



The Teflon Effect: When the Glass Slipper meets Merit

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Introduction

In this paper, we draw on the Ashcraft's (2013) metaphor of the 'glass slipper', which encapsulates the alignment between occupational identity and embodied social identities of workers. We argue that women experience a 'Teflon Effect' when misalignment occurs in that merit, on which promotion and progression decisions are often based, goes unrecognised and fails to 'stick' onto those who possess it. The glass slipper is part of a popular fairy tale of unjust oppression – a story of Cinderella, a mistreated and impoverished girl who meets a handsome prince. The prince later identifies her through a dropped slipper into which her foot neatly fits – marrying her in a true fairy tale ending. While not devoid of sexist overtones (Cinderella's ugly sisters attempt to seek the prince's favours by claiming the slipper as their own, but of course their feet are too big), the glass slipper metaphor is an apt one in that it captures the need in certain contexts for alignment and fit. Specifically, Ashcraft (2013) argues for recognition of the identity that attaches to occupations and how this may or may not align with the embodied dispositions of those doing the job.

As Ashcraft contends, occupations come to appear 'naturally' possessed of certain features that fit certain people yet are improbable for others - arguing that studies of inequality need to take this alignment into account. She therefore fosters a 'bilateral' view which suggests a reciprocal relationship between identity and work i.e. 'people derive identity from work' and 'work derives identity from associated people' (Ashcraft, 2013:6). Further, she adds a more embodied dimension to current glass metaphors (e.g. glass ceiling; glass cliff) through the emphasis on the meanings attached to the bodies of workers and the extent to which these 'fit' the nature of the work they do.

Ashcraft does not delve deeply into the consequences of a *misalignment* (i.e. when occupation and embodied social identity do not fit) and in this context the metaphor tends to overlook the processes underlying work based disadvantage. In response this paper considers consequences of

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3 such misfit by examining the processes of assigning and rewarding women according to merit. By
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5 drawing on the glass slipper concept, and by introducing the Teflon Effect, we develop a more
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7 embodied understanding of merit and of the glass ceiling more generally. Specifically, we go some
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9 way to explain the existence and persistence of the glass ceiling in the form of career barriers by
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11 suggesting that merit may not adhere to specific bodies if a misalignment occurs between the
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13 occupational identity and embodied social identity. This highlights the significance of the
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15 recognition, performance and embodiment of merit and how, through the Teflon effect, it may fail
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17 to adhere to the bodies of women in management and leadership roles.
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21 Our paper is organized as follows. We firstly outline work, largely in the gender in management
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23 domain, which has been based on the metaphor of glass – including a detailed account of Ashcraft's
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25 (2013) conceptualisation of the glass slipper and the implications of fit and misfit. We then critically
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27 discuss and evaluate conceptualisations of merit as a method of reward allocation in organizations,
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29 highlighting the significance of the recognition, performance and embodiment of merit. We apply
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31 the metaphor of the glass slipper to these conceptualisations and introduce the notion of the Teflon
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33 Effect in the context of a misalignment between occupational identity and embodied social identity.
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35 We conclude by arguing that the Teflon effect combined with the glass slipper concept help explain
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37 the persistence of the glass ceiling in management and organizations more generally.
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41 **Glass Works**

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44 The notion of glass has become a well utilised and apt metaphor for the invisible yet durable barriers
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46 and obstacles that women and other groups face in the workplace. Dominant among these different
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48 conceptualisations is the so-called Glass Ceiling, first coined in 1986 by the Wall Street Journal,
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50 which has captured the artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities and has
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52 sought to throw light on the reasons for the persistent paucity of women in senior management
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54 roles. These reasons have included norms supporting men and women's differential hierarchical
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56 positioning (e.g. Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990); gendered notions of successful management
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3 based on masculine characteristics (e.g. Schein, 1973; Powell, 1993); the effects of homosocial
4 reproduction whereby (male) decision makers choose others for key positions similar to themselves
5 (e.g. Kanter, 1977) ; stereotypes and negative perceptions of women (Powell, 2005); a male model of
6 working based on uninterrupted work and long hours (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005); the demands of
7 motherhood (Hewlett, 2007); lack of mentoring (Ragins, 19990; and different development
8 experiences (job variety, challenging tasks) which are often given to men rather than women and
9 give men a competitive edge (Ohlott, Ruderman and McCauley, 1994). A useful summary of the
10 factors contained within the glass ceiling can be found in Weyer (2007) in this journal.
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21 Other, perhaps less utilized conceptualisations, include the Glass Cliff which captures the problems
22 women face once they have achieved a leadership position (Ryan and Haslam, 2005) and suggests
23 that women are often put into precarious or risky roles where there is a higher likelihood of failure.
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27 As Ryan and Haslam found, companies that appointed women to boards of directors had
28 experienced consistently poor performance in the months preceding the appointment of women
29 whereas performance was more stable in companies that went on to appoint men. Another glass
30 metaphor, the Glass Wall, describes persistent occupational segregation attributed to employment
31 barriers that restricts the access of women to particular types of jobs or functional areas. These walls
32 tend to see women segregated into jobs or roles that carry low pay and less prospects compared
33 with men (Bronstein et al, 1993; Miller, et al, 1999) so drawing attention to horizontal rather than
34 vertical barriers. Finally, the Glass Escalator refers to the hidden and often subtle mechanisms that
35 enhance men's positions in female dominated occupations (Williams, 1992) so that men take their
36 gender privilege with them despite relative numerical rarity, ascending the hierarchy in these
37 occupations more rapidly and more consistently than women.
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52 The glass metaphor has accordingly been a useful one in helping to highlight hidden yet durable
53 processes in organizations that disfavour some groups while favouring others and has been
54 foundational in shaping the field. However, at the same time it has been subject to critique. These
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3 often focus on the idea that the glass metaphor implies external, transparent edifices based on
4
5 realist assumptions that serve to reify understandings of careers as 'objective' phenomenon (Cohen,
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7 2014) which women themselves must work to overcome (thereby placing responsibility firmly in
8
9 women's domain). Cohen (2104) argues for a more socially constructed orientation that sees career
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11 experiences as a process 'cast and re-cast in the flow of time and across space' (Cohen, 2014:165).
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13 This undermines any conceptualisation of career barriers as a concrete reality and places such
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15 constraints at the interface of social/cultural context and individual dispositions, themselves
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17 conditioned by past and present circumstances.
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24 In terms of the former, highlighting issues of context, Symons (1992) has argued that while the glass
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26 ceiling concept suggests that women bring problems into a gender neutral organization with a
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28 gender neutral logic and language, they in fact encounter a 'long standing dynamic' of gender based
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30 domination and subordination. Further, the 'dispositions' of the workers (perceptions, assumptions,
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32 values, embodied capital), foregrounded by Cohen, are often overlooked. In particular, the glass
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34 ceiling and its related concepts fail to recognize the embodied dimensions of work – how bodies are
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36 not just the containers of capital (skills and knowledge) and the primary source of effort – but also
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38 carry meanings that are intimately related to gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation and
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40 able-bodiedness. These meanings imply that some individuals may be seen as more 'suitable' for
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42 some forms of work.
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46 **The Glass Slipper**

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49 This idea of 'suitability' finds purchase in Cohen's suggestion for a more fluid notion of career as a
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51 "product of a particular time and place and social circumstance, informed by experience and history"
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53 (Cohen, 2014: 167). Here she develops the concept of a 'career imagination' – a construct that
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55 defines the limits of what a person sees as possible in career terms and in so doing also what is
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3 impossible. As she argues, career imaginations are circumscribed by the occupations and sectors
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5 that are seen as available and appropriate and by the progression routes prescribed.
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8 This suggests a need to recognise that particular occupations may be deemed more 'suitable' or
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10 'appropriate' for some groups over others. Here, Ashcraft (2013) argues for a more embodied use of
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12 the glass metaphor which, drawing implicitly on notions of suitability, she develops into the 'glass
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14 slipper'. As she suggests, current work on equality has tended to assume a unilateral view that
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16 disconnects diversity issues at work from the nature of the work itself – creating a 'blind spot' in
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18 diversity research. While it is accepted that individuals derive identity from work, what is less
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20 evident is that *work also derives identity from associated people* so that occupations assume
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22 aggregate identities by virtue of their alignment with social identities. Work has a 'collective self'
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24 that can alter over time and with economic and social circumstances. Introducing the concept of the
25
26 glass slipper, she explains:
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30 *"...occupations come to appear, by nature, possessed of central, enduring and distinctive*
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32 *characteristics that make them suited to certain people and implausible for others. Like*
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34 *similar metaphors in management science such as the glass ceiling...or the glass cliff...the*
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36 *glass slipper exposes systematic forms of advantage and disadvantage, in this case*
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38 *stemming from alignment between occupations and social identities "* (Ashcraft, 2013:7)
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42 Drawing on Kirkham and Loft's (1993) study of accountancy, she shows how the occupation became
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44 professionalised by mobilising gender to upgrade accountancy practice (casting the work as
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46 technical and elite and suitable for men) while downgrading bookkeeping through feminization.
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48 Occupations therefore are distinguished by collective identities in that we treat lines of work as
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50 typified by central, abiding and unique features – features that emanate partly from social identities
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52 of those who undertake such work but which can also 'stand alone' – independent of incumbents.
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55 These social identities shape the content, value, practices and administration of the job. As Ashcraft
56
57 (2013) points out, accountancy became upgraded and 'masculinized' - divorced from book-keeping
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3 – leading to changes in entry requirements, formal employment classifications and task divisions
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5 that presented the work as complex, technical and valuable. The nature of work therefore does not
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7 speak for itself - ‘to secure professional privileges an occupation must first construct and control the
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9 identity of its work’ (Ashcraft, 2013: 14). As she suggests, this implies a propensity to not just
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11 discriminate against individuals but to also discriminate against some forms of work – devalued, for
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13 example, as lacking in value and skill.
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20 Ashcraft identifies two main forms of body-work associations which, together, suggest that the
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22 identity of work is constructed in relation to the embodied social identities associated with it. One is
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24 based on physical characteristics and *demographic alignment* between an occupation and certain
25
26 social identity characteristics such as gender or race with studies often focussing on the extent and
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28 implications of numerical proportions. At issue here is who actually does the work – which socially
29
30 coded bodies (white, black, male, female) in that labour processes such as the degree of supervision
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32 and/or promotion opportunities may ‘develop around the race and gender profile of those doing the
33
34 work’ (Ashcraft, 2013: 8). This may include implications of numerical disadvantage for women’s
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36 career progression, such as the experiences of women in male dominated, management roles (e.g.
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38 Kanter, 1977; Simpson, 1997). Secondly, she draw attention to *symbolic alignment* whereby some
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40 groups may be ‘discursively or emblematically’ associated with some forms of work and how work is
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42 coded through social identities such as through the sex typing of particular tasks. This conceives of
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44 social identities, not as measurable, physical entities (e.g. the number of women in particular roles),
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46 but as entailing embodied performances and bodily imagery. As example, primary school teaching
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48 may be seen as suitable for women based on notions of the unthreatening maternal body ,
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50 appropriate for the care of others, versus the more ‘dangerous’ bodies of men (Simpson, 2009). As
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52 Swan (2012) suggests, cleanliness and associated meanings of morality are commonly associated
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54 with ‘whiteness’ and with the white, middle-class body whereas black and working-class bodies are
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3 marked as 'unclean' and routinely carry dirt's stigma. In the context of domestic service, Duffy
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5 (2007) has highlighted the consistency, through historical precedent, with which 'dirty work' (i.e.
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7 undesirable work) in the form of reproductive service work has been relegated to and seen as
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9 suitable for ethnic minority women. This leads analyses towards the meanings attached to bodies
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11 undertaking particular forms of work, based for example on notions of devaluation, and how
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13 'bodies, real and imagined are invoked as figurative practitioners to construct the nature of
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15 occupations' (Ashcraft, 2013: 9).
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21 Similarly, in the context of management and leadership, research has indicated how the tasks and
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23 skills of management and ideas of successful leadership are inscribed onto the bodies of (white,
24
25 middle class) men through shared notions of discipline, rationality, detachment, direction and
26
27 control (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993). Typical descriptions of masculinity call upon qualities which are
28
29 (among others) analytic, quantitative, rationalist and outer focused (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000;
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31 Hines, 1992) and which find purchase in dominant conceptualizations of management practice and
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33 skills. Schein (1973), for example, drew attention to the strength of the relationship between
34
35 characteristics perceived to be held by men and those perceived as required for managerial success
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37 ('think manager, think male') while Collinson and Hearn (1994) highlighted how the managerial
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39 prerogative over key decisions can be seen as part of a highly masculine discourse based on power
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41 and control. For example, gendered assumptions can be discerned in initiatives such as performance
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43 reviews and performance targets which can be linked to masculinist concerns with personal power
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45 and accountability (e.g. Hearn, 1994; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993; 1998) while strategic management
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47 can be seen as masculine both in its militaristic language (campaigns, attacks, targets) and in its core
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49 assumptions that plans, objectives and techniques can render the future controllable (Hearn, 1994).
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3 As Hearn (1994) argues, this coincides with contemporary forms of masculinity that emphasizes
4 conquest and involves a 'disembodied and emotionally estranged concept of reason'. Given the
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6
7 higher proportion of men in senior management and leadership roles in most organizational
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10 contexts, this supports the notion that there is a demographic as well as a symbolic alignment
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12 between the figurative masculine body (associated with dryness, discipline, containment) and the
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14 identity of management/leadership roles.
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20 In referring to the alignment between occupational identity and embodied social identities, the glass
21
22 slipper concept allows, as Ashcraft contends, to see how identity of work (e.g. accountancy,
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24 management, cleaning, teaching) is constructed in relation to the embodied social identities
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26 associated with it. People accordingly derive identity from work and work derives identity from
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28 people so that practitioner bodies and the nature of work are mutually influential. This 'coupling' is
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30 based on socially classified physical bodies (who is doing the work and how that shapes the
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32 construction of tasks, skills); task features in terms of content and how this invokes bodies; the
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34 material organization of work and how occupational configurations and bodies interact.
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38 The glass slipper metaphor therefore brings bodies into how we conceptualize career effects – how
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40 physical bodies, work properties and their complex relationship will 'play out' in any given context.
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42 The metaphor, from her perspective, is a powerful one for its ability to capture the ways that
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44 occupations "come to appear possessed of inherent characteristics that render them a natural fit for
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46 some and a stretch if not an impossibility for others" (Ashcraft, 2013:16) granting certain social
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48 identities 'natural rights' to an occupation; through the privileging within the fable of a 'young
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50 woman of dainty physique' it captures the central role of embodied social identities in constructing
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52 the identities of work and how criteria for gauging suitability and competence are often
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54 disconnected from the actual work done (shoe size is immaterial in undertaking a princess role).
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57 Further, as the experiences of the ugly sisters attest, it potentially highlights the difficulties of fit
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3 when one's own social embodied identities do not readily align with those used to construct the
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5 identity of work.
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11 While the possibility of misalignment is acknowledged in her paper, this is not pursued in any
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13 substantive sense – despite the growing body of work that has examined work contexts and
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15 experiences of men and women who are either (demographically) in the minority at work or who do
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17 not (symbolically) appear to fit the perceived characteristics of the job (e.g. Kanter, 1977; Simpson,
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19 1997; Cross and Bagilhole, 2002; Lupton, 1999). Further, the glass slipper does not explain why and
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21 how disadvantages accrue beyond the notion of *devaluation* of the occupations and/or the social
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23 identities concerned. In other words, what are the processes that contribute to work based
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25 disadvantage when a misalignment exists between the two? In exploring some of these processes,
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27 we draw on understandings of merit and integrate these with the Teflon effect, discussed further
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29 below.
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33 **When the Glass Slipper does not Fit**

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36 While alignment of occupational identity and embodied social identities may have positive effects in
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38 terms of remuneration, progression and other aspects of work based experiences, misalignment has
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40 potential to lead to systematic forms of disadvantage. While not fully explored in her account, if
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42 some people are seen to 'naturally' fit certain occupations and roles, it follows that others do not
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44 align with the social definition of the work they do. Looking at nursing care, some work (Simpson et
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46 al, 2012; Pullen and Simpson, 2009) has highlighted how meanings attached to men's bodies (e.g. of
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48 rationality, detachment, cleanliness, authority) are seen as incongruent with the demands of bodily
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50 nursing care and emotional support. Instead these demands are commonly inscribed onto the
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52 bodies of women (Evans, 2002) with their association with 'lower order' behaviours. Men are seen
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54 as out of place and unsuitable for the demands of such roles. Similarly, as discussed earlier,
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3 Anderson (2000) refers to how norms of acceptability deem some 'dirty work' such as domestic
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5 cleaning to be appropriate for women – their bodies marked by misogyny and carrying dirt's stigma
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7 – but not, from Glenn (1992) suitable for the 'cleaner' bodies of men.
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11 In the context of management, research has shown how women's bodies are 'out of place' in a
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13 leadership role. As we have seen, management comprises a space of disembodied rationality, where
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15 authority is associated with the white, masculine body (Swan, 2005). Women and minorities, who do
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17 not 'fit' the social definition of the job, often feel conspicuous, awkward and self-conscious (Puwar,
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19 2004). Women in particular are seen to be profoundly embodied, carriers of "nature, sexuality,
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21 emotions and hormones" (Swan, 2005: 319) and hence incongruent with the demands for
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23 rationality, authority and control. Management as disembodied has led to women being
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25 'problematic signifiers' (Brewis and Sinclair, 2000: 195) in the workplace – so that women have to
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27 manage their bodies to construct authority through dress, talk, comportment. In short, and drawing
28
29 on the glass slipper metaphor, women do not fit the occupational identity of management and the
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31 glass ceiling, which focusses on the barriers that women face, fails to take into account the dynamic
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33 interplay between embodied dispositions and the social definition of the job.
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37 **Merit and the Glass Ceiling**

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40 Drawing on earlier discussions, the glass ceiling is based on notions of a concrete reality that is
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42 largely divorced from considerations of the identity of the work and from the embodied dispositions
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44 of the workers. Education, skills and past achievements – that comprise key criteria for merit and the
45
46 distribution of rewards – are seen to adhere to a neutral body with the suggestion that women (or
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48 other groups) must work hard - in Sheryl Sanberg's terms, '*lean in*', to overcome barriers faced.
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51 Heavily influenced by liberal-democratic ideals, merit is seen in most Western organizations as an
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53 'objective' measure of ability and achievement and is generally accepted, both morally and
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3 practically, as the main criterion determining progression within organizations – replacing earlier
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5 standards of assessment based on family, religion or birth. Thus, as Farber and Sherry (1995) explain:
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8 *“The meritocratic ideal is that positions in society should be based on the abilities and*
9 *achievements of the individual rather than on characteristics such as family background,*
10 *race, religion, or wealth. This ideal requires that merit be objective in the sense of being*
11 *definable without reference to those personal characteristics”.* Farber and Sherry (1995:856).
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17 Meritocracy is therefore a social order in which individuals are ranked on the basis of their individual
18 merit or worth - with the assumption that ability can be quantified, separated from social context
19 and assigned to the individual, leading to the identification of characteristics that are seen as
20 meritworthy or not (Jackson, 2007). Merit is therefore presented as an objective measure of
21 individual ability and achievement based on qualifications and the ability of the individual to apply
22 them to job-related tasks (Kumra, 2014). This is seen to help create a ‘level playing field’, aimed at
23 ensuring that fair chances are available to all individuals and groups, where decisions are based on
24 individual ability and/or the passing of technical qualifications in open competition (Crompton &
25 Sanderson, 1986).
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37 Within this aim in mind, the meritocratic ideal is presented as a strategic mechanism through which
38 equality of opportunity is ensured. Through an emphasis only on the talents and effort made by
39 individuals, it is felt that opportunity is available to all as differentiation between individuals based
40 on their membership or otherwise of particular groups is rendered irrelevant and unjust. Those with
41 merit will be rewarded for their talent and contributions and those who do not succeed do not do so
42 because of unjust or discriminatory organizational practices, but rather as a result of their lack of
43 merit.
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53 Various criticisms have been presented of this meritocratic ideal. One strand has focused on the
54 supposedly ‘objective’ nature of the criteria used to judge merit which presupposes reliance on
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3 rational choice in decision making (Thornton, 2007). From this view, far from being a purely
4 objective measure, judgments on merit contain an in-built uncertainty as they require subjective
5 predictions about future performance based on the past (Thornton, 2007; Knights & Richards, 2003).
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10 Other critiques highlight how concepts of merit are divorced, problematically, from social and
11 historical context. In this respect, Williams (1991) argues merit standards, while presented a-
12 historically and as power-neutral, represent socially acceptable preferences developed in an
13 instrumental sense by members of social groups in power at a particular time and place. As
14 Roithmayr, (1997) argues, rather than protecting against discrimination, merit is inscribed with
15 subjective, hierarchically based social bias which reproduces the status quo. In this respect, the
16 heavy reliance on discourses of merit to justify (promotion/hiring) decisions at higher levels of the
17 organizational hierarchy – and given that the top of most organizational hierarchies are dominated
18 by men - the benchmark for the 'best person for the job' is often based upon a masculine model of
19 success (Thornton, 2007) where merit celebrates a particular hegemonic masculinity oriented
20 towards a timetable of the male life course (Heward, 1994). This bias however is largely hidden by
21 the desire to see merit in fixed, universal terms (Sen, 1992) where it can assuage concerns about
22 unequal allocations of power and authority, and provide a discursive mechanism by which inequality
23 is justified.
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41 Studies of women in management and the professions support these critiques. Brink & Benschop
42 (2012) in their study of the construction of merit in professorial appointments, take issue with a core
43 contention of meritocracy i.e. that those in power are there because they are the most meritorious.
44 Along with Sommerlad (2011), Williams, (1991) and Roithmayr (1997) they argue the constitution of
45 merit is constructed and endorsed by prevailing power elites who stand to gain most from
46 maintaining the status quo. By presenting the processes which enabled them to reach their positions
47 of seniority and power as precise, objective and unequivocal, these processes are rendered beyond
48 reproach and the responsibility for anyone who does not succeed within the prevailing system lies
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3 with the individual (Brink & Benschop, 2012). Those from disadvantaged groups who struggle to
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5 meet these so-called objective criteria are accordingly deemed incapable of meeting 'absolute',
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7 'objective' and 'fairly applied' standards for success.
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11 As Heward (1994) suggests, merit is about establishing a reputation, being visible, ensuring one's
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13 activities are recognised and valued by those with decision making power. This suggests that merit -
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15 as in the possession of attributes - is insufficient in that it has to be recognized through practice and
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17 performance. In this respect, Kumra and Vinnicombe (2010) found that women in professional
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19 service firms not only had to meet the stringent requirements of the job but also had to engage in
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21 impression management so that they could be seen as ambitious and available. Referring to the
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23 gendered nature of 'fitness to practice' in law and accountancy firms, Haynes (2012) describes how
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25 success is predicated upon a masculine body and how women must distance themselves from
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27 negatively constructed aspects of their femininity through overt displays of positively viewed
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29 masculine forms of embodiment (e.g. dress, voice and self-presentation) if they wish to be taken
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31 seriously. However, as Kumra points out, women often find some of these practices, particularly
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33 around self-promotion, problematic - seeing them as 'inherently subjective, manipulative and largely
34
35 self-serving' (Kumra, 2014: 277) while Miller et al (1992) suggest that self-promotion is normatively
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37 more acceptable for men than for women.
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42 These studies indicate that merit is not just a set of skills and attributes that an individual possesses,
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44 as a form of physical capital anchored on a gender neutral body but also involves embodied
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46 performances. In other words, merit has to be demonstrated in day to day activities and practices
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48 e.g. through dress, language, comportment as well as self-presentations and impression
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50 management – so that others can be persuaded of value and worth. Merit is therefore conveyed
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52 through performance and the extent to which it is seen as deserved will depend in part on the
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54 meanings attached to the bodies in which merit is partly contained. So-called 'objective measures'
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56 such as qualification and skill will therefore be differentially valued according to how they are
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3 performed - and 'authentic' and valued performances will depend in part on the meanings attached
4 to bodies in context. Thus, as Haynes (2012) found, possession of capital (and hence, potentially,
5 'merit') are linked, through gender based embodied performances, to the acquisition of status and
6 distinction and are associated with hierarchical and inegalitarian notions of worth. Women
7 accountants and lawyers, through dress, voice and self-presentation, accordingly 'worked' their
8 bodies to conform to masculine ideals and to support their credibility and authority in their work
9 based aspirations.
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18 **When the Glass Slipper meets Merit: The Teflon Effect**

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21 Haynes's (2012) study highlights how professional identity and gendered embodiment are closely
22 interlinked. This has clear parallels with the glass slipper concept which demonstrates the importance
23 of an alignment between occupations and embodied social identities. As discussed earlier, bodies are
24 seen as appropriate for different forms of work – an alignment that can be both demographic (based
25 e.g. on gender, race, class) and symbolic in that some groups may be 'discursively or emblematically'
26 associated with the job (Ashcraft, 2013:9). Professional services such as law and accountancy are
27 accordingly linked to the embodied dispositions and embodied performances of men.
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37 As Ashcraft (2013) argues, and as discussed above, these alignments and misalignments 'expose'
38 systematic forms of advantage and disadvantage at work. This suggests that merit, as a dominant form
39 of resource allocation in Western organizations, is differentially valued according to both the nature of
40 work and the embodied social identities aligned with it i.e. it is contingent, largely, upon the 'glass
41 slipper fit'. As we have seen, the meanings attached to white middle class masculine bodies align with
42 the occupational identity of management. Merit (in the form of qualification, knowledge, skill, expertise)
43 performed through speech, language, dress, comportment, appears persuasive and easily adheres. In
44 other words, in these contexts, merit sticks.
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55 The notion of stickiness has been introduced and used in the dirty work literature (e.g. Bergman and
56 Chalkley, 2007) to describe how, from a social psychological perspective, stigma can adhere to the
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3 individual and affect, negatively, perceptions on the part of others of internal attributions of the
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5 individual concerned. Following this, we can see that 'stickiness' can also find purchase in
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7 understandings of the processes around the assignation of merit, as qualities that must be effectively
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9 performed and given external recognition. Such processes involve adherence to and absorption into
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11 bodies that are deemed to 'fit' the identity of the job. Thus, through processes of attribution – the
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13 *recognition* of merit - leadership qualities such as authority and decisiveness stick to and are absorbed
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15 into the bodies of men.

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18 Stickiness implies an opposite namely, the capacity for certain attributes to 'slide off' the body and to
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20 fail to adhere – which we refer to as the Teflon Effect. Teflon is a brand name of a non-stick chemical
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22 used on cookware – a term that is widely used, metaphorically, to refer to any non-stick properties of
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24 individuals e.g. where people do not accept particular identities or, in popular discourse, where they
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26 refuse to take on board criticism or blame. Alvesson and Robertson (2015) for example adopt the term
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28 'teflonic identity manoeuvring' to refer to a process of disengagement where deeper personal meanings
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30 of work identity are avoided. In the media, the term is often drawn on to describe a leading figure
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32 whose popularity appears unaffected by scandal or what is seen as poor judgment. As we suggest,
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34 the term can be equally used to refer to the 'stickiness' or otherwise of merit, capturing potentially
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36 the way merit adheres to some individuals – recognised as worthy and deserving – and not to others
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38 even though actual credentials may be broadly the same. More specifically, giving an understanding
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40 of some of the *processes* underlying misalignment or misfit, we can argue that a misalignment
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43 between occupation and embodied social identity may lead to the Teflon effect whereby the possession
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45 of merit fails to stick and the performance of merit lacks conviction and does not persuade.

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52 As example, in a recent film *The Imitation Game*, based on the breaking of the enigma code during the
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54 war, the team leader Professor Turing selects potential code breakers by inviting candidates who had
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56 solved a particularly tricky cross-word puzzle to attend a selection test. The room is full of men ready to
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3 start when a woman appears at the door. She is told she is in the wrong place. She protests 'I've come
4 to take the test. I solved the cross word puzzle and was invited to come'. But, says the man on duty at
5 the door, did you really do it yourself? He refused to believe that, as a woman, she was capable of such
6 a feat (she in fact had a double of first in Mathematics). The slipper did not fit – and merit did not stick.
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14 In Haynes's (2012) study of lawyers and accountants, merit also fails to adhere. One of her participants,
15 a female lawyer, recalls:
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18 "We disagreed with the hiring partner on a candidate ... his reaction ... to the way that she
19 was speaking, because she does have this very authoritative manner of speaking, is that she
20 was forceful and he couldn't get past that and listen to what she was saying". (Haynes,
21 2012: 495)
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28 In the context of law where, as Haynes points out, powerful advocacy and assertive behaviour are
29 required for effective performance of the job – particularly in areas such as litigation - an
30 'authoritative manner' might be seen as an asset, reflecting an ability to protect a client's interests.
31 From the Oxford English Dictionary, 'authority' is equated with confidence, firmness, influence and
32 respect. It implies possession of knowledge that is confidently and effectively displayed. These are
33 qualities embedded within the social definition of the work – qualities, however, that do not align with
34 the embodied dispositions of women. Similarly, looking at the context of the work meeting, research
35 (e.g. Maddock, 1993) suggests that authority adheres to men but that women have to work hard to
36 display the same level of competence. Simpson's (1997) study of MBA graduates is a case in point.
37 Here, she found that women managers, despite having the same credentials as male counterparts,
38 felt the need to attend meetings exceptionally well briefed. To be seen to be asking too many
39 questions or not being 'up to speed' were considered undesirable if they wished to avoid being seen
40 as naïve, 'dumb', ill-informed. Not surprisingly, male colleagues did not appear to share this pressure
41 and were often less well prepared – arriving casually at meetings and, in the words of one woman
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3 manager “not have a notepad and they’ll sit back in the chair and be very relaxed and, you know,
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5 add a few comments here and there” (Simpson, 1997: 125). However, this did not appear to affect
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7 the level of ‘authority’ or expertise conveyed. Merit adhered no matter how they presented
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9 themselves while women had to work hard to deserve recognition. In other words, merit is not
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11 something that is ‘possessed’ but must be demonstrated through embodied performances. So while
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13 authority adheres to men, it fails to stick to the bodies of women – the Teflon Effect - even when, as in
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15 Haynes’s study, it is displayed. Merit in this case was not recognised and was reinterpreted as ‘strident’
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17 in highly gendered and devalued ways.
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20 21 **Conclusion**

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23 In this paper, we have introduced the Teflon Effect, integrating it with Ashcraft’s (2013) notion of the
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25 ‘glass slipper’ – the latest in the glass metaphors to describe the problems women face in
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27 undertaking or aspiring to management roles. We accordingly draw attention towards processes
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29 underpinning misalignment or misfit, largely overlooked in her account. We argue that women
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31 experience a ‘Teflon effect’ when misalignment occurs between occupational identity and the
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33 embodied social identity of workers in that merit (requisite skills, qualifications, expertise) fails to
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35 ‘stick’. As the ugly sisters found as they sought to squeeze into the glass slipper and claim the prize
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37 of marriage to the prince, bodies are marked with meaning. Their bodies did not fit the idealised
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39 notion of a princess if only because of their unattractiveness and their oversized feet. They may have
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41 the qualities for a princess (whatever that may be) but merit did not stick.
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46 However, fit alone may not be sufficient for achieving equality at work. As Ashcraft contends,
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48 discrimination can be focussed on the work or occupation as well as on the individual who performs
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50 it. Work has its own, sometimes devalued, identity so that disadvantage may accrue primarily due to
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52 the nature of the job. Within the area of management, HRM has struggled over time to maintain a
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54 valued identity –often seen as non-core and lacking in strategic importance (Brewster and Smith,
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56 1990). HRM managers therefore, traditionally excluded from the boardroom, may face disadvantage
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3 from their occupation which ultimately 'rubs off' in terms of how others perceive them. There is
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5 therefore a complex interplay between mutually reinforcing entities based on occupation and self.
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8 Following the above, the Teflon Effect does two key things. Firstly, it provides an explanation for the
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10 persistence of the glass ceiling through a focus on how perceptions of merit are influenced by the fit
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12 between embodied social identities and perceived characteristics and features of the job – thereby
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14 helping to develop a more embodied understanding of the glass ceiling effect. As Ashcraft (2013)
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16 maintains, the dominant unilateral view of work-practitioner relations obscures the reciprocal
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18 relation between embodied social identity and work. Combined with notions of merit, the Teflon
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20 effect gives greater weight to this relationship and in so doing provides a deeper explanation for the
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22 persistence of barriers, despite equality initiatives and the possession, on the part of individuals
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24 concerned, of relevant credentials.
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28 Secondly and more specifically, the concept enables an understanding of the processes underlying
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30 misfit i.e. why and how a misalignment between social identity and the nature of the job may lead to
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32 persistent disadvantage. As we have seen, while the glass slipper incorporates a wider, bi-lateral
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34 view of discrimination at work, it does not address the underlying processes of misalignment. In this
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36 respect, building on Ashcraft's more embodied understanding of the glass ceiling, the Teflon effect
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38 draws attention to the embodied nature of merit. Thus, merit needs to be effectively demonstrated
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40 through embodied performances that require recognition for it to carry conviction and have value –
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42 recognition that is undermined when embodied social identity and occupational identity do not fit.
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44 This highlights the significance of the recognition, performance and embodiment of merit and how,
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46 through the Teflon effect, it may fail to adhere to the bodies of women in management and
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48 leadership roles and hence, fail to persuade. Our analysis highlights how merit, far from being an
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50 objective measure, is unstable and contingent. So while the glass ceiling concept is based, somewhat
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52 unproblematically, on a stable definition of merit, and while the glass slipper introduces a bi-lateral
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54 and more embodied orientation, the Teflon effect highlights the processes underlying misfit,
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3 foregrounding merit's instability and contingency and tying it closely to notions of embodied
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5 performance.

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8 This has implications for Human Resource professionals, line managers and diversity officers who
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10 must see beyond so-called objective measures of merit in performance reviews and/or in
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12 recruitment and promotion decisions to include a level of reflexivity on the significance of merit's
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14 subjective, 'performed' dimensions – the (e.g. gendered) as well as contextual factors that may
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16 underpin how merit is recognised and given value. The drive to formalisation (Noon et al, 2013)
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18 which assumes a stable, rational notion of merit may therefore not achieve the expected fairness of
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20 outcome if the 'bi-lateral' nature of potential discrimination is not recognised by key decision makers
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22 and if the potential 'stickiness', as well as 'non-stick' dimensions, of merit are overlooked. In this
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24 respect, future research could examine circumstances of alignment and misalignment between
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26 occupational identity and embodied social identity in terms of how merit is recognised and given
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28 value. This could build on already established work on men and women in non-traditional roles to
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30 examine enactments and performances of merit: how, in terms of gender and/or race, do
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32 comparable credentials potentially translate into different notions of worth and value; how is merit
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34 understood in these contexts and how is it conveyed?
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41 In this paper, we have drawn on some of the current glass metaphors that seek to capture and to
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43 theorise inequality and have sought to add a new dimension to this well established terrain. As
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45 Alvesson and Robertson (2015) argue, there is a need to supplement current metaphors with new
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47 concepts that can expand our interpretive repertoires. In this respect, the glass ceiling metaphor has
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49 captured, in realist terms, the failure of merit in the persistence of barriers faced by women at
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51 higher levels of the organizations even when relevant qualifications, skills and experience are
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53 possessed. By drawing on the glass slipper concept, and by introducing the Teflon Effect, we have
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55 sought to 'reinvigorate' current glass metaphors that describe women's position at work to include a
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3 more embodied dimension that can open up an understanding of merit as contingent and unstable –
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5 dependent in part on embodied performances and on notions of work/identity 'fit'.
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For Peer Review

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