**Abstract**

Women in Japan have faced a myriad of inequality, especially in the work place. In order to explore current issues and current perceptions of how discrimination of women in the workplace is perceived, regarding job opportunity, promotion, wages, and support from family and co-workers, I conducted a survey of both native Japanese and American people and asked: What are the current perceptions between Japan and America regarding men's and women's roles in the workplace? What kinds of discrimination of women are evident and inconspicuous in the Japanese and American workplace? What efforts are taken to minimize the discrimination of women in the workplace? The survey revealed that, Japanese people are under the impression that America does not have any gender discrimination of women in the workplace, however, in contrast, American men believe that women receive better treatment. Furthermore, the survey revealed that Japanese men and women still have traditional gender role expectations even among young college students.

**Introduction**

Gender discrimination of women has been a persistent problem since the foundation of both America and Japan; however government legislation has stepped in to prohibit these kinds of practices with equal rights and equal opportunity regulations.

**1. Significance of the Study**

During my study abroad in Japan, I noticed that there were various things which was gender specific such as: menu items, trains, and even roles in a school circle or club. Taking an independent study course at Okayama University allowed me to talk to women about their perspective on discrimination in Japan. I want to compare the differences in perception of gender discrimination of women in the workplace between the American and Japanese people.

**2. Research Questions**

1. What are the current perceived perceptions of men's and woman's roles in the work place?

2. What kinds of discrimination of women go unseen or evident in the Japanese and American work place?

3. What efforts are taken to minimize the discrimination of women in the working environment?

3. **Background Research**

3.1. History of Gender Discrimination in Japan

Women’s independence was increasing limited during the long centuries of shogunate rule. Even in the early feudal period, women took a considerable role in the household, by the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868), women’s rights within the samurai family were practically nonexistent. The oft quoted *Three Obedience’s* dictated their lives: “When she is young, she obeys her father; when she is married, she obeys her husband; when she is widowed, she obeys her son.” The 1762 treatise called *Greater Learning for Women* illustrates this Neo-Confucian ideal of proper female behavior.

By the late nineteenth, early twentieth century’s, serious challenges to accepted beliefs about gender were mounted in both Japan and China. Although concerns about women’s position had been expressed earlier, the concept of women’s liberation became a major motivating force within the era’s nationalist, reform, and revolution movements.

3.2. Redefining gender roles

It wasn’t until around 1890 when women were finally allow a little bit of equality when factories began hiring women because of the shortage of workers. However during the 1960’s -1980’s post war economic growth, the roles of women were redefined once again. During this period, Japan’s economy was doing well and the men were making enough money to support the family, thus allowing women to quit their jobs and become stay at home mothers.

After Japan’s economic bubble burst, the traditional mindset and values still remained with the generation, however with the fall of the economy, women were slowly pushed back into the workforce. With the traditional dogmatic points of views, the unfair treatment of women in the workplace prompts for equal rights and opportunity regulations.

3.3. Timeline of gender discrimination regulations

In 1890 woman began working in factories due to the shortage of workers. In 1911 a regulations was passed to protect women from working long hours under poor circumstances as well as allowing pregnant women to take a period of unpaid leave, usually permanent, in order to birth and raise the child. In 1947 the Labor Act was passed to ensure that all workers, male and female, had fair standards in the workplace to avoid working long unfair hours based on gender as well as among other things. In 1972 the Women’s Welfare Act as established to protect women from discrimination in the workplace. Even with these regulations put into place, many companies and even the government found loopholes to ignore these regulations and treat women with the traditional mindset of gender roles. Since 1985, regulations have been modified in order to reduce the amount of discrimination in the work place.

**4. Juxtaposing American and Japan**

4.1. American and Japan Equal Opportunity Act

In America, the equal opportunity Act was put into effect on 1972 while Japan did not put theirs into effect till 1986. During this 14 year period, America’s depiction of equal opportunity propaganda spread throughout Japan to give the impression that there was no such things as gender discrimination in the workplace.

4.2. Laws a regulations protection against

The regulations that were created were to protect women in the workplace against: wage differences between men, benefits discrimination, the “glass ceiling”, discrimination when being hired or terminated, gender specific job assignment, unwelcomed verbal and sexual harassment.

4.3. Evident and inconspicuous discrimination

Even today, some of the discrimination is still evident in the workplace in both Japan and America some of the things that we here most about discrimination of women in America is usually regarding wages, promotion, and sexual harassment. While in Japan there are gamuts of issues that are both evident and inconspicuous. Some of these discriminations include: age discrimination, verbal abuse from co-workers, expected job duties not pertaining to their entailed job placement, promotion, wages, benefits, etc.

**5. Recent cases of gender discrimination**

5.1. case studies

Back in 2009, a woman working for Prada Japan, a branch of Prada, was told by higher executives that she needs to change the way she applied her make up as well as lose weight. After not complying with these regulations, she was terminated for being unable to fulfill her duties in the company. The worker filed a discrimination suit against the company but even till this day the case has not been settled. Another more recent cause is in 2011 when a class action suit was filed against Toshiba Corporation for systemic gender discrimination. The entire executive board consisted of only males along with most of its managerial positions. After further investigations it was also unveiled that men were receiving better benefits as well as higher wages that women.

5.2. efforts to reduce discrimination of women in the workplace

On May of 2014, United States president Obama, traveled to Japan to meet with newly reelected Prime Minister Shino Abe, to discuss the current issues and plans to reduce the gender discrimination of women in the workplace along with getting mothers back to work in order to re-boost the Japanese economy.

**6. Results**

6.1. Research question 1: What are the current perceived perceptions of men's and woman's roles in the work place?

After surveying over 80 people in total, results show that a higher percentage of both men and women in Japan agreed with the statement that men are stronger figures than women in the workplace, while a majority of Americans strongly disagreed. In a second question, a survey was conducted using the statement that men are capable of doing certain task that women can’t. Americans answered no while 45% of Japanese people said yes. The third question was, if their gender determined how hard they have to work. These questions results showed that a majority of both American and Japanese people did not feel that they had to work harder because of their gender. Finally the survey participants were asked if they think they is gender discrimination in America and Japan. The results both Americans and Japanese people believed that there is gender discrimination of women in Japan, but however, Japanese people did not think there was and discrimination in America. In the end, Japanese people seem to still have a traditional mind set in terms of gender role, while Americans have clear mind set of equal opportunity.

6.2. Research question 2: What kinds of discrimination of women go unseen or evident in the Japanese and American work place?

When asked if women should be expected to serve beverages to superiors in the workplace, Americans believed women should not be expected to serve beverages to superiors while about have of Japanese people answered that they believed it should be expected. Another question was if a self photo prior to job interview should be supplied. More than 70% of Americans don’t feel it is necessary to supply employers with self-photos while 40% of the Japanese people believe that is necessary. The reason that Japanese people feel this was is that every company requires a photo of the applicant before being considered for an interview. This shows that Japanese people have a traditional mindset in terms of gender role.

6.3. Research question 3: What efforts are taken to minimize the discrimination of women in the working environment?

Participants were asked if wages should be based on qualifications rather than gender. The results for both Japanese and Americans came back almost completely identical with over 90% people from each group agree that wages should be decided based on qualifications rather than gender.

Another question that was proposed was whether or not both genders should be doing household chores. 90% of Americans believe that household chores should be done by both genders; however, interesting enough that only 60% of Japanese males and 70% of Japanese women believed that household chores should be completed by both genders.

The third question used to answer my research questions was regarding the employee’s knowledge of gender discrimination regulations in their workplace. Less than half of both Japanese and American people knew about the rules or regulations in their workplace.

Finally, the survey asked if women receive better treatment in the workplace because of their gender. 50% of American men feel that women in their workplace receives better treatment while over 75% of Japanese men acknowledge that women do not receive better treatment than men.

**7. Conclusion**

Japanese people are under the impression that America does not have any gender discrimination of women in the workplace. I believe that it is because of American claim of being a free and equal country. However, American men feel that women are getting better treatment in their workplace. I believe that is mainly because women in the past have been suing for equal rights and treatment in the workplace which has lead to them being treated better. Furthermore, Japanese men and women still have very traditional ideals even among young college students.

**8. Limitations of the study**

The limitations of the study included the lack of experienced working demographic as well as having most of the participants being college students.

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