

The glass ceiling 1691



" You" ve Come a Short Way, Baby!"

Professor Diana Bilimoria hit it on the nail when she proclaimed, " Even when women do all the right things, and have all the right stuff, they continue to be blocked from the innermost circles of power" (Daily). The increasing number of working women with an education and experience in the business world continue to encounter this blockade mentioned by Professor Bilimoria. Suzanne M. Crampton and Jitendra M. Mishra find that the promotions to managerial positions achieved by women have, unfortunately, not kept up with the increase of women in the work force. This barrier that keeps women from promotions is called the glass ceiling. " Glass ceiling is a term coined in the 1970" s to describe the invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, which bar women from top executive jobs" (" Glass Ceiling Separates Women for Top"). Robert B. Reich, Secretary of Labor, informs his readers that the expression " glass ceiling" first appeared about ten years ago in a column entitled " Corporate Women" in the Wall Street Journal" (iii). Since the mid to late eighties, the term has been applied to identify situations where women have bumped their heads in efforts to reach high-level positions. One source reports that the results of a Labor Department study prove that the " glass ceiling" prevents women from achieving promotions in management and leadership positions (Crampton). Women" s " highest levels tend to be in staff positions, such as human resources, or research or administration, rather than line positions, such as marketing, or sales, or production" (Reich iii). Crampton finds that out of all management positions of modern organizations women hold only sixteen percent of them. Even worse, women reside in 4 percent of the highest-level

positions in management and administration (Crampton). Even with the help of affirmative action, the glass ceiling still does not shatter.

Affirmative action was developed in reaction to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act declared that discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sex was illegal. The President's call for affirmative action acted as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Act. The Random House Dictionary defines affirmative action as "the encouragement of increased representation of women and minority members, especially in employment." With the establishment of affirmative action women have gained advancements and prestige in the business world; however, the phenomenon known as the glass ceiling hinders women from achieving promotions to high-level positions in corporate America. Similar to how the government recognized affirmative action as a solution to enforcing the Civil Rights Act, it recognized the need for a solution to the glass ceiling situation. Reich believes that due to the efforts of Secretary Elizabeth Dole and Secretary Lynn Martin "the Department of Labor became closely involved in identifying and publicizing the glass ceiling problem" (iii). Senator Bob Dole proposed the Glass Ceiling Act in order to address the situation. The Glass Ceiling Act designed a commission, known as the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, to study and propose means for eliminating the glass ceiling (iii).

Fortune magazine periodically ranks and publishes a list of America's largest companies. Many women advocates use these reports as tests to see where women stand in the selected companies. Crampton reports "of the Fortune 50 companies, only 1.3 percent of corporate officers are women, while 1.7 percent are women within the Fortune 500 companies. Among

two-hundred of America" s largest companies, women hold less than a quarter of executive jobs and less than five percent of the vice-presidents are women." One may think well at least women have broken through the glass ceiling and that advancements have been made. However, in the past ten years no more than two women have served as CEO" s for a Fortune 500 company (Daily). The number of women who serve on the boards for these major corporations " comprise a relatively modest percentage of all board members" (Daily). A catch-22 is established because most male board members once served as CEO" s, and that experience is sometimes an unestablished rule to becoming a board member. If few women can make it to the top, how will women ever make it on the boards? The women that are board members usually serve on more than one, or two boards; the statistics are unable to convey that the same few women make up that " modest percentage" (Daily).

Kaufman relays that the Bureau of Labor estimates that in five years women will make up forty-eight percent of the American work force. Advocates for women" s progression in business occupations would hope that with the increase in working women, the number of women in CEO positions would also increase. Unfortunately, this view does not seem too promising. In Fortune magazine" s survey of America" s largest companies " only sixteen indicated that they thought it very likely or somewhat likely that their company would have a female CEO within the next ten years, while eighteen percent believed it was very likely within the next twenty years" (Crampton). Several key factors hold fast the glass ceiling and prevent women from progression.

Discrimination against women still plays a large part in enforcing the artificial barrier. Crampton reported that a recent study found that 79 percent of the CEO's believed that "prejudice and stereotypes are among the most identifiable barriers to women's advancements." "Discrimination can occur in the form of organizational structure policies, informal networks, and cultures that are so male-dominated that they become barriers for women to rise in the organization" (Crampton). Women can hope that over the next couple of years discrimination will begin to disintegrate, which will allow for more penetration through the glass ceiling. Even though women cannot control the prejudices held by men, women can try to break and rid of the gender stereotypes. By disproving that not all women fit the stereotypes, career women may be able to aid their advancement to higher positions.

"Females are often thought of as being dependent, passive, fragile, non aggressive, non competitive^; women lack career commitment, are not tough enough, don't want to work long and unusual hours, are too emotional, won't relocate, lack quantitative and analytical skills and have trouble making decisions" (Crampton).

Since men and women's characteristics differ in certain aspects, the male-dominated business world believes that women lack the "qualities that are considered beneficial to be effective managers, and traditionally masculine traits have a higher perceived value" (Crampton). Women are not even given chances because of pre-established beliefs even when they may be more qualified and better educated than their male counterparts. This situation occurs more often than not, and companies create excuses that will appear legitimate. Catherine M. Daily informs that when Mr. Preston, the CEO of

Avon, resigned, numerous top female executives within the company possessed the qualities and experiences to fill the vacancy. However, the board elected an outside director, Charles R. Perrin, to replace Preston (Daily). Even though discrimination and stereotypes essentially preserve the barriers, other factors contribute to their upholding.

Another controlling factor that reinforces the glass ceiling is the lack of mentors.

Women" s biological features, which men do not possess also hinders women from reaching high-level positions. " Women have to deal with the complexities of the dual role as working woman and mother" (Crampton). Even though women almost make up half of the work force, they alone are still expected to carry out all of the household chores and duties. Most women leave work only to go home and run around, clean and cook. " Combining of a family and a career and the behavioral expectation placed on woman" at times seems impossible (Crampton).

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