

# Research paper on breaking the glass ceiling

[Law](#), [Justice](#)



## **Derailing Mommy Track Using the**

Kelso-Adler Theory of Economic Justice

### **Abstract**

The Glass Ceiling was an analogy used to describe invisible barriers that exist in the career progression paths of women and minorities. This was further reinterpreted as a Mommy Track – an image which focused particularly on maternity and the nature of women's societal and cultural roles. The paper uses the Kelso-Adler theory of economic justice to arrive at a series of guidelines which can be used to break the mommy track attitude and thus lead to a more harmonious workplace situation. In doing so, the arms of economic justice- participative and distributive are invoked.

## **Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Derailing Mommy Track Using the Kelso-Adler Theory of Economic Justice**

### **Introduction**

Glass ceilings are the invisible or subliminal barriers that exist in the career paths of women and minorities. Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia and Vanneman proposed in their theory of the Glass Ceiling Effect that the typical characteristics of this racial and gender based difference include increasing hindrances to the progression of minorities as they move up in their career. (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia & Vanneman, 2001) Notably, the theory doesn't base itself on the number of women and minorities in the higher echelons of the corporate but on the chances of advancement of these groups. Cotler and his colleagues also noted that the phenomenon was much more prevalent among women (both black and white) as compared to black men. (Cotler et al., 2001) The Federal Glass Commission (1995) established in its

fact finding report four different categories of this phenomena namely societal, governmental, internal (business) and a few other factors grouped together as others. (The Federal Glass Commission, 1995)

As early as 1989, the analogy of a glass ceiling being placed on top of the growing careers of women and minority was found to be misleading by theorists. Felice Schwartz was the first to question the imagery on the basis that the glass ceiling gives a notion of the management imposing an invisible barrier in the progress of the minority. He instead found that it is the inherent nature of the culturally prominent roles and responsibilities of a woman that makes for the barriers. He drew references to maternity and other commitments of women which increase the employment cost of the company they are employed in. (Schwartz, 1989) Referring to Schwartz's views and the wide range of intense reactions, the New York Times published an article and for the first time coined the term " Mommy Track". (Lewin, 1989) Since then, Mommy Track has come to represent the view that the devotion of women to their careers is vastly dependent on maternity and that there are factors within the society that make women spend more time away from work. This has drawn criticism for assuming discrimination in the very basic threads of the society.

It is in this context that the fundamentals of justice come in. Justice, social or economic, refers to those principles that make the society strive towards equality and equal opportunities for its members. The principles in general intend that the society express solidarity with their members and work towards valuing human rights and dignity. (Zajda, Majhonovich, Rust, 2006) In particular, economic justice is a set of guidelines that helps the society

design economically just institutions that provide men and women with the space to work beyond the pulls and pressures of economics itself. (Centre for Economic and Social Justice (CESJ), n. d) The Kelso-Adler theory of Economic justice talks about participation, distribution and harmony. (CESJ, n. d) This paper aims to use the Kelso-Adler theory of economic justice to de-construct the presence of the mommy track and the glass ceiling phenomena in the society. The first part of the paper discusses the how the equality of participation can be guaranteed through equating participation. The second part speaks about women and the equality of distribution. The final part discusses how through these two arms of economic justice, harmony can be achieved. Conclusions are made, drawing a parallel to similar attempts at achieving economic justice of different classes in the past.

## **Mommy Track and Participative Justice**

Mary Anne Zammit, in her article in for the International Museum of Women speaks about women and workplace in the context of the economic slowdown. She touches on some of the core issues affecting women which include giving them equal opportunities as those given for men. (Zammit, 2013) This draws in the first arm of the Kelso-Adler theory which focusses on generating equal opportunity for all classes. The following paragraph aims to apply this arm of the theory to the condition of women.

The principle of participation or participative justice focusses on the input from the labor vis-à-vis the input from the capital into the market. The fundamental principle here is to ensure that every human being who is a part of the economy has equal opportunities to contribute to it. The violation

of participative justice occurs when the laws are inclined towards a particular sect, in this case, men. The monopolistic laws in favor of the supposedly strong gender violate the rights of the women to have an equal opportunity to participate in the economic structure. The alternative to these structures and paradigms is to not look at jobs and opportunities for women as charity but to instead look at it as an alternative to redistribution and reaffirmation. There are many ways using which women can be made a part and parcel of the economic input. Given below are a few guidelines that throw light on how to use this arm of the Kelso-Adler principle of economic justice to break a layer of the mommy track imagery. These are in sync with the principles described in the age of the robot by Norman G Kurland. (Kurland, 1986)

- The Women's right to life must include their right to earn a livelihood. The women must be in a position to enjoy everything that the world has to offer including intellectual and spiritual satisfaction.
- Women should be a part of policy decisions also. Policy decisions often play a leading role in changing the face of an organization or an industry over a course of time. The women must therefore be involved in participatory policy framework development thereby eliminating any sense of discrimination from the base. An important point here with regards to mommy track is that the presence of a woman in the policy making body will be able to split the parenthood responsibility among women and men and hence negate the theory of the mommy track.
- Apart from the corporate world, this concept of women participation must be taken into the citizen framework. Here the citizen participation in governance must include a special focus on women and their rights and

participation. This is another organic way of including women into the system. Women shouldn't be in a position where in the machines end up doing more work than them. This is grossly misunderstood as the ability of women to not live up to the demands of top jobs, often reflecting in theories such as the mommy track

- The women must be increasingly included and involved in various creative and managerial roles as well as be give equal opportunities to earn their right to comment. This is the basic tenet of human dignity and it must equally and wholly apply to the women as well.
- The women must be allowed to control their own capital and property. This is referred to as the right to private property and is an economic instrument that guarantees an equal share for women in the profits entitled for them.
- Technology is an important leveler in as far as the input into economy is concerned. Women must be given a platform to play an equal role in this technological revolution. They must be allowed to not only learn the state of the art models and the cutting edge technology but also be allowed to be in a position from where they can lead the revolution.
- The share of the women in the corporate decision making is key to granting them participative justice. Gone are the days when a woman would serve coffee in a board meeting. Today, women are heading some of the largest organizations and are taking all the important decisions or are at least playing a role in them. This is crucial to the participative justice for women.
- Information, accountability and risks – these three tenets should be equally shared with women. The concept being discussed here is that while the women should not be overtly showered with only power making it a reverse

affirmation against men, they should be provided a base from where they are able to share both the positives and the negatives – i. e. Information and risk equally.

## **Distributive Justice for Women**

Distribution in economic justice refers to the output of labor and the capital. This must not be confused with charity. Just like in labor, in the case of women and maternity too, the distributive justice must not be confused with providing women with more leave and other such benefits. The aim of this arm of economic justice is to bring an internal change in the system. There is a particular amount of sanctity involved to this process and that must not be breached. Kurland in his compilation documents these principles too. Here we look at them in the context of maternity, women and the glass ceiling. (Kurland, 1986). The requirement here is that once the women have been made a part of the system and the issues with relation to the society and maternity have been internalized into the economy of the organization, the women must be allowed to reap the benefits of their contribution.

Access to capital ownership thus plays a major role in here. The shareholding options too need to be equally divvied. The premise of this argument is that once it comes to distributing the gains, one must not at any cost reiterate the initially assumed inequality. The same inequality has been covered by the principles adapted in the participative part of the process. However the same can be of regressive effect when the men start feeling that their efforts deserve more output as compared to that of the women. This happens mostly due to the problems with time. For example, a person who has entered the system after the initial activities of participative justice have

been completed will not be in a position to appreciate the distribution either. This has to be avoided by making both participative and distributive justice a part of the organizational culture. The guidelines which must govern the distributive justice, in the case of women are as follows:

- Once established as equal contributors to the economy, the earnings of the women should also be in the same proportion. The system should focus on making the women equal contributors and then dividing the benefits equally instead of focussing on dividing the benefits based on past prejudice and assumed ideas of inefficiency that arise out of maternity.
- Both the human as well as the capital inputs of the women have to be respected while allocating the returns. This is a direct follow up to the principle of participative justice which guarantees the right to invest to a woman. While charity must be minimized and the attitude of doing a favour to women despite them having to go through the cycle of maternity must be cut down, the policy of rewarding each individual according to his or her needs and deeds must be implemented.
- Just prices and wages must support the free market place that has been established as a part of the principles of participative justice. This should not be coerced but should instead flow naturally into the system.
- Forced equality, especially in the case of women and in the instance of maternity coming in the way of a fledging career can often have a negative effect. This should be avoided at all costs. The incomes must increase with time and must follow the same ratio as followed for men.



## Conclusions - Harmony

In the two above sections, it has been established that a just and intelligent use of the Kelso-Adler theory and the two arms of economic justice namely participative and distributive will ensure that the mommy track is pushed outside the system. The effort therefore must be to use the principles of participative justice to plot an equal ground for both genders by internalizing the socio-biological phenomena of childbirth and its aftermath. This should be followed by the use of the distributive theory of economic justice to roll out benefits accordingly in a way that does not hurt or does not hint at charity. The key to derailing the mommy track and breaking the invisible glass ceiling lies in ensuring that the economic structures and mechanisms co-opt the basics of man-woman differences and synergize these differences into a positive output proposition. The guidelines of the Kelso-Adler theory of economic justice goes a long way in helping nations implement these thought processes; the glass ceiling, after all, can truly be broken.

## Bibliography

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This 1989 article traces the gradual acknowledgement of the existence of a glass ceiling and its relevance to women as well as the implications of motherhood. The author suggested that women employees be segregated on the basis of motherhood as working mothers cost more to the company.

Lewin, T (1989). “ Mommy Career Track Sets off A Furor.” The New York

Times. Retrieved from [http://www. nytimes. com/1989/03/08/us/mommy-career-track-sets-off-a-furor. html? pagewanted= all&src= pm](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/08/us/mommy-career-track-sets-off-a-furor.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm)

This 1989 article was in response to the article by Schwatzr in HBR. It contains the responses of several feminists, who were mostly outraged by the suggestion of segregation. It also notes that Schwartz intended the article only to promote flexibility at work for working mothers.

Zajda, J. L, Majhonovich, S , Rust, V. D, ( 2006) Education and Social Justice:

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This book contains a collection of articles related to gender discrimination and economic as well as social justice in the field of education.

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Zammit, M. A, (2013). “ Do Women Have Equal Opportunities in the Workplace?” Economica. Retrieved from <http://imow.org/economica/stories/viewStory?storyId=4664>

This article evaluates the current scenario for working mothers and concludes that the glass ceiling does still exist in the US as well as other countries. It also highlights some of the most pressing problems faced by women employees after motherhood.

Kurland, N. G, (1986).” Economic Justice in the Age of the Robot”. CESJ.

Retrieved from <http://www.cesj.org/thirdway/economicjustice/ageoftherobot.html>

This article from the Center for Economic and Social Justice provides a comprehensive understanding of the prominent concepts and theories of economic and social justice. This knowledge is crucial in understanding the effect of mommy track from an economic justice perspective.