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Perceptions of Gender Differences in the Real Estate Profession

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Not only can we learn how women have changed the shape of a formerly male-dominated profession, we can also learn more about gender characteristics within the workplace, and the potential for women and leadership within other occupations.

ABSTRACT

Until the mid-1960s most real estate agents selling residential real estate were male. Over the next decade, increasing numbers of women entered the profession, and by 1980, female real estate agents outnumbered male real estate agents. In this paper, I explore some reasons for this increase by comparing female and male residential real estate agents, motivations for becoming real estate agents, their satisfaction with the profession, and differences in the amount of hours worked.

The results show that the use of time and the amount of hours worked differs significantly for female and male real estate agents, and that female real estate agents believe more strongly than male real estate agents that the sex of the agent matters in residential real estate transactions.

INTRODUCTION

Various studies, including those by Smith & Smits (1994); Rosener (1995); and Buttner (2001), show that the presence of women in leadership and professional roles inspires other women to take on such roles. The residential real estate profession is an exceptional example of an arena in which women have demonstrated leadership and have achieved personal and financial success. Until the mid-1960's, most real estate agents selling residential real estate were male, but over

the next decade increasing numbers of women entered the profession, and by 1980, female real estate agents outnumbered male real estate agents. In 1999, the National Association of Realtors noted that 61% of sales agents and 45% of brokers were female (Evans, 1999).

Different explanations have been proffered as to how and why women have come to dominate the residential real estate profession. Some accounts emphasize structural factors, other focus on cultural factors. Structural explanations are concerned with the organizational and institutional constitution of work situations and families (Evetts, 2000, p. 61). For example, in 1945, Smedley and Robinson (p. 179) encouraged women to pursue real estate, arguing that your own common sense and familiarity with the problems of running a house will tell you why certain properties are more valuable than others; why they can be rented for more money than others. Research by Reskin and associates has analyzed the impact of economic and political transformations of the real estate profession. Reskin (1990, p. 41) maintains that when the market slump in residential sales occurred in the 1970's, instead of increasing commissions to entice men to stay in the profession, brokers actively recruited women at lower pay. Thomas and Reskin (1990, p. 205) add that this trend was exacerbated by the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act (TEFRA) of 1982, which determined that real estate agents would no longer be treated as employees for federal tax purposes. Instead, they would have independent contractor status, receiving sales-based commissions rather than hourly pay or salary, with no obligation on the part of the firm to provide social security, unemployment insurance, pension plans, or fringe benefits. Other structural explanations have focused on the flexibility of working hours (Jud & Winkler, 1999) and easy access to training (Thomas & Reskin, 1990).

Cultural explanations are concerned with socialization and ideologies about gender roles within the culture of work organizations and professions (Evetts, 2000, p. 59). Accordingly, women's dominance within the real estate profession is attributed to presumed correlations between characteristics important for success in real estate and those traditionally associated with women. Such characteristics for real estate generally include empathy, integrity, professionalism, and responsiveness¹ -- traits consistent with the intuition, empathy, and nurturing capacities equated with women by conventional wisdom, and some theoreticians and observers.² For instance, Rolle Davis, owner of a large real estate firm in New Jersey, reflects this sentiment in discussing why she tends to hire mostly women. "It has been my experience," she explains, "that women seem to have more of the skills that are needed for this type of business. This is a very nurturing type of business and you need different skills than you do when you are selling office supplies or a piece of furniture. This business involves ongoing relationships. It can sometimes take years to sell to a particular person and I think women are often better suited for this business because they have more patience than men" (Rose, 1997, p. G1). In other words, female real estate agents "sell a way of life that implies a traditional female role (Crispen, 1978, p. 4).

Whether structural, cultural, or a combination of both, accounts of women in real estate primarily have been based on conversations with real estate agents. What is needed is a systematic investigation to validate this anecdotal evidence. This paper is an initial attempt to undertake such a project.

THE STUDY

I developed a questionnaire based on scholarly and popular accounts of gender differences in the real estate profession. I asked questions concerning structural and cultural dimensions, including the number of hours real estate agents predicted they would work when they first received a real estate license compared with actual hours they worked once in the profession; the criteria used for choosing a career in real estate; satisfaction with that career; characteristics considered

important for success in real estate; and some general perceptions about women and real estate.

The questionnaire was mailed or delivered to 200 New Jersey members of the National Association of Realtors and e-mailed to another 200 members. There was a 37% response rate (73 responses) from the first group and a 17% response rate (33 responses) from the second group, for a total of 106 responses. Table 1 <#one> shows the make-up of the respondents. 58% were female and 42% were male. 77% of the women and 77% of the men were married, and 35% of the women and 52% of the men were parents of children under fifteen years of age. The average age was 39 for women and 37 for men. All the respondents had at least a high school degree, and 52% of the women and 55% of the men had college degrees. The average length of time in real estate was eight years for women and seven years for men.

Time Devoted to Real Estate

I first compared how many hours per week residential real estate agents predicted they would work when they first received their license to the actual number of hours they worked once in the profession. Table 2 <#two> shows the results for male and female respondents, and for male and female respondents according to whether or not they have children less than fifteen years of age. A one-way analysis of variance indicates that the number of hours women predicted they would work was less than the number of hours men predicted they would work. No one predicted they would work more than 50 hours per week. The results of a chi-square analysis, shown in Table 3 <#three>, indicate that the number of hours real estate agents predicted they would work was more than the expected count for women and less than the expected count for men.

With respect to actual number of hours worked, women worked significantly fewer hours per week than did men (Table 2 <#two>). Table 3 <#three> shows that the actual number of hours worked were less than the expected count for women and more than the expected count for men. Table 4 <#four> shows the percentage of respondents in each time category. Very few men and about one-third of the women worked part time (less than 40 hours), while less than one-third of the women and almost 90% of the men worked over 40 hours per week.

In comparing actual hours vs. predicted hours, both women and men tended to underestimate the hours of work required. The correlation (using Spearman's rho) between actual and predicted hours is not significant for women ($r = 0.222$; $p\text{-value} = 0.083$), but it is significant, although weak, for men ($r = 0.328$, $p\text{-value} = 0.030$) (Table 2 <#two>).

For respondents with children under fifteen, differences between women and men were even greater (Table 2 <#two>). The number of hours mothers predicted they would work was less than the number of hours fathers predicted they would work. The number of hours predicted was more than the expected count for mothers and less than the expected count for fathers (Table 3 <#three>).

In terms of actual hours worked, mothers worked significantly less than fathers. Very few of the fathers and more than half of the mothers worked less than 40 hours, while very few of the mothers but almost all of the fathers worked 40 or more hours per week (Table 4 <#four>). The actual number of hours worked was less than the expected count for mothers and more than the expected count for fathers (Table 3 <#three>). None of the spouses of the married mothers worked less than 40 hours, while 22% of the spouses of the married fathers did not work and approximately 35% worked less than 40 hours per week. While no significant relationship (using Spearman's rho) existed between the amount of hours mothers and their spouses worked ($r = -0.054$; $p\text{-value} = 0.815$), there was a negative correlation between the amount of hours fathers

worked and the amount their spouses worked ($r = -0.419$; $p\text{-value} = 0.050$).³

The hours mothers predicted they would work and the hours they actually worked were not significantly different ($r = 0.024$; $p\text{-value} = 0.912$); fathers, however, significantly underestimated the amount of hours they would actually work ($r = 0.462$; $p\text{-value} = 0.030$) (Table 2). A t-test of independent samples comparison of means also shows a significant difference in the amount of time parents worked during evening and weekend "family time", with fathers working an average of 15.19 hours and mothers working an average of 8.79 hours ($p\text{-value} = 0.001$).

There was no significant difference between the hours worked by fathers and the hours worked by men without children under fifteen. However, women without children under fifteen work approximately three hours per week less than men either with or without children, while women with children under fifteen work the least amount of hours (Table 2 <#two> and Table 4 <#four>).

Criteria Influencing the Decision to Become a Real Estate Agent

Table 5 <#five> shows how the respondents rated the criteria that motivated them to become real estate agent. For both female and male respondents, the ability to make money was very important. Women also rated flexible hours, working with people, and balancing family and career as significantly more important than did men.

The Degree of Satisfaction With Different Aspects of the Job

Table 6 <#six> shows the results when respondents rated their level of satisfaction with criteria related to the job. Both women and men felt relatively satisfied with most of the criteria, although women felt significantly more satisfied than men with the real estate profession overall.

Characteristics Considered Important in Real Estate

Table 7 <#seven> shows how respondents rated the importance of characteristics needed by real estate agents in attaining success in the profession. Male and female respondents considered the same for characteristics to be important: negotiating skills, patience, professionalism, and self-confidence.

Attitudes Concerning Gender and Real Estate

Respondents rated their agreement with three statements concerning female real estate clients and female real estate agents. As Table 8 <#eight> shows, women and men agreed that in a heterosexual couple, the woman generally makes the decision about which house to buy. Women agreed significantly more than men with the claim that female real estate agents have a greater understanding of women,s needs in a home, while disagreeing significantly more than men with claim that the sex of the real estate agent doesn,t matter in real estate transactions.

DISCUSSION

While female and male real estate agents agreed about many aspects of the real estate

profession, there were some clear differences, particularly related to hours of work. Flexibility of hours and balancing job and family responsibilities proved the most important criteria attracting women to the profession, and women did in fact work significantly fewer hours than the men. The discrepancy was particularly strong for mothers of children under fifteen; having children, however, did not impact the number of hours men worked. This is likely connected to the fact that none of the husbands of mothers worked less than 40 hours per week while more than fifty percent of the wives of fathers worked part time or not at all. Interestingly, when women first got their real estate license, they predicted they would work more hours than they actually did, while the reverse was true for men. Once in the profession, flexibility of hours proved satisfactory for both male and female respondents, although the amount of time needed for work and balancing family and career proved slightly less satisfactory than other criteria.

Making money and working with people were strong motivations and sources of satisfaction for female and male respondents. While female real estate agents had a significantly greater overall sense of satisfaction, male respondents also indicated they were satisfied with the profession-- which stands to reason since the respondents are people who have stayed in the real estate profession.

In choosing characteristics needed for success in real estate, both female and male respondents indicated the same four criteria as most important: negotiating skills, patience, professionalism, and self-confidence. While both regarded empathy to be an important attribute, female respondents did in fact consider the so-called "feminine" characteristic of nurturing skills, as well as tact and desire to please, to be significantly more important to success in real estate than did men.

Female and male respondents agreed that in heterosexual couples, women generally make the final decision about the house that will be purchased. There were, however, significant differences in male and female respondents, perception of the role of female real estate agents, in that female respondents believed more strongly that female real estate agents have a greater understanding of women's needs in a home and that the sex of the real estate agent matters. This is an interesting difference that may well be related to female respondents, higher valuation of nurturing skills, and certainly warrants further research.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research substantiate anecdotal claims that structural dimensions of the real estate profession fit the needs of women (and men) who have familial responsibilities. The results also show that female respondents consider cultural factors to be beneficial to success in the profession. These findings are important in understanding the attraction that the real estate profession holds for women, and this project sets up a road map for future research, including the determination of what characteristics actually do prove effective in real estate sales and whether there are any clear gender differences in the display of these characteristics; whether female agents, in fact, have an edge in real estate because of women's traditional association with the home; and the influence of such factors as ethnicity and class (of both real estate agent and client). Continued research into women in real estate can have implications extending beyond the real estate profession. Not only can we learn how women have changed the shape of a formerly male-dominated profession, we can also learn more about gender characteristics within the workplace, and the potential for women and leadership within other occupations.

NOTE

¹See, for instance, Crispen (1978), Johnson, Nourse, & Day (1988), Roulac (1999).

²For general discussions, see Gilligan (1982), Chodorow (1999); for discussions in business, see Rosener (1995), Buttner (2001); for discussions in real estate, see Crispen (1978), Monroe (1988).

³Only five of the respondents, three women and two men, were single parents and while no generalizations can be made from so small a sample, we can note that all worked at least forty hours per week.

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Table 1. Summary of Respondents Gender of Respondents

Total

Married

Parents of children under age 15

Average age

College education

Average years as realtor

Female

62 (58%)

48 (77%)

22 (35%)

39

30 (52%)

8

Male

44 (42%)

34 (77%)

23 (52%)

37

27 (55%)

7

Table 2. Analysis of Variances of Comparison of Means for Hours Realtors Predicted They Work When They First Received Real Estate License Compared With Actual Hours Worked Once in the Profession Respondents Hours Predicted to Work

Number

Mean

Standard Deviation

Female

62

37.82

3.09

Male

44

41.48

3.34

Total

106

39.34

3.66

F=33.725

Actual Hours Worked

Female

62

41.77

6.78

Male

44

48.07

6.40

Total

106

44.39

7.29

F=23.223

df=1

p-value=0.000

Parents and Non Parents

Hours Predicted to Work

Number

Mean

Standard Deviation

Female Parent

23

36.74

2.86

Male Parent

22

41.59

3.23

Female Non-Parent

39

38.46

3.07

Male Non-Parent

22

41.36

3.51

Total

106

39.34

3.66

F=12.952

Actual Hours Worked

Female Parent

23

37.61

3.65

Male Parent

22

48.41

6.05

Female Non-Parent

39

44.23

7.03

Male Non-Parent

22

47.73

6.85

Total

106

44.39

7.29

F=14.367

df=3

p-value=0.000

Table 3. Chi-Square Results of Hours Real Estate Agents Predicted They Would Work When They First Received Real Estate License Compared to Actual Hours Worked. Gender of Respondents Hours Predicted to Work

Hours

35 40 45

Female Count

31

27

4

Expected Count

21.1

28.1

12.9

Male Count

5

21

18

Expected Count

14.9

19.9

9.1

Chi-square = 26.134 df = 3 p-value = 0.000

Gender of Respondents Actual Hours Worked

Hours

35 40 45 50+

Female Count

22

14

17

9

Expected Count

14.6

9.9

21.6

15.8

Male Count

3

3

20

18

Expected Count

10.4

7.1

15.4

11.2

Chi-square = 22.390 df = 3 p-value = 0.000

Parents and Non-Parents Hours Predicted to Work

Hours

35 40 45

Female Parents Count

16

6

1

Expected Count

7.8

10.4

4.8

Male Parents Count

2

11

9

Expected Count

7.5

10.0

4.6

Female Non-Parents Count

15

21

3

Expected Count

13.2

17.7

8.1

Male Non-Parents Count

3

10

9

Expected Count

7.5

10.0

4.6

Chi-square = 32.912 df = 9 p-value = 0.000

Parents and Non-Parents Actual Hours Worked

Hours

35 40 45 50+

Female Parents Count

14

6

3

0

Expected Count

5.4

3.7

8.0

5.9

Male Parents Count

1

1

11

9

Expected Count

5.2

3.5

7.7

5.6

Female Non-Parents Count

8

8

14

9

Expected Count

9.2

6.3

13.6

9.9

Male Non-Parents Count

2

2

9

9

Expected Count

5.2

3.5

7.7

5.6

Chi-square = 38.349 df = 9 p-value = 0.000

Table 4. Percent of Respondents in Time Categories for Predicated and Actual Hours of Work Per Week Predicted Hours Per Week

Less than 40 hours

40 hours

41-50 hours

50 or more hours

Female

50%

44%

6%

0%

Male

11%

48%

40%

0%

Actual Hours Per Week

Less than 40 hours

40 hours

41-50 hours

50 or more hours

Female

35%

23%

27%

15%

Male

7%

7%

20%

66%

Predicted Hours Per Week

Less than 40 hours

40 hours

41-50 hours

50 or more hours

Female Parents

70%

26%

4%

0%

Male Parents

9%

50%

41%

0%

Female Non-Parents

38%

54%

8%

0%

Male Non-Parents

14%

45%

41%

0%

Actual Hours Per Week

Less than 40 hours

40 hours

41-50 hours

50 or more hours

Female Parents

61%

26%

13%

0%

Male Parents

4%

4%

50%

42%

Female Non-Parents

21%

21%

36%

23%

Male Non-Parents

9%

9%

41%

41%

Table 5. T-Test of Independent Samples Comparing Means of Criteria for Choosing Real Estate Career

Criteria Gender of Respondents

Mean

Standard Deviation

P-value

Results of buying/selling own home Female

Male

2.77

3.09

1.21

1.12

0.167

Balancing career and family Female

Male

1.92

2.59

1.25

1.09

0.004*

Flexible hours Female

Male

1.50

2.14

0.92

1.00

0.001*

Can make good money Female

Male

1.65

1.70

0.98

0.79

0.731

Can work from home Female

Male

2.00

2.61

1.20

1.20

0.001*

Minimal boss supervision Female

Male

2.40

2.45

1.23

1.13

0.825

Enjoy working with people Female

Male

1.53

2.11

0.86

0.97

0.002*

Couldn't figure out what else to do Female

Male

3.76

3.68

0.67

0.64

0.554

1 = Very Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 4 = Unimportant

* = Significant at the 0.01 level

Table 6. T-Test of Independent Samples Comparing Means of Satisfaction with Real Estate Profession

Criteria Gender of Respondents

Mean

Standard Deviation

P-value

Balancing career and family Female

Male

2.06

2.36

1.04

0.75

0.106

Flexibility of hours Female

Male

1.87

1.84

0.97

0.83

0.864

Income Female

Male

2.02

1.98

1.00

0.90

0.835

Minimal boss supervision Female

Male

1.61

1.77

0.64

0.89

0.309

Working with clients Female

Male

1.81

1.80

0.79

0.82

0.945

Amount of time needed to work Female

Male

2.21

2.41

0.98

0.90

0.280

Real estate profession in general Female

Male

1.85

2.20

0.74

0.79

0.024*

1 = Very Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 4 = Unimportant

* = Significant at the 0.01 level

Table 7. T-Test of Independent Samples Comparing Means of Ranking of Characteristics Considered Important for Success in Real Estate

Attribute Gender of Respondents

Mean

Standard Deviation

P-value

Tact Female

Male

1.32

1.60

0.60

0.73

0.032*

Patience Female

Male

1.14

1.49

0.37

0.67

0.002*

Desire to please Female

Male

1.63

2.37

0.79

0.82

0.000*

Self-confidence Female

Male

1.30

1.42

0.60

0.59

0.317

Tolerance Female

Male

1.32

1.56

0.60

0.73

0.073

Nurturing capacity Female

Male

1.91

2.51

1.02

0.91

0.003*

Good grooming Female

Male

1.54

2.07

0.83

0.83

0.002*

Professionalism Female

Male

1.09

1.40

0.34

0.66

0.003*

Organizational skills Female

Male

1.32

1.84

0.60

0.75

0.000*

Assertiveness Female

Male

1.58

1.81

0.80

0.76

0.142

Empathy Female

Male

1.70

1.98

0.91

0.71

0.103

Negotiating skills Female

Male

1.23

1.26

0.54

0.44

0.783

Tenacity Female

Male

1.42

1.74

0.65

0.83

0.036*

1 = Very Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 4 = Unimportant

* = Significant at the 0.01 level

Table 8. T-Test of Independent Samples Comparing Means of Perceptions About Women and Real Estate

Statement Gender of Respondent

Mean

Standard Deviation

P-value

In heterosexual couple, the women makes the ultimate decision about which house to buy
Female

Male

2.05

2.19

0.86

0.70

0.368

Female real estate agents have greater understanding of women's needs in a home Female

Male

1.76

2.65

0.80

0.87

0.000*

Sex of the real estate agent doesn't matter Female

Male

2.21

1.72

0.79

0.73

0.002*

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree

* = Significant at the 0.01 level

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