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### **A Cultural Comparison of Women at Work, in France and in the United States**

In this paper I am going to be exploring the cultural differences between the role of women in the workplace in France and in the United States. I am going to accomplish this by comparing labor force participation rates, the pay gap in the United States and its equivalent in France, workplace gender equality legislation, and professional workplace differences. I feel that this is a very thought-provoking subject as the role of women in the American workforce is rapidly changing and adapting. For me, when I think of women in the American professional workforce, I think of the wage gap and workplace discrimination. I feel that my mind jumps to these topics because they're always in the news. I'm using this opportunity to learn about the business culture of France and the role women play in it. I'm going to use my opinions, experiences, and understanding of French feminism to better understand the similarities and differences between women in business in the United States and in France.

I'd like to use Julie Kristeva's ideas of the semiotic and symbolic to expand upon the contribution women have on the French workforce. First, there are several different figures I would like to discuss so that we can get a gage on the extent to which women participate in the workforce. According to The World Bank, women make up 48.7% of the total labor force in France. On the other hand, women make up 46.3% of the total labor force in the United States. I was very surprised to see that women take up a more active role in the French working society than American women do in the United States. Other things to note about this data are the slopes

of the line. Looking at the line chart, it is apparent that over the past 30 years the slope of the US line has stagnated and is slowly declining. Whereas the French line has been steadily and progressively increasing. I find these two trends very interesting because I thought that they would be the other way around. My thought process was that if anything the participation of women in the American labor force would be trending upward, but this is not the case. The explanation for the climbing female labor force participation rate is that women make up the majority of the nation's part time labor force. A 2016 RFI article described how women made up more than 80% of the country's part time workers. The article describes how around one third of working women work part time, this is compared to around only seven percent of male workers working part time. The article cited childcare and homecare as the primary reasons for this shocking figure. The article insisted that many women do not want to commit or cannot fully commit to full time jobs because they must manage commitments at home. Those commitments mostly being taking care of children or another loved one. In my opinion, these circumstances are due to society pushing traditional gender roles onto women. These roles require women to be the head of the household and in order to do this, many have to leave their career aspirations behind. Society assumes that a woman will make this sacrifice in order to meet expectations. I think that this has a lot to do with the semiotic stage that Kristeva talks about in her writing. In the semiotic stage the child unconsciously identifies themselves with the mother, and they also subconsciously assume and need them to be there for them. I feel that this is similar to how society subconsciously assumes that women will take up the role of a housewife.

Next, I'm going to use Michele Le Doeuff's observations to examine how gender equality and equity are treated in the workplace in France and in the United States. When it comes to addressing American gender equality and equity in the workplace, most people think of

the wage gap between men and women. The wage gap is a figure that reports that women make only a fraction of what men make on the dollar/euro. The wage gap is not just exclusive to the United States, it is present in many other countries including France. The World Economic Forum posted an article in 2019 that provided figures for both an adjusted and unadjusted gender pay gap by country. In the US, the unadjusted pay gap was 0.79. This means that women make 21.4% less on the dollar than men. France's unadjusted gender pay gap was 0.88, which is noticeably better. This means that in France women make 11.6% less on the euro than men. Interestingly, according to this report France had the lowest unadjusted gender pay gap. This is due to several campaigns led by the French government to tackle the gender gap issue. President Emmanuel Macron stated that one of the main goals of his first term was to achieve professional equality between men and women. Since then, the French government has issued several laws that score companies based off their performance to uphold gender equality in the workplace. If a company drops below a certain threshold, then they will be penalized and potentially fined. The United States has made no real effort to close the gender wage gap. According to the World Economic Forum's pay gap study, the United States had the second worst gender pay gap divide after Germany. The gender pay gap is one of several aspects of gender inequality that still exists in the workplace. The main difference here between the United States and France is that France has taken an active role to fight this facet of gender inequality, and that is reflected in the data. In Le Doeuff's passage *Hipparchia's Choice* she discusses a hunger for consciousness that developed amongst women during the social upheaval caused by Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*. I feel that recent events such as the "me too" movement have caused similar social upheavals amongst women and men. During these upheavals people have begun to look into the

other areas of society where women are not treated equally to men. In this case, the gender pay gap has been in the news headlines and crosshairs of feminists for at least the past decade.

Working women have to deal with injustice in many aspects of their lives and careers. These injustices are visible all over the world, including in countries that claim to treat women equally in all regards. As detailed in this paper, workplace inequality is one of those injustices. It is evident that women in France make up a larger role of the working population than women do in the United States. The French government has also taken many steps to combat gender inequality in the workplace, with success. The United States has not taken such comprehensive steps towards the same goal. From these points, it is clear that the feminist movement in France has had a monumental role in pushing their government to take tangible action. This is in part thanks to the intellectually based French Feminists that we covered in class. It is also apparent that the fight for equality is not over, and the feminist movement and feminists are needed across the globe.

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