Editorial: Beyond the Glass Ceiling metaphor: 'Futuring' Research for Women in Management

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In 1992 Davidson and Cooper commented: 'Within the next decade, women will constitute around half of the total workforce in the UK [United Kingdom]. However, despite the introduction of sex discrimination and equal pay legislation, the majority of women are still concentrated in low pay, low status, gender segregated jobs' (Davidson and Cooper, 1992:v). Over the past decades we have seen widespread public commitment to equal opportunity and arguments for the commercial benefits of diverse leadership, yet a quarter of a century later this comment from Davidson and Copper remains largely true.

Searching for metaphors to explain women's positions in management reveals many results (as at August 2016): *glass ceiling* in Google Scholar gives 369,000 results; *barriers to women in management*, 1,450,000 results; *sticky floors*, 21,700 results; *glass cliff*, 27,900 results; *concrete ceilings*, 32,400 results and *labyrinths* for women in management, 20,400 results. As a community of Gender in Management researchers, we have a long history of excellent research to draw upon in understanding women's progress in organisations. Early examples of research into gendered management styles, barriers to women's progress and challenges to gendered management theory include Schein, (1975); Kanter, (1977); Marshall, (1984); Morrison, White, and Van Velsor (1987); Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), Davidson and Cooper, (1992); Schein and Davidson (1993), Powell and Butterfield (1994); Davidson and Burke (1994),Vinnicombe and Colwill, (1996), Wacjman (1996, 1998), Simpson (1997), Ragins, Townsend and Mattis, (1998) and (Wilson, 1996). Despite this systematic research and the various legislation that has been passed in Western countries, it remains the case that women have difficulty in advancing their careers (Mavin, 2001; Barreto, Ryan and Schmitt, 2009; Davidson and Burke, 2011), and are under-represented in managerial positions across most of the countries in the world (Office for National Statistics, 2013; Berry and Bell, 2012). Although some progress has indeed been made since the 1970s, we could argue this is relatively slow. In 1974 just two per cent of women occupied management positions in the UK (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006), by 1988 this was around 12% (Davidson, 1991), and now it is around a third (34.8%) of managers (ONS, 2013). This is against an employment rate for women of over two thirds (67.2%) in the UK, an increase from 53% in 1971 (Office for National Statistics, 2014). The gender pay gap also remains high in Europe (Eurostat, 2014).

Bruckmuller and Branscombe (2010) comment that there is clear evidence that gender discrimination still exists in higher management, albeit operating somewhat more subtly. A more recent report (Grant Thornton, 2016) showed that globally, women hold 24% of senior roles, while 33% of businesses do not have any women senior managers. Eastern Europe and ASEAN countries report the highest proportions of women in leadership at 35% and 34% respectively, and just 16% and 21% of firms respectively that had no women in senior management. The G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the United States) were reported as among the worst performing regions, with just 22% of senior roles occupied by women and 39% of companies with no women in senior roles. Japan and Germany fare particularly badly with just 7% and 15% of senior roles held by women respectively. The UK is also below average and has 21% of senior roles held by women and 36% of businesses with no women in senior management. In contrast, Russia surpasses the

list of individual countries with 45% of senior roles held by women, followed by the Philippines at 39%, where only 9% businesses have no women in senior management.

Moreover, women continue to be under-represented in the top executive positions (Eagly and Sczesny, 2009; Deloitte, 2012; Sharma, 2014, Catalyst, 2015a, b, c; Davies, 2015), and where women do hold board positions they are much more likely to be non-executive posts rather than the more powerful executive positions (Vinnicombe, Dolder and Turner, 2014, p. 4) (see also the Female FTSE Report by gender in management scholars, Vinncombe et al., and Sealy, et al.). The Centre for Women and Democracy (2015) shows that 29% of women in the UK are Members of Parliament, while the 2014 Sex and Power Report tells us that in the UK women account for 14.2% University Vice Chancellors, 15% of elected police and crime commissioners, 24% of local authority chief executives, 5% of national daily newspapers editors and 15.6% High Court Judges (The Sex and Power Report, 2014). As a stark reminder, in 2003, Dame Brenda Hale was the first woman judge appointed to the House of Lords in the UK since the Magna Carta in 1215. In contrast, Sealy et al. (2016), report that in the FTSE 100, 100% of boards now include women – a huge turnaround from 2011 where one in five boards were all male - based on an influencing and voluntary approach rather than quotas for women on boards - but will this create a lasting cultural shift?

Much research has recognised the difficulties women have faced in advancing their careers (Kottke and Pelliter, 2013; Mavin and Grandy, 2016) and how they have faced the glass ceiling. Described as *"a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy" (*Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990: 5), this ceiling acts as an invisible but impermeable barrier to career progression. Simpson and Altman (2000) offer three perspectives on the glass ceiling. The first is that it has been *demolished* as young women are progressing faster into management than ever before due to equal opportunities initiatives. Second, is that it has been *punctured*, in that some women are able to pass through, for example young and 'high flying' women, but that older women find it more difficult. The third perspective is that of a *relocated* glass ceiling. This relocation has enabled younger women to progress quicker into lower ranking management positions but still blocks ascension to the senior management levels of the organisation. Broadbridge and Simpson (2011) highlighted that this effect is still very relevant today, arguing that equal opportunity initiatives have failed to impact upon the competitive and emotionally detached nature of male dominated organisational cultures. O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria (2008) also argued that the effects of the glass ceiling continue to disadvantage women who seek advancement, arguing that the gendered nature of organisational structures (including male defined constructions of work and career success) limits women's access to powerful positions in the organisational hierarchy. Broadbridge and Simpson (2011) contend that current challenges persist in the form of gender denial, the concealment of gender as a source of disadvantage and privilege, and the additional entrenchment of gendered hierarchies. They conclude that researchers should challenge the idea that gender discrimination is a thing of the past and continue to measure and publicise continuing and emerging gender difference; to conceptualise new and evolving forms of gendered hierarchies and to disclose the hidden dimensions of gendered power.

Myriad reasons exist for why women do not reach senior management levels in organisations. The lack of qualifications of women who reach senior leader positions has often been cited as a major barrier within the glass ceiling, along with multiple barriers which confine women managers in the middle of organizations (Mooney and Ryan, 2009: Ryan *et al.,* 2010). Other barriers include family commitments and the organisation of work roles, and company

cultures that uphold patriarchal social systems (Broadbridge, 2008). Women's perfectionism, the need for women to be more explicitly encouraged to apply to leader roles and the issue of women's mentors needing to be at a significantly higher level of influence, power and position than that commonly found, in order to increase the number of women leaders, has been well documented (Ibarra *et al.,* 2010: Vinnicombe, 2011). Women leaders are as highly scrutinized by women below them in the paid work hierarchy as they are by their senior men peer-colleagues and they face on-going competition with senior women peers, as well as processes of female misogyny (Mavin, 2006; 2008). They have also suffered from the scrutiny of being placed in precarious leadership positions – the glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). Women leaders we know are more scrutinized by the press and media for their dress, impression management and family relationships (Mavin *et al.*, 2010; Vinnicombe, 2011), and the issue of work-life balance, and evaluation of women leaders' masculine and feminine characteristics versus masculinities and femininities required to sustain a senior leader position is currently up for critique. (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Much of the literature on women's career development has justifiably concentrated on the barriers women encounter when attempting to advance their careers. However, as women aspire to more senior positions, they do have to consider how their own behaviours and perceptions fit with those associated with successful careers in their organisations (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002) which are most often deemed to be characteristically male. Tienari et al. (2013) showed that executive search consultants and their clients contribute to the reproduction of male dominance in top management, and Holgersson (2013) pointed to the homosociality in recruiting managing directors and the preference for certain men and the exclusion of women. As Hanappi-Egger (2015) argues, women tend to accept the social construction of masculine norms and adapt to the male gender script of managers and so gender hierarchies in management are maintained and reproduced. While Mavin and Grandy (2016a and b) argue that women elite leaders are subject to 'respectable business femininity' akin to Victorian norms for their behaviours, as well as abjected – in that they have to 'manage' the ambiguities of their 'in-between' and 'abject' status in organisations. This can be seen through how they manage their own and other women's appearance at work. Further their abject status can lead to intra-gender micro-violence between women as they struggle to maintain their status in organisations (Mavin and Grandy, 2014).

Overall, Powell and Butterfield (2015) argue that factors at societal, organisational and individual level have been attributed over the years to blocking women's progression into top management positions. Thus the 'seen' and 'unseen' barriers to women's progress require continued investigation. Some women may not even face the glass ceiling as they encounter various issues that continue to plague their career progress lower in the organisation. In metaphoric terms this is often described as a labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007) which recognises the variety of challenges women may face as they go through their careers, and how some can reach the top of organisations while others drop out at various junctures along the way.

This Special Issue called for authors to revisit the various metaphors used to describe the position of women in today's workforce, and reflect on the current and future position of women in management and leadership. It focuses upon successful changes, adaptations and challenges gender in management research has made to the barriers which have prevented women progressing to senior positions in organisations. Further it engages academic discourse in 'futuring' research by identifying key research areas which aim to make a

difference to the experiences of women and their positions in management and leadership in organisations.

In the first paper of this issue, Linda Carli asks whether women face a glass ceiling, or are held down by a sticky floor or face a labyrinth in their career development. All these metaphors, along with others, have been used to describe women's career progression in modern organisations. She recognises that progress has been made for many women yet argues that full equality is far away as yet. Along with Alice Eagly, she proposed the more subtle and complex metaphor of a labyrinth to describe women's careers (Eagly and Carli, 2007). This proposed that some women do indeed reach their career pinnacles, but also recognises that various challenges along the way can prevent other women progressing, thus arguing that ,advancement is difficult but not impossible'. The paper goes on to argue that there are more women leaders now than in the past, and provides the current position of women in various occupations in the US. She attributes this rise in women leaders to educational experiences of women and changing attitudes about leadership. While Alice argues that women are earning more nowadays, she acknowledges that the gender pay gap persists. She concludes that while there is steady improvement in women's access to leadership positions, there is still a long way to go; they continue to face various challenges but the metaphor of a labyrinth continues to help us understand women's career development.

The second paper by Nighat Ansari draws on previous research by Fernando and Cohen in Sri Lanka (2014) and examines the role of 'respectable femininity' norms in the work lives of professional women in Pakistan. Drawing on empirical research, it investigates the extent to which these norms impact on women's career development in the context of a clash with the traditional career management techniques of accumulating social capital and managing desirable impression management. A qualitative research strategy was adopted, with interviews being conducted with ten men and ten women occupying middle and senior tiers of the Civil Service.

The findings showed that the theme of 'respectable femininity' was prominent in the accounts of both men and women, with the respondents arguing there was an obligation of working women to adhere by such rules of 'domesticity', 'restrained networking', and 'toning down their femininity' in order to maintain their reputation and honour in society. As such, the working women in Pakistan felt guilty of violating the norm of 'confinement to private spheres'. The study illustrates the struggles women face in becoming a 'good woman' and a 'successful careerist' at the same time and the subtle barriers they face in their careers. This creates a significant barrier in their career advancement by way of constraining their capacity to exploiting the career management techniques of accumulating 'social capital' and employing 'impression management' tactics, and can create a glass ceiling in their career progression.

In the third paper, Viki Holton argues that barriers to women's careers have not changed significantly over time and that the glass ceiling remains intact in many organisations. However, she proposes a blueprint for how individuals and organisations might create a better career environment for women in the future. Her paper draws on a mixed methods research approach that explored the key issues that help or block women's careers. It included a survey questionnaire completed by 1,402 women interviews in addition to interviews with 20 senior women managers from a range of sectors and countries.

Viki outlines various barriers to women's careers including that of the glass ceiling before summarising the findings of the study. The paper illustrates the difficulties that women continue to face in the workplace and how terms such as leadership, management and team leader may be gender biased. The findings acknowledged ways women can take more control for their own careers. Amongst these was the importance of the support and learning from others, mentors, coaches, sponsors and role models. Women reported facing more barriers than men and being judged differently with regard to behaviour and leadership abilities. However, over half the sample felt they were judged equally to men when it came to promotion. The paper concludes with a range of advice to individuals and organisations with regard to helping create a more positive career environment for women. Viki warns, however, that while women might take more responsibility for their own career development, in conjunction with this there is also a need for organisations to create a better organisational culture. The findings have implications for career development structures and talent management processes within organisations, while the blueprint proposed offers a useful guide to help organisations reflect on possible gender bias in career development structures.

In the final paper, Ruth Simpson and Savita Kumra use the metaphor of the 'glass slipper' (Ashcraft, 2013) to show how merit may not adhere to individuals when social identity in the form of gender, race or class fails to fit the definition and perceived characteristics of the job. In this way Ruth and Savita note how merit for women is like Teflon – it does not stick. In so doing, they provide an explanation for the persistence of the glass ceiling and the barriers women face as they undertake or aspire to management and/or leadership positions in organisations.

In their background to the paper, they consider the concepts of a glass ceiling, glass cliff, glass walls and a glass escalator, before examining the notion of a glass slipper. They argue that the glass slipper shows how the identity of work is constructed in relation to the embodied special identities associated with it. They look at the notion of merit and offer criticisms to how this is seen as an objective measure of ability and achievement, arguing that it observes a particular hegemonic masculinity orientation. They claim that in western cultures, merit is differentially valued according to the nature of the work and the embodied social identities aligned with it.

Their conceptual paper develops a new metaphor; that of 'the Teflon Effect', to add to our understanding of women's position in organisations. They highlight the significance of the recognition, performance and embodiment of merit and how merit may fail to 'stick' to the bodies of women in management and leadership roles. They argue that the 'Teflon Effect' enables an understanding of the processes underlying merit and how a misalignment between social identity and the nature of the job may lead to persistent disadvantage. It also explains the persistence of the glass ceiling by focusing on how perceptions of merit are influenced by the fit between embodied social identities and perceived characteristics and features of the job. They contend that professionals must look beyond 'objective' measures of merit in performance reviews and/or in recruitment and promotion decisions to include reflection on the significance of merit's subjective, 'performed' dimensions.

We hope you enjoy reading the conceptual and empirical papers in this special issue on the current position of women in management and leadership positions in 21st century organisations, and the progress made (or not) since the publication of legendary works.

Editors

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