

04 MAR 2020 RESEARCH & IDEAS

How Schmoozing with the Boss Helps Men Get Promoted

by Dina Gerdeman

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Male employees who bond with their male managers move up the ranks of their companies faster, reinforcing the gender pay gap, according to research by **Zoe B. Cullen**.



The old boys' club is alive and well in the workforce, as male employees regularly schmooze with their male bosses during coffee breaks, after-work drinks, and golf outings. All this socializing gives men a huge career advantage over women, leading to faster promotions and more pay, according to new research.

In fact, social bonding among men may account for more than a third of the gender gap in promotions, according to the working paper *The Old Boys' Club: Schmoozing and the Gender Gap* (pdf).

"I'm not surprised the old boys' club still exists, but I'm disappointed to see what a large impact it has," says Harvard Business School Assistant Professor Zoe B. Cullen, who coauthored the paper with Ricardo Perez-Truglia of the University of California, Anderson.



...its to evaluate salaries by gender. Yet Cullen's research suggests that companies may need to

consider more subtle underlying forces that are holding women back, specifically all the extra time male workers spend hanging out with male managers.

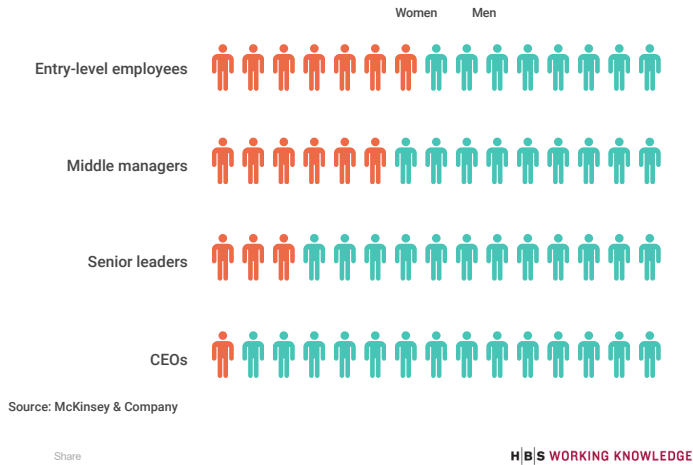
Among the paper’s key points:

Women are stuck at the bottom of the ladder

Despite the public outrage the pay gap has inspired in recent years, women continue to bring home lighter paychecks. In 2018, a women earned 81 cents for every dollar a man earned across all industries, according to December 2019 data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Fewer women are climbing the corporate ladder

Women make up almost half of entry-level roles, but few go on to become senior leaders.



And women continue to lag behind men in their ability to advance to higher ranks within organizations. While 48 percent of entry-level employees in the United States are female, women make up only 38 percent of middle management jobs, 22 percent of C-suite seats, and a grim 5 percent of CEO positions, according to 2019 data from the consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

“The improvement over the last several decades has been agonizingly slow,” Cullen and Perez-Truglia write in the working paper. “Not only is this unfair, it is inefficient; the economy is missing out on women who would make great managers.”

Male employees with male managers earn 13 percent more

In studying job assignments and manager transitions involving 6,536 employees and 751 managers at a large unnamed commercial bank in Asia between 2015 and 2018, Cullen and Perez-Truglia found that male employees advanced further and faster when they reported to male managers.

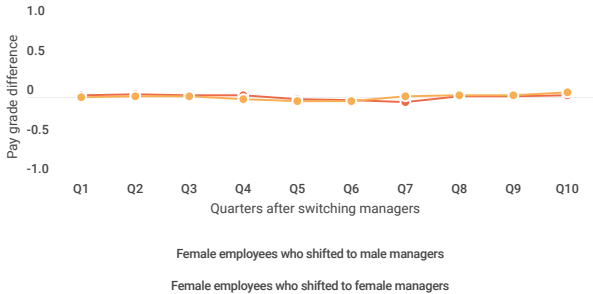


Men's pay rises when they report to male managers

Men who shift from a female boss to a male one receive more promotions, lifting their pay.



Women's pay grades followed the same trajectory regardless of their boss's gender.



Two and a half years after transitioning to a male supervisor, male employees were earning 13 percent more than male employees who had female managers. In contrast, women progressed in their careers the same way regardless of whether they had a male or female manager.

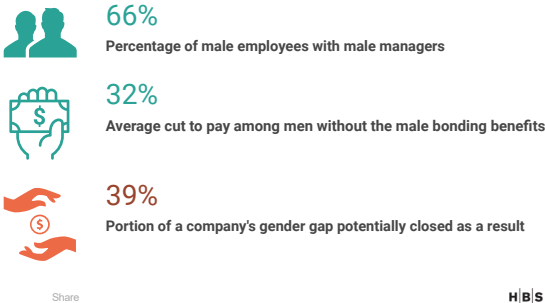
The difference in pay wasn't tied to how hard employees worked either. Male employees with male managers who earned higher pay didn't perform better or work longer hours than those who earned less. The researchers found that higher-paid employees worked a similar number of days and hours, and they brought in similar sales revenue to the organization as everyone else.

Male bonding accounts for 39 percent of the gender pay gap

The social advantage male employees enjoyed with male bosses didn't occur instantly when they were first paired together, which suggests that knee-jerk discrimination and chauvinism are probably not at play, Cullen says.

Tackling male bonding bias can shrink the pay gap

Researchers found that companies could close their gender pay gap by as much as 39% by eliminating the bias that arises amid male bonding. Here's the math:



Instead, the male-to-male advantage developed slowly over time. "Only after the first year do we begin to see a gap in the promotion rates between men and women," the authors write. And that makes sense given the time it takes to build close relationships, Cullen says.

teams. They found that men who switched from a female to male manager were 23 percent more likely to take breaks with their managers and were more familiar with their sports preferences.

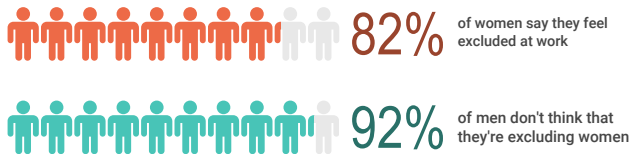
Once male solidarity was established, the lift to a male employee's career was significant. The researchers estimate that male-to-male hobnobbing could account for 39 percent of the gender gap in pay.

Most women feel left out at work

A survey of more than 100,000 men and women at more than 60 Fortune 500 companies found that 82 percent of women feel excluded at work, whether in business social events, casual meetings, conversations, or in getting feedback, according to the authors of the book *Work with Me: The 8 Blind Spots Between Men and Women at Work*. Yet, some 92 percent of men don't believe they're excluding women, the survey found.

The perception gap in gender inclusivity

A survey of 100,000 people at Fortune 500 companies illustrates how women and men view their workplaces so differently.



Source: *Work with Me: The 8 Blind Spots Between Men and Women at Work*

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Clearly women feel they have less access to managers who have the power and influence to make decisions about their career advancement, Cullen says.

And, she says, the male advantage can become a self-perpetuating cycle. If men are more likely to be promoted under male managers, they are also more likely to become managers themselves who pass on the same advantage to their male employees.

How employees and companies can help bridge the gap

So, what should employees do? Make an effort to engage with your manager whenever you can, the researchers say. "If you are shy, you'll have to make an effort," Cullen says. "If you are a woman, you might have to try even harder."

As for companies, the researchers advise organizations to change their promotion practices. In addition to basing promotions on objective data, such as worker productivity, companies could also ask multiple managers—both men and women—to review employees when promotions are up for grabs. Plus, it's more difficult for an employee to schmooze with three supervisors than one, they point out.

Also, when planning events where employees and managers mingle, companies should make a more conscious effort to develop gender-neutral activities that bring more women into the social fold. That would give all workers an equal shot at the informal face time that can impact their careers.

"Just being aware of this issue is step one for both employees and organizations," Cullen says.

About the Author

Dina Gerdeman is a senior writer at Harvard Business School Working Knowledge.

[Image: [mediaphotos](#)]

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COMMENTS

- 


Scott Roney

1 day ago

All the data come from a single bank in Asia. There is no evidence that they translate to the corporate culture in North America (or anywhere else).

Like

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Steph

1 day ago

82% of women say they feel excluded. What % of men say THEY feel excluded? Is it 75%? Is it 85%? Combining that statistic with the 92% (of men don't feel they are excluding women) is a purposeful juxtaposition. Interesting that 8% of men must admit they are excluding. One could infer from the 92% statistic that men are doing a great job of trying to not exclude women!

Like

Reply

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Mickey

1 day ago

The graph of pay when shifting to a male or female manager is interesting. What are the new female managers doing to the men to drive things in a negative direction? Are they poor managers? Do they not work well with their new male employees? Does morale suffer? Do they simply lack the competitive drive which drags the whole team down?

Like

Reply

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Mickey

1 day ago

The "gender pay gap" is a myth. Proven irrefutably over and over. The articles come out every year when the "pay gap day" rolls around. When the lede contains such an obvious falsehood, it makes me want to skip reading the rest.

Like

Reply

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fjrr


2 days ago

I would presume that some of the women's movements will dampen the opportunity for women to schmooze with men. They make it dangerous. Can't just say, let's go grab a bite, play a round of golf, go to the game.

Like

Reply

1 reply

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Steph

1 day ago

You are correct. No one wants to be sued or career derailed, for any reason especially when any accusation puts you on





Anya Shasaad

2 days ago

Yes ... I'm agree whit you apoyo to women's too

Like Reply

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Observer

2 days ago

This doesn't solely apply to men. Although women may earn less on average, this dynamic also occurs with women schmoozing women bosses.

Like Reply

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