

# Discrimination and Hostility Toward Women and Minorities in the IT Work Force

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## INTRODUCTION

There is substantial evidence for a critical shortage of skilled IT workers in the United States (Freeman & Aspray, 1999; ITAA, 2002). From 2000 to 2010, the occupation of computer specialists is projected to grow 69%, and the occupation of computer and information systems managers is projected to grow 48% (Hecker, 2001). Although demand for IT workers dropped in recent years (5% alone in 2001, ITAA, 2002), there is still a lack of *qualified* workers, referred to as the “gap” in IT workers. A large subset of this problem is the under representation of women and minorities in the IT workforce. It is possible that if women and minorities were represented in the IT workforce (ITWF) in proportion with their representation in the general population, the shortage of IT workers in the U.S. could be solved (CAWMSET, 2000; Freeman & Aspray, 1999). Some preliminary work has been done to identify barriers to the entrance and retention of women and underrepresented minorities in the ITWF (CAWMSET, 2000; ITAA, 2000), such as lack of role models and mentors, exclusion from informal networks, stereotyping and discrimination, an inhospitable atmosphere towards women, unequal pay scales and inadequate work/family balance (CAWMSET, 2000; ITAA, 2000; Panteli, Stack, Atkinson, & Ramsay, 1999).

## BACKGROUND

Over the past few decades, there has been increasing recognition of the seriousness of different forms of misogyny and hostility toward women in the workplace (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004). In particular, sexual harassment and its negative effects have received considerable attention (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfland, & Magley, 1997). Until recently, most research on hostility has focused on the direct, active, physical types of hostile behavior that occur in work settings (Neuman & Baron, 1997). More recently, researchers have examined more subtle forms of hostility, such as rude, impolite behavior (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004). Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2004) looked at how working in an organized context perceived as hostile toward women affects employee well-being, even in the absence of personal experience of hostility. Hostility toward women was found to be related to decreased well-being (work satisfaction and withdrawal behaviors) for both female and male employees. Gender discrimination and other forms of discrimination can be categorized into two practices: access and treatment (Levitin, Quinn, & Staines, 1971). Access discrimination emphasizes non-job-related qualifications on individuals, such as gender, race, age, and physical appearance, as limits for recruitment. Treatment discrimination is expressed in salary, job level, and status discrepancies. Treatment discrimination

can affect not only tangible phenomena such as possible assignment, training opportunity, salary increase, promotion, termination, and layoff, but also subtle issues as acceptance in a work group or availability of career-enhancing and psychosocial support from supervisors and others (Ilgen & Youtz, 1986).

Based on data collected between 1988 and 1990, Truman and Baroudi (1994) found that access discrimination toward women does not take place in the ITWF, at least not for women at the highest educational levels (bachelor's and master's degrees). They suggested that access discrimination may be occurring at earlier stages (i.e., during the socialization process when women attitudes about appropriate job roles are formed), during the college admission process, or during the educational process. However, they found some evidence for treatment discrimination: women received lower salaries than men even when job level, age, education, and work experience were considered (Truman & Baroudi, 1994). There is relatively little information on access and treatment discrimination of minorities. Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990) studied the effect of race on organizational experience, job performance evaluation, and career outcomes in a sample of 1628 black and white managers in three organizations. Race was found to have significant effects upon job performance evaluation, career plateauing and career satisfaction. Sanchez and Brock (1996) studied the effects of perceived treatment discrimination in a sample of 139 Hispanic employees. Results showed that a culturally relevant work stressor (i.e., perceived discrimination), contributed to employee outcomes above and beyond other work stressors.

In this article, we focus on unequal treatment, discrimination, and an inhospitable atmosphere towards women and minorities as possible reasons for high turnover of women and minorities in the ITWF.

Turnover is highly related to quality of working life (QWL: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and stress) in the ITWF (Baroudi, 1985; Hoonakker, Carayon, Schoepke, & Marian, 2004; Igbaria & Greenhaus, 1992). Therefore, we also examine the relation between unequal treatment, discrimination and a hostile environment, and QWL.

## MAIN THRUST OF THE ARTICLE

### Method

Two databases were used in the analyses. The *first database* has data of 624 male and female employees in five IT organizations in the U.S.: one large company (N>500), one medium sized company (N=200) and three small companies (N<100). The *second database* contains data of an international organization of female engineers and scientists employed in the IT field. In this second database, we only use data from 163 women employed in the U.S. Twenty-six cases had missing data on either gender and/or ethnicity<sup>1</sup>. See Table 1 for data on gender and ethnicity in the study sample.

We developed our own questionnaire based on existing scales; this questionnaire has been shown valid and reliable (Carayon, Schoepke, Hoonakker, Haims, & Brunette, 2006, in press). Two scales measured discrimination/unequal treatment. The first scale is adapted from Sanchez and Brock (1996) and contains two sets of questions. The first set of questions is aimed at personal experience of unequal treatment or discrimination, for example: "Have *YOU experienced* unequal treatment or discrimination at your current workplace on the basis of age, sex, having a family, being pregnant, etc. ..." (see Table 2 for all sources of discrimination). The second set of questions asks about unequal treatment or discrimination at the workplace: "Do you believe

*Table 1. Total sample by gender and ethnicity*

	Men	Women	Total
Majority (White, not of Hispanic origin)	280 (85%)	361 (83%)	641 (84%)
Minority	48 (15%)	72 (17%)	120 (16%)
Total	328 (100%)	433 (100%)	761 (100%)

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