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Gender and sex inequalities: Implications and resistance

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ABSTRACT

Despite gains in some regions and countries for justice and equality, people around the world are still constrained by patriarchal hetero orthodoxy and resultant inequality, discrimination, oppression, and violence. For women in the U.S., progress towards equality has been often met with backlash, stalling and/or rolling back any advances. The same is true for the LGBTQ community. In this introduction to the second of three issues focused on social inequalities, we discuss some of the recent trends and research detailing the status of women and LGBTQ, thus providing the context within which the articles contained in this issue are situated. Research presented in the current issue examines many of the inequalities that disrupt or hinder women and LGBTQ in society, and describes potential solutions involving community interventions, policy change, and political advocacy.

KEYWORDS

Gender; GLBTQ; inequalities; women

Introduction

Although the world has seen great strides toward gender/sex equality, a wide gap still remains and unfortunately may be widening. The *World Economic Forum* (WEF, 2017) annually evaluates the world's progress toward gender inequality in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. In their most recent report, gender inequality continues to be a persistent problem, with the gender gap in economic participation/opportunity; and health/survival actually widening rather than getting better. WEF most recently estimated that the overall global gender gap won't be closed for another 100 years (compared to 83 years estimated a year previously), and more specifically, the economic gender gap won't be closed for another 217 years.

Western European countries are estimated to be the closest to reaching gender equality at 61 years, with Iceland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Ireland all ranked within the top 10 closest to gender equality. In North

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America, estimates indicate it may take 168 years to close the overall gender gap, the longest of all the regions analyzed. The United States was ranked 49th overall, slipping four spots from previous years, though was comparatively ranked high for education (1st) and economic opportunity (19th). However, it fell way behind in political empowerment (96th) and health/survival of women (82nd).

Economic participation and opportunity

Women are more likely than men to be living at or below poverty. In the US, 14% of women and 27% of female led households (compared to 11% of men, 13% of male households) reported incomes that were below poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b). These gender disparities in poverty are a direct outcome of gender inequalities in economic participation and opportunity. Across the globe, many women remain economically dependent on men. Women are barred from owning land and their control over household economic resources and spending is limited. Women are more likely to be unemployed and more likely to work in positions in which they don't get paid (e.g. contributing family worker). When they are employed, women are more likely than men to be concentrated in industries and occupations with low wages, long hours, and no social protections (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). Women are less likely than men to hold management positions. Indeed, women hold only 5.2% of CEO positions and 21.2% of board seats in S&P 500 companies (Catalyst, 2018). In regard to wages, women earn between 70 and 90% of what a man earns in most countries (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015).

In the US, women represent 47% of the workforce (DeWolf, 2017) and own 11.6 million businesses (National Association of Women Business Owners, 2018). Women with children (under 18 years) are the primary earners for 40% of households with children (DeWolf, 2017). Since 1996, women's college attainment rates have outpaced men's (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). Yet, in regards to pay, women in general still earn only 82% (median full-time, weekly earnings) compared to White men (Hegewisch & Williams-Baron, 2018). The gender wage gap is further complicated when race/ethnicity is considered; Asian women earn 93%, Hispanic women earn 62% and Black women 68% compared to White men. The Institute for Women's Policy Research has estimated the wage gap in the US in general is likely not to close until 2059; and in some states not until the 22nd Century (Anderson, Milli, & Kruvelis, 2017). For women of color, they will have to wait longer; 2124 for Black women, and 2233 for Hispanic women (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016).

Research has pointed to a number of factors to explain the gap, including the "motherhood penalty" (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Hartmann, et al., 2016), occupational segregation (Hegewisch, Phil, Liepmann, Hayes, & Hartmann, 2010), compensation negotiation (Mazei et al., 2015), entitlement (O'Brien, Major, & Gilbert, 2012), the "glass ceiling" (Catalyst, 2018), the "glass cliff" (Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014), bias or discrimination in job advertisements/hiring (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011), performance evaluations (Koch, D'Mello, & Sackett, 2015), workplace climate/harassment (Hegewisch, Phil, Deitch, & Murphy, 2011), and leadership stereotyping and role congruity (Catalyst, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Although improvements in women's educational attainment, employment experience, and unions were important in closing the gender wage gap in earlier years, industry segregation remains responsible for 50% of the wage gap seen today (Blau & Kahn, 2016).

Education

Part of the explanation as to why industry gender segregation persists is that women remain "underrepresented in *Career and Technical Education* (CTE) programs that are nontraditional for their gender" (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2013). Analyses show women are concentrated in traditionally female and lower paying CTE programs in both secondary and postsecondary educational settings. Further, women are still underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs. Although STEM fields are some of the most in-demand and lucrative, women are less likely than men to pursue a college education in these fields, and even less likely to pursue a graduate degree in STEM (Hill, Corbett, & Rose, 2010). Gender stereotypes and bias in education and the potentially hostile climate of academic departments continue to deter women from these lucrative career opportunities.

Health and survival

Worldwide, access to and use of contraceptives, family planning, reproductive and maternal health is improving. However, poor access to information, early marriage, and lack of decision-making power continue to increase women and girls' exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and the risk of unsafe abortions (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). In the US, teen pregnancy in youth 15–19 years old dropped 47% between 2007 and 2015 to 22.3 births per 1000 (CDC, 2017a). Yet, the US rate is one of the highest among industrialized Nations (Sedgh, Finer, Bankole, Eilers, & Singh, 2015). Further, the teen pregnancy rate for Black and Hispanic teens is twice that of

non-Hispanic White teens, and the rate for American Indian/Alaska Native is one and a half times more than White teens (CDC, 2017a). Rates of STDs among youth similarly reflect these ethnic disparities (CDC, 2017c). Therefore, it is important for sex educators to develop more culturally responsive sexuality education practices (Szlachta & Champion, 2020, this issue).

Women are constantly bombarded with media advertisements that sexualize their bodies, and media images of extremely thin models with impossibly perfect hair and skin. The influence of media, television, movies, etc. has led to increased prevalence of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders globally (Makino, Tsuboi, & Dennerstein, 2004). A major factor in the development of eating disorders is the internalization of the thin Western beauty ideal (Stice, Gau, Rohde, & Shaw, 2017). Research has shown that women and girls who are exposed to thin ideal models in the media are more likely to feel dissatisfied with their own bodies (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). This dissatisfaction can lead to dieting, negative affect, and eating disorder symptomology. Although historically, the thin-ideal was primarily a White cultural phenomenon, women of color are increasingly held to White standards. Recent research with adolescents found that Asian American girls reported the highest levels of body dissatisfaction, and African American girls the least (Bucchianeri et al. 2016). Further, acculturation and the resultant contact with Western beauty ideals, has been shown to shift the beauty standard for immigrant women, resulting in body dissatisfaction (Thomas & Kleyman, 2020, this issue) and eating disorders (Stark-Wrobleski et al., 2005).

Violence toward women, including femicide, intimate partner violence (IPV), rape, and human trafficking, continues to impact women's health worldwide (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). Women across the world experience physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence often leading to long-term physical, mental and emotional health problems. Violence and abuse also make it difficult for women to pursue educational opportunities or to perform their jobs (Riger et al., 2000). Globally, IPV is the most common form of violence (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). Unfortunately, too often IPV ends in death. It is estimated that two-thirds of victims of intimate partner or family homicides are women.

In the US, homicide is one of the leading causes of death for women under the age of 45. Half of all female homicides is due to IPV (CDC, 2017b). In 35% of non-IPV cases, suspects were most often friends, family members, and acquaintances. For too many women, there are too many barriers and too few options of escape from the violence. And when women do seek help, it is often unavailable. After concluding their annual

census, the National Network to End Domestic Violence (2017) reported victims made nearly 12,000 requests for services (in 1 day) for programs that were unable to provide services because they didn't have the resources.

Unfortunately, when women find no way out, they may resort to killing their abusive partners or family members (Leonard, 2002). Those who do are met with an unbending legal system, more suitable for adjudicating men's behavior than women's. Few courts readily take the woman's history of victimization into account "either in establishing culpability or in sentencing" (Doyle, Khanna, & Grimstone, 2016). Many end up serving lengthy prison sentences (Field, Cherukuri, Kimuna, & Berg, 2017). Sichel, Javdani, Gordon, and Huynh (2020, this issue) in their examination of women's violence, argue that it is important to understand the "context of gendered inequality" in order to understand women's use of violence in response to patriarchal oppression.

Political empowerment

Across the globe, women hold a minority of political and institutional decision-making positions. Gender norms and prejudices work to both reduce the number of female candidates (about 30% are women) and contribute to the obstacles faced by women in elections (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). Although the number of women heads of state continues to grow, still only 38% of 146 nations have had a female leader for at least one year (Geiger & Kent, 2017). In 2017, women were heads of state in only 15 countries. Additionally, women were a small percentage of cabinet ministers (18.3% in 2017) and parliamentarians (22.8% in 2016) (United Nations Women, 2017). The judiciary remains primarily male, especially in the higher levels (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015).

In the US, 31% of the population is white and male, yet White men hold 65% of all elected offices (Henderson, 2014b), including 70% of Congressional seats (Bump, 2017). Women are 51% of the population, yet hold only 19% of Congressional seats, and 21% of the Senate (Bump, 2017). It has been estimated that women won't reach political parity in the US until 2121 (Henderson, 2014a).

In the current issue, Grabe and Dutt (2020) describe and analyze a community intervention to decrease the social inequalities in political participation in Nicaragua and show how community interventions can disrupt the traditional beliefs regarding gender, leading to higher levels of agency and political efficacy in women. This liberation psychology perspective can help empower women in facilitating more political participation and decision-making among women.

LGBTQ

Gender inequalites in employment, education, health/survival and political empowerment aren't the only ways in which our society's inability to transcend patriarchal ideologies impacts society. There continues to be persistent and pervasive discrimination against LGBTQ people, including housing discrimination (Friedman, et al., 2013; Johnson, Jackson, Arnette, & Koffman, 2005; Lauster & Easterbrook, 2011), workplace discrimination (Anastas, 2001; Fidas & Cooper, 2015; Kattari, Whitfield, Walls, Langenderfer-Magruder, & Ramos, 2016; Pizer, Sears, Mallory & Hunter, 2012), victimization (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Meyer, 2012), and the curtailment of basic human rights such as marriage and family adoption. This discrimination often results in mental and physical health concerns (Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Mayer et al., 2008) and estrangement from family members (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009),

Research has shown that family acceptance of the LGBTQ individual is related to greater self-esteem and social support, better health, and is important for the prevention of depression, suicide and other self-harm behaviors (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Leal, Gato & Coimbra (2020, in current issue) investigated intergenerational (family) solidarity through the lens of LGBT and gender. Intergenerational solidarity was defined as the "mutual support between different family generations." Although exploratory, some interesting trends found were that LGBT individuals had lower levels of normative and affectual solidarity and higher levels of conflictual solidarity. This suggests that societal stigmas associated with LGBTQ may negatively impact family support and the benefits derived from such support.

The recent battles over gay/lesbian marriage and family adoption have fostered harsh rhetoric and intransigent negative beliefs regarding gay/lesbian families. These beliefs, in turn, may erode LGBTQ families' ability to flourish and function in their communities. Curme et al. (2020, in current issue) suggest that stereotypical beliefs of the traditional family potentially bias adoption placements, thus leading to many children without homes. The authors investigated the effect of five different family structures (e.g. male/female, gay males, single males, etc.) on perceived adoption outcomes. Their results showed that nontraditional family structures were perceived as a lower "fit" for a child, especially when single males were adopting. The effect was more pronounced when social dominance orientation moderated the relationship, suggesting that individual beliefs in society as hierarchy attenuating (opposed to equality enhancing), play a role in enhancing adoption bias. Taken together, the research in this issue suggests that intergenerational solidarity is traditionally normative as far as family structure

and gendered roles, which then supports biased perceptions of how good a fit adoptive parents may be for an adopted child.

It is clear a combination of personal, social, community, organizational, and political change will be needed to address the various ways in which gender discrimination impacts the health and wellness of individuals and communities. The research presented in this special issue of the *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community* on gender inequalities offers a variety of perspectives on some of the current and lingering inequalities that exist for sexual and gendered minorities.

Some of the proposed solutions or proposed directions in the current issue offer insights into the holes in the current literature and potential programs and interventions that may help decrease some of these systematic inequalities. For example, Szlachta and Champion (2020) suggest that enhancing cultural awareness for sexuality educators is an important step in working with students and/or clients, as normalcy differs through different cultural lenses, and suggest developing strategies in building cultural frameworks to avoid the stereotypes and biases. They argue that this is important even for those with advanced levels of intercultural competence. Building on ideas of "normalcy," Thomas and Kleyman (2020) highlight the need for education related to body stigma in all cultures for all genders, especially those with an ever-growing westernized media presence. Further, they suggest designing interventions to reduce body dissatisfaction and increase advocacy efforts that foster changes in media's use of underweight models and image enhancing techniques.

Sichel et al. (2020) call for educating practitioners on the importance of ecological circumstances, and a deeper understanding of violence from a woman's perspective. The authors suggest that interventions with women should focus on an exploration of the social functions of their violent behavior and that practitioners need to attend to the "systemic forces of inequality," and teach women how to become civically engaged and advocate for themselves. This ties nicely to Grabe & Dutt (2020, this issue), who suggest using civic engagement to empower women. In their study, the use of community-based intervention models had a wider impact and brought about more meaningful participation. The authors suggest more longitudinal studies of community-based interventions in civic engagement to investigate the long-term change and impact.

Family was highlighted in the current issue, and in particular, that of nontraditional family structures. Leal et al. (2020) highlight the vulnerability of nontraditional families and disadvantages leading to lower social ties, etc. They suggest that creating community support and educational programs for LGBT families is an important step in enhancing intergenerational solidarity. In the same vain, Curme et al. (2020) highlight a call to

action for greater public consciousness of nontraditional family biases in the adoption system. More specifically, to reduce social inequalities and discrimination in adoption practices to benefit both potential parents and children in the adoption network. In total, the current issue highlights many of the social inequalities that disrupt or hinder women and sexual minorities in the social world and offers some solutions in the form ofinterventions, advocacy, and calls for further studies.

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