

Sample Essay for Chapter 12

Chapter 12 presents an extended segment on integration of women into professional orchestras. Considering this information, describe how integration has not lead to equality in this work setting. To complete your essay, connect the orchestral “workplace” with a non-musical example.

STOP and write your essay before scrolling down.

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The professional orchestral field offers much food for thought about how formerly segregated work settings can be challenging places in which to attain equality in pay and treatment.

Like many work settings, **hiring practices** are the first gateway in terms of “allowing” formerly banned workers into an organization. In earlier times, orchestras managed continued segregation simply, by featuring an **informal** “gigging culture” whereby job openings were announced by current orchestral members to their own (usually male) students. When **screened auditions** became the norm in the latter half of the 20th century, more women were accepted into professional orchestras, although that process was not perfect, either. Even the sound of high-heeled shoes could alert audition judges that a woman was applying for a job. Still, this process allowed more women than ever into the professional orchestral system. That did not mean, however, that women received equal pay or equal respect.

Within the ranks of the orchestra are “sections” of instruments, and the highest paid players are in the **principal seats**. It remains the case that the vast **majority of these positions are held by male performers**. The reasons for this are sometimes obvious, but more often are difficult to prove. In the case of trombonist Abbie Conant, for example, it was obvious that the conductor did not approve of placing a woman in the principal position—he stated this out loud, and demoted her to a lower “seat,” and resultantly, lower pay. She eventually won a lengthy lawsuit, but having done so, decided to leave the organization anyway, due to the distress that it caused. For many women, the **treatment that they receive at work, including being ignored, is not worth the cost** of remaining. This is one of the reasons that some people opt for gender-segregated ensemble work. Not every situation is as obvious as Conant’s. In a field where **judgement of performance is based on artistic merit**, performers who feel discriminated against are **hard-pressed to prove** that they have not been fairly treated.

Yet another example of continued bias is evident within the **ranks of conductor, which still remain heavily male-dominated**. There is no physical explanation for why a man could conduct better than a woman, but **sociocultural norms often link leadership with men**. The **role of conductor is all about leadership**. Conductors are fully in charge on the podium, with people in the seats literally looking up to them. The more professional the group, the more **power** conductors have in **making decisions**, including decisions about personnel. Talented women who have risen to this position have sometimes been openly opposed by members of their ensembles.

All of this connects with **other work settings** in which pioneers step into formerly segregated work systems and suffer harassment and discrimination. Professional sports provide just one example, in which racially segregated sports reluctantly hired members of other races out of segregated leagues. Jackie Robinson’s situation in baseball is one well-known story, as he endured physical abuse and written threats against he and his family. Only over time have these work settings become more equitable, but even so, there is work to be done. The National Football League, for example, still favors white men in leadership positions such as quarterback and head coach, despite the number of people of color in other positions. Not unlike the orchestral world, the role of “leader” in some sports is one of the last places in which segregation is fully erased.

Note to students: The final paragraph could feature politics or any other area in which you can make connections to the orchestral work setting. Be sure to cap your essay with a good closing statement!