MEN IN A WOMEN-DOMINATED WORKPLACE: TEN EXPERIMENTS ON GENDER INEQUALITY

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INTRODUCTION

Today, the place of men in a women-dominated workplace is a topical issue. A great number of articles published by various journals and magazines often give the impression of a poor man, surrounded by women, who needs to survive (GERASIMOVA, 2018; MONASTYRETSKAYA, 2020). At the same time, the results of a study conducted by the multinational professional services network Ernst & Young in 2019 showed that only 9% of women wanted to work in a women-dominated workplace and considered it comfortable (FORBES WOMAN, 2019).

According to gender studies, there are distinct differences in the perception of men and women and their role in society (DANILOVA, 2016; KURAPKOVA; POYARCOVA, 2016). It is logical to assume that the same differences exist within a small group, such as a workplace team. In gender-equal groups, a rare representative of the opposite sex is usually given increased attention (KORYAGINA, 2016; LOBUZOVA, 2019), which makes this study especially relevant, since it will illustrate gender stereotypes and interaction differences.

The main problem of the research was the unequal attitude towards men and women caused by gender perceptions. The study was aimed at identifying the features of the interaction between men and women working in a women-dominated team.

METHODS

Two groups of women were the sample groups. One group included the employees of a state social institution located in one of the cities in the Moscow region far from the capital. Another group included employees of a large telecommunications company, who work in an office in the centre of Moscow. Each group consisted of about 30 people.

Inclusive observation and social experiment were chosen as the main methods of collecting information. The choice was not random. Firstly, in the given conditions, it is impossible to use other tools, such as questionnaires, in-depth interviews, etc. Secondly, the above-mentioned groups also included the researchers, which creates favourable conditions for the use of the chosen methods. Thirdly, inclusive observation and social experiment allow revealing the features of interpersonal interaction in small groups, and this is precisely the purpose of this study. Research hypotheses:

1. There are distinct differences in attitudes towards men and women in a women-dominated workplace.
2. There are actions and patterns of behaviour that are either approved or disapproved in a women-dominated workplace, regardless of the gender of the doer.
3. There are actions and patterns of behaviour that are either approved or disapproved in a women-dominated workplace depending on the gender of the doer.
The study was conducted for three months, from February 2020 to April 2020.

Data collection was carried out by M. Golinskiy and A. Pochivalova, who were members of these teams. The first person is a 23-year-old male who, at the moment of the study, had been working in the kitchen as a maintenance worker for a year. He was a full-time worker with a 5-on 2-off work schedule. The second researcher is a 26-year-old female who, at the moment of the study, had been working for a telecommunications company as a senior communications specialist for more than two years. She worked part-time with a flexible schedule. Both researchers were in good, conflict-free relations with their directors and colleagues.

Observation and all experiments were hidden; no information about the details of the work was disclosed to the observed employees. The researchers kept observation diaries during the three months and conducted social experiments regularly, about once a week.

The researchers conducted ten experiments in both teams.

Experiment 1: “New hairstyle” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on the perception of the appearance (hairstyle).

The researcher intentionally changes the hairstyle to a completely different new one and comes to work. The researcher does not discuss the decision to change the hairstyle with colleagues and does not comment on this topic.

Experiment 2: “New clothes” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on the perception of appearance (clothes).

The researcher intentionally changes the usual outfit to a completely different new one and comes to work. The researcher does not discuss the decision to change the outfit with colleagues and does not comment on this topic.

Experiment 3: “Mess” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on the perception of appearance (tidy and clean clothes).

The researcher intentionally comes to work being untidy (wrinkled, dirty clothes, messy hair, etc.) for several days, so that it is noticeable. The researcher does not discuss such behaviour with colleagues and does not comment on this topic.

Experiment 4: “Late for work” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on the attitude towards being late.

The researcher is intentionally late for work (at least 30 minutes), without telling the directors in advance. In the conversation with colleagues and directors, the employee explains this behaviour by a coincidence of circumstances (broken alarm, late train, lost key to the apartment, etc.)

Experiment 5: “Unusual behaviour” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on the perception of unusual behaviour.

The researcher acts in an atypical way.

Experiment 6: “Jokes” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on the perception of a sense of humour.

The researcher tells jokes which are not funny.

Experiment 7: “Mistake” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on women’s perceptions of their gross working errors.

The researcher intentionally commits a gross working error, so that it is noticeable.

Experiment 8: “Stupid Idea” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on women’s perception of questionable, inadequate ideas.

The researcher intentionally suggests the team doing something that the team will not approve of. The researcher actively tries to defend this idea despite the confusion and disagreement.
Experiment 9: “Treats” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on women’s perception of the attempt to establish friendly relations with the team with the help of some kind of treat.

The researcher treats the team with something.

Experiment 10: “Tragedy” is aimed at studying the influence of an employee’s gender on women’s perception of a tragic story.

The researcher tells the team a personal and tragic story.

As a result of the experiments, it was possible to observe specific reactions to the non-standard behaviour of the researchers.

RESULTS
Interestingly, the male researcher received more positive reactions for his atypical behaviour, while the female researcher, on the contrary, received fewer positive reactions: five out of ten and two out of ten respectively. An equal number of experiments received neutral reactions: four out of ten in both cases. The male researcher received only one negative reaction out of ten. Yet, the female researcher received four negative reactions out of ten.

However, the attention of researchers was focused not on the distribution of reaction ratings, but on the types of experiments that caused positive, neutral, and negative assessments and how this is connected with gender. Let us examine the data in Table 1. For the convenience of further analysis, we divided all the experiments into three groups according to a common feature: working process, appearance, and life situations.

| Experiments   | Male | Female |
|---------------|------|--------|
| Working process | “Late for work” | + | / |
|                | “Stupid idea” | - | / |
|                | “Mistake” | + | - |
| Appearance     | “New hairstyle” | / | - |
|                | “New clothes” | / | - |
|                | “Mess” | + | / |
| Life situations | “Treats” | + | - |
|                | “Jokes” | + | / |
|                | “Unusual behaviour” | / | + |
|                | “Tragedy” | / | + |

* + positive, - negative, / neutral

Source: Search data.

The team of the first researcher was indifferent to his being late, mistakes, and untidiness; in general, the team was positive. Also, his colleagues did not pay much attention to the changes in appearance.

Several experiments intentionally made the researchers look bad, but in the case of the first researcher, the negative assessments still were friendly in terms of emotional perception. The researcher did not feel any negativity; he was neither criticized nor reprimanded, but rather scolded “in a family way”.

However, the female researcher during the experiments felt certain negativity from colleagues. The most complicated reaction was received in the experiments where there were changes in appearance. At the same time, it was not the untidy appearance of the researcher that caused a more noticeable reaction, but, on the contrary, an interesting new hairstyle and a well thought out spectacular outfit. No one paid much attention to wrinkled clothes and dirty shoes. It can be assumed that the female team does not miss the bright look of the employee, because it evokes a sense of competition. As for the working moments, they did not greatly offend the colleagues: being late, suggesting a stupid idea at a meeting, and even committing a gross error did not reveal clear positive or negative reactions.

During our experiments, we noticed that the female team perceived many of the man’s mistakes condescendingly, while the woman’s mistakes, on the contrary, were perceived...
worse. However, in the female team, the woman received more negative reactions during the experiments that involved either appearance changes or life orientations. It can be concluded that the appearance and life orientations of another woman evoke a greater response from female representatives (perhaps, in some cases, envy or gloating), but working mistakes and errors went practically unnoticed by the team. As for the man in the female team, the majority of colleagues perceived him as a “son” and “grandson” and showed concern for him in a “maternal” way. Even in situations where mistakes and errors were most noticeable, the team was soft to the researcher and treated him sympathetically.

**Figure 1.** Experiment results

![10 Experiments Diagram](image)

**Source:** Search data.

**CONCLUSION**

The first research hypothesis that there are distinct differences in attitudes towards men and women in a women-dominated workplace was confirmed. However, two other hypotheses were not confirmed. We were unable to identify the experiments in which both researchers would receive equal positive, negative, or neutral reactions.
The authors use empirical research to identify how gender influences the interaction with female colleagues. The article describes the results of ten experiments conducted by two teams of researchers in 2020. The authors conclude that a women-dominated team is more tolerant of men's unusual forms of behaviour and appearance. At the same time, a women-dominated team requires more from another female employee, which emphasizes the relevance of studying gender inequality still existing in many areas.

Keywords: Women-dominated workplace. Gender. Interaction. Inequality.

Los autores utilizan la investigación empírica para identificar cómo el género influye en la interacción con las colegas femeninas. El artículo describe los resultados de diez experimentos realizados por dos equipos de investigadores en 2020. Los autores concluyen que un equipo dominado por mujeres es más tolerante con las formas inusuales de comportamiento y apariencia de los hombres. Al mismo tiempo, un equipo dominado por mujeres requiere más de otra empleada, lo que enfatiza la relevancia de estudiar la desigualdad de género que aún existe en muchas áreas.

Palabras-clave: Lugar de trabajo dominado por mujeres. Género. Interacción. Desigualdad.