Who Gets More of the Pie? Predictors of Perceived Gender Inequity at Work

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ABSTRACT. Gender inequity is prevalent in the workplace. It violates the principle of equal treatment for all employees, and often leads to problems with retention, morale, and performance. Individuals, however, may have different perceptions of gender inequity. In this study, we examined the relationship between individual and organizational level variables and perceived gender inequity for a sample of church workers. Regression analysis was used to test several hypotheses informed by social psychological theories. The results showed that (1) individuals perceived gender inequity in the workplace; (2) organizational level variables had more effect on perceived gender inequity than individual level variables; and (3) compared to men, women perceived greater gender inequity favoring males. Discussion, limitations, and suggestions for future research are provided.

KEY WORDS: church workers, gender differences, gender equity, job segregation, perceived gender inequity, social psychology

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Introduction

A tremendous amount of research has shown, by objective measures, that gender inequity at work exists.[1] Income, authority, and prestige are all distributed unequally between men and women, even if they share the same occupational level (Britton and Williams, 2000). Researchers have proposed a variety of explanations for systematic gender inequity in the workplace, including cultural beliefs, men's actions, employers' actions, and workers' own preferences (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Gender inequity violates the principle of equal treatment that requires individuals with the same entitlement to a benefit be treated alike in terms of access (McEwan, 2001).

In addition to objective measures of gender inequity, individuals may perceive gender inequity within social contexts that often reward people differently on the basis of the social group to which they belong. Perceived gender inequity is the belief that inequity exists in an organization based solely on gender, an ascribed characteristic, rather than on other achieved

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characteristics. Focusing on perceived gender inequity rather than actual gender inequity is worthwhile since perceptions of organizational conditions affect work-related attitudes and behaviors (Sanchez and Brock, 1996). Perceptions of inequity are important as they often lead to problems with retention, morale, and performance (Shah, 1998). Using social psychological theories such as gender socialization, social identity, and social comparison, we hypothesize that individuals will perceive more inequity against women than against men, and that women will perceive significantly more inequity against women than will men.

Gender inequity is regarded as unethical because it violates human dignity and autonomy and often leads to the withdrawal of rights that should be available to all members of society (McEwan, 2001). Workplace inequity between men and women is among the most pernicious and persistent forms of gender discrimination (Reskin, 2000). Perceived gender inequity at work can be viewed as an ethical issue since it is related to fairness in the workplace as well as workers' rights (McEwan, 2001). If individuals perceive gender inequity at work as the outcome of discriminatory practices, then they may take actions to reduce such discrepancies and inequity.

The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) to extend the gender equity research beyond attempts to identify objective evidence of gender inequity, (2) to explore the extent of male-female differences in perceived gender inequity, and (3) to examine the determinants of perceived gender inequity at the individual and organizational levels. Perceived gender inequity is socially constructed to mean that social and contextual variables will impact individuals' perceptions of entitlements to socially distributed outcomes (i.e., outcomes in which another person or social system is involved). In this study, we demonstrate the importance of organizational context, particularly gender composition, job segregation by sex, and gender of the leader, in the determination of perceived gender inequity.

Our sample is comprised of Protestant church workers in Hong Kong. There are some main characteristics of the church structure in Hong Kong. In each church, a council or an executive body comprised of senior members oversees key administrative issues. It also decides on the hiring, terms of employment, and training and development for the church workers. Positions in the councils and executive bodies, however, are dominated by male clergy and male church members. Since different churches have different pay systems, a church worker's referent other for salary and benefits comparisons would be a worker in the same church rather than an employee of a different church. At the council level, comparisons to other churches would be made when adjusting their workers' salary level.

For organizations interested in addressing the issue of gender equity in a comprehensive manner, we offer a framework that helps illustrate why most approaches to gender equity are only partial solutions and do not address the issue in its entirety. When sub-groups of employees, such as males and females within an organization, are found to have differing perceptions of their work life and work outcomes, such differences may highlight other potential problem areas such as discrimination, harassment, or glass ceiling effects that will ultimately emerge, thereby reducing a company's competitive edge (McDaniel et al., 2001).

Literature review

Although women have made great strides in the global labor force, gender inequity still exists in various forms.[2] When the salaries of male and female managers and professionals are compared, females lag behind males in salary and salary progression (Blum et al., 1994; Stroh et al., 1992). Women's rewards and work conditions are usually less favorable than men's (Mueller and Wallace, 1996), and women are also more likely than men to work in dead-end jobs and, as a result, are less likely to be promoted (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Employers tend to reserve powerful positions for men, and women are less likely than men to exercise authority in the workplace (Lyness and Thompson, 1997; Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Even in predominantly female lines of work, such as nursing, the higher the position, the more likely the jobholder is to be

male (Williams, 1992). Women made no progress towards the CEO suite between the years 1987–1996; in fact, the situation in the U.S. actually deteriorated with no evidence of the situation improving anytime soon (Daily et al., 1999). In every country in the world, men outearn women (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Women tend to occupy a disadvantaged position in the labor market in both developed and developing countries (Blau et al., 1998; Ngo, 1997).

Gender inequity is the unequal distribution of opportunities, resources, and rewards on the basis of sex (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Much research has been done to identify gender inequities, the causes of gender inequity, or to explain why gender inequity exists. However, in addition to objective facts regarding gender inequity, there is also a subjective dimension which concerns how an individual interprets, perceives, and values inequity between the two sexes (Ngo, 2001). Each organization has its own unique expression of gender inequity, with its roots of discrimination deeply embedded in its systems, practices, and assumptions (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000). In an organizational context, direct interaction with others results in socially constructed perceptions (Ibarra and Andrews, 1993), and as a result, individuals may perceive gender inequity within their organization in the distribution of limited and valued resources. Social comparison theory has demonstrated the importance of social referents in helping individuals evaluate their pay, job complexity, workplace status (Adams, 1965; Oldham et al., 1986), performance, compensation, career trajectories, and work duties, especially under conditions of uncertainty (Shah, 1998). Organizational characteristics, such as sex segregation, gender discrimination, and group composition, are likely to structure comparison processes by shaping the relative value individuals attach to groups (Wharton, 1992). It is likely that perceptions of gender inequity may be affected by similar organizational characteristics.

Men and women often differ in their perceptions, and these gender differences in perceptions may be innate, a product of socialization or a person's value system, or due to prior experience (Rotundo et al., 2001). Gender socialization

theory proposes that males and females tend to regard their work environments with different attitudes and expectations (Smith and Rogers, 2000). Research on gender differences in perceptions of fairness suggest that for women, the relationship between the fairness of procedures (e.g., promotion, performance appraisal, discipline) and various organizational outcome variables (e.g., commitment, intent to stay) are stronger, and for men, the relationship between the fairness of outcome distributions (e.g., pay raises, promotions, performance ratings) and those same variables are stronger (Sweeney and McFarlin, 1997). It has also been noted that men and women are different in perceptions of entitlements and use different bases for comparisons (Major, 1994; Mueller and Wallace, 1996). Men perceived feminist issues as significantly less important than do women, and women had a broader conception of gender inequity than do men (Izraeli and Tabory, 1986). Gilligan (1982) has suggested that males and females differ on their bases for making ethical decisions, with males more rule-based, and females more care-based. Women perceive more discrimination against women than do men, and both sexes perceive more discrimination against women than against men (Gutek et al., 1996). Our study extends Gutek et al.'s (1996) research to perceived gender inequity, and extends from the business sector to the non-profit sector as a research setting.

Why do men and women perceive things differently? Individuals may be socialized to perceive behaviors differently. For example, men and women may be socialized to perceive different social-sexual behaviors as appropriate or inappropriate (Rotundo et al., 2001). Individuals may be socialized to perceive different organizational rewards as equal or not for males and females, therefore, it is conceivable that the same rewards may be perceived as equally distributed by one gender and as unequal by the other based on how one is socialized. On the other hand, men and women may have different perceptions due to their differential roles and positions in the organization. Their stakes may affect how they perceive gender inequity.
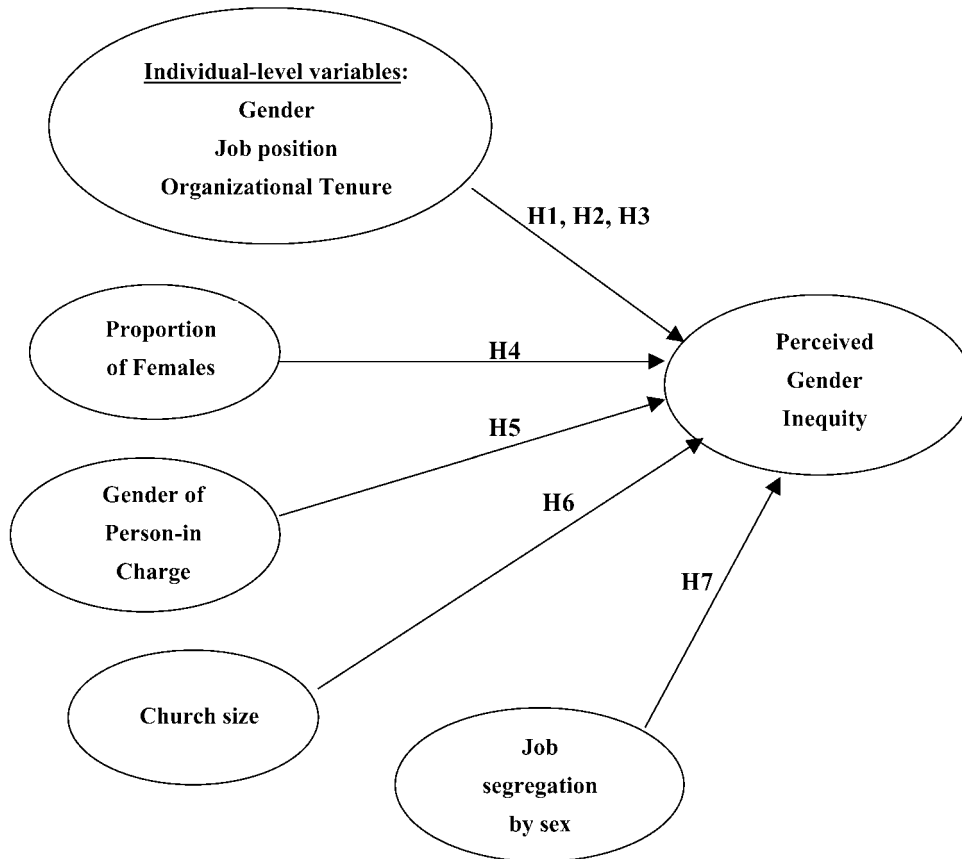
Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model.

Hypotheses

Drawing on theories from social psychology, we propose a model through which to understand perceived gender inequity. In our model, our goal is not to predict whether gender inequity exists in the organization, but rather whether gender inequity is perceived to exist.

Women usually experience worse work conditions (e.g., lower pay, less autonomy, and less authority) than their male counterparts (Crosby, 1982; Mueller and Wallace 1996; Phelan, 1994). As individuals use members of their own and the opposite gender as their reference groups when evaluating the distribution of organizational resources, they tend to perceive inequity that favors males. Research has shown that both men and women perceive more gender discrimination against women than against men, and women perceive more discrimination against women

than do men (Gutek et al., 1996). Since there is a lack of support for the claim that women and men value extrinsic and intrinsic rewards differently (Mueller and Wallace, 1996), rewards will be salient for both women and men. When men perceive an implicit status threat in the equal rewarding of comparatively skilled men and women, they will exhibit gender-interested behaviors (Ridgeway, 1997). Men's gender-interested behaviors are subtle modifications of behavior and judgments to preserve their interest as men even when they may feel no special loyalty to their sex. Men are less likely to notice, and more likely to discount if they do notice, information about self or other that might diminish or eliminate the effects of gender status beliefs on expectations for competence and rewards (Ridgeway, 1997). Since the workplace environment for men is "male friendly" (Tharenou, 2002), and masculinity confers

advantages within the workplace, men may face a particular imperative to preserve their identity (Lupton, 2000). We predict that although men will perceive gender inequity favoring men, they will perceive significantly less than women perceive, thus preserving their gender status.

> *Hypothesis 1.* Both males and females will perceive gender inequity favoring males. However, compared to males, females will perceive significantly higher gender inequity favoring males.

When individuals occupy a high position in the organization, they will be less likely to perceive gender inequity. For example, women who reported severe and persistent discrimination are those most likely to have fallen off the corporate ladder or those who never made it beyond the lowest rungs, thus they are less likely to be found in the upper levels of organizations (Alessio and Andrzejewski, 2000). A structural model of organizational behavior also suggests that position in the organizational hierarchy impacts on individuals' behavior and perceptions at work (Kanter, 1977). The structural model would interpret women's lack of upward mobility as a consequence of work structures and organizational practices, such as the distribution of power, rewards, and opportunities that are biased against women (Aguinis and Adams, 1998). As such, workers at the lower level may attribute their disadvantages at work to those structural factors, and also perceive more gender inequity. On the other hand, the dominant group in an organization often looks for ways to maintain its advantage (Reskin, 2000), and based on one's self-interest in the process, perceived gender inequity will be negatively related to one's position in the hierarchy.

> *Hypothesis 2.* Employees occupying a low job position will perceive higher gender inequity than those occupying a higher job position.

Employees who have been in an organization for a long period of time have observed promotions, training opportunities, etc., and have data on which to base their perceptions. Employees with short tenure have little or no data so they may be less likely to perceive inequity in their organization than those with longer tenure. Additionally, occupational socialization theory posits that employees are socialized within the work environment through training, organizational culture, and workplace rewards (Smith and Rogers, 2000), thus those with a longer tenure have been fully socialized and may be more sensitive to gender inequity issues in their workplace.

> *Hypothesis 3.* Employees with a long organizational tenure will perceive higher gender inequity than those with a shorter tenure.

The sex composition of managers affects the extent of gender inequity in organizations. The proportion of women in management positions at all organizational levels is positively related to the proportion of women in non-management positions, number of annual management vacancies, industry type (non-manufacturing rather than manufacturing), and emphasis on training, development, and promotion from within the organization, and negatively related to the average management salary (Blum et al., 1994; Cohen et al., 1998). Women lawyers working as associates in law firms in which there were higher proportions of women who were partners ("sex-integrated" firms) regarded feminine attributes as a source of strength and competence (Ely, 1995). In sex-balanced groups, sex-based differences are less salient (Kanter, 1977). Gutek and Morasch (1982) have argued that in work environments dominated by men or by women, sex differences become salient. The proportional representation of women affects women's gender identity at work in that sex roles were more stereotypical and more problematic (Ely, 1995). Respondents who are employed in organizations with a lower or higher percentage of women will perceive greater gender inequity than those who are employed in organizations with equal proportion of the two sexes.

> *Hypothesis 4.* The relationship between proportion of females and perceived gender inequity will be a non-linear (i.e., U-

shaped) one. Specifically, the more extreme the proportion of female employees in an organization (e.g., very low or very high), the higher will be the employees' perceived gender inequity.

Women are less likely to be promoted to (or hired into) positions where they are not already present (Cohen et al., 1998). This may be due in part to the notion of homosocial reproduction, a process in which managers select workers for jobs based on their social similarity to managers (Kanter, 1977). Women in senior positions in organizations may positively influence organizational culture for women and make it more attractive for women to remain (Elvira and Cohen, 2001). Pazy (1986) conducted a study in Israel in which the gender of the promotion candidate and relevance of prior jobs were varied. She found that respondents who had worked in the past under a female manager showed a pro-female bias in choosing among candidates with relevant career experience. Tharenou (2002) found that when women employees in an organization do not work with women managers, the women employees likely expect that they will not advance as much as men, and may change organizations in order to advance. In terms of evaluating performance, both male and female supervisors exhibit a positive bias toward subordinates of the same gender and rate members of the same gender higher, even after controlling for actual performance (Varma and Stroh, 2001). Extending this logic, women may perceive more gender inequity if their supervisor is a man rather than a woman.

> *Hypothesis 5.* The gender of the person in-charge will affect perceived gender inequity such that women employees will perceive greater gender inequity when the person in-charge of the organization is male.

Social comparisons play an important role in determining how individuals judge their attributes, abilities, and outcomes (Major, 1994). Employees of smaller organizations deal with smaller numbers of individuals, systems, and processes, thus allowing a participant to learn a great deal about the other organizational members in a short period of time (Schminke, 2001). Thus, perceived gender inequity may be higher in smaller organizations. In larger organizations, specific knowledge of all other organizational members' behavior is not possible (Schminke, 2001). The human resource practices of large firms are more formal, more bureaucratic and more resource-intensive than the practices of smaller organizations (Barber et al., 1999). Therefore, we predict that individuals in large, bureaucratic organizations will perceive less gender inequity than those in smaller organizations.

> *Hypothesis 6.* Organizational size will affect employees' perceived gender inequity. Specifically, the smaller the organization, the higher will be the employees' perceived gender inequity and vice versa.

Sex segregation in the workplace refers to the concentration of men and women in different occupations, jobs, and places of work (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). It is one of the most visible signs of social inequity (Bielby and Baron, 1984). Sex segregation fosters the tendency to devalue women and their work, and is a key factor in differential compensation for men and women (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Gender differences will be most likely when the context is one in which men and women have traditionally assumed different roles and in which the organizational structure is based on a premise of different activities for women and men (Deaux and Major, 2000). When women are segregated into certain jobs, those jobs usually pay less, have fewer opportunities for advancement, less job autonomy, and authority. Because of sex segregation, men and women have less interaction at work, and hence they tend to perpetuate their sex-role stereotyping. Individuals are more likely to perceive gender inequity when they are working in a sex-segregated environment.

> *Hypothesis 7.* Job segregation by sex will be positively associated with perceived gender inequity. Specifically, the higher the degree of job segregation, the higher the employees' perceived gender inequity.

Methodology

Sample and data

The data come from a survey of Protestant church workers conducted in Hong Kong during the summer of 2001. The target respondents were 2600 pastors and preachers who worked for local churches. A Christian association provided the name list and mailing address of these church workers. We chose a sample of church workers because gender inequity at work has long been an issue of concern among local church workers. A self-administered questionnaire in Chinese was mailed to each potential respondent, together with a cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey and invited them to participate in this study on a voluntary basis. All respondents were assured of confidentiality and were asked to return their completed questionnaire to a research center affiliated with a local university. A follow-up call was made three to four weeks after the initial mailing to remind the respondents to complete the questionnaire. A total of 877 surveys were finally returned, representing a response rate of 33.7%.

Since the present study involves gender comparisons, we excluded 163 respondents who do not have a coworker of opposite sex in their workplace because they may not provide an accurate description of gender differences at work. Our analysis is thus restricted to 714 respondents. Among them, 50.8% were males and 49.2% were females. Their average organizational tenure was 5.52 years. As regards their job positions, 23.7% reported that they were in charge of the church and the remaining were junior pastors and preachers.

Measures

We developed six items to measure *perceived gender inequity*, the dependent variable in this study. The items cover the following aspects of employment: pay and allowance, fringe benefits, promotion opportunity, training and development opportunity, job autonomy, and authority exercised. We selected these items based on our literature review and prior interviews with several church workers regarding their terms and conditions of employment. Respondents used a five-point Likert-typed scale to respond to the items. We assigned a score of 2 to the response "males are much better than females", a score of 1 to the response "males are better than females", a score of 0 to the response "males and females are the same", a score of −1 to the response "females are better than males", and a score of −2 to the response "females are much better than males." A scale was then constructed by taking the average of the scores for these six items. A positive value of the scale implied bias favoring males and a negative value implied bias favoring females. If the respondents perceived little gender inequity, then the value would be close to 0. The alpha reliability for this scale was 0.736, which is acceptable for a new scale. Table I contains the distribution of responses in these six items by sex. Men and women are significantly different in their responses as shown by contingency coefficients and the associated significance test.

A number of independent variables were included in this study, three of which were measured at the individual level. First, *gender* was measured by asking the respondents to indicate whether they are male or female. Second, *job position* is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is the person who is in charge of the church. Third, *organizational tenure* is the respondents' total number of years working in the church. We also included several organizational-level predictors. *Gender of in-charge* is a dummy variable indicating whether the person in charge of the church is a male or a female. *Proportion of females* was calculated as the number of female workers divided by the total number of workers in the church. *Organizational size* was measured as the total number of church workers in the church. Lastly, *job segregation by sex* measured the degree of sexual division of labor in the church. Respondents were asked about who was responsible for nine major tasks in their church, including preaching, teaching, conducting seminars, conducting rites and ceremonies, visiting, administrative work, and providing services for women, youth, and

TABLE I
Perceptions of gender inequity in various aspects by gender

Aspect of gender inequity		Males much better than females (%)	Males better than females (%)	Same for the two sexes (%)	Females better than males (%)	Females much better than males (%)	Contingency coefficient
Salary and allowance	Males:	1 (0.3)	22 (6.2)	327 (92.1)	2 (0.6)	3 (0.8)	0.14**
	Females:	7 (2.1)	39 (11.6)	290 (86.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.3)	
Fringe benefits	Males:	1 (0.3)	9 (2.5)	342 (95.8)	4 (1.1)	1 (0.3)	0.15**
	Females:	4 (1.2)	28 (8.2)	308 (90.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.3)	
Promotion opportunity	Males:	8 (2.2)	107 (30.0)	240 (67.2)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)	0.15**
	Females:	27 (8.0)	116 (34.3)	194 (57.4)	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	
Training and development opportunity	Males:	3 (0.8)	9 (2.5)	342 (95.8)	2 (0.6)	1 (0.3)	0.15**
	Females:	5 (1.5)	31 (9.0)	307 (89.2)	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	
Job autonomy	Males:	5 (1.4)	42 (11.8)	302 (84.6)	7 (2.0)	1 (0.3)	0.17**
	Females:	8 (2.3)	67 (19.6)	243 (71.1)	20 (5.8)	4 (1.2)	
Authority exercised	Males:	14 (3.9)	84 (23.6)	254 (71.3)	3 (0.8)	1 (0.3)	0.15**
	Females:	21 (6.2)	120 (35.3)	194 (57.1)	5 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	

** $p < 0.01$; N ranges from 692 to 701.

children. Five possible responses were provided. A score of 2 was assigned to the responses "predominantly by males" and "predominantly by females", a score of 1 was assigned to the responses "largely by males" and "largely by females", and a score of 0 was assigned to the response "equally shared by males and females". An index was then constructed by taking the average of the scores for these nine items. A high value of the index implies a great degree of job segregation by sex and vise versa.

Statistical procedure

First of all, we used *t*-test to analyze the significance of difference between the two sexes regarding perceived gender inequity. Second, regression analysis was used to determine the major factors that affect perceived gender inequity and job segregation by sex. Since there were two different sets of independent variables, we conducted stepwise multiple regression analysis to show their unique contributions in predicting perceived gender inequity. In the first step, all individual-level variables were entered as a group into the regression model. In the second step, organizational-level variables were added to the model. Since we expect a non-linear effect of proportion of females, a square term of that variable was also included. The additional effect of the organizational-level variables can be demonstrated by the change in *R*-square. The effect of each independent variable can be evaluated by its coefficient in the regression models.

Results

Table II presents the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among the study variables, and Table III shows the results of regression analysis on perceived gender inequity. The mean value of perceived gender inequity is 0.19, suggesting that respondents perceived gender inequity favoring males. A *t*-test further reveals that males and females were different in their perceptions of gender inequity (t =

−4.48; $p < 0.001$). Compared to males, females perceived greater gender inequity favoring males. This provides initial support for Hypothesis 1.

We then turn to the results of regression analysis. First of all, we found a significant positive effect of gender. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, females perceived greater gender inequity than males. Our statistical results, however, did not lend support to Hypothesis 2 that predicted employees occupying a low job position would perceive higher gender inequity than those occupying a higher job position. Hypothesis 3 states that employees with a shorter organizational tenure will perceive higher gender inequity than those with a longer tenure. This hypothesis was also not supported as no significant relationship was found between organizational tenure and perceived gender inequity. In Hypothesis 4, we predicted that the relationship between proportion of females and perceived gender inequity would be a non-linear one (i.e., U-shaped relationship). This prediction was supported with a significant coefficient of proportion of females and its square term. In other words, respondents who were employed in organizations with a lower or higher percentage of women perceived greater gender inequity than those who were employed in organizations with equal proportion of the two sexes. Consistent with Hypothesis 5, respondents reported a higher level of perceived gender inequity when the person in-charge was male. Hypothesis 6, predicting that organizational size will affect respondents' perceived gender inequity, was not supported. Although we found that in smaller organizations employees perceived more gender inequity, the negative coefficient of organizational size was not statistically significant. Lastly, our results support Hypothesis 7 that predicted job segregation by sex was positively associated with perceived gender inequity. Specifically, we found that the higher the degree of job segregation, the greater the respondents' perceived gender inequity.

TABLE II
Means, standard deviations and inter-correlations of variables

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender (female = 1)	0.49	0.50	1.00							
2. Job position (in-charge = 1)	0.24	0.43	-0.37**	1.00						
3. Organizational tenure	5.52	5.04	-0.12**	0.30**	1.00					
4. Gender of in-charge (female = 1)	0.12	0.33	-0.08*	0.05	0.02	1.00				
5. Proportion of females	49.67	12.70	0.15**	-0.02	-0.01	0.08*	1.00			
6. Organizational size	5.58	11.59	0.05	-0.11**	-0.01	-0.03	0.06	1.00		
7. Job segregation by sex	0.77	0.31	0.02	-0.04	-0.10**	-0.24**	0.05	-0.06	1.00	
8. Perceived gender inequity	0.19	0.32	0.17**	-0.09*	-0.05	-0.23**	0.06	-0.14**	0.38**	1.00

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. All two-tailed test.
N ranges from 652 to 714

TABLE III
Regression analysis on perceived gender inequity

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2
Individual-level		
Gender (female = 1)	0.17**	0.18**
Job position (in-charge = 1)	−0.04	−0.03
Organizational tenure	−0.03	0.01
Organizational-level		
Proportion of females		0.49*
Square term of proportion of females		−0.46*
Gender of in-charge (female = 1)		−0.18**
Organizational size		−0.06
Job segregation by sex		0.30**
Adjusted R^2	0.03	0.18
F-statistic	8.02**	18.76**
ΔR^2		0.16
F-statistic		24.33**
N	641	641

Notes: Standardized regression coefficients are reported.
* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

While previous gender equity studies have examined outcome differences (such as pay and promotion opportunity) for men and women (e.g., Blum et al., 1994; Stroh et al., 1992), this study examined the perceptions of gender inequity. By studying how individuals construct and interpret the reality of gender inequity, we make several unique contributions to the literature. First, our results support the assertion that individuals commonly perceive gender inequity in the workplace. A second main finding was that individual-level variables as a group have less effect on perceived gender inequity than organization level variables. Individual level variables together explained only 3% of the variance, with gender (but not job position and organizational tenure) having a significant effect in the predicted direction. All the organization-level variables except organizational size had stronger effects on

perceived gender inequity and explained an additional 16% of the variance. We found that men and women have very different perceptions of the existence of gender inequity in the workplace, supporting prior research that found that men and women often differ in the perceptions (Gilligan, 1982; Gutek et al., 1996; Rotundo et al., 2001). Lastly, our findings extend the research on perceived gender inequity from the business sector to the non-profit sector, and extend the literature beyond the U.S. to Asia.

Implications for theory and practice

Our study lends support to Deaux and Major's (2000) suggestion that a social-psychological perspective emphasizes the varying forces that influence women and men. The actions and perceptions of individual women and men cannot be understood without reference to social context (Deaux and Major, 2000), therefore, theories of social psychology provide a useful framework for exploring gender equity issues.

The research presented here is practical for senior management in that it provides insight into employees' perceptions of gender inequity. Organizations need to regularly monitor and assess perceptions of gender inequity held by those employees who increase the diversity of the workplace along with those in the majority. Since our survey asked the respondents to comment on the situation in their workplace, these reactions highlight the need for management to convey information about policies and procedures addressing gender inequity. For example, managers should clarify for women as well as men the experience and skills needed to be eligible for promotion, the opportunities for training and developing, and how to go about applying for such training. It is the responsibility of management to provide a discrimination-free work environment for the employees.

Heterogeneous groups need to be studied from the viewpoint of the majority as well as the minority, and researchers should devote more attention to the experiences of the dominant group rather than restrict their research to how minorities fit the dominant culture (Tsui et al.,

1992). The men in our study perceived gender inequity for women, but significantly less than women perceived. A theory that purports to explain unequal outcomes without examining the dominant group's stake in maintaining them is incomplete (Reskin, 2000). The beneficiaries of hierarchical reward systems yield their privileges only when failing to yield is more costly than yielding, therefore, increasing the costs men pay to maintain the status quo or rewarding men for dividing resources more equitable may reduce their resistance (Reskin, 2000).

Overall, the female respondents in this study perceived greater gender inequity than did the male respondents. When women suspect that the person who is evaluating their work is biased against them, they may believe that they will receive negative feedback, and, as a result, they might withdraw effort from the task and ultimately perform worse (Ruggiero et al., 2000). As pointed out by Gutek et al. (1996), women's perception of discrimination may make them feel powerless, create work conflict, and make them question whether they entered the right career in the first place. Women who perceive gender inequity may feel similarly, therefore, perceptions of inequity need to be addressed by management.

The high rates of turnover among talented women many organizations are facing today (Morrison et al., 1987) may, in part, be an outcome of perceived gender inequity. Organizational support of gender equity can be demonstrated by having women in non-stereotyped positions, in decision-making and supervisory positions, and earning pay comparable to men (Bell and McLaughlin, 2002). New regulations and better enforcement of existing ones are essential to reducing inequalities in work processes and outcomes, as are policies that will improve the overall quality of work (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). This research suggests that decreasing sex segregation of jobs may help organizations to decrease perceptions of gender inequity.

Limitations and directions for future research

Although the present results are significant both theoretically and empirically, there are some methodological limitations. First, the potential for social desirability bias influencing responses was present because of the sensitive nature of the questions. This limitation was addressed in part by the guaranteed confidentiality of responses. Second, all of the variables were assessed by self-report measures, raising the possibility of common methods bias. Third, the study was cross-sectional and did not capture trends within organizations, yet causal relationships were inferred. One must be sure to note that causal inferences made from cross-sectional designs are never more than inferences (Moorman, 1991).

Our theoretical framework helps us to understand how individuals react to outcomes that they and others receive, however, an issue concerns whether and to what extent the theoretical framework developed here generalizes across different types of professions. We believe that our results generalize to other helping professions (e.g., social workers) as well as other workers in the non-profit sector because they face similar work conditions and practices as church workers. Future research is needed to cross-validate the current model, using other professional employees as well as different nationalities and denominations. Research is also needed that compares employees' perceptions of gender inequity with objective measures of gender inequity.

The finding that the gender difference in perceived gender inequity was larger for women than men calls for further research to determine the origin of this difference. Although our study examined a number of predictors of perceived gender inequity, there may be moderators of the gender difference or there may be other factors that explain additional variance. Another avenue for future research would be to explore the circumstances under which high-level women affect organizational atmosphere (Elvira and Cohen, 2001), and thus lower perceptions of gender inequity among employees.

In conclusion, this study provides initial evidence of the existence of perceived gender inequity. As part of the large body of research on gender inequity, this study broadens our understanding of the influence of perceptions by providing a theoretical framework grounded in social psychology theories. Further research in

this area, particularly from an ethical point of view, is recommended to increase our understanding of the implications of perceptions of gender inequity in the workplace.

Notes

[1] We will use the term "gender" rather than "sex" in our paper. Gender refers in general to the psychological and social ramifications of being biologically male or female, whereas sex refers to a biological property of individuals (Powell, 1999).

[2] Most of the literature that we cite in our paper pertains to workers in the U.S., with a few notable exceptions: Izraeli and Tabory (1986) – Israel; Lupton (2000) – England; Ngo (1997) – Asian countries; Ngo (2001) – Hong Kong; Pazy (1986) – Israel; and Tharenou (2002) – Australia.

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