FAITH & REASON HONORS PROGRAM
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The Impact of Social Identity on Opportunities in the Workforce

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**Abstract**

Discrimination in the workplace today is a persistent issue that requires further action in order to prevent it in our society. Women and minorities face significant roadblocks when trying to join or advance in the workplace through issues such as résumé discrimination, pay inequity, and limited promotion opportunities. Companies claiming to be equal opportunity employers continue to discriminate against individuals based on social factors that are out of their control, suppressing opportunities that could be made available to other qualified candidates in the workforce. The root of these inequities lies in the systemic and structural racism that has developed throughout history in the United States, which has predominantly benefitted white men and has oppressed men and women of cultural minorities. Although white women benefit from structural racism as well, sexism is another persistent issue in the workplace that affects women of all races. This paper explores the impact of social identity on opportunities in the workforce, particularly in the areas of hiring, compensation, and advancement. Possible solutions or steps that can be taken to improve upon these issues will be considered, consistent with the principles of Salesian faith & tradition.

***We are an equal opportunity employer. All applicants will be considered for employment without attention to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, veteran, or disability status.***

Statements like this have been seen time and time again on a variety of job postings across the country. Inclusive hiring practices are commonly stated in job listings to ensure that any individual has the opportunity to apply. Although the intent of these statements is respectable, their effectiveness must be called into question. Throughout history, employers have diminished the importance of the “equal opportunity employer” mantra, judging individuals based on their social identity and the stereotypes attached to these factors. Because of these stereotypes, many individuals, especially women and people of color, have had difficulties becoming employed, being properly compensated during their employment, and gaining advancement opportunities in their workplace. Rather than discrimination being an inherently prejudicial issue, it is important to understand that discrimination based social identity is a social construct. This means that racism and discrimination based on social identity is not so much a biologically based issue, it is rather an issue based on how society has been perceiving people of these identities throughout history and in their communities. As a consequence, we have expectations and interact with people based on certain assumptions that have been made beforehand in society. Assumptions based on cultural and social stereotypes can have both positive and negative effects depending on the individual, because the stereotypes applied to people of a certain race or gender significantly impacts how they are perceived by society.

**Defining Personal vs. Social Identity**

 *Who am I? What makes me...****me****?*

Identity is an important factor of why discrimination occurs, since much of the prejudice occurring in social and professional settings has to do with how individuals are perceived. There are two main branches of the term *identity*: personal identity and social identity (Turner et al). Our personal identity answers questions such as, “Who am I?” or, “What links my past self to my present self?” It focuses on the philosophical questions that arise about ourselves from our being *persons* (Penelhum). Social identity, on the other hand, is a person’s sense of who they are based on their group memberships. Group memberships can include race, religion, gender, political standing, income bracket, club memberships, and more. While personal identity focuses on who a person is on the inside, social identity is what impacts people in the workplace since it has to do with their gender, race, and other distinguishable factors.

Discriminating against individuals based on social factors is further explained by the social identity theory, which social psychologists Tajawal and Turner explain as the discrimination of the in-group against the out-group in order to enhance one’s self-image. The in-group (“us”) is the group the individual wants to be a part of since it is perceived as the favored group. The out-group (“them”) is everyone else, also known as the outcast group. Tajawal and Turner identify social characterization, social identification, and social comparisons as the three cognitive processes that comprise social identity theory. Social categorization starts with the individual deciding what groups they want to be associated with. This is very similar to how we as people categorize individuals in order to understand our social environment, such as distinguishing people as Muslim, German, or as a student. Picking a category or categories can help an individual understand what group(s) they belong to and helps them solidify aspects of their identity and personality (McLeod). The next cognitive process, social identification, involves the individual determining how compatible they are with the group(s), making sure they fit in with the norms that the members follow. Going through this process helps the individual fully adopt the identity and values of the group(s) they’ve determined they belong to. This process causes a significant emotional connection between the group(s) and one’s self esteem, since their esteem now becomes interwoven with their group membership(s). Social comparisons, the last cognitive process, involves the individual comparing themselves (in the in-group) to everyone else (out-group). Doing this helps the individual establish or even increase their sense of self-esteem since they believe they are part of a more favorable group. As we will see throughout this thesis, categorizing and comparing individuals based on their social identity factors leads to many forms of prejudicial behavior in the workplace.

**Structural Racism: The Root of Workforce Oppression**

All human beings are of the same species and origin. Although we are united in this essential way, racism is an unfortunate, systemic epidemic that has led to ignorance and a fear of the unknown. It is clear to most individuals that deeply-rooted racism and discrimination is a prevalent issue in our society today, and sociologists and historians now suggest that ideological racism is a result of structural racism (Kendi). While ideological racism is easily observable through blatant forms of discrimination, such as verbal and physical harassment, structural racism is the “…normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of …racially oppressed people” (Lawrence et al). As Bonilla-Silva stated in his paper *Rethinking Racism: Towards A Structural Interpretation*, “the existence of racism indicates the existence of a racial structure in society...After societies experienced racialization–social creation of racial categories—race became an independent category of group association with meaningful consequences for all the races in the social system.” (Bonilla Silva). If not for the structural racism embedded in our history, racism would not be as exacerbated in the United States as it is today.

Racism in the workplace today is categorized within the overarching term known as *institutional racism*, which is “a system of procedures/patterns in all walks of life, i.e. education, housing, businesses, employment, professional associations, religion, media, etc., whose effect is to perpetuate and maintain the power, influence and well-being of one group over another” (Randall). Institutional racism has been built into our social, economic, and political systems, making it challenging to pinpoint exact evidence of this due to its non-discernable presence. Due to this growing issue of racism in the workplace, the annual number of charges and lawsuits that claim color-based discrimination has consistently risen since 1992. In 1992, The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 374 charges alleging discrimination based on color, but by 2006, that number increased to 1,241 charges (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission).

 One example of structural racism can be seen through *colorblind ideology*, which is a very prevalent ideology that people may not even consciously understand they’re a part of. The term “colorblind” may appear harmless since it would mean that a person “doesn’t see color,” however it is a misnomer because it would be inaccurate to believe that race does *not* matter in decision making. Whenever an issue of racism arises, color blindness may categorize these issues as *individual occurrences* rather than understanding the bigger-picture issue of systemic and institutional racism. Colorblind racism is rooted in the idea of avoiding and ignoring racism rather than effectively trying to acknowledge that minorities have disproportionate opportunities compared to racially privileged people. This form of racism can make it seem as though we as a society “can effectively ignore racism in American life, justify the current social order” and allow white individuals to “feel more comfortable with their relatively privileged standing in society” (Williams). This contrasts with the interpretation most minorities have of colorblind racism, since they regularly encounter difficulties due to race, having to deal with “a society that denies their negative racial experiences, rejects their cultural heritage, and invalidates their unique perspectives” (Williams).

Dr. Philip Mazzocco, author of *The Psychology of Racial Colorblindness: A Critical Review,* has done substantial research on the issue of colorblindness, and has found that there are four overarching categorizes of colorblindness that must be acknowledged and stifled. He created a colorblindness model based on two variables: levels of prejudice and awareness of racial inequality (Ohio State Insights). The first category of those who follow the colorblind ideology are protectionists, which are high prejudice, low awareness individuals. Protectionists believe interracial inequality is the fault of minority culture, often stating that minorities complaining of mistreatment are just “playing the race card.” Egalitarians, which are low prejudice, low awareness individuals, believe that discussion of racial issues is all-together unnecessary. Antagonistic individuals, which are categorized as “high prejudice, high awareness,” acknowledge that racial justice has its flaws, however they are complacent since they believe they are rightfully favored in society. Shrouding themselves as colorblind helps these individuals argue against outcomes such as affirmative action, which single out and assist certain racial groups over their own. The last category of colorblind theorists is that they are visionary individuals, meaning they have low prejudice and high awareness. Visionaries are those who do understand that racial injustice is a concurrent issue today, and believe that the solution is to not emphasize racial boundaries and focus on people's’ commonalities. As a continuation of his theory, Mazzocco conducted a study of 153 Americans to determine how many people may fall into each of his theorized categories. In this preliminary survey, most participants claimed to be racially colorblind, with only 27% said they are not. The egalitarian group (low prejudice, low awareness) was the largest at 29%, while protectionists were 20%, visionaries were 18% and antagonistics accounted for 7% of the survey (Ohio State Insights).

 As can be seen through studies such as Dr. Mazzocco’s, colorblind racism is much more harmful than it is beneficial, because minorities already acknowledge and understand that their race impacts their opportunities, income, and public perception, however it is not an issue that is brought up often or discussed by those who claim to “not see color.” Many people from privileged identities may not realize the negative effects of colorblind racism because they do not understand that race *does* have a huge impact on the opportunities for minorities in the United States.

“A therapist should not be blinded, especially to something as critical as a person's culture or racial identity...encouraging the exploration of racial and cultural concepts...can provide a more authentic opportunity to understand and resolve the client's problems” (Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 1991).

As shown in the quote above, simply ignoring race is not the solution to helping minorities overcome their disproportionately limited opportunities and public perception. In society today, we are often told as children that acknowledging and talking about other peoples’ races may come off as inappropriate. It is important that we change the way Americans perceive the concept of race in order to better understand and resolve the different facets of racism. They key is not ignoring these factors and pretending they don’t exist, but it is rather about openly exploring these concepts and seeing how we can prevent these factors from being the deciding point in how these individuals are treated in the workplace.

**Occupational Sexism & Gender Roles**

**Figure 1**

While race and ethnic background can negatively impact an individual’s opportunities in the workplace, women also face these types of discriminatory behavior. According to a 2017 study by Pew Research Center, four-in-ten working women (42%) in the United States say they have faced discrimination on the job because of their gender, reporting experiences such as earning less than male counterparts for doing the same job to being passed over for important assignments. **Figure 1** shows that more women than man have experienced earning less while doing the same job, have been treated as incompetent, obtained less support from senior leaders, been passed over for more important assignments, felt isolated, denied promotion, and have been turned down for a job. Although there are obvious forms of discrimination and misogyny, sometimes this behavior is not as explicit. Discriminatory behavior on the basis of gender is known as sexism. Sexism is most commonly applied against women and functions to maintain patriarchy through “ideological and material practices of individuals, [collectives](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collectives), and institutions that oppress women and girls on the basis of...gender” (Britannica).

Although it is unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the basis of sex or gender, this form of discrimination is still prevalent in the workplace today. The term for this form of discrimination is known as occupational sexism, which is defined as “any discriminatory practices, statements, actions, etc. based on a person’s sex that are present or occur in a place of employment” (Adjei). Occupational sexism has many causes, including the expectations for social roles and different stereotypes that still exist in our society regarding women. According to The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies, the social role theory “is a social psychological theory that pertains to sex differences and similarities in social behavior.” The main principle of this theory is that these differences and similarities come from the social roles men and women have been placed into within their society (Eagly & Wood).

Socialization and gender roles have both aided in division of labor between men and women based on their behaviorisms. Throughout history, we have seen that men are more likely to be the family providers and obtain full-time roles in the workplace, especially those roles involving strength, leadership skills, and confidence. Women, on the other hand, have historically been the home and children caretakers, primarily taking roles in the workforce involving caretaking skills. Because of these social roles that have been established through time, women have a more difficult time breaking out of these preconceived notions about what roles they have in society.

 When looking at the issue of discrimination in the workplace based on social identity, it is important to understand the moral and ethical implications of this type of behavior. Treating individuals unequally due to factors such as race and gender is a violation of human dignity. Christian humanists see human dignity as an inherent quality in all human beings, as a result of being created in the image and likeness of God. According to Catholic social teaching, solidarity, care for creation, economic justice, and the common good are indispensable values in any society built upon the dignity of the human person (Stocking). When we fail to see all people in this way, we are essentially dehumanizing individuals and opening the doors to different types of violence and injustice. As Martina Manzone explained in her paper titled *Is Discrimination Ethical?*, ethics can be defined as “a moral philosophy or code of morals practiced by a person or group of people, without treating other persons or groups of people as inferior based on their race, sex, national origin, age or other characteristics.” This interpretation is an interesting blend of the traditional definition of ethics and the concept of discrimination. As a society we have a responsibility for other people, which includes ensuring that everyone is treated with respect and a fundamental level of dignity. When discriminatory behavior occurs, it does not just impact one person, it impacts us all as a society. We all bear the burden of people being subjugated based on their social identity, so acknowledging this issue is an essential step forward in eradicating workplace discrimination.

**Résumé & Hiring Discrimination**

**“I have never been so disgusted by my own data.”**

 - Dr. Colin Holbrook, UCLA Research Scientist

One of the biggest obstacles one faces when applying for a job is perhaps the most preliminary stage: submitting a résumé. Employers sift through hundreds of applications every hiring cycle, and many of them take shortcuts in order to eliminate certain individuals right off the bat. Many women and people of color face covert discrimination when applying for a job, and people are beginning to notice. According to Katherine A. DeCelles, a visiting associate professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, “Research findings should provide a startling wake up call for business executives: A bias against minorities runs rampant through the résumé screening process at companies throughout the United States” (Gerdeman). This discrimination can occur based on the names people of color have been given at birth, along with many stereotypes associated with these names regarding one’s racial background.

Margery Austin Turner, Michael Fix, and Raymond J. Struyk conducted a study that was published in *Opportunities Denied, Opportunities Diminished: Racial Discrimination in Hirin*g, which involved 10 pairs of black and white men who were all carefully matched in their characteristics and were trained to behave as similarly as possible in an interview setting. These men applied for entry level jobs and each applicant reported their treatment at every stage of the hiring process. The hiring audit demonstrated the unequal treatment of black job seekers versus white job seekers. Overall, this study showed that 15% of the audits resulted in a white job seeker being offered a job while the equally qualified black job seeker was not (Quillian).

Another significant experiment, conducted by researchers at the UCLA [Center for Behavior, Evolution, and Culture](http://cholbrook01.bol.ucla.edu/), involved roughly 1,500 mostly white adult participants, and the results they found were alarming. In the first experiment, participants read one of two nearly identical stories about an individual who bumped into a man at a bar, and the man angrily responded “Watch where you’re going, a—hole!” In this version of the story, the angry responder’s name was either Jamal, DeShawn, or Darnell. In the second version of the story, the responder’s name was either Connor, Wyatt, or Garrett. Experiment two had an identical story, but this time the main character was described as either a “successful college graduate or business owner” (Howard). During both experiments, participants had to report their impressions of the main character’s height, build, aggressiveness, etc. Although both stories were the same but with different names for the main character, participants believed the characters named Jamal, DeShawn, or Darnell were larger in size and more aggressive than the characters named Connor, Wyatt, or Garrett (Howard). This study is important because it “seems to clearly echo the fear of black and Latino men in our society, which is ironic and disturbing as they are often the victims of violence — precisely because people are afraid of them,” according to Dr. Colin Holbrook, the lead author of this study. The participants of this study automatically attributed qualities of violence to individuals named Darnell or Juan, whereas white-sounding names such as Connor or Garrett evoked assumptions of status and prestige. This study is important in understanding the issue of discrimination in the workplace since many applicants with traditionally non-white sounding names have a significantly lower chance of receiving callbacks for job interviews and/or even have their résumé be considered by hiring staff, with the main reason being that they are perceived to be aggressive, violent, and of a lower social status based on the stereotypes associated with their name.

One of the ways that people of color have tried to increase their chances at getting a callback for a job interview is what is called “résumé whitening.” Résumé whitening involves deleting information that may reveal one’s race in their résumé. Applicants may remove any trace of their racial background using tactics such as changing their names to sound more “white” and eliminating cultural extracurricular activities, and studies have shown that this does the trick. Many studies about résumé whitening show that the discriminatory practice is just as strong for businesses that specifically claim to value diversity as those who don’t (Gerdeman).

****An article published by Gerdeman, titled “Minorities Who 'Whiten' Job Résumés Get More Interviews,”discussed a study which involved testing the differences in callback rates between Asians and African American students who whitened and didn’t whiten their résumés before sending them out to employers. In this study, researchers created résumés for African American and Asian applicants and sent out résumés for 1,600 entry-level jobs posted on posted online in 16 metropolitan U.S. areas. Some of the résumés pointed out the applicants’ minority status while others were whitened, or “scrubbed of racial clues.” Researchers then created phone numbers for the applicants in order to observe how many of the subjects would receive callbacks from the selected employers. Employer callback rates for whitened résumés were much greater than for those résumés that included culturally revealing information, even though the qualifications were the same (Kang et al).

**Figure 2**

**Figure 2** shows that over 25% of black candidates in this study received callbacks from their whitened résumés, and only 10 percent received callbacks when they left their ethnic information on the résumés. When looking at the Asian applicants, 21% received calls with their whitened résumés, while only 11.5% heard back from employers if they sent their normal, non-whitened résumés (Kang et al). It is unfortunate that minority applicants have to deal with this type of discrimination from both regular employers and those who state that they are “pro-diversity.” Many minority applicants develop a false sense of security when seeing these pro-diversity statements on applications and reveal their race on their résumés, which backfires on them. Katherine DeCelles, who also helped develop this study, explains, “This is a major point of our research—that you are at an even greater risk for discrimination when applying with a pro-diversity employer because you’re being more transparent. Those companies have the same rate of discrimination, which makes you more vulnerable when you expose yourself to those companies” (Gerdeman). Many studies have also shown employers discriminating based on many social factors such as where a potential employee may live and their previous job experience. Although some of these factors are not explicitly racial, many employers see this type of information on job applications and résumés and tend to favor the white job candidate over the candidate of color who may not live in the best locations, have a substantial record of previous employment, or have long letters of recommendation from people who already have notable jobs in the workforce. Another cause of discrimination is in part due to statistics, which has “nothing to do with any emotional distaste for working with minorities” (Kellogg Institute). Employers don’t necessarily look at the fact that an employee is black, however they do look at the observable facts such as lower SAT scores, lack of work experience, and where candidates live, and if they don’t personally know the candidate, they’re forced to consider them based solely on that type of data. The issue with statistical discrimination is that it creates a bias, regardless of what employers may say, since they associate lower SAT scores and other similar types of observable data with the “black” group as a whole. There are many disparities for certain racial communities in the U.S., and because of the systemic discrimination these people face on a daily basis, their opportunities to excel in educational opportunities and in the workforce is significantly impacted.

We have seen through many studies that résumé discrimination affects racial minority groups, however this issues greatly affects individuals based on their gender as well. One example of this is revealed in the story of a female student who faced substantial discrimination when applying for jobs. Erin McKelvey, a recent college graduate, didn’t get a single response to the many résumés she had send out. “Mack”McKelvey, on the other hand, saw a 70% response rate on “his” applications (Cohn). Although her qualifications remained unchanged, Erin saw a significant increase in the number of responses she got from the same company by simply changing her name to a male’s name.

One survey in particular, conducted by InSync Surveys, revealed a bias towards interviewing men over women in larger businesses and found that this type of name/gender discrimination was not exclusive to male recruiters. Their data showed that when the time came to make a hiring decision, gender bias is what primarily affected the outcome. They asked respondents to review the cover letter they received, from either “Susan” or “Simon,” and then rate the candidates based on their technical skills. Although the cover letters were identical, 38% of respondents from large organizations thought Susan clearly matched the attributes needed for the job, while 33% felt this way towards Simon. Despite the fact that Susan appeared more qualified, the study found that 62% of respondents from large organizations said they were likely to interview Simon, while 56% would interview Susan (Barnett et al). This research highlights the effects of gender discrimination in the workplace because it shows that although Susan had better technical skills and qualifications, Simon was more likely to be called in for an interview.

Feeding into a cultural stereotype, many believe that men have a better ability to perform in both laborious and intellectual jobs than women. New research published in the American Psychologist journal showed that women are overlooked when employers need bright employees who can keep up with intellectually demanding tasks (Bian et al). One study involved 347 participants that were asked to refer individuals for a job. Half of the participants were told that the job required high-level intellectual ability, while the other half were not. Their results revealed that the odds of referring a woman were 38.3% lower when the job description mentioned “intellectual ability,” which is illustrates gender bias when hiring employees (Bian et al). According to researchers Lin Bian, Andrei Cimpian, and Sarah-Jane Leslie, this type of gender bias is a learned behavior that is even displayed by children as young as five years old. In another study designed to test the impact of learned gender biases, researchers conducted an experiment with 192 kindergarten and first-grade children, in which the children were taught how to play a team game and were allowed to pick their partners. Half of the kindergarteners were told the game was for “really, really smart” people, and the other half were not. Each child then chose three teammates from pictures of six children: three boys and three girls, whom they hadn’t met before. All of the children showed a preference for teammates of their own gender initially, but those children who were told the game was for “really, really smart” people were more likely to select a boy over a girl as their partner. Girls were chosen 37.6% of the time when the game required “really, really smart” partners, however they were chosen 53.4% of the time when partners were asked to pick who they liked best (Bian et al). The stereotypes reflected in these results are concerning and ironic, given that many studies around the world have shown that women tend to perform better than men in educational settings. One such study was conducted at Leeds Metropolitan University, where 1,500 students were tested at the start of their first year to see if levels of psychological resilience (the capacity of individuals to adapt to new challenges) affected academic performance. Those who were seen as “resilient” were much more likely to perform better in the first years of schooling, and this trend was more pronounced for female students than for male ones. This study suggests that the general nature of higher education is better suited to women, because women with a tough mindset and resilience are much more capable of adapting to new challenges in institutional settings. Despite these findings, gender bias negatively affects the workforce because many jobs in the S.T.E.M fields tend to hire fewer women than men, stunting their opportunity to advance in and contribute to these fields. The Pew Research Center conducted an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data since 1990 which showed that while jobs in the S.T.E.M fields have grown substantially, the share of women working in these job fields has remained at about half over time (Funk et al).

These forms of discrimination are important to study because they go against many Christian humanist values and Salesian virtues. Those who study Christian humanism believe in the notions of common humanity, freedom, and personhood. Discrimination against persons based on their race and gender is a direct violation of this mode of thought. Although there are many virtues that are emphasized in Salesian thinking, some of the most relevant virtues to the discussion of racial and gender based discrimination in the hiring process would be those of honesty and sincerity (St. Francis de Sales Association). Employers and recruiters must be honest when releasing statements such as “We do not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnic background, sex, etc.”. Releasing these types of nondiscrimination statements on job applications does not clear employers and recruiters of discrimination – they must take better steps in becoming more aware of these issues in order to resolve them. Social identity factors including the color of one’s skin, their ethnic background, and their gender should not be deciding factors in whether an applicant receives a job or not.

**Solutions to Résumé and Hiring Discrimination**

Although this topic is still being studied and more and more evidence is being released about discriminatory practices in the initial hiring stages, there are some solutions that can be implemented in order to turn this issue around. An obvious step in the right direction would be for employers to be more honest – which is much easier said than done. Although they should be honest with job seekers when posting about new jobs, they must start by being honest with themselves first. Even though we all strive to eliminate even the subtlest of biases from our lives, it is part of the human condition, which is why résumé discrimination is still such an issue.

Recruiters must be willing to look internally and understand what their biases may be when recruiting for potential new hires. According to IMI Data Search, potential ways in which recruiters can begin to combat their biases in the hiring process would be to “follow scripted application protocols and apply every single application step to every applicant,” regardless of personal feelings towards the applicant that may be based on underlying assumptions. It could also be beneficial to establish at least one in-house member to review applications independently; providing a necessary separation against bias-related discrimination that would be difficult for a recruiter to self-identify. Another possible solution that has been presented in many publications would be the concept of blind hiring. Blind hiring “aims at reducing biases during the hiring process. The idea is to promote talent acquisition based on a transparent method and hire eligible candidates regardless of their name, gender, mother tongue, religion, and socioeconomic background” (Marsh). Although it is a step in the right direction when trying to combat the issue of hiring discrimination, there are a significant number of advantages and disadvantages when implementing this tactic in the hiring process(Rinne).

**Figure 3** shows some key findings by researcher Ulf Rinne regarding anonymous job applications. Rinne concludes that although some positive results of blind hiring may include initial prevention of discrimination, boosting job offer rates for minorities, and focusing more on skills and qualifications rather than identity factors, blind hiring practices may only postpone discriminatory behavior and even fail to promote future diversity and appreciation for female employees in a company’s future.

**Figure 3**

The theory behind blind hiring is that providing less information may lead to better choices and results by recruiters. Although blind hiring could be a useful starting point for allowing less discriminatory behavior to occur in the hiring process, employers and hiring managers having more racial and cultural awareness would be a much more positive step forward in the right direction. Evidence-based policy making, along with the much-needed reform of current laws, should be utilized more often to promote inclusivity and further benefit the workforce (Rinne).

**Pay Discrimination & the Gender Wage Gap**

**“Women won't receive equal pay until 2059—and they are ahead of black and Hispanic men, and black and Hispanic women.”**

Source: Infoplease

Although many efforts have been made by advocates regarding income inequality, this issue persists among women and people of minority racial backgrounds. It is illegal to discriminate against an individual based on race, especially due to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, yet this hasn't changed the fact that there is still discrimination occurring in terms of income between different racial groups and genders. Because wages from jobs in the labor market are the main source of income for most families in the U.S., it’s important to understand the reason individuals with the same educational background and skill sets are getting paid less than others based on social factors.

According to a study released by The Economic Policy Institute, researchers found that “the distance between what white Americans and black Americans earn is larger than it's been in almost 40 years” (Demby). According to the report, during the early 1980s, factors such as rising unemployment, failure to raise minimum wage, and weak enforcement of antidiscrimination practices contributed to the expanding wage gap between black and white employees. However, this type of discriminatory practice was not very effective in the late 1990’s due to tighter labor market that actually made discrimination more costly. Since 2000, the black-white wage gap has grown again, and there is still no progress in reducing that gap. **Figure 4** shows data collected by the Economic Policy Institute indicating that average wages for black workers were 26.7% less than those for white workers in 2015, which is up from 8.6% from 1979.

**Figure 4**

As mentioned previously, many employers seem to be discriminating based on “black-sounding” names since they are associated with negative connotations of violence and unprofessionalism. The results of a 2003 study, in which applicants with black-sounding names such as Jamal or Lakisha were found to be less likely to get callbacks for employment, support the conclusion that discrimination is a cause of wage gaps between individuals in the workplace (Francis). Another 2014 study by economists Roland G. Fryer Jr., Devah Pager, and Jörg L. Spenkuch found that “black job seekers are offered—and accept—less compensation than white job seekers. In fact, racial discrimination among employers could account for at least a third of the raw wage gap between black and white workers” (Kellogg Insight).

In order to further investigate the black-white wage gap, Fryer, Pager, and Spenkuch conducted a study, published in the *Journal of Law and Economics* titled “Racial Disparities in Job Finding and Offered Wages,” in which they determined that there were no variables correlated with race that affect wages, separately from race. The study found that not only were black job seekers offered much less compensation than white job seekers, they were also much more likely to accept a lower offer than white job seekers. This may be because black job seekers experience workplace discrimination and sometimes resort to taking whatever they’re able to get. The study concluded that the wage gap would only begin to narrow over time once a black worker stays at the same job for a long period of time. “As an employer I may discriminate against you by offering a lower wage when I first hire you...but over time as you work for me, I come to know how good you really are as an individual, and I adjust your wage accordingly,” Spenkuch explains. Another statistic regarding racial discrimination in compensation, found by the Pew Research Center, showed that in 2015, the average hourly wage for blacks and Hispanic men was $14-15, while white workers were earning an average of $21 (Patten).

Women have also experienced the repercussions of discrimination in the workplace, especially when it comes to compensation. Historically, women have been paid less than men in many different types of jobs, and this statistic hasn’t changed enough to show that there is equality between genders and pay in the workplace. In fact, according to data collected by PayScale, the median salary for men is 21% higher than for women, which is only a one percent improvement from 2018 and a 5% improvement from 2015. These results are important because they show that there is still a significant raw wage gap between men and women, in which women are earning 79 cents for every dollar earned by men (PayScale). Women of all races are earning significantly less than men, but especially women from a minority ethnicity. In the previously mentioned Pew Research Center study of 2015, data showed that white women were earning an average hourly wage of $17-18, while black and Hispanic women were earning about $12-13 (Patten), compared to an average of $21 for white men. This study showed that black women narrowed the wage gap by 9 cents, from earning 56 cents per dollar earned by a white man in 1980 to 65 cents per dollar earned today. Hispanic women fared even worse than black women in these statistics, narrowing the wage gap by just 5 cents, since they earned 58 cents on the dollar in 2015 (Patten).

 The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which call for equal pay amongst men and women and removed the “180-day rule” (in which you can only fight pay discrimination 180 days after earning your first paycheck) respectively, were meant to halt gender discrimination in the workplace, however there is still a lot of work left to do. Based on current progress of wage gap reform, which has essentially stopped since the mid-1990s, the World Economic Forum estimates that it may take about 217 years to finally end gender-based wage gaps in the workforce worldwide (Polman).

Many employers look at education levels when considering who they should hire and how they should be compensated, however research shows that the gender wage gap may be even larger at higher levels of education. According to the White House Council of Economic Advisers and the American Association of University Women (AAUW), women are earning higher educational degrees at a faster and higher rate than men, however they are still earning less money working the same jobs as men (Brinlee). Individuals, regardless of race or gender, are told that a higher degree equals higher pay. Even after paying thousands of dollars to receive a higher education and furthering their expertise in their fields, women with graduate degrees experience one of the highest gender pay gaps, earning about 69% as much as men do (Covert).

Many companies across the country have been accused of not compensating women at an equal level as men. One company that has received more backlash than most has been Walmart, since the company has been accused of not hiring women for jobs that call for “more experience,” and in turn allegedly doesn’t pay women the same for jobs that their male counterparts are doing. The lawsuit emphasized that Walmart district managers “had ultimate authority over whether, and by how much, to adjust the pay of hourly employees” (Lieber). This is a huge issue because it shows that managers had knowledge of hourly and salary payments of employees, yet haven’t restructured their pay system to benefit all employees equally. Many women who worked for this company have said they learned, by talking to other employees of the same job type, that many of their male counterparts were earning more while working in the same or a lesser position. One red flag found within the study of Walmart’s discriminatory practices is that they have a rule in their handbook in which employees are not allowed to discuss compensation with other employees. This has legal implications because this type of practice interferes with the National Labor Relations Act, which was enacted to “protect the rights of employees and employers, to encourage collective bargaining, and to curtail certain private sector labor and management practices, which can harm the general welfare of workers, businesses and the U.S. economy” (National Labor Relations Board).

**Solutions to Pay Discrimination & The Gender Wage Gap**

Although there are many issues in pay equality and compensation between both women and those of a racial minority group, there are solutions that could be enacted to help reduce the amount of discrimination that is seen in the workforce. One significant step forward would be requiring employers to report what they pay workers, categorized by race, ethnicity, and gender. This is crucial to ensure that this type of information is transparent and to ensure equal treatment of all employees regardless of social identity factors. Eliminating the pay gap is crucial in ensuring a better society since it would reduce the number of working poor, improve the financial security of many American families, and significantly strength’s the U.S. economy (EEOC). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is also proposing that employers with 100 or more employees must report W-2 income and hours worked based on the categories of sex, race, ethnicity, etc. Analyzing bonuses, overtime, and summary of pay data will aid the EEOC and other organizations in better understanding where there are discrepancies in pay based on social factors. Some other policies that should be implemented, as highlighted by the Economic Policy Institute, include enforcing antidiscrimination laws in the several stages of the hiring process, as well as in terms of promotions and pay received by minorities and women (Wilson et al). This action, on top of raising the federal minimum wage, creating a work scheduling standard, and strictly enforcing wage laws in order to prevent wage theft would significant help in identifying wage gaps and how organizations can start shutting them down.

The important takeaway regarding this issue is that although there are some policies that can be put into place to help stop this issue, there is no one industry or organization that can do this alone. The wage gap between minorities and women compared to white men is much too high and requires collaboration and partnership between all businesses and government organizations in order to see significant change. Research by Unilever and other large companies suggests that one of the biggest causes of the gender gap in the workplace is due to dangerous social norms and false stereotypes that limit the capabilities and opportunities of what women can or should do (Polman). Taking strides to eliminate these social norms and stereotypes would greatly benefit women and minorities and allow them more opportunities in the growing workforce of the United States. By acknowledging our inner biases and exchanging our stereotypes for truths, we can see people more clearly for who they are and what they contribute to those around them. Once we start to see all people in this same light, many biases and stereotypes will dissolve, resulting in companies seeing improvement in their employee environment, company growth, and overall positivity and equity in the work environment.

**Disadvantages in Workplace Advancement & Growth Opportunities**

**“Only 19 Fortune 500 firms are led by people of color, and only 21 of these companies are led by women, according to recent data. And almost 75% of Fortune 500 boards are mainly comprised of white men.”**

Source: Scientific American

Racial minorities and women have faced the issues of résumé discrimination and pay inequality, however they face yet another hurdle in the workplace: disadvantages in opportunities for advancement. Not only is it a challenge to get past the barriers of hiring and compensation, they must also deal with the reality that employers may hinder them from rising up the ranks in their company. A study published in the Academy of Management Journal, written by researchers David R. Hekman, Stefanie K. Johnson, Maw-Der Foo and Wei Yang, was comprised of 307 participants that read about an imaginary hiring manager who was choosing between two different candidates for a senior vice president role. Each of these candidates were equally qualified, however one of them belonged to a low-status demographic group (female or nonwhite), and the other was a white male. Participants were also shown a photo of the hiring manager who had to choose between the two candidates, which revealed the person’s race and gender. The researchers then described the hiring manager as someone who was advocating for diversity or as someone who was *publicly* advocating for diversity and choosing the demographically low-status candidate. The results of this study aligned with the researchers’ field evidence, in which the participants—*including women and nonwhites*—rated minority and female leaders who supported candidates similar to them more negatively (Gino).

The idea of not appreciating minorities and females in leading roles has also been seen numerous times in the real world, with an example being when Rosalind Brewer, an African American and former CEO of Sam’s Club, was considered racist by the media for promoting diversity at Sam’s Club (Bever). Brewer had stated many times that she supports and encourages diversity in her work environment. In regards to discussing diversity within her job position, she talked to her suppliers about diversity, saying that “Every now and then you have to nudge your partners. You have to speak up and speak out. And I try to use my platform for that. I try to set an example” (O’Brien). When discussing a story about one of her meetings with her suppliers, Brewer said “The entire other side of the table was all Caucasian male...that was interesting” (O’Brien). She decided not to address that fact with everyone in the room, however she did say she would later “place a call" to the supplier. That comment of hers spurred a lot of backlash, with people calling her “racist” and encouraging a boycott of Sam’s Club locations while using the hashtag #boycottracistsamsclub (O’Brien). Women and minorities receive a lot of backlash when attempting to promote diversity by aiding those like them, which hinders the ability of certain individuals to advance in the workplace.

Racial minorities face a difficult roadblock when trying to advance in the workplace due to a structural bias that is set against them in the existing workplace. As mentioned in the quote above from the Scientific American, almost 75% of all Fortune 500 boards are mainly comprised of white men. Minorities are severely underrepresented in higher leadership roles, and according to data collected by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission from 2007-2015 (Molla):

* Asian men and women were more common in entry-level professional jobs, white men and women were twice as likely as Asians to become executives.
* Black and Hispanic professionals are much less likely than their white peers to become executives.
* Hispanics remained only 3.5 percent of all executives but declined from 5.2 percent to 4.8 percent of all professionals (also not promising for future promotions).

 This data, which especially focused on science, technology, engineering and math (S.T.E.M) companies, show that minorities are underrepresented in executive roles, while being more likely to have entry level roles at companies where they have been working for multiple years. Data found by the Pew Research Center shows that blacks, Hispanics, and Asians working in S.T.E.M jobs are all much less likely than whites to believe that members of their own social identity groups are treated fairly, especially when it comes to opportunities for advancement. Most blacks and Hispanics in the S.T.E.M fields believe part of the reasoning for this unfair treatment is due to “limited access to quality education, discrimination in recruitment and promotions and a lack of encouragement to pursue these jobs from an early age” (Funk et al).

Illustrating the impact of identity factors on promotion, research conducted by David Heckman and his colleagues at the University of Colorado showed that behaviors supporting diversity are only seen as acceptable when they are promoted by white men (Hekman et al). These researchers found that “ethnic minority or female leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are penalized with worse performance ratings, whereas white or male leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are not penalized for doing so.” They concluded that “this divergent effect results from traditional negative race and sex stereotypes placed upon diversity-valuing ethnic minority and female leaders” (Hekman et al). According to research gathered by the Academy of Management, “Ethnic minority or female leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are penalized with worse performance ratings than their equally diversity-valuing white or male counterparts,” while “white leaders may increase their own chances of advancing up the corporate ladder by actually engaging in a very low level of diversity-valuing behavior” (Haimowitz). The issue this quote highlights is that while minorities would be punished and seen as “favoring” when trying to include and promote diversity in the workplace, white leaders could be seen as progressive, inclusive, and better fit for a leadership position than others.

Women are prone to being treated differently based on their gender, with socially constructed gender roles causing them to lose opportunities they have worked hard to earn. Many women who work in a male-dominated work environments say that they have faced more challenges when trying to advance in the workplace or receive attention from their bosses and other leaders of their company. According to the Pew Research Center, only 48% of women who work in a male-majority setting feel as though they are treated fairly where they work, and only 38% say that they’re treated fairly when it comes to promotions and advancement opportunities (Parker). Not only are women three times more likely than men to say that their gender has made it harder for them to succeed at their job, 34% of women who work in a predominantly male populated workplace have said that they face negative consequences due to their gender (Parker). According to this study, “while roughly a third of women who work in majority-male establishments (35%) say they have earned less than a man who was doing the same job, fewer women in female-dominated workplaces (22%) or in workplaces with an even mix of men and women (23%) say this has happened to them” (Parker). This shows that women face challenges in the workplace when they are compared to men, since being in a male-dominated work environment gives women fewer chances at obtaining opportunities. Men more often favor and advance other men in their work environment, and this type of behavior puts women in a position of having to work harder to get the same opportunities and attention as their male coworkers.

Women in a male-dominated work environment may also experience feeling isolated, being disregarded for important assignments, and being denied promotions or being turned down for jobs due to their gender. Along with this mistreatment, another persistent issue women have been dealing with in the workplace is sexual harassment, which is defined as “unwelcome sexual advances which affects an individual's employment” such as when “an employer refuses to offers promotions to employees who decline his sexual advances” (Workplace Fairness). About 28% of women who work predominantly with men say they have been sexually harassed at work, while 21% of women who worked in a gender-balanced workplace say they’ve experienced sexual harassment (Parker). When tackling the issue of sexual harassment, employers must be more diligent when teaching employees and other high-level members of the company about policies regarding sexual harassment. Outdated videos explaining sexual harassment must be remade and updated with a clearer understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment, what should be done to avoid from occurring, and how to handle it if it occurs. According to the American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons, both genders have varying perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment (Wicks). Employers have the responsibility to prevent sexual harassment in their workplace and must take stricter steps of preventing these instances from occurring. Until women are treated with proper respect both physically and socially, they have a lesser opportunity of advancing in the workplace and being treated as equals.

When it comes to senior leadership positions, women are still underrepresented due to the many stereotypes and hurdles they must deal with when trying to advance in the workplace. Because of exclusivity and difficulties that women face when trying to advance in the workplace, even women themselves seem to prefer men in leadership positions. According to a study by Gallup, the longer women are in the workplace, the less likely they are to want a female as their boss due to the competitive nature of women in the workplace and fear of how they would be perceived for supporting another female (Riffkin).

One possible reason for this is revealed by an experiment conducted by Michelle Duguid of Cornell University, in which Duguid found that “females felt threatened by candidates of the same gender who had either higher or lower job qualifications than they did” (Riffkin). Duguid found that women experienced three types of threats: the threat of competition, negative stereotypes against women, and gender bias. First, women were concerned that female candidates with higher qualifications would end up being more qualified and competent than they are, which sets up a sense of competition in a context where only a few women are accepted. Second, women didn’t want to hire or bring in a woman with lower qualifications, since they believed this might reinforce negative stereotypes about women and impact others’ impressions of their decision making capabilities. Third, many females were concerned about appearing biased toward other women in their workplace (Gino). Because of these concerns, both women and ethnic minorities may fail to support and advocate for their peers.

As mentioned previously, many women and minorities face backlash when trying to support those similar to them. This can cause an unfortunate reduction in the number of opportunities that women and minorities have in being hired or promoted by other women and minorities in their workplace. In our society today, women supporting other women in the workplace is seen as preferential treatment rather than a selection based on their accomplishments and value that they bring to the company. Although they may have the same or even higher qualifications or years of experience than their male counterparts, women have noticed that they are constantly being turned down for roles simply based on their gender and the stereotypes that are associated with it.

A prime example of advancement discrimination based on gender is alleged in the many lawsuits filed against Walmart claiming that female employees are often times passed over in favor of less qualified male employees for certain roles (Lieber). In one particular case, Lisa Youman, a former employee of Walmart, had been working for years at a Walmart in Florida. She joined the company as a sales associate and worked her way up to department manager and eventually to support manager. Since she had so much experience was climbing up the corporate ladder through her years of experience and knowledge, she had applied to an even higher management position that she was qualified for. What she came to realize after applying for this position is that she was passed over in favor of a lower-ranking male co-worker with less experience than she had. Youman had experienced this type of discrimination at Walmart before, and when she asked her boss why she was turned down for the role, she was told she wasn’t chosen because she was a female (Lieber). Apparently part of her job involved moving furniture, which according to her boss, “required strength only a man could have” (Lieber). Youman was also told she was “overqualified” for the role, which is a nonsensical response that indicates some sort of bias against her. Her boss telling her she was overqualified, on top of the statement he made saying she wasn’t qualified due to being female, shows that companies may try to create some form of false rationale to prohibit females from having certain jobs that they believe only men should have.

Another example of discrimination at Walmart involves former employee Betty Dukes, who filed a class-action lawsuit against Walmart since she believed she and other women employed by this company were consistently passed over for wage increases and promotions. This case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court before it was dismissed for being “too expansive” (Lieber). Women have made it clear that they are trying to break out of a system of systematic persecution against women that hinders them from advancing alongside their male peers.

Google, another company that has faced some backlash for discriminatory practices, was sued in 2017 for gender discrimination by previous female employees (O’Connor). In one of the lawsuits, Kelly Ellis, an experienced software engineer who had been an employee for four years, resigned from Google five years ago “because of the sexist culture” (O’Connor). Ellis claims to have been “occupationally-segregated” into a front-end role due to a “false and gendered perception at Google that back-end software engineering is more technically rigorous, and therefore more prestigious,” observing that “almost all back-end software engineers were men” (O’Connor). As discussed above, women are oftentimes overlooked for more technical positions, especially in the STEM fields. Although Google has issued an apology and has strict practices of antidiscrimination, this shows that a few bad apples in a company with false perceptions of gender differences could hinder the opportunities women deserve to have.

**Solutions to Unequal Workplace Advancement and Growth Opportunities**

Not only is discriminating against women and minorities in the workplace illegal, it is also highly unethical. By working hard and obtaining the right qualifications, any individual, regardless of social factors, should be allowed and encouraged to advance in their career. As human beings, we tend to abide by fairness, which involves impartiality towards everyone -- including women and minorities. The stereotype of dominant, white men in positions of power has been conditioned and reinforced in most people minds and emphasizes the lack of equity in the way that all individuals are being treated in the workplace. Although it is very difficult to pinpoint exact solutions to such a vast issue, some steps that can be taken to solve the discriminatory practices against women and minorities advancing in the workplace could be to implement even stricter policies of what the requirements are to advance in the workplace hierarchy. Having a set outline of requirements that one must meet in order to advance to a higher position could help ensure that a women or minority employee, if interested, had the opportunity to fulfill those qualities and gain a better chance at receiving a higher level position at their company.

Not basing advancement opportunities on personality factors could also help give women and minorities a better chance at competing alongside their white co-workers for advanced positions, since companies may often times tell a woman, for example, that they chose a man for the role instead because they liked his *dominant personality* better. Although not explicitly discriminatory, employers are still finding ways to skirt around rules and regulations by coming up with different reasons for hiring white men instead of women and minorities. When an employee is being considered for advancement, the HR team must play a bigger role than the company leader or manager alone, since that team of trained individuals could help ensure that the decision for who takes the higher position is fair and appropriate based on their work experience and knowledge of the company.

**Conclusion**

In order to give women and minorities better opportunities for advancing in the workplace, current laws that are set in place must be further regulated by the companies themselves. When looking at résumé and hiring discrimination, employers must take more action in making their hiring practices equal for all applicants. Blind hiring and improving awareness in hiring managers could be a beneficial step forward, however there must be a structural system set in place of interview questions and processes that are used for every single job prospect, regardless of their racial background or gender. With regard to wage gaps and advancement opportunities, women and minorities have been fighting for years to have the same level of pay and compensation as their fellow male co-workers, but the results are still not showing. Christian humanism values human potential and inherent worth. Not giving people what they have rightfully earned is a violation of their value and diminishes their potential for growth. Individuals of these social identities have made their voices loud and clear, and now society must take these claims seriously and start a broader conversation on how to acknowledge and permanently end workplace discrimination in the United States.

**“Through love, tribes have been intermixing colors to reveal a new rainbow world. And as more time passes, this racial and cultural blending will make it harder for humans to side with one race, nation or religion over another.”**

― Suzy Kaseem

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