

Working in Media Analytics: A Feminist Analysis of Gender Inequality in the Data and Communications Industry

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Abstract

Nearly four out of ten working women in the United States report being discriminated against at work due to their gender. Data and media analytics is a male-dominated sector, with women accounting for less than 17 percent of all employment in data and analytics. It is important to understand gender-based impediments in this field and how women have overcome them. Through the lens of feminist standpoint theory, this study examines qualitative data from five in-depth interviews conducted with women working in the field of data and media analytics. The analysis yielded two primary findings: the usage of derogatory adjectives towards women in the profession, and a heavy focus on the conception of motherhood, thereby restricting women's purpose in life and employment. This study investigates approaches to prevent and combat gender discrimination going forward.

I. Introduction

Women make up more than 50 percent of the American workforce, but female employment in data and analytics professions is disproportionately low, even though many have degrees in these fields (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In conjunction, there is a decrease in the number of women applying for statistical and analytical roles, as corporations have not done enough to ensure they are actively trying to fill executive and managerial positions with qualified females (Samuel, 2020).

When a management position is viewed as more suitable for a man, gender-stereotypical beliefs play an integral part in preventing women from being hired into these leadership positions. Despite efforts to equalize representation, roughly a quarter of male executives polled still believe that women will “never” occupy the desired minimum of 50% of senior management positions in their company[ies] (Wood, 2008).

Gender disparity in this field is pervasive and multifaceted, with variables ranging from pay discrepancies to preconceptions about applied, insight-driven work shaping how women approach data analytics careers. To pursue this line of work then, it is imperative to understand the extent to which these gender-based impediments affect women in media analytics, and perhaps more significantly, how previous women surmounted such disadvantages.

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This paper analyzes the personal accounts of women working in the field to uncover ways in which gender discrimination may be acting on them. The ensuing sections will highlight central elements from the interviews and contrast them with research from related disciplines. The report commences by sharing future advice from interviewees to aid women of similar passions in moving forward with their career endeavors. According to this study's findings, gender discrimination continues to be widespread, yet women are more equipped with the tools they need to reform how corporations operate and to report aggressions when they happen.

II. Literature Review

Scholarship related to gender discrimination is vast. This literature review focuses on variables impacting women's labor-force participation and advancement. Biased procedures that are counterintuitive to equitable and inclusive hiring, as well as polarizing interpretations of gender stereotypes, are identified in the literature as potential causes of gender discrimination in the workplace. The literature also reveals flawed systemic procedures within workplace culture that further prevent women from advancing in their career endeavors. A comparatively narrow body of research examines women's diminished role in data and media analytics professionals specifically.

Adverse effects of gender stereotypes have been substantiated through scientific study addressing many of the same questions. What perpetuates these stereotypes? How do they influence women's career ventures? Findings show that even small differences in gender perception increase the likelihood of chauvinism or inequity when it comes to women filling managerial positions (Wood, 2008). Previous research has found that gender stereotypes create barriers, such as structural misogyny, that are embedded in society's cultural frameworks (Sundstrom, 2019). This seemingly unconscious bias is replicated in larger institutions (Castaño, 2019). Furthermore, although corporate social responsibility initiatives include gender discrimination policies and are widely regarded as critical for company diversification, women continue to appear less suitable for managerial positions dependent on what has been deemed worthy personality attributes within the workplace culture (Castaño, 2019).

A longitudinal study conducted via in-depth interviews found that attitudes of middle managers about female promotion remained pessimistic over an eight-year span. Most respondents said it would take "more than ten years" for female managers to fill 50% of senior management positions (Wood, 2008). The findings additionally revealed that gender stereotypes have a negative impact on women's career advancement, with female talent being undervalued in management and leadership positions. This was consistent with the general perception that despite increased female participation in labor markets, gender stereotyping of management roles persists (Sundstrom, 2019).

Within conversations about the "glass ceiling," motherhood is coined as one of the main causes of economic disparities (Zagorsky, 2017). According to the World Policy Analysis Center, children have a significant impact on women in the United States due to a lack of national laws regarding maternity leave or guaranteed paid parental leave. As a result, childbirth frequently disrupts professional aspirations and comfortable working conditions for women, who often cut their work hours or take time off to care for both mother and child (Lettry, 2017). Many women will choose jobs based on criteria that are favorable to their familial life and increased involvement in the domestic sphere post-childbirth. Depending on the company's maternity leave provisions, 40% of women will not be eligible for the federally mandated 12 weeks of unpaid protected job leave established in the Family Medical Leave Act (Lettry, 2017). Irrespective of whether a woman qualifies, the United States does not provide paid maternity leave, leaving many women vulnerable to job loss and financial insecurity (OECD Development Centre, 2016). Furthermore, final salary is offered in part on the employer's anticipation of a reduction in availability given that women may be pregnant (OECD Development Centre, 2016).

Paternity leave is uncommon, despite being proven to have substantial advantages, including reinforced connection between child and father (Kramer, 2019). For example, researchers discovered that between 1994 and 2015, the average month recorded 273,000 women and only 1,000 men on leave following the birth of a child. Conclusively, the research reveals that while the US economy has grown since 1994, this

does not manifest itself in role versatility among men and women, with women still outnumbering fathers in taking leave of absence (Zagorsky, 2017).

Additional research suggests that gender inequalities in the workplace are closely associated with low job satisfaction, with levels of burnout and stress as relative indicators (Keene, 2005). This type of research connects to feminist theory by addressing the issues of gender inequality and, more specifically, the multifaceted disposition of workers' lives (Dietz, 2003). These issues include employees' dedication to their jobs and subsequent responsibilities, as well as their social and familial obligations (Moreno et al., 2021).

In contrast, feminist standpoint theory, a distinguishable branch of feminist thought, is engaged with assertions that childbirth and family obligations are the underpinnings of patriarchal oppression (Wood, 2005). It is founded on Marxist analysis, which examines free-market capitalism via the juxtaposition between ruling and laboring classes (Schram, 1988). Similarly, feminist standpoint theory investigates how patriarchy exacerbates male and female divisions, perpetuating the myth that women are innately subordinate and thus should be mirrored in societal structures (Dietz, 2003). The Marxist premise that our surroundings and daily activities shape our identities and thinking processes is central to feminist standpoint theory (Schram, 1988). While Marxist analysis is focused on the working class, feminist standpoint theory is rooted in women's lived experiences (Dietz, 2003). The central thesis of feminist standpoint theory is that women's lives are methodically different from men's, resulting in systematic differences in experience and knowledge.

Women's participation in data reporting and analytics careers remains proportionately low, despite this new age of advanced technology. Additionally, compared with other professions, women hold leadership roles in these fields at low rates. As a result, researchers have questioned why dramatic shifts in overall opportunity for women have not yet translated into equivalent growth of, or advancement within, data and analytical occupations for women (Samuel, 2020).

In conclusion, previous research has explored gender discrimination and predetermined gender roles in a wide variety of contexts. Numerous studies have examined communications in relation to gender limitations; few studies have probed gender discrimination in the field of data and media analytics specifically. The current study intends to fill this gap by employing in-depth interviews with women in this sector of work.

Research Question(s)

1. To what extent do gender-based impediments affect women working in data and media analytics?
2. How do women combat these gender-based challenges?

III. Methods

This analysis is based on five in-depth interviews with women working in the field of data and media analytics. Participants were gathered using a snowball sampling method, beginning with referrals from Media Analytics professors in Elon University's School of Communications, then following with referrals from interviewees. This method provides for the evaluation of personal narratives and testimonies related to women's personal career paths, the challenges they've faced or are facing regarding gender bias, and any advice they have for future women entering the sector.

Interviewees were kept anonymous, and a participant index was used. Contributors are referred to as Interviewees 1, 2, and so on to preserve privacy and to encourage candid responses. The speakers are listed sequentially in the index, alongside their corresponding demographic information. To ensure that the rights and protection of human subjects engaging in research efforts were safeguarded, IRB approval was granted by Elon University before interviews began.

Participant Index

Interviewee One: Staff Consultant

Interviewee Two: Data Analyst

Interviewee Three: Campaign Insights Manager

Interviewee Four: Performance Marketing Manager

Interviewee Five: Assistant Professor

The interview guide flowed from general to specific, unaided to aided questions, and included a warm-up to establish rapport. There was additionally a closing section to thank participants for their time, seek to address further concerns and questions, and give them space to discuss anything not covered in the interview. The bulk of the moderator's guide flowed from the general/logistics of their job position, the path they took to obtain their job, discussions concerning discrimination, and advice to those wishing to pursue a similar profession.

A thematic analysis, with additional inspiration from grounded theory, was implemented to interpret the qualitative data for emerging concepts. Grounded theory is used with qualitative data to identify prevailing dynamics in the social domain under investigation (Coyne & Cowley, 2006). More specifically for this study, Chapman, Hadfield, and Chapman's work (2015) typifies the interrelatedness of grounded theory and thematic analysis to generate concepts that emerge from multiple instances of qualitative data. Parts of each interview transcript were assigned to words and phrases (buckets) that most appropriately encapsulated their meaning. Coded data was then combined to refine these initial groupings. Lastly, connections and themes among categories were established, putting the findings together into a logical theoretical structure (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

IV. Findings

Two primary themes emerged from interview transcripts – a critique of harmful labels frequently applied to women, as well as a fixation on motherhood and childbearing. The first, prescribed to women to make them feel inferior or position them as “the other”; the latter effectively limiting women's purpose in life and employment. The section “Looking Toward the Future,” discusses solutions offered by women with expertise in the field to stop or reduce gender discrimination. Because they are founded on personal and lived experiences, these practical implementations are fundamental to this study.

The first question asked of respondents was to define gender discrimination in their own words. While the most straightforward response was “unequal treatment of women based on sex,” others pointed out that gender discrimination occurs in the workplace when individuals in positions of power look at someone and define their traits and abilities through the lens of their gender. This leads to pay disparities and, in many circumstances, heightened scrutiny of work performance. Interviewee Five said that as a black female, her race is most salient to her, followed by gender. In accordance, she noted that when she walks into a room, she is faced with a set of expected attitudes and behaviors on her part, shaping her understanding of gender discrimination to include invalidation and belittlement of her experiences, as well as discounting of what she can bring to the table. “CEO's and executives walk in the room and always think the white man is the one in charge,” she said.

According to participants, those who are impacted by gender discrimination often believe they need to distance themselves from being assertive. “Discrimination itself is more intentional,” said Interviewee Two. “It takes manifestation when women begin to question if they're too emotional or passionate to do A, B, or C.”

All women interviewed expressed that the topic of gender discrimination was important to them. While it was not something they contemplated daily, it commonly presented itself in the form of subtle microaggressions. Even so, none of the participants said they had ever faced gender discrimination in their present jobs. Over half said they had encountered it at their previous job, and just one said she had never directly experienced it but knew people who had.

“Bitch,” “Bossy,” and Everything In Between

The usage of negative adjectives to describe participants was one trend that arose from the interviews. Women indicated that these terms, which were all derogatory in nature, came from both male and female employees, yet that they were most commonly wielded by male coworkers. The terms “bitch” and “bossy” were mentioned several times. While males were the only ones who used the adjective “bitch” (to the participant’s knowledge), both men and women used the phrase “bossy” to describe the interviewees. One respondent voiced her dissatisfaction with the absence of female empowerment in her workplace: “It’s especially crucial for female coworkers to support other female coworkers,” she said. “It hurt a lot to find out that other women I worked with saw me as ‘too much’ rather than just passionate about my work.”

Interviewee One reported that a particular coworker, an older man, would consistently refer to women on her team as “you women,” thereby reducing their identities to solely what he perceived their gender to be. “It always rubbed me the wrong way,” she said. Interviewee Four added, “While most people would describe guys as macho, tough adjectives, women in the industry are frequently referred to as sweet, sweetheart, and gentler words.” This, she pointed out, results in conflict and a perceived power struggle.

Interviewee Three also disclosed that in her prior work, she was frequently chastised for going above and beyond her responsibilities. After missing a staff lunch to attend a private event with the company’s Vice President, she was dubbed a “lost puppy,” implying she was following around upper management to gain “brownie points.”

In conjunction with derogatory language, participants also discussed the differences in treatment in the workplace. “This goes back to the idea of STEM. That this field is primarily technical work or requires higher mathematical abilities; it’s thought of as male-dominated,” Interviewee Five said. “And Black women have to work twice as hard. We have lower expectations and pay - fewer opportunities, really.”

Similarly, Interviewee Two noted that “communication roles are predominantly filled with women. But data and media analysis itself is really different because of the way women are perceived,” she said. “You need to back up everything that you’ve already done. To build trust and respect in the workplace, you really have to prove yourself in a way a male coworker may not.” This was often addressed in relation to presentation and verbal communication. “Women apologize way more for things that are not their fault,” Interviewee Two continued. “They minimize themselves and their intelligence in an attempt to take up less space. This gives the impression that women are not confident in their work.” The balance between friendly and emotional, then, is an ever-present struggle, she concluded.

Manager or Mother? The Belief That All Women Will Have Children

Over half of the women spoken with indicated their dissatisfaction with being asked the clichéd question, “When do you intend on starting a family?” At its core, the emphasis on children and marriage is harmful to women’s sense of purpose in life, according to participants. “There is more to me than the ability to procreate. I bring a lot to the table. I have valuable skills and abilities, as well as crucial insights. I’m not sure why there’s such a focus on my private affairs.”

Interviewee Four specifically remarked that taking time off for maternal needs post-childbirth is often frowned upon; “It’s a hard thing to balance if you’re out of the industry for too long. In general, data and analytics change quickly. Being gone for an extended period - it’s easy to fall behind.” Because of the nature of the work, she added, this occurs frequently in highly technical positions. As previously mentioned by Interviewee Five, media analytics is often believed to be in a similar if not overlapping domain of STEM. It relies on fast-paced data collection and continually improved methods of obtaining and understanding this data. Ironically enough, Interviewee One acknowledged that there is a significant quantity of data on gender discrimination and discrepancy itself, suggesting that these issues are pervasive and existent though unbeknownst to those who might not experience it directly.

This concept that it’s either family or promotion, Interviewee Five added, is a real concern. “We have a lot of men out there that were raised by single mothers. My hope is that maybe this will change some people’s ideas. A push for paternity leave perhaps,” she said. “But we’re asking a lot of our society because we’re breaking traditional roles. There’s this myth about work-life balance. It’s more of an integration. You can work and be a mother, but something will always be out of balance ... there’s a decision point then ... Which

are you going to choose at what moment?"

Looking Toward the Future

When asked how to potentially combat gender discrimination in the field of media analytics, participants offered several suggestions. Primary among them is reporting incidents as they occur. "Don't be afraid to stick up for yourself and others," Interviewee One said. Similarly, Interviewee Four added, "First and foremost, stand up for yourself and surround yourself with those who boost you up. Address what you see. Know your worth for what you're willing to accept and what you're not."

Interviewee Two expressed that there is no clean, step-by-step solution. By formalizing a clear-cut approach, there is the potential to erase or minimize individual experiences. "Identifies are not monolithic," she noted, "Data as a profession is different than healthcare or a stay-at-home mom." Replacing one identity with another can also be problematic. Interviewee Two went on to note that management and often male coworkers seem to assume, "because you're a white woman you must know what it's like for a black woman. Or because you're pretty and meet this beauty standard compared to another, you got this position." However, acknowledgment was the first step in her eyes. "We don't need across the board, checkmark, workshop shit. Take a good look at the industry and the specific company. Awareness in an intentional way you know? Even with the increased pressure for justice, one workshop or post, or share doesn't cut it."

Interviewee Three noted that because data is on the frontier of STEM, there is a perception that it is a male-dominated field, making it increasingly difficult to break into. "This mindset leaves no room for people to see it as a more equitable opportunity and job market," she said. "A lot of work has gone into getting women more involved in STEM. Misconceptions like this only serve to hold us back."

Similarly, Interviewee Five added, "There were always people saying to me 'you can work late because you don't have children,' or 'let Bob be the lead on the pitch because he knows this guy or plays golf with this guy...you're a woman you don't have anything in common with them.'" She also added there is a big push to find out what people get paid now, expressing one time where she was getting compensated less than her male colleague, though they held the same title. "We had the same degree. From the same school. He made more."

As it appears from participants, the biggest thing with any career is to be courageous and confident. "What I mean by courage," said Interviewee Five, "is the silent kind of courage. Ensure that your mere presence is changing things for other people. Call it out when it's not right."

To conclude, Interviewee Five finished with this; "Women in all fields still experience gender discrimination today. We've been fighting this battle for hundreds of years and I just hope that we don't give up on thinking change can happen. There are qualified women that need to be where decisions are made. Leadership positions. Boards of companies. And they're not going to stay if there's a bunch of dudes around treating them badly. I've worked in the industry for 20 years and I believe it's going to take another 20 to eradicate this phenomenon. But it starts with asking tough questions and continuing to do good research."

V. Discussion

The study's findings demonstrate that there are a number of professional obstacles for women working in media analytics, yet they also provide some solutions for navigating beyond them.

One finding consistent with previous literature was the idea that full integration of women into management positions across all firms will take a considerable amount of time. Similar to Wood's 2008 research, where middle managers stated it would take "more than ten years" for female managers to fill 50% of senior management positions, participants in the current study noted that gender stereotypes have a detrimental influence on women's professional progression, with female talent discounted in management and leadership roles.

One of the largest takeaways from interviewees was the idea that motherhood promotes disparate treatment in the workplace. As previous scholarship noted, motherhood is cited as one of the key drivers of

income inequality in discussions regarding the glass ceiling (Zagorsky, 2017). Although the US economy has grown since 1994, this has not translated to gender-role adaptability among men and women, according to interviewee replies. Participants, particularly Interviewee Five, pointed to the growth of single moms and the hope that this will change society's concept of work-life norms.

Diverging slightly from previous literature was participants' job satisfaction level. All of the participants said they expected to stay in this sector of work, with many reporting they wanted to get a master's degree if they didn't already have one and engage in future roles like predictive analytics, syndicated research, or senior strategy. While previous scholars have argued that gender inequalities in the workplace are closely associated with low job satisfaction (Keene, 2005), participants in the current study intend to remain with their present organization and were generally optimistic about their advancement in the company.

VI. Conclusion

This study sought to understand how gender discrimination is manifested in the field of data and media analytics. Gender discrimination is still commonplace, according to the participant responses, and is most commonly seen in the form of microaggressions, which range from derogatory adjectives to the implicit idea that all women will or should choose child-rearing above job advancement. Women who took part in this study specifically attested that they had been deemed "too emotional" and chastised for being "bossy" or worse, "bitchy." While most reported that they did speak up after an incident, others voiced that they were afraid to seem overly sensitive or unable to work with others. Women who took part in the study were also given the opportunity to suggest insightful proposals for the future. According to participants, speaking up against injustices is a crucial first step, followed by asking challenging questions and engaging in open and informed dialogue.

This research had several limitations. One is sample selection. Since this study evaluated only a few women, a larger, more diversified pool of interviewees might provide further insights. Other techniques, such as a survey, could yield industry-wide information about gender discrimination. Future work may also consider focusing on a single area of media analytics, such as positions that only include senior analysts or digital marketing analysts.

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