

**Women Fighting for Their Executive Spot in the Workplace**

Allyson Ferreira

Professor Young and Professor Stiltner

Honors Capstone HN-300-I

16 December 2022

Does glass-to-skin contact harm woman more than men? Of course, it does because woman in business face the struggles of encountering the glass ceiling, but men can walk around carelessly with no worries. The concept of the glass ceiling was created in 1978 by Marilyn Loden. It acknowledges the obstacles to advance in a particular profession. For decades, there has been a stigma around women in business. It's evident that males make up the majority of executive job positions. “Women hold 1 to 3% of top executive jobs in the largest corporations worldwide. For women who also experience race discrimination, the percentage is even less” (Peus, Claudia). But why? Do women have too much family responsibility? Are women too emotionally unstable? Or are we just simply not qualified? All of these simplistic – even sexist answers – are wrong. The causes, we will see, lie in changeable cultures and practices. Understanding what causes women not to obtain executive roles will guide a better solution to giving women the chance to showcase their capabilities.

### **Corporate Culture**

The idea of corporate culture plays a leading cause in the issue of underrepresentation for women. The hiring process is a significant factor in part of this corporate culture. There is a preconceived notion of women that affects firms from hiring women versus hiring men. Gender stereotypes lessen the chance for women to be hired because stereotypical characteristics of women do not align with the characteristics thought of as necessary for a leadership position. According to a source by Schein, the typical model is “think manager, think male” (Kossek, Ellen Ernst, et al). As a female pursuing a career in business, it’s unsettling to hear this phrase. It makes me feel unworthy and unqualified for certain positions solely because I am female. Studies show that businesses tend to favor male applicants over female applicants. This is

especially seen when evaluators are male. This becomes an endless cycle of males hiring males. According to Kossek, “Findings showed that the women in the sample were rejected for an interview for the male dominated engineering position at twice the rate of the men, 46% of the time versus 23% of the time.” This proves the idea that businesses favor males and will continue to hire them for positions that are in fields heavily male dominated. The individuals in charge of the hiring selection have different norms when choosing between male and female candidates. The evaluators of applications have a subconscious bias for what positions males and females should have, simply based on their gender. Because it is subconscious, there is no subjective evidence to be made regarding their biases. This is because stereotypes are feelings and judgements that individuals have rather than specific data. When hiring applicants, many businesses consider the perceived risk. The higher the risk of hiring someone, the less likely they are to hire them at all. Positions that are considered more important, specifically executive positions, make the perceived risk greater for applicants. This is exemplified because news headlines, as well as investor reactions of females hired in executive positions are much different than if a man were to be hired in that exact position.

Another issue that corporate culture raises is because we are female, it is presumed we have a larger scale of family commitments as opposed to men. This is simply due to the fact they we are [or could become] a mother. Mothers are stereotypically known to be more involved in the child’s life. From personal experience, my mother always has played a larger role in my life than my father, and I could speak for a lot of my friends that felt the same way. She cooked me dinner, did my hair, and bought me new clothes as I grew up. The most prevalent and drastic example to show this role would be through dance. I have been a competitive dancer all my life. I was at the studio every day of the week for hours on end. We had to travel far for dance

competitions on the weekends, stay in hotels, buy costumes, have recitals, rehearse late nights and early mornings, and much more. Who was the one that took me everywhere and helped with it all? My mom did. Without her, I wouldn't have been able to do this. On the contrary, there were a decent amount of dance dads that helped some other dancers, but not nearly as many in comparison to the amount of dance moms.

My story is very common in the contemporary U.S. Male and female roles are vastly different in all areas of life, not just the workplace. While there are many household varieties and many two-parent full-time working families, much of the work of childcare and household chores still fall to the female partner, even if she is working full-time outside the home. Most women will have to choose between making sacrifices in their careers versus sacrifices in their family life. Claudia Peus demonstrated that in some countries, sacrificing family time for professional purposes was considered normal to benefit the family. In other locations, sacrificing careers for family time was more normalized. Although different everywhere, overall culture and tradition is the root to this impacting issue.

One issue that is more sensitive to individuals in corporate culture is gender discrimination and how it relates to sexual harassment. Priscilla Berry describes the history behind gender discrimination in the workplace. This is relevant to note because it helps shape the way the rest of history unfolds. In 1964, The Civil Rights Act was passed. This act prohibits discrimination in the workplace against race, color, religion, and most importantly, sex. It's targeted to deal with all aspects from hiring to firing. In 1972, Title IX was passed, prohibiting sex discrimination in education. Although not related to the workplace, this law was a step in the right direction to get equal rights between male and females. In 1978, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was passed, allowing for mothers to not be discriminated against simply due

to childbirth and other related situations. The Glass Ceiling Act of 1991 was passed to establish the Glass Ceiling Commission. The glass ceiling, as mentioned earlier, is a well-known issue that has been around for centuries. The act that was established is meant to conduct studies to research and fixate on the barriers of the advancement of woman, as well as increasing our opportunities. One would think that after all these federal laws were passed to benefit woman, change would occur. I can't say there hasn't been change, but there is in fact a long way to go. After all these attempts to change, various cases of sexual harassment and sex scandals were being revealed.

Sexual harassment affects both a women's work ethic and mental health. Priscilla Berry had a first-hand experience. When she applied to a job after graduation, the boss stated, "I just can't hire you, honey, even though you are more than qualified. If I put you on the floor with all those men, I would never get any work done." "My friends say, "Well, this kind of behavior has always been the norm with men in power"" (Berry, P. and Franks, T.). Actions and statements like these should not be normalized in the workplace. It creates a toxic environment that make woman feel uncomfortable. These reasons alone can affect women from getting hired from job, even if they are qualified. If a female does end up getting hired, various sexual altercations may cause various scenarios in the workplace. Women may quit their jobs because they cannot handle it or they become scared to speak up for themselves and have to suffer in silence. If they remain in their positions with these altercations occurring, they may have weaker job performances. This will seem like they're letting down their superiors. In past work experiences, as a female, I can say that male coworkers have made comments to me. Although they did not take it any further than a verbal remark and it wasn't extreme, it still made me feel uncomfortable. Now imagine the situation getting worse. It could happen to females you know – your sister, your daughter,

your girlfriend, or your best friend. Think about how it would make you feel if it was happening to someone you loved.

### **Traditional Gender Roles**

Aside from corporate culture, gender roles have become a societal norm that affects our behaviors because they create major differences between male and females. Individuals tend to do what they perceive as being considered socially acceptable. These gender roles are typically formed throughout our childhood directly from our environment (Cerbara, Loredana, et al). A study was conducted in which children were interviewed to measure how much they adhere to roles in society. In a year 2021 study, researchers analyzed children 8 to 11 years old on their levels of adhering to gender roles, as well as the variables that impact gender roles. It may come off as surprising, but these results showed that children saw women in the roles of cooking teaching, cleaning, whereas the men were seen as roles in driving, earning money, being a leader, etc. According to Loredana Cerbara, around 60% of the sample had medium to high levels of adhering to expected gender roles. The study also had felt as though family context throughout childhood was a primary factor in stereotypical behavior.

From personal experience, I can agree with the results of this study. My environment growing up consisted of my mom cooking and cleaning, while my dad was the one constantly fixing things and being the so called “leader” of the family. This was also the same for my aunts and uncles. Being that my entire environment revolved around these gender roles, it became engrained in my mind. After being engrained, it’s a difficult cycle to break out of. Slowly as I grew older, I’ve come to learn that these gender roles are just a societal norm and don’t need to be followed. It took a while for my mindset to adjust because I’ve been told phrases along the

lines of “girls can’t do this, or girls can’t do that.” More specifically during teenage years, you learn more about yourself, and it can be hard to navigate what you should or shouldn’t be doing with these societal norms. When people do things considered out of norm, others become quick to judge. Breaking out of this “norm” cycle is the first step into removing traditional gender roles in society.

Our traditional gender roles are also affected and represented based on our gender’s reproductive roles. If fertile, we have the option to have children and become a part of motherhood. This is something that drastically affects our lives. Motherhood is one of the ways that women are stereotypically seen as being more caring and nurturing than males. Men should be and should work to be more involved at home. Males tend to have a stigma of being assertive and aggressive. In a periodical by Patricia Moore, she found that men were seen as direct, aggressive, and competitive, while women were seen as indirect, collaborative, and person oriented. This shows that majority of individuals believe in the stereotype of male versus female characteristics. These characteristics reflect our roles and leadership styles.

A team of National Academy of Sciences’ scientists explain how, because men are associated with assertiveness and achievement oriented, it is part of the reason for the underrepresentation that females face. In general, there is a stigma around women in positions of authority. Oftentimes when women do get the opportunity to hold a leadership position, they are considered independent and confident, but no longer considered as likeable (Lawson, M. Asher, et al). Women begin to face more struggles in leadership positions because they are targeted for going against the societal norm. Companies not only should do their part in hiring more females in executive positions, but they should portray them in positive ways to begin to remove the stereotypes they are traditionally associated with. Traditionally in the workplace, women tend

not to be taken as seriously as men. Because of gender norms, males are thought of as to always know what they are talking about, whereas females need to prove themselves and are often underestimated. Situations outside of the workplace affects this issue as well. A lot of male employees tend to get together and exclude their female coworkers. Female coworkers often lack invitations to after work informal events such as sporting events, golfing, etc. This is yet another example of how women face stereotypes in the workplace.

### **Gender Pay Gap**

Because of the cultural and corporate attitudes described above, gender discrimination becomes embedded in pay and promotion practices. Signe M. Spencer states that “Bertrand and Hallock (2001) performed a detailed data analysis of 42,000 annual executive pay records in the USA to uncover that woman represented about 2.5% of the sample and earned about 45% less than men.” This shows that not only are women getting paid way less for their work, but also are not being equally represented in the field. Furthermore, a study found that with after analyzing 505,000 salaries, men were earning 24.1% more than women. To put this into perspective, the pay gap currently has been standing at around 20%. Some barriers to women advancement have been caused by gender discrimination; therefore, creating a gender pay gap. These factors include but are not limited to “human capital barriers (lack of education, finances, resources, and experience); gender-based stereotypes; differences in communication styles; exclusion from informal networks; limited management support for work/life programs; lack of mentors and role-models” (Malladi, Rama K. and Mean, Joshua D.). Without getting rid of gender discrimination, the gender pay gap will always remain.



As a young adult with a minimum wage job, a gender pay gap is nonexistent as roles are not often fixated on gender. Because of this, I have not yet had to experience issues caused by the gender pay gap. It does, however, make me worried about my future career. From a young age, I have been extremely driven and passionate about the things I involve myself in. I will continue to take these types of qualities with me into my future. If I'm dedicating my time and efforts into my job, meanwhile another male is doing the same yet getting paid more, that would make me feel defeated. According to the *United Nations*, at the current rate of improvement in pay equity, it would take over 250 years to close the pay gap. Clearly, I would be long gone and never able to see the effects this will have on the world.

### **Necessary Changes**

Action is needed to give women equal opportunities in executive positions in the business industry. There are a multitude of ways to contribute to this ongoing issue. Beginning with human resources, there should be policies set in place to strategize the hiring and selection process. By doing so, it will eliminate bias during the process. Building a more efficient human resources department that is actively seeking to hire females in high leadership positions will also help the issue. Because of the traditional gender roles in society, it has typically stopped some companies from hiring females into executive positions. The perspectives of these human resource department employees must coincide with the value women have to offer. This would ultimately aid in the hiring process of women.

Women are capable of more than thought out to be, so understanding these talents and utilizing their qualifications will push the world in the right direction. One of the reasons companies may find it difficult to hire females is the issue of work life and family colliding has

predominantly grown. Having a career that provides flexibility is becoming more and more important. Claudia Peus describes how incorporating ideas such as having equal opportunity policies and diversity management can help improve gender equality within training, recruitment, and promotion.

The International Labor Organization (*ILO*) has played a large role in the equality of women in the workforce. Some of the key factors they have influenced include discrimination issues, equal pay, and responsibility. They have even begun to work with the government to analyze and address the pay gap issue. The ILO has a platform called the EW@W, which stands for Empowering Women at Work. Through this platform they have self-assessments, learning modules, and various resources. Their goal is to promote gender equality within equal pay, work life balance, and eliminating harassment in the workplace (*ILO*). These are all key factors in the issues that women face in the workplace.

Encouraging and supporting the current female employees at a company is important as well. Recognition is often influential in a person's behaviors and performance. Programs to guide females as they get promoted could be beneficial as well. For example, a mentorship program could be influential in this aspect. Having a mentor can better assist career advancement. In a 2021 study by Mihali Mcilongo and Kariena Strydom, they identified whether mentorship and career advancement have a relationship statistically. The results of the study found that mentoring and career support was an important factor in women development in the workplace. Although it does not guarantee career advancement, it aids in the process because they are able to learn from and be supported by their coworkers.

### **Positive Female Influence**

Changes are necessary to demonstrate the influence that female executives can have in the workplace. Alice Eagly found that women are more transformational than men in the workplace. This is because they form deeper interactions with others, allowing them to listen effectively and develop the people around them. Overall, we tend to be more creative, allowing for different processes in decision making than men. Studies have shown that when women are in senior positions, they benefit the company in ways different than that of men. For example, they are more socially responsible, they provide better customer service, and they provide a safer work environment (Post, Lokshin, and Boone). Corrine Post, Boris Lokshin, and Christophe Boone with the *Harvard Business Review* analyzed over 150 companies to identify how women have changed a company. It has been seen that women bring an innovation approach to the company. This allows for more change in the company with less risk, but still keeping in mind the effects their decision may make. The costs of female's mistakes as opposed to their male counterparts comes at more of a cost; simply due to the fact that they are underrepresented, so they are more careful in their decision process. Having more women in executive positions will allow for new perspectives and new strategies in a company.

Some of the most influential moments have come from a woman being in an executive role. Numerous factors have stopped women from reaching the top, yet again allowing men to make all the decisions. Between the hiring process, family commitments, and sexual harassment, corporate culture has created a barrier between women and the equal representation we deserve in leadership roles. Gender roles and inequality have also created stereotypical thoughts which influence the recruiting process of women in the workplace. Women have proven to be influential in the business workplace, so action must be taken to allow us to gain increased

dominance in executive roles. The more opportunities and support we are offered to make change and advance in our careers, the more the world will see women as the corporate leaders they are deserving to be. Are you ready to break the glass ceiling?

### Works Cited

- Berry, Priscilla, and Tommy J. Franks. "Women in the World of Corporate Business: Looking at the Glass Ceiling." *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, Feb. 2010, pp. 1-10. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1072602&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Cerbara, Loredana, et al. "Are We Still a Sexist Society? Primary Socialisation and Adherence to Gender Roles in Childhood." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, no.6, Marc. 2022. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/10.3390/ijerph19063408>
- International Labour Organization. (n.d.). Retrieved November 17, 2022, from <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>
- Kossek, Ellen Ernst, et al. "How Perceived Riskiness Influences the Selection of Women and Men as Senior Leaders." *Human Resource Management (Wiley)*, vol. 57, no. 4, July 2018, p. 915. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/hrm.21902>.
- Lawson, M. Asher, et al. "Hiring Women into Senior Leadership Positions Is Associated with a Reduction in Gender Stereotypes in Organizational Language." *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 119, no. 9, Mar. 2022, pp. 1-11. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/10.1073/pnas.2026443119>.
- Malladi, Rama K., and Joshua D. Mean. "Is IT a gender Representation Issue or a Gender Pay Gap Issue? A Study of the Replaced Executives in the USA." *Business Economics*, vol. 56, no. 2, Apr. 2021, pp. 67-80. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eoh&AN=1896898&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- McIlongo, M., and K. Styrdom. "The Significance of Mentorship in Supporting the Career Advancement of Women in the Public Sector." *Heliyon*, vol. 7, no. 6, June 2021. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07321>.
- Moore, Patricia. "Battle of the Sexes! Male vs Female – Which gender Packs the Most Punch When It Comes to Business Management and Leadership Qualities? Patricia Moore Went in Search of Some Answers." *NZ Business*, vol. 20, no. 2, Mar. 2006. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbig&AN=edsbig.A143527284&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Peus, Claudia, et al. "On Becoming a Leader in Asia and America: Empirical Evidence from Women Managers." *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1, Feb. 2015, pp. 55–67. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.08.004>.

- Post, Corinne, Lokshin, Boris and Boone, Christopher. *Research: Adding women to the C-suite changes how companies think*. Harvard Business Review. (2021, September 17). Retrieved November 17, 2022, from [https://hbr.org/2021/04/research-adding-women-to-the-c-suite-changes-how-companies-think#:~:text=Research%20has%20shown%20that%20firms,top%20management%20teams%20\(TMTs\).](https://hbr.org/2021/04/research-adding-women-to-the-c-suite-changes-how-companies-think#:~:text=Research%20has%20shown%20that%20firms,top%20management%20teams%20(TMTs).)
- Spencer, Signe M., et al. “Bolstering the Female CEO Pipeline: Equalizing the Playing Field and Igniting Women’s Potential as Top-Level Leaders.” *Business Horizons*, vol. 62, no. 5, Sept. 2019, pp. 567-77. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.sacredheart.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.10.001>.
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Closing gender pay gaps is more important than ever*. IUN news. United Nations. Retrieved November 17, 2022, from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1126901>