A Commentary on Women in the Workforce: Has the Issue of Gender Discrimination Pierced through to the Accounting Profession?

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A Commentary on Women in the Workforce:

Has the Issue of Gender Discrimination Pierced through to the Accounting Profession?

An honors thesis presented to the School of Business,
University at Albany, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Accounting & Business Administration and graduation from The Honors College.

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The following is intended to be a theoretical commentary on the issue of gender discrimination against women in the modern professional workforce. The content is designed to discuss the issue at hand and explain its pertinence within modern society. The relevant discussion will suggest that there seems to be a sufficient quantity of anecdotal evidence in order to suggest that this issue may have penetrated the accounting profession. This raises the concern that women may be experiencing discrimination within the accounting profession, in terms of leadership roles, monetary earnings, and employer-provided benefits.

Ultimately, this discussion will raise questions to be further investigated by empirical researchers in the future, and will identify three domains to assess discrimination against women, which include benefits, promotions, and compensation.
I would like to express my extreme gratitude toward Dr. Haugaard for encouraging his students to take advantage of this valuable endeavor. This experience has allowed me to extend my opportunities for learning above and beyond the classroom. This journey has proved to be both a beneficial and profitable learning experience, and I am thankful to have had the guidance of Dr. Van Ness throughout the process. His advisement helped to ensure that I took advantage of every opportunity to learn and grow, as both a scholar and a young professional.

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The journey toward career progression begins at the precise moment when an individual receives a formal education. Many understand the significance of receiving an education, as the experience represents a time during which personal and academic growth may flourish for an individual. This particular life event is a time in which talents and skills are fostered, as well as when an individual considers many options with regard to a career path. Throughout the duration of a formal education, many will make an ultimate decision about the type of position they aspire to hold, as well as the path toward a particular career that they wish to explore. Along the way, they will consider a multitude of options and will treat them with an appropriate amount of consideration. They will find themselves weighing both the costs and benefits of a prospective career, and will spend adequate time reflecting upon such concerns. These concerns include, but are not limited to, the type of work one would like to complete, as well as the priority of factors relating to a particular career. This decision may be relative to opportunities for insurmountable monetary earnings, or even to the satisfaction of internal drives, motivators, and individualized goals for personal development.

The amount of time and effort taken throughout the journey toward receiving an education and advancing a career is immeasurable. The culmination of these moments represents one of the most significant achievements in the life of an individual. It would be devastating for an individual to learn that their time, efforts, skills, and talents are not appreciated to the fullest extent, due to circumstances beyond their control. For a particular group of people who aspire to enter the workforce, experiencing this issue is an inevitable and unfortunate truth. For women in the modern workforce, the issue of gender discrimination is a challenge that they must face, due to the sole fact that they are women.
The issue of gender discrimination is incredibly apparent within the modern workforce, and is an unfortunate side effect of centuries of the misappropriations of gender norms. Although women have unique talents and skills, their monetary earnings for the same positions are significantly smaller as compared to their male counterparts. Beyond the issue of earnings, many do not have access to certain benefits that are adapted to fit their unique needs as women, and ultimately do not experience certain promotions throughout their careers. This unfortunate issue is not attributed to the fact that these individuals are less capable than others, but it exists simply because they are women.

According to the Center for American Progress, certain staggering statistics demonstrate the severity of the issue of gender discrimination in the 21st century. In terms of the leadership gap that women experience, data from 2014 show that “women make up a majority of the U.S. population,” they earn “almost 60 percent of undergraduate degrees, and 60 percent of all master’s degrees,” and they represent “47 percent of the U.S. labor force, and 59 percent of the college-educated, entry-level workforce” (Warner). Although women hold “almost 52 percent of all professional-level jobs, American women lag substantially behind men when it comes to their representation in leadership positions” (Warner). The issue at hand is that although these rates of change demonstrate the incredible efforts taken by women to earn higher education degrees as well as secure professional careers in the modern labor force, “they have not moved up to positions of prominence and power in America at anywhere near the rate that should have followed” (Warner).

Additional factors come into play with specific regard to the gender wage gap, one of which includes race. Activists argue that although American women face discrimination when it comes to their monetary earnings, minority women tend to face more extreme levels of wage
discrepancies. Research has shown that, on average, “American women working full-time, year-round jobs earn roughly 77 cents to every dollar,” while the “typical African-American woman makes only 64 cents for every dollar paid to her white male counterpart. For Hispanic women, this figure is only 55 cents” (Casserly). These shocking statistics demonstrate the importance of increasing awareness and recognition of the issue of gender discrimination in the workplace. This is an issue that extends beyond the construct of gender, but to race as well. Effectively combating this issue will encourage present and future generations of women to seek equal rights and equitable treatment, regardless of gender or race. This will set the pace for encouraging women to fight for what is rightfully deserved.

Individuals who seek to advance the objectives of their respective organizations must recognize that men and women contribute unique skills and talents. These unique skills and talents have the ability to create and accelerate workplace synergy, which serves as a value-added benefit to any organization (“Why Men Earn More”). The concept of workplace synergy may be accelerated through the recognition that the performance, motivation, and overall marginal productivity of women in the workplace may be increased through carefully considered courses of action (Noe). It is important for professional organizations to acknowledge that “the ability to retain and develop top talent and achieve diversity in leadership ranks today is imperative” in terms of putting themselves in better positions in the future (Franzel). Organizations that recognize the unique talents and skills that women possess “have the advantage of increased access to larger talent pools,” and they will succeed by “harnessing the talents and energies of a diverse workforce” (Franzel). Taking steps to effectively increase compensation, benefits, and opportunities provided to women will empower efforts toward the achievement of social, economic, and societal progress.
The issue of gender discrimination against women in the workplace is an unfortunate and apparent concern in modern times. This issue did not recently emerge in the professional workforce, but has been in existence for decades. The United States government has passed legislation in order to combat workplace discrimination faced by women, but the relevance of the issue remains strong since the fight toward equality has been an issue raised throughout many presidential administrations. Because this issue has persevered in workplace culture for many decades, this ignites concerns that the problems associated with the overall issue may have become apparent within other sectors of the workforce. For example, the accounting profession may have fallen victim to these issues, due to the significant role that it plays within the overall business environment. It is important to highlight the possibility of consistent evidence of gender discrimination within the accounting profession, and to further investigate the extent of its existence, the relative impact it has on the overall issue of gender discrimination, and how it can be appropriately combated.
The issues relating to the gender divide in the workforce are often analyzed through a statistical lens, which has allowed a great deal of shocking data to come forward. For example, “women continue to outpace men in educational achievement,” but have ceased when it comes to “making real progress at the top of any industry. This means that when it comes to making the decisions that most affect [the] world, women’s voices are not heard equally” (Sandberg 6). It is a possibility that women outpace men as they have had more to achieve in a shorter time span, since the now antiquated outlook on gender roles suggested that men play the role of primary breadwinners, and that women were expected to take on the role of homemaker.

According to the AICPA, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, gender discrimination is “based upon a perception that women will sacrifice their career aspirations in favor of their family obligations. This stereotype leads to a sex-segregated labor market with women being expected to cut back in favor of family and providing an excuse for differential compensation” (Single and Almer). Although this stereotype may still be apparent, changes in the traditional outlook of gender roles have allowed women to advance their roles as professionals in the workforce, but it is important for the modern workforce to evolve in order to provide more flexibility by allowing women to “fulfill [their] responsibilities at home,” all while granting them the ability to achieve their professional aspirations (Sandberg 18).

Although women have made incredible advances in educational achievements throughout the last century, they still fall far behind in terms of compensation, promotions, and leadership roles in the professional workforce. The concern that further arises from these unfortunate circumstances is that they may have permeated through other industries as well, which poses the
following question – has the issue of gender discrimination pierced through to the accounting profession?

Women in the modern workforce experience a significant number of gender-related issues, and this raises the possibility that certain women in certain professions may be more susceptible to these issues, based on various external factors. It is important to shed light on the accounting profession, as the profession is ever growing, and employs an astronomical amount of women. Because of this, it is reasonable to express concern that this issue has broken through to the accounting profession. It is imperative to study how its impact can be measured and assessed if the issue is, in fact, prevalent. A study of the four largest accounting firms, “known as the ‘Big Four’: Deloitte, Ernst & Young, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and KPMG,” shows that senior women have reported “less overall workplace satisfaction than senior men did” (Cunningham). The discrepancies in the levels of satisfaction were “particularly true concerning promotions and compensations” (Cunningham).

According to the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB), a corporation that oversees the audits of public companies, many shocking statistics highlight certain trends relating to gender discrimination within the profession, which signify that the “representation of women within accounting firm leadership is too low” (Franzel). Although women have “represented about 50 percent of new certified public accountants (CPAs) in the accounting profession for the past 20 years, women account for only 19 percent of partners in CPA firms nationwide” (Franzel). Within accounting firms that employ more than 50 staff members, “women make up only 17 percent of partners,” and this staggering statistic marks “an improvement since 2010, when women accounted for 15 percent of partners at firms of that size” (Franzel).
There seems to be a sufficient quantity of anecdotal evidence in order to suggest that the issue of gender discrimination may have, in fact, pierced through to the accounting profession. Since there is potential evidence and considerable belief that female employees are being discriminated against within accounting firms, there are a number of correlated questions that should be investigated. These questions address the concern that women may be experiencing discrimination within the accounting profession, and seek to provide means in which to effectively combat relevant issues. They allow for three domains of research to be gathered relating to the issue, which include benefits, promotions, and compensation. The following points are suggestions for further research relative to the topic of gender discrimination within accounting firms:

1. Benefits: Do employer-provided benefits appear to be adequate to fit the unique needs of women?

2. Promotions: There has been an increase in the number of women earning CPAs. Has the number of internal employment promotions kept pace with this growth?

3. Compensation: Are the wages paid to women employed by accounting firms comparable to those paid to men?

Researchers who seek to assess the existence of gender discrimination within the accounting profession must collect data relative to the benefits provided to working women. The existence of value-added benefits provided to employees of accounting organizations begs the following question - do employer-provided benefits appear to be adequate to fit the unique needs of women?
Many corporations within the United States value the functions of their Human Resources departments, which are tasked with providing various value-adding deliverables. The deliverables that are provided are intended to not only offer benefits to employees, but to customers and shareholders as well. Although customers and shareholders are not entitled to the same set of benefits as employees, it is important to understand the dynamics of all personnel within an organization. The personnel of an organization fit into components that are all structurally linked, and any impact made on a single component may have the ability to affect another. It is important to recognize that employees are a vital component to the health of an organization, so the existence of certain value-added benefits has the power to influence the behavior and productivity of employees. In other words, it is reasonable to assume that adequate employee benefits may boost individual performance, which may, in turn, increase customer and owner satisfaction and loyalty. This increase plays a vital role in the overall performance of an organization, so it is important for members to understand the inherent value of employee benefits.

According to federal law, organizations are mandated to provide a specific set of benefits to their employees. The issue with the set of benefits provided by employers is that they may only cater to the pool of general employees, and may fail to address the unique needs of women. The inequalities relative to mandated benefits have startling “long-term financial implications … particularly when you factor in women’s propensity to spend an average of 11 or more years than men out of the paid workforce caring for children and/or elderly parents” (Thakor). In this case, certain deliverables that aim to benefit female employees should be effectively designed and implemented.
One of the most common struggles that working women face is the onset of motherhood, as many are tasked with the inherent challenges of handling responsibilities at home, as well as in the workplace. For American women, finding a balance between both responsibilities is especially difficult, considering the fact that, “of all industrial nations, the U.S. is the only one without a paid maternity leave policy” (Sandberg 29). Because these programs are not mandated by federal law, it is essential for firms to design and implement programs that provide aid during the transition between motherhood and returning to work, after the birth of a child. It is crucial for employer-provided benefits to aid women beyond this transition, as their responsibilities in the workplace, as well as at home, represent a long-term commitment. According to the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, “motherhood is associated with a wage penalty and lower future career earnings” (Stevenson). Research has shown that “a lack of paid leave is one reason mothers with infants leave the labor force and therefore earn less later in life,” so it is imperative for firms to enact “policies providing paid sick and family leave” in order to “encourage women to participate in the labor force and therefore bolster their lifelong earnings” (Stevenson). A challenge that is prevalent in the lives of working women is that many organizations do not provide adequate support beyond maternity benefits, and disguise the issue through the term ‘work-life balance’ (Sandberg 29). Firms must recognize that throughout their careers, women should never be faced with the challenge of choosing between work and life, but should flourish in all respects (Sandberg 30).

According to the AICPA, it is imperative for firms to offer programs designed to assist working mothers. According to their research, a gap emerges between men and women in accounting firms, “due to women’s lack of access to informal organizational networks and discrimination based upon a perception that women will sacrifice their career aspirations in favor
of their family obligations. This stereotype leads to a sex-segregated labor market with women being expected to cut back in favor of family” (Single and Almer). This research suggests that this stereotype provides an excuse for the gap to exist between men and women, and that programs should be enacted by firms in order to combat these inequalities.

Organizations must provide benefits that are designed to promote flexibility for working women, as it will allow them to simultaneously fulfill their professional aspirations and their responsibilities at home with relative ease. Several firms address the importance of this issue through many of the programs that are offered toward female employees. One such program has been enacted by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, which allows for planning additions to a family, assistance with parental leave, and adoption financial reimbursement. The firm recognizes that “supporting families improves loyalty and performance,” which are “essential in an environment…where success depends entirely on [its] people” (“Family”). The firm recognizes that “the decision to start a family is often accompanied by concerns about timing, finances, career, health and a long-term commitment to care,” and stresses that it believes that individuals can be successful professionals and parents and its “programs, benefits and supportive culture are designed with that belief in mind” (“Family”). Additionally, Ernst & Young LLP has also “established ongoing ways of helping its people confidently manage the coexistence of work and caregiving,” by providing fully paid parental leave packages, care options, and mentoring networks (“Ernst & Young LLP Marks”). As of 2014, all of the Big 4 audit firms are listed on Working Mother magazine’s list of the top 100 companies to work for, as they “exemplify the best in workplace flexibility – for women and for men” (“2014 Working Mother 100 Best”). These rankings are reflective of the successful efforts that these firms have taken in terms of
recognizing the importance of essential value-adding benefits for women employed within their organizations.

A significant issue that accounting firms may face in the wake of gender discrimination is high turnover rates within their organizations. The increased turnover of female employees may be apparent when employer-provided benefits do not adequately cater to the unique needs of women. High turnover can be a detriment to both employers and employees, as the financial safety of employees may be compromised if they resign from their position, and organizations may face financial strain, as well as lapses in productivity, since the recruiting and hiring process is costly and time-consuming.

In 1993, the AICPA published a survey which “revealed that women hired into public accounting firms were not progressing up the ranks as expected, in part, due to disproportionate turnover,” with “work/family conflict [being] the single most important driver of disproportionate turnover among female professionals” (Single and Almer). It is important for firms to “make the retention of women a priority and to adopt a variety of women’s initiatives,” including the allowance of more flexible schedules, which “result in lower burnout and intended turnover” (Single and Almer). The goal that firms should work toward is to reduce statistics relating to the high turnover of women employed by accounting firms, by extending many applicable benefits to working women.

Organizations must analyze the benefits that are provided to their employees to the value-adding deliverable they offer. Firms must determine if the benefits provided are too standard in nature and fail to address the unique needs of women. In the event that benefits provided are not sufficient in this respect, they must design and implement policies that will correct these discrepancies. In some cases, benefits may be provided that appear to meet the needs of female
accountants but may not be doing so at an adequate level. For researchers who aim to seek relevant knowledge on the matter, it is essential for them to collect data to assess that employer-provided benefits are adequate to fit the unique needs of women.

Promotions

Throughout the career of a working professional, employers will often extend offers to promote those who demonstrate excellent performance in their current position. With respect to promotions, it is imperative for researchers to study the likelihood of women employed in the accounting field receiving promotions, as compared to women within the overall workforce. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, there has been an increase in the number of both men and women earning their CPA licenses, and the number of relevant positions that will be available “is projected to grow 13 percent from 2012 to 2022” (“Accountants and Auditors”). The increase in the number of women earning their accounting licenses in the last few decades poses the following question: Has the number of internal employment promotions kept pace with this growth?

Studies related to the gender pay gap have demonstrated that, “in the past, men had greater levels of both education and experience than women, but these gaps have closed since the 1970s” (Stevenson). Women have made significant educational advancements over the last century, considering the fact that, “while men were more likely to graduate from college in the 1960s and 1970s, since the 1990s, the majority of all undergraduate and graduate degrees have gone to women” (Stevenson). In the past, “women typically left the labor force after marrying or having children,” but “women today are more likely to work throughout their lifetimes” (Stevenson).
Research related to the gender gap suggests that educational advancement of women over the last several decades is “due to women’s relative gains in experience,” as well as in educational achievements (Stevenson). In recent years, “more of the pay gap is unexplained, leaving a greater role for factors beyond differences in education and experience” (Stevenson). Some research suggests that family and work-life issues are to blame, with regards to the gender gap, as women have a greater propensity than men when it comes to caring for family members. This propensity suggests that firms may not be doing enough to offer incentives for working women, as well as opportunities for career progression. Duties external to the organization may be preventing women from earning promotions that they may rightfully deserve, so it is imperative that firms address these issues related to work-life balance. Whether women are proactively offered positions or not, “there is a possibility that firms are not maximizing their investment in these professionals if they do not develop the full set of skills necessary to promote women to the partnership, and a danger that a new “mommy track” is being created” (Single and Almer).

According to the Council of Economic Advisers to the President, studies show that “women get fewer raises and promotions, particularly because they negotiate less” (Stevenson). In the event that women do negotiate, “they are likely to receive less than men or be penalized for violating social norms” (Stevenson). The Council highlights that “other work has also found that women are more likely to be penalized for initiating negotiations. This type of implicit bias leads to gaps that grow over a woman’s lifetime” (Stevenson). In order to combat this apparent issue, organizations should work to foster an environment in which women are encouraged to negotiate for positions that they feel qualified to fill.
An important issue that may shed light on the issue of promotions offered to female workers is the fact that firms fail at retaining women, since many women “leave accounting firms in such high numbers” (Franzel). It is important for companies to address this decline by better addressing “the barriers and problems faced by women in their organizations”, taking stock of “their diversity and human capital practices more generally,” and better understanding “the connection between effective talent management and their specialized ‘gatekeeper’ role in the capital markets” (Franzel). It is imperative that firms recognize that their failure to retain female employees may be attributed to “structural and organizational problems in the firms, often combined with other economic and societal pressures”, which have led to the outcome of “low percentages of women in top leadership positions” (Franzel).

Many accounting firms are making significant efforts with regard to increasing the number of women in leadership roles. “After nearly three decades of working at the world’s largest accounting firm, Cathy Englebert is set to become Deloitte’s chief executive in the United States, making her the first woman to lead any of the country’s big professional services firms” (Cunningham). In recent years, these firms have “intensified their efforts to recruit and retain female employees, and have in some cases even led the way on gender diversity research” (Cunningham). Women still face significant inequalities relative to their respective industries within the accounting profession, as they “have still been slow to move the needle on women’s representation in leadership. More than 60 percent of U. S accountants and auditors are women, yet women comprise only about 18 percent of equity partners at the large firms, according to a 2010 study by Public Accounting Report” (Cunningham). The actions taken by these firms are a strong demonstration of their commitment toward the advancement of women within their organization, and although the number of women in leadership roles at these firms falls below
desirable levels, it is imperative that firms continue to take actions to combat these numbers into the future.

Offering promotions to deserving women in the accounting profession, as well as the overall professional workforce, set a strong precedence for growth. Placing more women in higher leadership roles is essential for the professional advancement of women all around the world, as it allows women to be appropriately recognized for their achievements, and to encourage others to work toward their fullest potential. In order to ensure the advancement of women in the workforce, policies must be researched and implemented in order to provide a more equitable balance in terms of the number of career promotions offered to both men and women.

Compensation

The issue of compensation is significant with respect to gender discrimination in the workforce. The goal to legally mandate equal pay dates back many decades, as the Equal Pay Act was passed under President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The purpose of this legislation was to ensure that men and women are compensated equally and fairly. Under this Act, “if men and women in an organization are doing equal work, the employer must pay them equally. The act defines equal in terms of skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions” (Noe 66). “Over the past century, American women have made tremendous strides in increasing their labor market experience and their skills,” but the United States still faces the troubling fact that “despite women’s gains, a large gender pay gap still exists” (Stevenson). Studies suggest that despite this historic legislation, the gender wage gap is still an important issue that must be effectively resolved. In terms of the compensation of accounting professionals, it is important for
research to identify if wages earned by women are comparable to those paid to their male counterparts, and how to balance these discrepancies if they do exist.

The wage gap extends far beyond the realm of gender, as studies have suggested that minority women are severely impacted by this divide. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, “women earn less than men in (almost) all of the most common occupations for women” and for men as well (Hegewisch). “The gender wage gap differs by race and ethnic background,” as “Hispanic/Latina women have the lowest median earnings,” and the median earnings of black women represent a mere “64 percent of median weekly earnings of white men” (Hegewisch).

A multitude of studies have been conducted whose findings demonstrate that the issue of gender discrimination is an apparent issue within the professional work force. The Council of Economic Advisors to the President highlights that “the median woman working full-time all year earned 78 percent of what the median man working full-time all year earned” (Stevenson). The Institute of Management Accountants, or the IMA, “quantifies the salary gap between men and women in the accounting profession in its annual salary survey” (“The Gender Gap in Accounting”). In 2014, the IMA conducted a global salary survey, and focused its findings on the “median compensation by gender and age range” (Desroches and Lawson 27). The results of the survey highlighted the universality of the issue of wage discrimination based on gender, as data collected for the survey was taken from countries in the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East/Africa (Desroches and Lawson 25). The results of the survey demonstrated that the total compensation for women between the ages of 19 and 29 was 95% of what men earned (Desroches and Lawson 27). This percentage decreased as the age ranges were increased, as it was determined from the study that women who were 50 years or older earned 81% of what their
male counterparts earned in similar positions (Desroches and Lawson 27). The Council of Economic Advisors to the President notes that, “in general, the pay gap grows over workers’ careers,” and that “young people tend to start their careers with more similar levels of earnings and over time the gender gap grows” (Stevenson). Because this survey demonstrates the existence of the gender wage gap for professionals around the globe, it is important for future researchers to assess the relative impact on different components of the modern workforce, including the accounting profession.

The IMA conducted a survey of the U.S. workforce in 2013, which “reported the gap in mean salary and total compensation” (Desroches and Lawson 27). Researchers for this survey concluded that “the results support prior conclusions that, while gender pay gaps appear to exist, the gap is narrower or non-existent for those now entering the management accounting field. It remains to be seen if that will hold up as the younger respondents get older” (Desroches and Lawson 27). Kristine Brands, who is a member of the IMA Global Board of Directors, stated: “the professional opportunities for women accountants are very strong. In my accounting classes, women now outnumber men. It wouldn’t surprise me to see the salary gap close very rapidly in the next three to five years” (“The Gender Gap in Accounting”). Although studies have shown that “female accountants feel gender prevents success,” these studies have also demonstrated that the salary gap within the accounting profession is shrinking (“Female Accountants Feel Gender”). According to Dave Way, managing director of Marks Sattin, and a specialist in financial recruitment, “the accountancy industry must be proud that the gender pay gap is being narrowed, but the fact that women working full-time are still receiving a fifth less than their male peers reminds us all of the vital work that needs to be done to ensure that females operate on a level playing field” (“Female Accountants Feel Gender”).

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Although many studies suggest that the gender wage gap is heavily apparent in the professional workforce, this specific issue is not as evident within the accounting profession. “While the narrowing of the pay divide is an encouraging sign of a more level playing field for women in the accountancy industry,” it is still important for researchers to monitor its existence ("Female Accountants Feel Gender"). Despite the results of the single IMA study, it is imperative that researchers conduct similar surveys in order to achieve similar results. They must assess the variables tested in the IMA study in order to ensure the validity and reliability of its conclusions. Researchers and other relevant organizations should conduct more of these surveys in order to avoid a biased conclusion, as it is imperative to avoid making generalizations about the issue of the gender wage gap without substantial and concrete evidence.

The narrowing of the gap in compensation between men and women marks significant hope for the future of female professionals. It is imperative for researchers to further test some of the factors relating to the relative balance in wages within the accounting profession. In order to effectively combat this issue on a global scale, these factors should be applied within the professional workforce to maintain a desirable balance between wages paid to men and women. Researchers must begin with an analysis of the accounting profession, which employs a significant amount of individuals. As they manage to combat this issue within this profession and maintain a close balance in terms of compensation between the genders, researchers may find ways to apply these methods to better combat these issues in other sectors of the workforce. In doing so, they should then be able to address the discrepancies that exist within the entire global workforce in order to ensure that the issue of the gender pay gap becomes an issue of the past.
Addressing the concerns related to gender discrimination is a vital issue in the modern workforce, as continued efforts to understand the unprecedented value that women bring to society is essential in order to motivate them toward improved performance, as well as increase their financial independence. Beyond the obvious monetary benefit that an increase in wages brings, the financial impact brought about by eliminating the gender wage gap extends beyond a simple increase in a paycheck. Research has shown that the gender pay gap not only plays a role in the earnings that women currently receive, but has the ability to cause a detrimental impact on pensions and other relevant retirement plans as well. In other words, because women are paid less for their efforts, their lower earnings will result in lower contributions toward retirement plans (as compared to their male counterparts), which puts women at higher risk for poverty upon reaching retirement age (“Closing the Gender Pay Gap”). Beyond the issues relevant to pension contributions, it is important to address the issue of gender discrimination related to wages and leadership roles, as closing the wage gap as well as increasing the workplace participation of women has the strong potential to create a significant economic stimulus. Correcting these inequities has the power to grow the economy, since an increase in earnings by women will make them more likely to spend their earnings, as they will experience an increase in their disposable income that may be used to stimulate the economy (Bassett).

The correlated issues pertaining to benefits, promotions, and compensation represent suggestions for further researchers to consider in order to effectively combat gender discrimination within the accounting profession. It is important to shed light on the significance that the issue of gender discrimination has on the accounting profession, since the performance of the profession plays a significant role in the business world. In terms of the leadership gap,
“the lack of gender diversity is a concern throughout corporate America”, but specific attention should be drawn to accounting firms, since “in the exercise of their assurance mission, they fall under the regulatory oversight of the PCAOB, and they play a significant role in the financial markets” (Franzel). It is important to understand the severity of this issue has within the profession, since “firms have been entrusted with the audit function for publicly traded companies and securities broker-dealers,” and they “provide assurance over financial reporting and disclosures to protect investors and promote confidence in our capital markets” (Franzel). Moving forward, it is vital for accounting firms to improve conditions within their firms in order to bring about benefits to the women they employ, the accounting profession, and the business environment as a whole. It is important for “public accounting firms to invest in and focus on the retention and development of its female leaders”, as “research shows that organizations with diverse leadership teams outperform those with homogeneous leadership teams” (Franzel).

Gender discrimination experienced by women in the modern workforce is not something to be overlooked, as the correction of this issue is critical for the advancement of all working women, as well as the modern business environment. With respect to the professional labor force, “pooling from the largest and most diverse set of candidates is increasingly necessary to succeed in the market”, as we live in “an increasingly competitive economy where talent is crucial to improving the bottom line” (Kerby and Burns). The resolution of this issue has the power to bring about insurmountable societal advancements, as “the laws of economics and many studies of diversity tell us that if we tapped the entire pool of human resources and talent, our collective performance would improve” (Sandberg 8). It is essential for people to fully embrace the resolution of this issue, as it will not only provide increased benefits toward women, but also to the economy as a whole.
Women play a vital role within the workforce, as their knowledge, skills, abilities, and unique talents are necessary for both individual and economic development. The main issue at hand regarding gender discrimination is that the vital role that women play is not appropriately reflected in their earnings, in the leadership positions they attain, or the benefits they receive. The lack of praise and value attributed to the output provided by women, as well as the underutilization of their unique talents, represents a wasted resource for themselves, for their employers, and for the business environment as a whole. Putting these talents to appropriate use will allow for greater contributions that can bring unprecedented benefits to women as well as society as a whole. Although the efforts toward closing the gender pay gap are perceived as making “good business sense,” it is important to highlight that the recognition of the value of women’s input will contribute to the formation of a more cohesive and equitable society (Kerby and Burns). Closing the divide between men and women can be achieved by changing the conditions that allow for these inequalities to permeate throughout society. In order to effectively combat this issue, it is important to note that “conditions for all women will improve when there are more women in leadership roles giving strong and powerful voice to their needs and concerns” (Sandberg 9).

The issues relating to gender discrimination in the accounting profession are not only detrimental to women, but to organizations as a whole. In the event that upper management roles are not offered to deserving women, all aspects of decision making within that particular organization will not be properly addressed, as dimensions for expansion and growth will be limited. For individuals who value critical thinking from a 360-degree perspective, excluding possible leaders by means of gender discrimination is nothing short of a crime against logic, as well as a shameful exhibition of human behavior. The presence of discrimination in an
organization may hamper productivity, development, and success of organizational goals, due to
preconceived notions regarding the skills and abilities of both men and women. Discrimination
makes for a hostile working environment, and has the ability to tarnish reputations. It is
important to fight for equality in the workplace in order to ensure that all individuals experience
equal benefits, regardless of gender identification. The resolution of these issues can ensure
increased worker satisfaction, productivity, and a positive working environment. It is imperative
for organizations to set a precedent against gender discrimination, as it has the ability to bring
about positive change. The time has come for business organizations and accounting firms to
offer equal opportunities relating to benefits, promotions, and compensation for both men and
women, as well as for researchers to suggest methods to combat gender discrepancies in order to
bring about positive change to the industry.
Works Cited


"Ernst & Young LLP Marks Ninth Straight Year Among the Top 10 on Working Mother Best Companies list." *EY*. Ernst & Young Global Limited, 16 Sept. 2014. Web. 1 Apr. 2015. 


