Gender Inequality for the Working Women in Japanese Society

Introduction

Gender inequality is a definite worldwide issue. Between men and women exists a clear wall that goes primarily unfocused by a broader community but definitely not unnoticed by women. Since the world has yet to fully advance with such a broad subject, there is no doubt that each country will have its own specific struggles. In the country of Japan, Japanese women have to deal with the issue of gender inequality in the two most important parts of their lives: the workplace and their homelife. Japanese women have struggled with wages, treatment, and expectations in both of these daily environments.

Literature Review

With newer publications, there is a wider perspective the world can see when it comes to the working Japanese woman. This essay will cover the subject of the two most important parts of a Japanese woman’s daily life as stated above through a variety of articles and publications. Each will have its own valuable input to the topic of gender inequality.

The book, *Too Few Women at the Top : The Persistence of Inequality in Japan* written by Kumiko Nemoto serves as a primary source and has insight on the inequality of working women in Japan since its growth over the past years. The fourth chapter,“Women As Cheap Labor: Salaries, Promotions, Ghettos, and the Culture of Women Blaming,” will be focused as it talks about the three things practiced in the workplace that result in unequal pay and opportunity for women.

“Decisions Not to Report Sexual Assault: A Comparative Study Among Women Living in Japan Who Are Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and English-Speaking,” by John P. J. Dussich, provides situations as to why women in the workplace decided to not come forward, thus reasoning that Japanese working women are not just affected by the wage gap in the work environment.

In an article published by The New York Times written by Motoko Rich called “Japan’s Working Mothers: Record Responsibilities, Little Help From Dads,” standards held for a Japanese woman as compared to a Japanese man in terms of domestic duties don’t change depending on whether they choose to work or not.

# Peter Matanle, Kuniko Ishiguro, and Leo McCann have written an article called, “Popular Culture and Workplace Gendering among Varieties of Capitalism: Working Women and their Representation in Japanese Manga” that goes into how manga has represented the Japanese working women within this nineteenth century style.

Slowly but surely there exists an actual progression to gender equality in Japanese society. In fact, in yet another article included in The New York Times by the same author Motoko Rich, Japanese women are beginning to value self worth while the old-fashioned part of society is truthfully still struggling to accept their reality. The article is called, “Craving Freedom, Japan's Women Opt out of Marriage.”

“Cross-Sectional Association Between Employment Status and Self-Rated Health Among Middle-Aged Japanese Women: The Influence of Socioeconomic Conditions and Work-Life Conflict,” is a research project conducted by a study group for the Japan Public Health Center-based Prospective Study for the Next Generation. They concluded that a paradox exists in the working environment for middle-aged Japanese women.

In an article written by Kasi Eswarappa called “Gender Inequalities in the Japanese Workplace and Employment: Theories and Empirical Evidence,” it is concluded that gender equality for the Japanese working women the way they are trying to diminish it actually does not give the desired results in the workplace.

In “Working for the Woman? Female Managers and the Gender Wage Gap,” by Phyllip Cohen and Matt Huffman, they also found a sort of paradox for the workplace for working American women trying to be independent in a setting where they were also oppressed for a long time.

Methodology

The sources that are discussed above are necessary to shed light on the subject of gender inequality in the country of Japan. The following information has been accumulated from each of one of those sources and grasps on only its key points to support the experiences that Japanese women face.

Research Findings

The first environment that will be focused in this essay is the workplace for the Japanese women who live in the country of Japan. The country of Japan just as any other country has its historical background for the oppression of women and certain standards they were held up to before they started to officially work. One might have heard or said before that the men were seen as the hunters while women were the gatherers. Through this specific practice, the long lasting effects of them were definitely existent for Japanese women once laws permitted them to join the workplace.

Beginning with the fourth chapter in Nemoto’s book, “Women As Cheap Labor: Salaries, Promotions, Ghettos, and the Culture of Women Blaming,” Nemoto states that the three things practiced in the workplace that result in unequal pay and opportunity for women are of seniority pay, carrer-tracking, and household benefits that are offered to Japanese working women. The following sections of the essay will give a brief explanation of each contribution.

Nemoto’s research consisted of five different firms that employed male and female workers. She stated clearly that salary differences could be due to different positions. However a promotion won’t take place until about fifteen to twenty years working in the same place which is when a woman will most likely get married and start a family. This prevents the acceptance of such a position because it requires more to maintain it. The slow pace in promotions for a company presents the lack of women in higher positions once they have already been hired for the company but the struggle to even get a position is yet another milestone for Japanese women workers.

They are also at a disadvantage when hired at companies who claim that they do not hire using career-tracking but clearly do, resulting in a woman receiving less than one-fourth of a man’s salary. Career-tracking is when companies hire women but place them in positions that are subcategorized, such as part-time. She discovered Daigo Life Insurance and Shijo Asset Management both practice it when most of the women have higher educational backgrounds then men hired for full-time positions. Essentially, companies get away with cheap labor just to selfishly save money on labor costs at the expense of a woman’s salary.

The last contribution ties in with career-tracking in the sense that if women are being hired for part-time positions, they’re not going to receive the same benefits as males hired for a full time position which is a repeating narrative in the Japanese workplace. Through interviews conducted by Nemoto herself, women would not receive the same benefits because they lived with their parents or had a husband excluding them from crucial benefits such as housing, health insurance, a pension, and allowances for family members as said by Nemoto.

Japanese working women are not just affected by the wage gap in the work environment. They are also subjected to mistreatment in a place that they already do not get correctly paid enough to be in. Nonetheless it is very different getting mistreated in your job by the people that are above you in terms of position, which are mostly men, but it is another problem and unfortunate experience when you face mistreatment from your fellow coworkers. The mistreatment that Japanese woman can face in a working environment can range from more disrespect from coworkers, but even worst, sexual abuse.

Referring back to, “Decisions Not to Report Sexual Assault: A Comparative Study Among Women Living in Japan Who Are Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and English-Speaking,” by John P. J. Dussich, most of the Japenese women had said that they didn’t take it seriously which already says enough about sexual assault being embedded into the Japanese workplace as if it were something not sever enough to report. The rest of the responses made sense given that the Japanese workplace is led mainly by male authority, making it harder for women to report.

In case it has been overlooked or perhaps forgotten, the two main parts of a Japanese woman's daily life are lived in the workplace and at home. The section above explained a lot about what a woman goes through while she is at work. Not only that but it also included an in depth explanation of how it is difficult for them to get out of the never-ending cycle that is the wage gap because of certain workplace practices. The following section will give an overview of the expectations that a Japanese woman faces once she returns to her home.

In the article published by Motoko Rich called “Japan’s Working Mothers: Record Responsibilities, Little Help From Dads,” it states that “...men in Japan do fewer hours of household chores and child care than in any of the world’s wealthiest nations.” Additionally, also included in Richs article is that Japanese mothers work their regular hours a week but contribute to 25 hours of housework as well.

With Japanese women facing dscirminations at work and in their own homes, one would think that it is all there is to gender inequality in the country of Japan. In all actuality, it is not fair to completely reject the little progress that has been recorded. With so many different types of social media and even new literature, gender inequality that has been embedded into Japanese society for so long has the opportunity to dismantle as long as there is a consistency of it. Manga, which are graphic novels pertaining to a distinct style of Japanese comic illustrations and story-telling, have been able to serve as a more positively evolving representation of Japanese working women.

Going back to “Popular Culture and Workplace Gendering among Varieties of Capitalism: Working Women and their Representation in Japanese Manga,” since manga is pop culture, it is safe to say that it appeals to the younger audience, and there is no telling of the long-lasting effects that this representation can have on younger generations. As said in their article, “Popular culture…plays a substantial role in framing, legitimizing and reproducing cultural norms or institutions that are central to the varieties of capitalism and national business systems discourse in comparative political economy.”

With this, these modern pieces of work are beginning to include storylines that serve as critiques to a lot of political and societal issues. The roles that Japanese women have been used to seeing in the media are beginning to see their own narratives in many of the storylines. The most important point to this is that these narratives could potentially result in the normalization of gender equality in media, making it easier for Japanese society to progress in time in that aspect as well.

In the article called, “Craving Freedom, Japan's Women Opt out of Marriage,” it starts with the story of Sanae Hanaoka gathering her family and friends to celebrate her decision to stay independent, a practice not seen before. The article continues to state that Japanese women would get to a certain age and be subjected to slurs that expose them because Japanese men would not want to marry them anymore.

Just like the title intels, regardless of the existance of such slurs, Japanese women are not as worried about marriage and are quite fond of being independent. Just like in mangas, companies are actually beginning to evolve as well and convert into companies that focus on hring single Japanese women. These environments are a change in the lives of many single Japanese women as they are more comfortable to be in as opposed to a male-led company.

Referring once more to Nemoto’s research on the three contributions to the gender wage gap that still exists for Japanese women, she reassured the reality of Japanese women in the workplace. Even though this pertains to the country of Japan specifically, who is to say that it doesn’t apply to gender inequality in the workplace for women in the United States. This section of the essay makes a connection between gender inequality for Japanese and American women with three different articles and each of their paradoxes.

The Japan Public Health Center-based Prospective Study for the Next Generation concluded that a paradox exists in the working environment for middle-aged Japanese women. They can’t get a job because of their age and their health status so they won’t talk about their health problems to get hired. When they do get hired, they are expected to have great work ethic but their work ethic is affected by their health status that they kept quiet about in the first place in order to get the job. This results in their health status affecting their work ethic because a job refused to acknowledge they had one in the first place.

In the second article written by Kasi Eswarappa, “Gender Inequalities in the Japanese Workplace and Employment: Theories and Empirical Evidence,” they concluded that gender equality for the Japanese working women, “intensifies occupational gender segregation between men and women,” making another paradoxical environment for the women of Japan. This shows the never-ending cycle of Japanese women just trying to work and get paid the same for it.

Lastly, in the article “Working for the Woman? Female Managers and the Gender Wage Gap,” by Phyllip Cohen and Matt Huffman, they also found the same paradoxical result where in order for American women in any position to get payed the same, they must first get to an extremely high position in an environment where they prevent women from being promoted at the same rate as male workers.

Ultimately, there is a connection between the country of Japan and the United States in terms of inequality in the workplace and how it creates a repeating cycle that keeps women in general from ever reaching a point of equal pay or frankly equal opportunity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are scholarly communities that have collectively decided to not overlook the issue of gender inequality in Japan. There is a wider community that understands its effects on the Japanese women's daily life at the workplace as well as the household. This new wave of a variety of books and articles pertaining to gender inequality consist of ranging subtopics such as oppression of Japanese women flowing into their place of work to how pop culture has expressed certain narratives that Japanese women could come to appreciate. All in all, there is no denying that gender inequality still exists in Japan, however the progression seen in modern day Japan has proven a steady change that will hopefully stay consistent for the next generations to to practice.

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