

Demystifying Gender Stereotypes

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Abstract

“Think Manager, Think Male” has been the perception over the years. Women have been stereotyped on many aspects with regard to their Career Orientation, Ability to work in Shifts, Putting late work hours, Decision Making Skills, Mobility, Location Change, Availing Work-Life Balance Practices, Not negotiating for their pay and the like. There is a slow change in the perception. The objective of the paper is to identify the stereotypes related to women and research results differing from it and suggest areas of improvement for women employees. The methodology adopted is review of various literatures related to the topic. The study has revealed that in certain areas, women have broken the stereotypes and established themselves.

Key Words: Gender Stereotype, Women Employees.

Introduction:

With increasing number of women climbing the competitive corporate ladder, companies are also keen in welcoming them for their diverse talents. Though the volumes are higher at the entry level, as they move up the ladder, the numbers dwindle reflecting a “leaking pipeline” (Price Water House Coopers 2008). The Corner Office is still prized for many women to reach, inter alia, due to the stereotypes that the fairer sex cannot make it.

“Think Manager, Think Male” has been the perception over the years. Women have been stereotyped on many aspects with regard to their Career Orientation, Ability to work in Shifts, Putting late work hours, Decision Making Skills, Mobility, Pay, Flexi timings and the like. Now, with changing times the perception is also slowly changing.

Problem Statement:

Women being stereotyped for various reasons like they prioritize their family, not really career – oriented, not willing to stretch at work (stay late hours), not keen on working in shifts, not really good in decision-making, not very assertive in demanding their pay and list goes on. These primary stereotypes have been an hindrance to woman workforce serious about their careers. There are numerous researchers supporting the stereotyping of women. But, with changing times are there research results to prove that the stereotypes are wrong. Hence, the problem focused is looking out for researchers which disprove the stereotypes associated with women.

Objectives:

The paper is set out with the following objectives:

- ❖ to identify the stereotypes associated with Gender (Women)
- ❖ to review literatures which have reported differing results than the stereotypes
- ❖ to suggest the areas of improvement for the women employees

Scope of the Study:

Though many kind of stereotypes are associated with women, this study limits to three variables – Pay, Work-Life Trade-off including flexi-timing and Mobility. The reason for the choice of these variables is the availability of literature supporting the objective of this paper for these variables.

Need for the Study:

Women at work have been a topic of research from various viewpoints for decades. The literature survey on the Stereotyping of Women revealed that no study have been taken up comparing the literature findings of various researchers. This study fills this gap.

Methodology:

The data used for the study is secondary data. The input for the study is review of various literatures related to the topic. The paper relies on secondary data from published sources like books and journals.

Key Definitions/Phrases:

Gender Stereotype:

Gender stereotypes present a conventionally simplified and standardized conception or image concerning the typical social roles of male and female, both domestically and socially. To simplify this definition, gender stereotypes are beliefs held about characteristics, traits, and activity-domains that are "deemed" appropriate for men and women. For example, traditionally, typical characteristics for women are piety, submissiveness, and domesticity, while authority, and social behavior, are traits commonly held by men.

'Think Manager, Think Male':

This perception refers to the general perception attached to the designation of a Manager. Also, it generalizes for any leadership position as the Manager/Leader is always considered to be a Male rather than a Female.

Leaking Pipeline:

The term first used by Price Water House Coopers refers to the volumes of women entering the workforce and as they move up the corporate ladder, there is a leak and numbers reduce at the top.

Stereotypes associated with Women:

Numerous stereotypes are associated with the fairer sex such that they are more tuned to domestic responsibilities, their priority is Family than Career, they are not willing to stretch timings at work, they leave office on time and bring with them lots of excuses for missing deadlines, so on and so forth. Though, we can substantiate the cases on either side of the coin, for the purpose of this study three major stereotypes have been identified - stereotypes related to Pay, Work/family tradeoffs and Mobility.

(i) Stereotype related to Pay:

Differentials in wages have been an accepted norm. It is very usual that women get paid lesser than their male counterpart. It is observed in many studies¹ that even within the same occupation, women are paid lower wages relative to men and male-female earnings.

Though various studies have reported so, there is a relief to note , **Rosesner (1989)** in her study on women leaders who were members of IWF (International Women’s Forum) in diverse professions around the world cites that women earn the same amount of money as their male counterparts. The average yearly income for men is \$136,510 for women it is \$140,573. Most other studies have shown a wage gap between men and women. Another study by **Bureau of Labour and Employment Statistics, Philippines (1999)** states that in the 1999 Occupational Wages Survey, systems analysts and designers, a category associated with women ICT professionals are rated as the highest paid in the computer industry, while computer programmers, a category associated with men, earn about 30% less than systems analysts and designers.

(ii) Stereotype related to Work/family tradeoffs:

When any work-life balance policy is made, it is assumed that women make the most use of it. Also, flexi time is expected to be used extensively by women employees. The research reports differ –

(a) A majority of past research implicitly assumes that work-life balance is only relevant to women and or members of family with children (**Fredriksen Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001**). Also, Wu et al. (2003) found that female workers whose income makes up

between 40 and 60 per cent of their family income would have more WLC (Work Life Conflict). This is because women with less income weight are focusing more on their family, whereas women with more income weight are more career – oriented.

On the flip side, **Melissa and Peitola (1999)** using a sample of married, employed Americans from the 1996 General Social Survey state that they found, unexpectedly, that women and men report similar levels of success and kinds of work-family tradeoffs. However, they found that for men, imbalance is predicted by long work hours, wives who work fewer hours, perceived unfairness in sharing housework, marital unhappiness, and tradeoffs made at work for family and at home for work.

(b) While **Galinsky, Bond & Hill (2004)** report that women are somewhat more likely (79%) than men (68%) to use flexitime when it is available. **Comfort et al (2003)** analysed the data collected from new Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) and showed that women reported lower flexitime participation rate than men; 44% of men reported a flexitime arrangement, as compared to only 36% of women.

Susan Halford, et al (1997) mention that across the sector examined (Banking, Local Government and Nursing sectors) Men, compared with Women, place a similar or slightly higher emphasis on the value of spending time with their children, whilst women are equally as likely as men to place a high value on work, although both sexes rated work as relatively unimportant compared with other activities.

(iii) Stereotype related to Mobility:

It is typical of families to restrict movement of their female family members. They are not allowed to work late, work in shifts or relocate. A DQ- JobsAhead survey in 2003 found that 52% of the women were not open to relocation. A large number of married women are still bound by domestic and childcare responsibilities and are still not as mobile as men. This perception too, is changing slowly. **Kelkar, Shrestha and Veena (2005)** who examine women's agency in the IT industry in India based on field research in two cities Bangalore and Delhi. They point out that the nature of work in the IT industry is different as networking capacities have increased women's capacities to take decisions, thereby constructing greater spaces to enhance their agency.

In another study by **Kelkar, Govind and Nathan (2002)** at both the Software Industry and IT-Enabled services (ITES) particularly through the perceptions of women and men workers, and managers within the industry. Single women are more mobile and less hindered by family concerns when compared to married women, who are bound by the contradictory demands of their families, jobs and children. At the same time, the prestige attached to the IT industry allows young women to work night shifts, live alone in cities and control their incomes. **Kalpagam (2002)** note that restriction on women's mobility have loosened over the years since such mobility has a direct bearing on their ability to take up employment outside the house.

Scope for Further Research:

The literature reviewed reveals that in the variables studied, there have been women breaking the stereotypes. Of various literatures referred for the study, the authors have also identified the gaps which are yet to be filled in this arena. The studies mostly relate to out of India context and as such not many studies are available on the topic in the Indian milieu. And also, in relation to other factors of Gender Stereotypes, like Career Orientation, Decision-Making Skills, etc., much research needs to be taken up in these arena, which could reveal if the stereotypes are broken or persistent.

Suggestions on Ways to Succeed:

Though women have cracked the shell and knocked at the Glass Ceiling, the journey is still not complete. This leaves us the question what women need to improve. Dr. Donna Brooks have listed the following to be the areas of improvement for women to succeed –

- (i) Women should improve on Assertiveness, Toughness and Confidence.
- (ii) They should make themselves visible, market themselves and build their profile.
- (iii) Improve on their bargaining and negotiation skills.
- (iv) Improve the ability to take decisions and
- (v) Finally, should not take things personally and should react less emotionally.

The Organisations should also provide a supportive climate and supportive policies for women to succeed.

Conclusion:

Though the literature findings relate to studies taken up with different demographics, a considerable set of women population across geography have demonstrated that they can break the stereotypes. This shows that women have definitely come out their shell and have made great strides evidently with Family support, Organisational support and Individual drive. The path crossed has not been easy but many more should walk the path to set it and show the way for the generations to come. The change is slow but SURE.

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