Stratification and Differentiation

Worksheet 4.2: Gender and Other Inequalities

Read the text below and answer the questions that follow

The pay gap refers to the differences in average pay between a range of social groups. A 2008 report from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) analysed the pay gap among full-time employees in relation to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability.

The EHRC report found there was persistent gender disadvantage in all social groups. For example, on average, disabled men could expect to be better paid than disabled women, but also better paid than non-disabled women. All groups of ethnic minority women and men (except Indian and Chinese men) experienced gaps in pay compared to White British men. Disabled men and women were disadvantaged compared to non-disabled men. Disabled women were particularly disadvantaged, regardless of whether they had low or high qualifications, compared to similarly qualified non-disabled men.

Differences in average pay occur for a range of reasons, including age profiles, levels of disability, occupational distribution, discrimination and, crucially, qualifications. The EHRC report covered a range of potential reasons why one group had lower average pay than another. For example, the factors contributing to the gender pay gap include:

- differences in educational qualifications
- differences in length and type of work experience
- occupational segregation, with workplaces with high proportions of women concentrated in lower-paying industries or occupations
- differences in sector of employment – public versus private
- differences in hours spent on the job
- differences in access – time spent commuting, and employer discrimination, both at recruitment and during employment (the 'glass ceiling')

These factors may also apply when comparing other groups. For example, for some minority groups, large differences in average qualifications are likely to be an important source of average pay disadvantage – or advantage.

A 2008 report from the Office for National Statistics, based on payroll records from Britain's employers, found 'almost two-thirds of the wage gap is because of reasons unexplained and one-third is for reasons explained'. Discrimination was only one of the unexplained factors resulting in women earning less than men. Other influences might include educational qualifications and motivation. More than 30 years after the passing of the Equal Pay Act, the report concluded that prejudice still meant women were taking home smaller pay packets than men doing the same job, despite a shift towards a fairer labour market over the past decade.

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The number of women holding senior posts fell between 2007 and 2008, according to a 2008 EHRC report, *Sex and Power,* based on its annual study of women in top positions of power and influence. The report showed the biggest number of reversals since the report was started five years earlier. In 12 of 25 job categories studied, there were fewer women holding top posts. There were fewer women MPs, cabinet members, national newspaper editors, senior police officers and judges, NHS executives, trade union leaders and heads of professional bodies, compared with 2007. The number of female media bosses, MEPs, directors of major museums and galleries, chairs of national arts companies and holders of senior ranks in the Armed Forces had remained the same. Women's representation had increased in eight areas, including in the House of Lords and among company directors, council leaders, university vice-chancellors and top civil service managers. However, in six of these categories the increase was less than 1 per cent.

The EHRC said opportunities for ambitious women to reach the top of their career were changing at a 'snail's pace'. It blamed Britain's business culture of long working days and inflexible working practices for discouraging women who wanted to both work and raise a family. Nicola Brewer, the chief executive of the EHRC, said: 'Workplaces forged in an era of stay-at-home mums and breadwinner dads are putting too many barriers in the way, resulting in an avoidable loss of talent at the top. We always speak of a glass ceiling. These figures reveal that in some cases it appears to be made of reinforced concrete.'

Adapted from: Longhi, S. and Platt, L. (2008) *Pay Gaps Across Equalities Areas,* Research Report 9, London: Equality and Human Rights Commission; Elliott, L. (2008) *Equal rights: Prejudice contributes to women earning less, says ONS study* The Guardian, Tuesday 12 August; *Women 'lose out' in top jobs race* BBC News 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk/7596319.stm

Questions

1. Identify inequalities between three social groups referred to in the passage, e.g. between age groups.
2. Drawing on the material in the passage and your wider knowledge, suggest and explain three possible reasons for the inequalities between the groups you identified in question 1.
3. Explain what is meant by the 'glass ceiling'.
4. Suggest ways that employers might discriminate against social groups in ways that help them to avoid prosecution, or that make it difficult for those discriminated against to prove their cases.
5. What difficulties might women who wish to work and raise a family face in paid employment, and particularly in high-powered career jobs?
6. Outline and fully explain three possible reasons for the fact that, on average, women in full-time paid employment still earn less than their male equivalents.