality as the difference in the status, power, prestige that women and men have in groups, communities, and societies. Despite the advances that many women have made in the United States, gender inequality still persists. There are various forms of gender inequality in the workplace, in education systems, and in politics.

Employment of Women in the Twentieth Century

Employment of women in the US was quite low until the twentieth century. If women labor was primarily connected to child-rearing, it greatly changed after the expansion of the US economy. The number of working women increased especially after the 1960s. Women began working outside the home, the marriage age declined and their educational attainment increased. Women

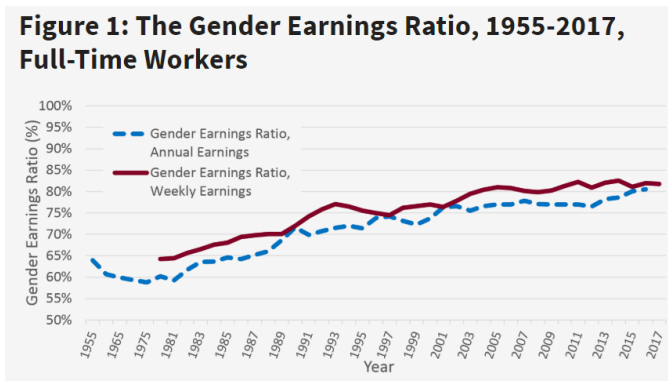
have paved the way to the jobs that were predominantly considered as the “men’s jobs”. Women began to enter in the fields of law, medicine or technology.

Still, there are still some jobs that have less woman worker than men. Women keep on choosing professions connected to art or humanities rather than technology and science (Giddens, Duneier, & Appelbaum, 2005).

The wage gap is one factor that refers gender inequality in workplaces, women are paid less than men. According to the US Institute for Family Studies, research reveals that despite the higher educational attainment of married women, they were still earning less than their husbands. Recent figures show that for every dollar earned by men, women earn just 80 cents. This is due in part to women tending to work in lower-paid industries, as well as a number of other factors including discrimination and bias in hiring and pay decisions. This is often compounded when

women take time out of the workforce to raise children (Friday & Reeves, 2017).

Sociologists consider gender segregation as a cause of the pay gap in earnings. Feminist sociologists think that traditional biases existing in society often limit women career choices. Some professions such as teaching or nursing are regarded as compatible with “feminine” traits. Another obstacle comes from discriminatory bosses or co-workers. Women’s work is devalued by society, that’s why they earn less than men for their work. Some women who entering professions are considered as “male” don’t get increase in pay or promotion because of the “glass ceiling” which is a kind of barrier for them to get promoted. One reason of those inequality is based on gender stereotypes. For example, males identify potential leaders as people like themselves. Women are assessed lower as they deviate from this norm. (Cleveland, 1996 as cited in Anthony Giddens, 2005) The graph below illustrates well a pay-gap between men and women.



Another factor that is characterized of gender inequality is gender gap in educational systems such as the attendance of women and men at colleges and positions held in higher education (Hu, 2015). Sadly, women in different positions at universities are still relegated to the status of a minority, as defined by sociologist Richard T. Schaefer. According to the American

Council on Education, less than a quarter of American colleges and universities are led by women. The American Association of University Professors’ faculty gender equity indicators report shows that women make up just 39 percent of full-time faculty nationally. Men, on the other hand, make up 61 percent (Mokoro, 2012).

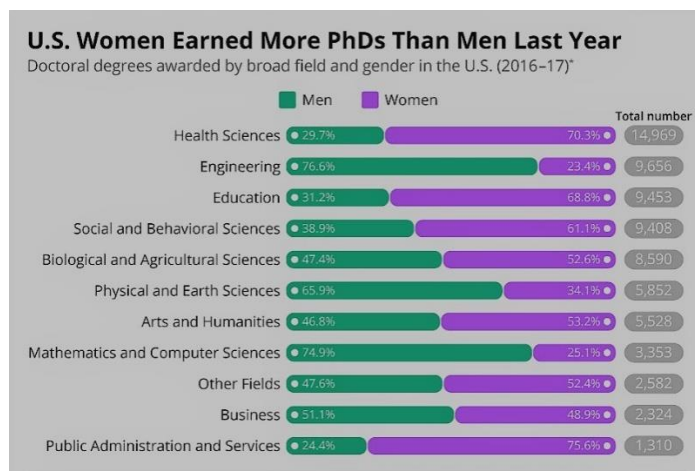
The fact of gender pay gap at the top levels of higher education leadership is another proof of gender imbalance in higher education. The new research on women’s pay and representation in the top ranks of colleges and universities shows that female administrators in many other positions where women are more prevalent are paid substantially less than men in the same roles. Women hold more than half of the available jobs in only a handful of executive positions: human resources, libraries, public relations, institutional

research and student affairs. Women make up more than 70 percent of administrators in only one of those areas, human resources. Meanwhile, male presidents outnumber female presidents by a ratio of more than two to one. Male chief information officers and chief athletics administrators outnumber women by a ratio of more than four to one (Seltzer, 2017).

Gender gap in education have changed in the US lately but not greatly. According to the Council of Graduate Schools’ CGS/GRE Graduate Enrollment & Degrees: 2007-2017 report regarding women at US universities to have earned more

doctoral degrees than men, In some fields, as many as three-quarters of the PhDs awarded went to women, including public administration and services (75.6%), health sciences (70.3%) and education (68.8%). Women were also ahead of men in arts and humanities, as well as social and behavioral sciences.

However, men still dominated in the fields of engineering (76.6%), mathematics and computer sciences (74.9%) and physical and earth sciences (65.9%), which suggests that more needs to be done to encourage women to study STEM subjects to a higher level (Whiting, 2018).



Gender disparity is a big challenge for any university. Some stereotypes and biases prevent people to pursue their real interest. As a result, women are drastically underrepresented in leadership positions as well as the STEM fields. Women only comprise 25% of STEM related fields, because of lots of unspoken rules or biases which

often discourages females from even trying to pursue a career in business, science, technology, engineering, math, or any leadership position. The participation of women in STEM professions is salient in terms of prosperity and innovation. Data from the US National Science Foundation shows that between 2006-2014, the number of women

graduating with a degree in computer science actually declined. Research shows that diverse teams perform better. Individuals from different genders, races, backgrounds and experiences bring different perspectives that can lead to innovative solutions (Powers, 2019).

A lot of organizations are actively working to eliminate those problems and to empower more women. 11th February is the International day of Women and Girls in Science declared by the United Nations for achieving full and equal access and participation in science for women and girl. The purpose of the organization is to promote more women to enter professions connected to science and technology.

Another global organization is HeForShe UN Women's solidarity movement that contributes a lot to eliminate gender inequality and create gender

equal world. HeForShe launched IMPACT 10x10x10, an initiative that unites ten Heads of State, ten global CEOs and ten University Presidents to formulate solutions that will realize equality in every boardroom, classroom, and capitol building around the world. One of the participants of that union is Georgetown University that has made numerous contributions to the movement for gender equality through education, public dialogue, learning opportunities, and professional development workshops. The university tries to make difference all over the world through Institute for Women, Peace and Security. For instance, the Institute brought world leaders to campus to discuss women's key role in political participation in peace processes and climate change. The university also works to make its campus safe and inclusive for students. Besides the educational and awareness programs for students, they run the faculty and staff program, "RESPECT Training: Preventing Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct". This training

provides faculty and staff with valuable information about what is discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct and their roles, rights, and responsibilities (HeForShe Impact 10x10x10 University Parity Report, 2016).

The problem of gender equality still perpetuates in modern society despite global activities to create a society where every person will be treated fairly and equally. Education is considered to be one of the main tools to eliminate gender disparity. Through universities, colleges or schools it is available to change attitudes that are discriminatory and unfair. Building society based on justice and equity should be priority for educational system, as schools and universities prepare new generation of citizens that can really make a difference.

Unfair, discriminatory treatment of women is not new, it has always been part of the educational system of the United States, like many other social institutions. There is a lot of evidence of that refers to unfair treatment of women in

education. In the United States, women were not allowed to enroll at colleges or universities until 1833. Oberlin College was the first institution of higher learning which admitted women to study with men. It happened after 200 years after the first men's college was founded. Although women were admitted to enter colleges, Oberlin believed that women's main duty was to be wives and mothers rather than lawyers or intellectuals. As a result, women students had to wash men's clothes, cared for their rooms and served them at meals. Later in the following century the reality did not change greatly in terms of gender inequality. Lots of prejudices and biases increased more segregation between men and women in education which showed up in many ways such as textbooks which contained negative stereotypes of women, also unequal funding for women's and men's athletic programs. Unlike past years the problem

has not fully eliminated but situation is somehow getting better due to the active movements of women, global organizations and feminists as well. (Richard, 2005) Still, the number of men still outnumbers women not only in educational systems but also in different workplaces, unequal payment and unequal access to education are problems that need to be solved.

There are different single-gender clubs that only enhance gender segregation on campuses rather than its elimination. Harvard's campus really boasts with its various clubs such as women organizations, the university announced to ban students from participation in clubs that exclude people from other genders. The purpose of this prohibition is to advance women and diminish gender inequality.

Neuroscientist Lise Eliot thinks that separating groups by gender inevitably affects the way we perceive each other and ourselves, "It's simple math; the more time you spend with people of the same gender, the more similar you will become to each other and the more different you will become from the other," Eliot says. She thinks that there is no fundamental difference between men and women in terms of personality or cognitive abilities; it is a society and culture that makes differences between men and women. False attitude and biases are created through culture and society.

"The fact that we consistently divide people along gender lines creates powerful biases, according to psychologist Rebecca Bigler of the University of Texas, who has been studying gender for two decades." Despite coeducational system in the US, there are a lot of single-gender organizations and clubs on campuses which may encourage gender segregation in American higher education institutions.

Harvard University's initiative to ban students' involvement in single gender has gained more positive assessments from psychologists or scientists, though it has also caused some debates and disagreements. For example, some critics say that "the decision will end up penalizing women-only spaces, which offer young female students unique sources of support and community." But most agree to support the university administration's ban and think that life would be better without gender lines. Equality in educational institutions will only impact positively on our society and would foster more people for better life. This policy will put students on the path to better understanding and empathizing with one another.

The author of the article "Gender-segregated social life is hurting today's college students" regards that women will benefit more from mixed gender-clubs and organizations on campuses and it does not diminish the importance of women's spaces. The author defines that "gender-segregated groups do not reflect the realities of the world we live in. Consciously or not, college groups based on gender can wind up emphasizing and reinforcing differences. If we want real gender equality, we could start by spending more time together rather than apart" (Case-Levine, 2016).

Conclusion

Segregation, inequality and unfair treatment of the citizens of our society will only harm and cause suffering to our world. Only with the mutual efforts we can build society based on justice and fair. Empowerment of women and entitling them with equal rights will have positive impact on modern world that faces many challenges. It will decrease gender-based violence, will give more people opportunities for better life and chances to realize their best.

References

Giddens, A. M. D. (2005). *SOCIOLOGY* (fifth ed.). W.W.Norton& Company,INC.

Bot, M. (2018). *What Does Gender Equality Mean to You? #PressForProgress*. Retrieved March 28, 2019, from Polyglot Group: <https://www.thepolyglotgroup.com.au/newsroom/what-does-gender-equality-mean-to-you-pressforprogress/>

Case-Levine, J. (2016). *Gender-segregated social life is hurting today's college students*. Retrieved March 31, 2019, from QUARTZ: <https://qz.com/776116/harvards-finals-clubs-how-gender-segregated-social-life-is-hurting-todays-college-students/>

Gosepath, S. (2001). *Equality*. Retrieved March 25, 2019, from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=equality>

Guyot Friday, R. V. (2017). *College friends keep getting married? It's bad news for your travel budget... and inequality*. Retrieved March 28, 2019, from BROOKINGS: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2017/11/17/college-friends-keep-getting-married-its-bad-news-for-your-travel-budget-and-inequality/>

HeforShe *IMPACT10x10x10University parity report*. (2016). Retrieved March 29, 2019, from <https://www.heforshe.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/HeForShe%20University%20Parity%20Report%202016.pdf>

Hu, N. (2015). *If We Want Equality, Then We Must Stop Perpetuating Gender Roles*. Retrieved march 20, 2019, from HARVARD POLITICAL REVIEW: <http://harvardpolitics.com/harvard/want-equality-must-stop-perpetuating-gender-roles/>

Kate Whiting, S. W. (2018). *Women were awarded more PhDs in the US than men last year*. Retrieved March 29, 2019, from World Economic Forum: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/chart-of-the-day-more-women-than-men-earned-phds-in-the-us-last-year/>

Mokoro, S. (2012). *Gender equity on college campuses*. Retrieved March 20, 2019, from Boston Globe: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2012/04/11/gender-equity-college-campuses/1opAoDTfFnX3ONQa5vfPWO/story.html>

Powers, A. (2019). *International Day Of Women And Girls In Science: Inspiring More Young Women To Be Innovators*. Retrieved March 29, 2019, from Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/annapowers/2019/02/11/international-day-of-women-and-girls-in-science-inspiring-more-young-women-to-be-innovators/#3e3981ee392a>

Seltzer, R. (2017). *80 Cents on the Dollar*. Retrieved March 29, 2019, from INSIDE HIGHED: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/15/gender-pay-gap-persists-higher-education-administrators>

Schaefer, R. (2005). *SOCIOLOGY* (Fifth ed.). New York: The McGraw-Hill companies.