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Article

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Junior Management Science (JUMS)

Provided in Cooperation with:

Junior Management Science e. V.

Suggested Citation: Vetter, Julia (2021) : The Glass Cliff – Women's Thrive to Save Poor Performance and how to Approach it in the Workplace, Junior Management Science (JUMS), ISSN 2942-1861, Junior Management Science e. V., Planegg, Vol. 6, Iss. 1, pp. 39-59, <https://doi.org/10.5282/jums/v6i1pp39-59>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/294945>

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The Glass Cliff – Women's Thrive to Save Poor Performance and how to Approach it in the Workplace

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Abstract

For decades the rise of women to leadership positions in the workplace has been a conspicuous matter on a global spectrum. Women are challenging the prospects that were once emplaced upon them and continue to break the forefronts of opportunity that face them. This thesis brings life to Eleanor Roosevelt's quote "A woman is like a tea bag: you never know how strong she is until she gets into hot water" by exploring the glass cliff phenomenon. Stating that women have a higher chance of rising into leadership positions during a time of poor company performance, the research conducted for this paper aims to look further into the background of the principles creating this subtle form of discrimination. To discover the root cause of the glass cliff phenomenon, this thesis aims to understand when, how and why these positions are conceived furthering on how to approach the changes coveted by modern society regarding female leadership. This composition takes into account an amalgamation of existing research and the individual empirical research conducted, explaining the causation behind the glass cliff through understanding the biases, stereotypes and societal dynamics that enable glass cliff positions in the workplace.

Keywords: Glass cliff; women in leadership; discrimination; equality; management.

1. Introduction

The rise of women to leadership positions in the workplace has been a quintessential matter on a global spectrum for the last decades. Women have taken on roles in society that do not always fit the perceived image of what it means to be a woman and this courage is what has paved the way for the next woman to do the same. Whether this be women flying airplanes, breaking world records or running Forbes 100 companies; the transparency of gender roles is diminishing. In professional setting as well as in society, women are challenging the parameters that cuffed them to the standards of civilization. There are more women than ever achieving leadership positions although, the majority of companies continue to have male-dominated upper management (Catalyst, 2009; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). Exploring these new frontiers of leadership and success creates new barriers for many women and minorities climbing the corporate ladder. Barriers that are not always visible yet very restricting in their aptitude.

1.1. Relevance

The tides are turning, socially and institutionally to eliminate the obstacles limiting female leadership. California

State Legislature, home to Silicon Valley, passed the Senate Bill 826 (SB 826) on the 30th October 2018, requiring all public companies in California listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) to have a minimum of one female board member by the closing of 2019. Further prescribing the necessity of women on boards by the closing of 2021 in ratio terms of board members (e.g. minimum of three women directors on a board of six directors or more) (SB 826). Nearing the end of 2018 only 21% of companies with an IPO in California would have met the requirements of the SB 826 according to an Equilar study.¹ This addresses that the implementation of institutional support for women is becoming a requisite in being enforced to create the space for women to access certain positions with less resistance. However, by mandating female leadership, the positions made available could develop into glass cliff positions depending on certain environmental factors that will be further explored in this analysis. Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) state a higher representation of women in positions of organizational leadership may well lead to changes in the associations of leadership and masculinity. Using quotas to regulate the hiring and promo-

¹Forbes, AllBusiness (2018, October 4).

tion processes within working environments causes extensive dispute amongst individuals, justly arguing that talent does not pertain to gender. This thesis will further on the notions regarding quotas in the workplace in respect to their relation to glass cliff positions.

Recent research revealed that economic crisis could present itself as the idealistic time frame for a woman to achieve a leadership position (M. K. Ryan & Haslam, 2005, M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007). One does not have to look far to see glass cliff positions in present day culture; from Marissa Mayer taking over at Yahoo after a long term of crisis within in the company to Theresa May stepping in as Prime Minister after the Brexit referendum in 2016. The leadership roles these women took on had tremendous potential to fail and existed in extreme times of crisis, the very definition of a glass cliff position. Selecting women for these precarious positions has negative implications for their future career opportunities, as directors of unsuccessful companies are less likely to be offered different leadership possibilities (Ferris, Jagannathan, & Pritchard, 2003).

1.2. Academic Foundation

While women are accessing the management positions and breaking glass ceilings around the world, they continue to face a subtle art of gender discrimination along the way (Agars, 2004; King, 2006; Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003). The significance of gender stereotypes and organizational structures on leadership opportunities for women in the working world is prevalent and well researched by many ambivalent researchers like Michelle Ryan and Alex Haslam. Their studies will be thoroughly exhausted in this thesis providing for the foundation of the research conducted.

Primary research conducted by M. K. Ryan and Haslam (2005) revealed that companies on the London Stock exchange were more likely to hire a woman to their executive board during a time of poor performance in the prior months. They furthered their findings in a laboratory setting three years later, giving participants scenarios of differently performing companies and assessing their attitudes toward future leadership. Men and women partaking in the study showed favoritism towards female leadership during poor performance periods within the company, hence emphasizing that women are preferred in a time of crisis by both men and women (M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007). However, present research also implies that gender discrimination for organizational leadership is not necessarily against women rather regarding the stereotypes about men (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010).

1.3. Research Structure

This analysis aims to understand the causation of these glass cliff in three measures. First, considering the past historical positions women held in the corporate world will further the understanding of *when* the glass cliff emerges. Then, through key analysis of existing literature review and qualitative interviews, this paper will assess *how* and *why* glass

cliffs are created. To conclude, evaluating the perceptions of men and women in the workplace in regard to the idealistic working environment, this thesis will shed light on what the ideals in the working world could establish when diminishing gender discrimination.

The research conducted is contingent on the qualitative interviews executed in the time frame provided for this thesis. Through the analysis of the responses collected and further interpretation, the structure this paper takes on derives from the presumptions made by the participants and according research.

Chapter 2: The literature review summarizes existing and essential insights to understand the foundation of the glass cliff phenomenon. By defining the indispensable terminology relevant to deriving the means of the phenomenon, this chapter will lay the ground work needed for the research phase to initiate. This latter part of this chapter will provide a holistic view of the different phenomena associated to the glass cliff and the main attributions that explain its existence.

Chapter 3: The methodological approach depicts the research method used in this thesis. First, by covering the general approach then thoroughly discussing how the qualitative research was designed by capturing the empirical setting, procedure, participants and analysis in depth.

Chapter 4: The results of the interviewees conducted are summarized in this chapter, defining the different insights gathered from the 13 participants. The analysis is split into three sub categories based on the point of time in the interviewees career path: (1) the younger generation, (2) the middle generation and (3) the mature generation. The chapter identifies the primal patterns in the responses collected and compares the view points of the different contributors.

Chapter 5: The discussion of this paper interpretation of the major findings concluded from the interviews conducted. Furthermore, discussing the meaning these findings contributed to the thesis and how the research is relevant in regards to prior existing work. Lastly, this chapter will also analyze the validity of the research conducted.

Chapter 6: The conclusion and contribution will summarize the main findings that were drawn from the research conducted. It will assess the future of female leadership in the workplace and regard the limitations that this research encountered. This chapter will also identify future research that can be conducted to further understand how female leadership is impacted by gender discrimination and how women potentially add to the discrimination.

2. Background

To understand the glass cliff and how it was created, one must first understand the psychological phenomena that underlie its existence. It is critical to recognize the differences between a glass cliff and glass ceiling, which this chapter will elucidate. Essentially, the creation of a glass cliff position is expedient in a plethora of different pathways and usually isn't due to only one of the factor. While stereotypes about

gender and leadership are a main causation, biases, group dynamics and perceptions of change can significantly impact the reasons behind the formation of a glass cliff. This chapter will decipher the main causes that equate to the creation and continuance of this phenomenon.

2.1. Definitions

As the glass cliff phenomenon pertains to other phenomena regarding the path to leadership for women and minorities, this chapter will clarify the difference in the conceptions and their significance parallel to the glass cliff. Understanding the differences between terms such as the glass ceiling and glass elevator is critical for the apperception of the glass cliff, which will be defined in the aftermath of the former.

2.1.1. The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling by definition is “an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions.”² It is argued that women are held back from corporate promotion and advancement due to informal networks of communication and male preconceptions and stereotyping of women (Hefferman, 2002). Therefore, creating a glass ceiling that permits for women to see the success they could have while climbing the latter of success though rarely ever reaching the promotion. While the glass ceiling has hindered women from achieving managerial success in the past, the number of women who occupy leadership positions is greater than ever (Bullard & Wright, 1993; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005; Dreher, 2003; Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), 2002).

2.1.2. The Glass Escalator

While discussing gender phenomena, the glass elevator is often overlooked. The term refers “to the precipitous promotion of men over women into management positions in female-dominated fields such as nursing, education and social work”.³ Men often experience positive discrimination when working in female-dominated fields, where women are eager to work with men in “their” occupations, unlike the “poisoned” work environment women encounter when entering into male-dominated occupations (Williams, 1992). Discrimination against men in certain female-dominated occupations is still prevalent today, starting in the youthful years when teenage girls start their first babysitting jobs, teenage boys are less likely to be chosen to care for children than girls are. This later pans out into professional careers where the initial discrimination unravels creating female-dominated occupations. However, when men do stay in the female-dominated occupation, they are more likely to reach managerial success for instance, as a principal of school.

2.1.3. The Glass Cliff

Essentially, the glass cliff phenomenon states that “women’s perceived suitability for senior positions is likely to increase under conditions of organizational crisis.”⁴ The term *glass cliff* was coined by S. Alexander Haslam and Michelle K. Ryan (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; M. K. Ryan & Haslam, 2005) as a rebuttal to Judge (2003) analysis of the highest Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 (FTSE 100) performing companies’ boards. He observed that in the ten highest ranked companies with women on their boards, six had underperformed the mean performance of FTSE 100 companies. Meanwhile, the five companies with the lowest amount of female board members performed better than the FTSE 100 average. His comment that “corporate Britain may well be better off without women on the board”⁵ was what triggered Haslam and Ryan to analyze the correlation of company performance and appointments of male or female board members (M. K. Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

2.2. Causes of the glass cliff

To understand how, why and when glass cliffs are created, one must look past the current corporate positions and return to the origins of modern societies perceptions. Due to a large part of historical leadership having been male-dominated, stereotypes regarding the perceived qualities of gender and leadership shaped the biases of women in leadership positions. This continues influencing the perceptions regarding women in general and the qualities of success, creating stereotypes that strengthen the feasibility of creating glass cliffs in the workplace. Further theories, biases and stereotypes that lead to the creation of glass cliffs will be explored in this chapter.

2.2.1. Implicit theories

There is bountiful research that affirms a correlation of gender differentiation in the workplace, more specifically a reflection in people’s implicit theories about gender and leadership. Evidence observed that there is an incompatibility in perception of beliefs about what it means to be female and what it means to be a good leader. (Agars, 2004; Eagly & Karas, 2002; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Schein, 1973, Schein, 1975, Schein, 2001). Implicit theories about management and gender are critical as they are not only descriptive but also powerfully descriptive (Heilman, 2001) meaning that they have immense impact on how women are treated in the workplace as these theories provide the foundation for expectations of how roles are distributed and how to act in the workplace.

2.2.2. Stereotypes about Gender and leadership

While it is often underestimated, stereotypes are a main contributor to differences in associations of leadership styles. Stereotypes are “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern”⁶ (See Appendix 1). Through societies prejudiced

²Glass Ceiling (n.d.) in Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary.

³Broner, Asselmeier, and Broner (2013, September 30).

⁴Academy of Management Review 2007, Vol 32, No.2, p. 554

⁵Judge (2003, p. 21)

⁶Stereotype (n.d.) in Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary.

and overgeneralized view of gender roles and leadership qualities, the expediency of creating a glass cliff is accelerated. In a historical context, leadership has been predominantly male which has subconsciously shaped societies' view of how leadership is portrayed, creating a masculine stereotype of leadership (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004; Eagly, 2007). The effect that gender stereotypes have on women in the workplace have been extensively researched and have been expanded into two phenomena, think manager- think male and think crisis- think female, which will be further expanded on in this thesis. Having studied women in management to ascertain their issues and challenges in managerial diversity, Antal and Izraeli (1993) stated that “*probably the single most important hurdle for Women in management... is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male.*”⁷

Think manager—think male

One of the major hurdles women encounter when climbing the steps of leadership is the perception of what manager qualities are, quite in contrary as to how women are; this is more simply reduced to the phenomenon of *think manager-think male* (TMTM). Schein (1973) studied the correlation of stereotypes of men and women as well as middle managers. Participants were given a list with ninety-two descriptive terms and were asked to associate them with either (1) women in general (2) men in general or (3) successful middle managers. She observed that sixty of the terms overlapped between the characteristics of men and managers including terms such as self-reliant, confident, ambitious, forceful and informed. Schein repeated the study with male (1973) and with female (1975) managers, concluding the same results in both studies. Schein's study was repeated on a global scale in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, China and Japan as well as in the Military⁸ all proving the initial findings of Schein (1973). Schein's study proved that there is direct linkage between the perceptions of women and the perceptions of what it means to be a good manager. The TMTM phenomenon is seen even stronger in management areas that have been male- dominated where women are then at a two-fold disadvantage against a male candidate. (Schein, 2001). Furthermore, the TMTM is evident in the mannerisms that managers portray during the workday; if a man is assertive then he's being a leader whereas, if a woman is being assertive she is seen as pushy (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992) Therefore, the TMTM phenomenon is a lose- lose situation for women that continues to be an obstacle in the workplace and is a main contributor to the creation of the glass cliff.

Think crisis—think female

Context determines the grounds for any preconceptions to exist hence why the prejudice towards female leadership changes when there is crisis involved.

Known as the *think crisis- think female* (TCTF) phenomenon (M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007), the correlation that women may be better equipped in situations of plight. Schein (1973), Schein (1975) study also revealed that the descriptive terms associated to women were understanding, intuitive, helpful, sophisticated and cheerful; traits that are often desired and useful during a time of crisis. TCTF was further confirmed when a three-part study (M. K. Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011) compared gender stereotypes in successful and unsuccessful companies resulting in apparent correlation between the preference for male leadership in successful companies and female leadership in the unsuccessful companies. Table 1 is a result of Study 1 and reflects current perception of characteristics of male and female managers in successful and unsuccessful companies. The TMTM association is evident in the results, more specifically underlining that when one thinks of crisis they think “*not male.*”

However, Table 2 is the result of Study 2 which underlines the qualities desired from managers in successful and unsuccessful companies, the mere difference in length in the qualities exhibited between men and women reflects the stereotypes attributed to crisis management and women. It also shed light on the ideology that female qualities are much more desired in successful companies than currently expressed due to the status quo bias of men having previously dominated upper management.

Furthermore, as seen in Table 1 the TCTF association is evident when the company was performing poorly and needed a responsible, managing leader that could endure the hardship. However, the TMTM association is visible in the more agentic roles like spokesperson and improvement of company standing where more masculine traits were desired.

TCTF is part of the foundation that creates glass cliffs, it puts women in the position to help in a crisis but exposes them to greater risk by doing so. By inheriting prior poor management, the woman will encounter heavier criticism and be judged more intensively than taking over during a time of success within the company. It's easier to make her be the “*fall guy*” than a man during critical times as the pre-judgments regarding her management skills are already in place.

2.2.3. Status quo bias

Why fix a wheel if it's not broken? Peoples reluctance to change something if there is no need for it or continuing to stick to a decision made previously, is known as the status quo bias (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988). Due to a large majority of history having been male-dominated, the status quo bias is applicable to existence of the glass cliff or more specifically the glass ceiling. By having no obligation to change the leadership styles when a company is performing well, men continue in leadership but when poor performance calls for organizational restructuring women enter the solution; this is how the status quo bias amplifies the existence of the glass cliff.

⁷Antal and Izraeli (1993, p. 63)

⁸M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007, p. 550

Table 1: Attributes Seen to Be Characteristic of Managers of Successful or Unsuccessful Companies and Also Stereotypical of Men or Women (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011)

Attribute	Stereotypical of men	Stereotypical of women
Characteristic of managers of successful companies	Decisive (4.11. 3.98) Dominant (4.11. 4.24) Feeling not easily hurt (3.97. 3.46) Able to separate feeling from idea (3.97. 3.46) Speedy recovery from emotional disturbance (3.94. 3.85) Forceful (3.81. 3.88) Hides emotion (3.69. 3.80) High need for autonomy (3.69. 3.80) Aggressive (3.63.4.10)	Intuitive (3.89. 4.04) Sophisticated (3.89. 3.98) Tactful (3.83. 3.73) Neat (3.80. 4.22) Understanding (3.69. 4.49)
Characteristic of managers of unsuccessful companies	Hasty (3.57.3.41) Quarrelsome (3.43. 3.50)	Fearful (4.24. 3.88) Wavering in decision (4.23. 3.64) Nervous (3.91.3.51) Passive (3.80.3.46) Sympathetic (3.73.4.67) Desire to avoid controversy (3.62. 3.55) Frivolous (3.49.3.38) Understanding (3.46.4.49)

Note: Figure in parentheses refer to the mean level of characterizability for managers and for gender, respectively.

Table 2: Attributes Seen to Be Desirable for Managers of Successful or Unsuccessful Companies and Also Stereotypical of Men or Women (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011)

Attribute	Stereotypical of men	Stereotypical of women
Desirable for managers of successful companies	Decisive (4.69. 3.98) Speedy recovery from emotional disturbance (4.57. 3.85) Feeling not easily hurt (4.51. 3.65) Assertive (4.33. 4.10) Not uncomfortable about being aggressive (3.57. 3.61) High need for autonomy (3.51. 3.80) Dominant (3.44. 4.24) Hides emotion (3.27. 3.90)	Understanding (4.51. 4.59) Aware of the feeling of other (4.37. 4.30) Tactful (4.33. 3.73) Intuitive (4.27. 4.04) Grateful (4.22. 3.86) Neat (4.10. 4.22) Modest (4.08. 3.79) Sophisticated (3.92. 3.98) Sympathetic (3.63. 4.67) Understanding (4.75. 4.49)
Desirable for managers of unsuccessful companies	Decisive (4.47.3.98) Assertive (4.30. 4.10) Able to separate feelings from ideas (4.23.3.46) Speedy recovery from emotional disturbance (4.20.3.85) Feelings not easily hurt (3.98. 3.65) Not uncomfortable about being aggressive (3.53.3.61)	Intuitive (4.60. 4.04) Tactful (4.60.3.73) Aware of the feeling of others (4.55. 4.37) Grateful (4.38.3.86) Modest (4.18.3.79) Sympathetic (4.15.4.67) Neat (4.15.4.22) Sophisticated (3.85. 3.98) Sentimental (3.47.4.20) Desire to avoid controversy (3.40. 3.55)

Note: Figure in parentheses refer to the mean level of desirability for managers and characterizability for gender, respectively.

2.2.4. Hostile and Benevolent Sexism

Sexism is the mere discrimination based on a person's sex or gender.⁹ Ambivalent sexism consists of two frameworks, hostile and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism has a negative evaluation of gender and suggests that in the workplace the appointment of women to leadership positions is with the mere intention to disadvantage the woman and desire

to see them fail (M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007). This is a major factor of influence for women and other minorities in the workplace. While many companies have policies and regulations against discriminatory behavior within the corporation, it doesn't eradicate the individual prejudices certain management positions may hold. Benevolent sexism appears to be more positive yet discriminates against a person in a subtle mannerism. It refers to women taking on or being rewarded with leadership positions as an attractive challenge whereas

⁹Sexism (n.d.) in Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary.

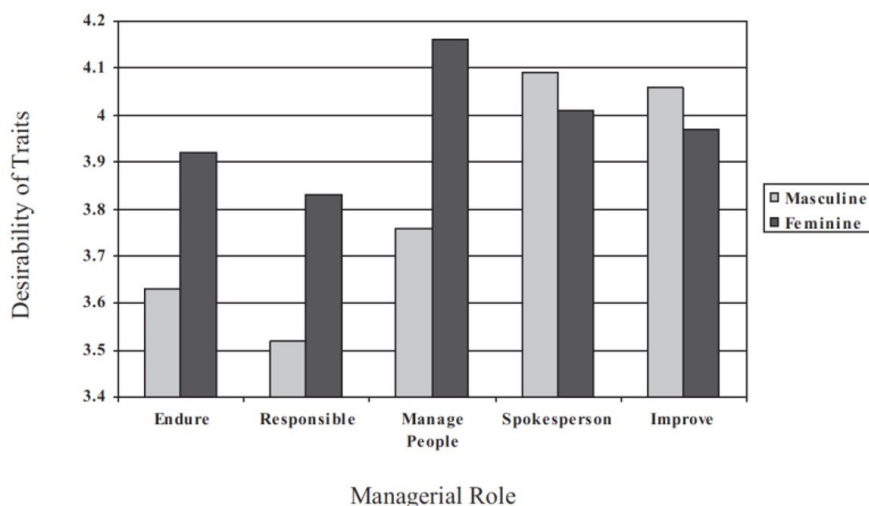


Figure 1: The impact of managerial role on the desirability of masculine and feminine traits (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011)

the position is actually problematic. (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Glick & Fiske, 2001). Since the advancement is seen as a favor to the woman, it's difficult for her to reject the offer and provides the means for this overt discrimination to occur. These promotions allow for sexists to appear as a supporter of women although they are subtly maintaining the gender hierarchy within the company by ensuring that the professional development of the women promoted remains limited. Thus, any type of sexism affects the implication of the glass cliff for women rising into management positions.

2.2.5. Group Dynamics and In-group Favoritism

Group dynamics shape how an individual thinks and acts which therefore significantly affects the decisions and actions of that person. Though it has been proven that when many share the ideas of another, a bias within the group is created leading to a stronger and more effective ideology. The infamous quote "it is a man's job" is the literal implication of what in-group favoritism is. If a group decides that a certain role can only be handled and executed by a certain figure, for instance that a job can only be done by a man then the bias affects the entire group in favor of that opinion and more specifically any women who could potentially fill that role. This expands to identifying that women do not have the "homo-social" (Ramsay & Parker, 1992) network that provides them with the support, infrastructure and resources that abet men ascending the corporate ladder and climb the ranks of senior management (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Ibarra, 1993; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). Due to the favoritism within the group, during the decision making of leadership advancement this dynamic easily restrains the opportunities for women to advance in management, therefore directly aiding to the creation of a glass cliff.

2.2.6. Signaling change

Appointing a woman into a precarious leadership position after having only men in the prior symbolizes a change in the situation. The purposes behind the sudden leadership change can be one of many, signaling a change to internal and external observers. New company policy to encouraging gender equality can encourage the companies' willingness to apprehend its prior methods of managing thereby alleviating the TMTM principles within the corporate culture. Signaling change can also be seen in a more sinister perspective, akin to a company having nothing left to lose. This can be seen in Kaplan and Minton (1994) study in Japan where the appointment of a highly visible "outsider" (e.g. a woman) is associated with poor company performance, therefore influencing the impression of the management. With changes in leadership signaling such perceptions inside and outside the company, the stigma created directly induces the creation of a glass cliff.

3. Methodology

The focus of this chapter is to explain the research strategy and general approach of this thesis. Through a combination of theory and practice, this paper will focus on an academic analysis of the current perceptions in the workplace regarding women in leadership. After the literature review that set a foundation for the research to proceed, the qualitative research conducted will provide diverse insights into today's working environment. The research will be explained in depth through the empirical setting, target group, procedure and data analysis.

3.1. General Approach

After assessing the amount of research already existing, in the genesis of this thesis it was clear that an empirical approach is justified. This qualitative research has a theoretic

cal base that will interpret context through sensing and exploration of relevant factors. Through inductive reasoning, this small sampled, non-standardized approach will provide a contextual understanding. Through a combination of exploratory and action research, the participants involved will be asked to reflect on their personal experiences subject to analysis in their actions and speculations.

3.2. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is beneficial in understanding the conceptual orientation of human beings and their surroundings. Having an explorative character, using a qualitative approach to analyze how women are working their way up the corporate ladder seems only fit. This thesis intends to capture not only the women's perspective but to embody the different points of view that contribute to the leadership appointments today.

3.2.1. Research Design/ Empirical Setting

To ensure that this empirical research is well rounded and reflects a varied origin of opinions, the empirical setting is eminently diversified. This holistic approach drove the participants to be from a plethora of countries in assorted industries. This includes the medical and educational field, the entrepreneurial world and consulting, real-estate and race-car industries. Furthermore, the research conducted was on a global scale collecting insights from participants in Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and the United States. By providing a scope of backgrounds, including male and female dominated industries, this thesis will provide a perceptive insight across the different paths to leadership.

3.2.2. Target group/Participants

To begin a research study, one must first derive the target group. The path to leadership will be best reflected by the women who have already embarked on journey. Among the women climbing into leadership, the women in upper management positions are the initial subjects of this thesis making them a critical component to shape the focal point of the research conducted. By having the women in management positions reflect the dependent factor it allows permits their age, location and industry to be the independent factors. By fixating this target group as the centrifuge of this research, further participants can be added to provide a more perceptive insight.

For a broader understanding of the women and the different industries, it was decided to add a few outliers to the portfolio to allow for a more contextual analysis and limit any feminist biases. This drove to including younger and older participants ranging from twenty to eighty-seven, both male and female in different statuses of life. By including a scope of age ranges, a distinction can be made in the changes that have occurred with time. This permits for a comparison to made between the younger perception joining the workforce and looking into the future for their careers in regards to a retired point of view that reflects how the workplace has

changed and how the present situation was shaped. Furthermore, by assessing both genders point of view, the research provided gives proper insights into the different perspectives of how leadership can be attained within a company; more specifically, it provides the information needed to assess the difference in paths based on gender. By adding outliers, there was the potential of excess information and disagreeing perspectives which is accounted for accordingly in the analysis. The representation of these participants was done through convenience sampling based on availability and willingness to contribute.

3.2.3. Empirical Procedure

The preeminent empirical procedure driving the research concluded was conducting qualitative interviews. Through a combination of personal meetings, phone interviews and written responses, data was collected over a six-week time frame in the spring of concoction of this thesis. To find patterns in the data, there were three different question sets based on the classification of the participant being interviewed, (1) woman in leadership, (2) man in leadership and (3) outsider point of view. By differentiating the content and context of each question set, the focal point of the interviews was maintained. The question set for women included one additional question in regard to the personal reflection of the target group of this research. The women in leadership were guided to give reflective insights on their personal experiences while climbing the corporate ladders in their given industries. This provided easy identification of patterns experienced in across industries in regards to difference in genders when ascending to leadership positions. The men in leadership were conveyed similar questions in regard to their female colleagues being promoted as well the personal instances they had experienced. The male perspective allowed for subjective insight on how men reflected on the concept of female leadership, especially on the discrimination of it. Lastly, the outsider group was asked the same question set as the men in leadership group, this accounted for a more objective point of view into the corporate management world. The question set for men in leadership and the objective point of view had one ancillary question to the female interviews as it asked for the male path to leadership and difference in the perceived path for a woman.

There was only a primal interview conducted with each participant which covered all the themes within the scope of research. Additionally, to ensure a diverse portfolio of participants, demographic analysis followed each interview. The demographic data collected reflects the gender, age, level of education, occupation and nationality. By collecting the demographics of each participant, the anonymity of each interviewee will be kept for the purpose of this thesis with mere reference to their background.

3.2.4. Data Analysis

The resolutions and observations of the participants are the foundation for the empirical analysis conducted. Based on the first-hand experiences of women who have embarked

on the leadership path combined with the views of bystanders who recognized their journey and reflected their contributions, the analysis conducted in this thesis will provide the grounds for interpretation of the current workforce environment in concerning female leadership. Taking into account the different obstacles, networks, industries, characters and demographics, the analysis conducted will apprehend the overall effect of the glass ceiling in the modern corporate world. Based on the answers provided by the participants, specifically the women in leadership interviewed, this thesis will analyze the commentary carefully while elucidating the effects of the glass cliff facing women rising in leadership. Essentially, the qualitative analysis of the data collected will encompass the research question respecting any margin of error and further research to be conducted.

4. Results

This chapter focuses on the insights collected from the interviews conducted, summarizing the different points of views shared in opinions and experiences regarding women's journeys to leadership. To begin, an overview into the research will be provided to administer the proper foundation to analyze the responses accordingly. Following with an introduction of the individuals interviewed giving minor insight into their background. This will be furthered into reflecting on the responses of the interviewees to assess any patterns in the answers collected. Summarizing at the end with a small synopsis on the interviews conducted.

4.1. General

The term lead means *"to direct the operations, activity, or performance of"*¹⁰ which is can be regarded as easier to do with more time or experience. It would be an over generalization to conclude that good leaders need immense experience however it is arguable to say that leading becomes easier with experience and knowledge.¹¹ The term leadership is derived from lead and defines as the *"capacity to lead."*¹² Therefore, one could imply that leadership is often possessed by individuals that have the right experience to lead which inherently comes with times. Naturally, this also effects the stages when leadership is acquired within the working world; justifying why the average age of CEO's is 57.¹³ This factor is critical to note for this paper, as the interviewed individuals come from different age backgrounds and experiences which is evident in the answers collected.

4.2. Meet the interviewees

Consisting of 13 individuals who agreed to partake and contribute to the research conducted, the interviews provided a plethora of different insights into the experiences and perceptions in the modern working world regarding women in leadership (see Table 3).

4.3. General overview in results

Upon conducting the interviews, it was visible to see that opening the conversation about female leadership can be strenuous some individuals as it compelled them to look at oneself and at the people around them to see how they were experiencing their career path. The individuals that were aware of their own actions, or in actions, could to deliberate one's standpoint and perspective on the matter, which appeared to strenuous for some of the participants. This impression was coherent in some of the interviews conducted, most noticeable in the different standpoints in career also reflected in the age range and gender of the interviewee. This chapter will highlight the results regarding women in leadership positions from different standpoints which have been divided into three sub- patterns (a) the younger generation, (b) the middle generation and (c) the mature generation.

4.3.1. The younger generation

The younger generation, age range 20-29, was eager to discuss and challenge the points of view at hand. The main point of differentiation with this group was that the majority of the participants still have their careers in their future, merely anticipating the working world ahead of them based on their own first experiences and the impacts left on them by their forerunners. This age group showed the least bias and heavily emphasized their wishes for truly equalitarian opportunity when ascending the ladder of success while still upholding meritocracy. One could speculate and suggest that they were sanguine for their own futures hoping that the past and current hurdles and limitations might cease by the time they embark on their career paths. This generational difference depicted some of the more passionate points of view on the topic during the discussions. The women heavily emphasized their own role in society to change the situations at hand.

This age faction reflected the futuristic view imposed on their generation, the insights these individuals expressed showed a pattern that each of them felt they still had to prove themselves as women in comparison to men. When asked to further on their angst regarding their future career paths, all five women expressed that they knew that pure performance, merit and hard-work was not going to suffice for their promotions. Interviewee C stated *"men are expected to be the store managers, the district managers and the CEO's... women have to work a lot harder to get [into leadership positions] those, and more importantly feel worthy and respected in that position."* She continued to express that the stereotype associated with female CEO's continues to restrict the influence and ability a woman can have in the workplace, arguing that Hollywood's image of a female CEO has painted them into *"sassy, sexy and smart, with a tight pant suits, walking into work in the court heels and their skinny chai latte."* While her argument maybe premature, there is veracity in her statement; how Hollywood has portrayed female leaders in movies is a reflection of how society views women managers. From Miranda Priestly in the Devil Wears Prada to Claire Underwood in House of Cards, the view on negative

¹⁰Lead (n.d.) in Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary.

¹¹Center for Creative Leadership, n.d..

¹²Leadership (n.d.) in Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary.

¹³Fortune (n.p.), n.d..

Table 3: List of Respondents (Data compiled by Author)

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Origin	Education	Job Title
A	Female	20	United Kingdom	Student in medical school	N/A
B	Female	21	United Kingdom	UK GCSE-A Level	Lettings negotiator/administrator
C	Female	21	United Kingdom	Undergraduate Degree	Student of midwifery
D	Female	27	United Kingdom	Undergraduate Degree	SaaS Sales
E	Female	27	United Kingdom	Postgraduate Degree	Teacher
F	Male	30	Germany	Engineering	Consultant
G	Male	34	United Kingdom	UK GSCE - Level 2 & 3	Director
H	Female	37	Italy	MSc. Language/Literature	Fee Lance/Race car
I	Male	38	United Kingdom	Law Degree	Life Coach
J	Male	47	United Kingdom	Bachelors Degree	Entrepreneur (PMO/Coaching/Event Mgmt.)
K	Female	54	United State of Ame	Msc. in Finance	Finance/now Consultant
L	Female	56	United Kingdom	Postgraduate Degree	3D Architectural Visualisation
M	Female	57	Netherlands	College	Mastermind Facilitator

female leadership is strengthened as seen in Schein (1973) study of stereotypes about women in leadership. Interviewee A remarked that “men believe they are superior without knowing their [women’s] qualities first,” reinforcing the argument made by Interviewee E. As a medical student, she reflected that she does not feel at a disadvantage in comparison to men in her field except for certain medical specializations such as orthopedic surgery where major physical strength is required. However, she did comment that the minor activities such as planning, project leads and minor leadership were often a struggle for her and other women in to take lead in. One could see her reflecting on the comment she just made, which led to Interviewee E asking herself what she does about it and what she should do about it.

Interviewee D initiated the conversation of maternity leave upon being asked if she ever found it difficult to advance into leadership as woman. She expressed her concern that once “the engagement age” comes around, women are assumed to be having a baby soon and are therefore overlooked for the future promotions. As a 27-year-old, she disclosed that she feels has to “prove herself even more” continuing on to say that many of her female friends find it particularly more intense in their late twenties and early thirties to be promoted. The topic of women stepping out of the office to start their families will continue to be a conversation that women, men, companies, governments and societies as a whole need to have. While certain companies have great policies and governments are encouraging parental leave for both women and men, it does not resolve the prejudice affiliated with maternal or paternal leave. The conversation of how the future will look in regards to paternal leave provides space for an entirely new thesis therefore, the conversation with Interviewee D was subdued back to the current state of women in leadership positions.

The interviews conducted also addressed the associated phenomena surrounding the class cliff and Interviewee E spoke about her glass escalator experience. As a school teacher, she works primarily with women coworkers and leads her faculty; however, she stated that the “senior lead-

ership is very male dominated and there is explicit sexism.” Furthering into the conversation, she said that “many men seem to have been prematurely promoted [in my organization]. Their confidence and arrogance is taken at face value while their soft skills are lacking in comparison to female colleagues.” She continued to give the example of the glass cliff in her organization by expanding on her experience of joining the school. The school had been receiving negative press due to a scandal and they had just hired a new principal, a woman, after two years of clearing the name of the school, the principal was asked to leave for a back-office job in the district office. She was replaced by a male principal; Interviewee E was unsure what the specifics behind the “promotion” were yet showed slight hesitation and confusion when being asked to further on the subject. Examples like the following disclose how subtle the glass cliff positions can occur and disappear; also shining direct light into the presumptions women have on the scenarios.

An interesting pattern arose in this age faction, when being asked about their ideal workplace environments, all four used the word *nurture* in their description. Plus, three of the interviewees used *supportive* in the environmental aspects. These two terms were characterized as female descriptive terms (Schein, 1973) and were reflected to the similar qualities desired of women managers in any company regardless of performance (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011) depicting the terms *understanding* and *aware of the feelings of others*. This strengthens the argument that the qualities making a good manager are not explicitly “male traits” and that leadership positions in modern society are yearning to be filled with qualities that currently being associated with the stereotypes of women. After initiating the conversation of glass cliffs in the workplace, all four interviewees shared how they had seen these positions arise for themselves or for the people in their environments. The explicit example from the teacher, Interviewee E, showed that glass cliff positions do not necessarily exist in only male dominated environments but can be created in female-dominated workplaces as well.

4.3.2. The middle generation

"Some people are like trees; they take forever to grow up." This was the first sentence that Interviewee I said before initiating the conversation, immediately setting a different tune for our interview. It quickly made me realize that this stage of interviewees would provide a very different point of view on the matter at hand, a more seasoned and pragmatic outlook. The 30 to 45-year-old perspective did indeed give a sensible insight into the working world of today, considering they are the current middle and upper management climbers working through the exact theme of this thesis. Overall, the conversations proved to be more distant and emotional than with the prior group, the interviewees displayed a sense of discomfort in the topic and had very different acumen of how the glass cliff exists and should be addressed in the workplace.

Interviewee I was the first contributor to this age aggregation and was quick to express his frustration towards the conversation as whole. Baffled that in *"modern times, we are still having a conversation about gender and its impact on somebody to do a job"* he clarified that he is an outspoken egalitarian that does not see how gender, skin color, sexuality or religion could impact one's ability to lead. Heavily emphasizing that one's skill, mindset and execution are the mere principles needed to make a good leader in the workplace. Interviewee F also addressed the issue in stating *"the only determining factors that leadership should be measured on are hard-work and merit."* Both were irritated when discussing how female leadership is viewed in this present day, giving examples of inspiring female bosses in their surroundings. As men, they had a distance to their own point of view, showing a sense of empathy towards women and an awareness for the men that hinder the furthering of certain women to leadership positions.

The three men who responded in this age group degraded their own gender in the conversations, they were harsh in their judgements towards their male colleagues and bosses. Not directly blaming themselves for the struggles women have encountered in the workplace, Interviewee F, Interviewee G and Interviewee I showed a sense of acrimony and resentment in the situation. All three men knew women in their inner circles who had faced some form of gender discrimination in the workplace; they shared how they were appalled that there were still men in today's society that could see a woman as less competent for a job. Interviewee F appended that there were still physical differences between men and women and that this can make certain jobs difficult for certain genders. Giving the example of heavy lifting jobs for men that could be difficult for the average woman to do in her *"normal"* strength, vice versa noting that it could be difficult for a man to work in areas where delicate materials are in place or certain sensitivity is required. He discussed that the difference in genders should not be perceived as a negative trait to either one but as a positive value added to each other's lifestyle, stating that *"the best teams I've worked on had an equal balance of men and women that were both open to working towards the best solution together, knowing that every*

individual had a different value to bring to the table." He got frustrated when he reflected on his time as an engineer where he was surrounded mostly by men, who then also made every woman in the field feel alone. Upon asking where the frustration came from, he noted that abilities in IT, engineering or finance were not based on gender but merely based on education and that this misconception of *"female"* and *"male"* jobs was one of societies biggest misconstructions.

In an attempt to understand why Interviewee F and Interviewee I were so frustrated with the discrimination defined, the discussion turned to understanding the male side of gender discrimination in the workplace. Interviewee I quickly stated that he believed *"it boils down to insecurities"* amongst men, not stepping into their masculinity to identify the added value women bring to a table. He argued that a real man would never stand in the way of a woman, he would stand behind her to push her forwards; he noted that it's easier when the woman is someone one cares about than just a colleague. *"When losing a promotion to a woman, the man should feel no less than if he lost the promotion to man, however they often do"* shared Interviewee F, he said that it was often the subtlest of actions that showed how biased one can be when it comes to women working their way up the corporate ladder.

Upon discussing quotas, the men shared the view that quotas were necessary in certain industries where women have not yet made the imprint they need to and that it opens the door of opportunity for some. However, they quickly added that it does not resolve the social image of the woman in her leadership position, the sentiment towards the woman promoted merely degrades as the surrounding colleagues view of the promotion as a regulation instead of her merit. This could effectively be worse as the male colleagues may resent the woman or not respect her new position, despite her true ability to do the job. Stating that *"the benefits of quotas make foul play limited and provide the space for the women to rewarded for their skills where they previously were not"* Interviewee I insisted that for the time being, quotas may be the only feasible option to permit for women leadership in certain industries. He also clearly expressed that he wishes the need for quotas and glass cliffs would dissipate in the near future where all leadership positions are filled on the mere *"skill, mindset and execution"* one presents in the workplace.

Incorporating the conversation about glass cliffs, all three interviewees noted that they had seen a woman get promoted during a *"riskier time frame"* in either their personal lives or their professions. Reflecting back on the individual cases, Interviewee F further discussed how Marissa Mayer or Theresa May faced the same scenarios. He showed a sense of sympathy as though he felt bad for the women rising during a time of crisis; when asked about his reaction, he stated that he felt it *"unfair to put a woman a gravel road while men are taking the smooth paved path towards the same destination, no wonder women end up a bit more tough when arriving at the destination [leadership position]."* Interviewee G added that he could not find an example of a *"feminine"* CEO.

The very compelling conversation was advanced when In-

interviewee H appended her point of view as woman in leadership. In a male-dominated workplace she reflected on her own path to management, with a cunning smirk on her face, she established that women are in charge of their own path to management. Stating that *"we [women] are conditioned to believe that men work against us and that we are less or not respected"* she explained that how one is perceived in the workplace is simply up to them. If one wants to be respected, he or she must demand that respect; *"I'm not sure if this is my Italian upbringing, but in Italy, how you walk down the street defines how you'll be treated."* She continued to expand on her experiences working with women, saying that her very direct mentality did not often fit to their working styles and that men often appreciated her straightforwardness, furthering the comment with *"when in Rome, do as the Romans do."* Interviewee H wanted to enter a male-dominated workplace and accepted the conditions corresponding with it; she said that if she were to be herself *"dancing, smiling and funny"* she would most likely lose her credibility in the workplace. Interviewee H is an exact depiction of the women who acquire *"masculine"* traits to achieve the managerial positions. While she may not want to realize or accept this fact, she exhibited the main four stereotypes associated with stereotypical men in successful managing positions of companies- *decisive, dominant, feelings not easily hurt and able to separate feelings from ideas* (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011).

This age faction was very adverse in their responses to the modern corporate world in regards to female leadership. Having experienced a lot more personally and naming numerous examples in their personal environments, all four exhibited the need for conversation of female challenges in ascending to management positions. Realizing that many of the women in their surroundings either took on a leadership position by changing their own methodologies in the workplace or by taking an opportunity presented to them, either through quotas or a glass cliff position.

4.3.3. The mature generation

Defined as the seniority of the participant assemblage, these Interviewees ranged between the ages of 46 to 60. Characteristically bringing more experience and insight to the conversation about gender discrimination in the workplace and the existence of the glass cliff. Each interviewee provided different insight on their career paths and the experiences they encountered along the way. With three women in management positions and one man, this faction had the most in depth and reflected answers also noting that the interviews with this faction took nearly twice as long as those in the intermediate phased group.

Opening the discussion with the differences in paths to leadership between men and women, all four interviewees agreed that there were explicit disparities. Interviewee K described *"the path for men is just very implied, it is nothing new and they know what is expected of them and how to deal with hurdles upon entering and rising in the workplace."* While she reflected that her comments were quite generalizing she contended further stating *"they [men] don't overthink all the*

problems they could face... it's a very direct culture, also in their path to leadership... if you do X, you get Y." Interviewee M described the different approaches as transactional and transformational explaining that *"[men] use the transactional approach... wanting to achieve certain goals and each member of their team do their something that will result into reaching that goal... often not engaged with their team and their work."* Whereas, *"[women] use the transformational approach... the focus is more on how the goal is achieved, being very engaged with their team and their work."* Both women who have climbed the corporate ladder themselves, compared their paths to the journeys of the men around them. There was a serenity and composure in their responses, looking into the past with a sigh of relief that it's over, at least for now. Interviewee M added profoundly *"sometimes, you have to be the rock the river"* when asked about her tranquil answers. Interviewee J, the only man in the round, added that *"there is a choice between career and motherhood, women who become mothers appear to take considerably longer to reach leadership status in organizations."* Interviewee K reflected on the different phases of her career, starting off as a freelance architect in her mid-thirties, she confronted many prejudices about her work as a woman however, now that she has created a name for herself and a clientele, she rarely faces any gender discrimination upon a new project offer. All four of the interviewees are in management positions are have a hindsight view of their paths to their positions which extends the points of view described to be more reflective than futuristic and gives an insight into the paths transformed of how their climb was successful.

Addressing quotas in the management positions stirred Interviewee K to talk about equal opportunities in the workplace. She stated that *"quotas stand for opportunity and that's what the conversation needs to be about, women need to have the opportunity to get a position and since the foundation of society currently puts their management abilities behind those of men- they are needed as the stepping stone of progress."* While she hopes to agree that one-day society will be able to *"appoint on individual merit"* as Interviewee J pointed out who believes that quotas *"can lead to the appointment of a less suitable candidate,"* she doubts that certain male-dominated fields can give women the proper opportunity without certain regulations in place to do so. Working as a freelance architect, Interviewee L, did not encounter many quotas beside the admission rates during university however, she felt compelled to share that *"quotas are not the ideal way to promote women into workplaces however, in certain industries, they are needed for women to get their foot in the door."* She described how her freelance work does not call for quota positions and that a quota would most likely hurt her reputation instead; however, acknowledging that STEM positions, especially in upper management still *"majorly lack women in their leadership and that quotas maybe the only way to change the dinosaur foundations at hand."*

This prior discussion initiated the conversation into when women are hired into leadership positions, especially into glass cliff positions. Interviewee M opened up about a close

friend who was hired to “*clean up the mess*” when the company ran into financial trouble and as the numbers shifted from red to black, her senior position was no longer required. Despite her success in the company’s mishap, the acknowledgement for her work was undeniable, more importantly, the company had several new hires in the following weeks all male in similar leading positions. Interviewee K reflected on her team experiences, where the more critical tasks were usually delegated to the woman in the group and how it was often the woman who was chosen to approach a delicate conversation if there was an issue at hand, this was if the confrontation went bad it would not fall back on the male members in group. She furthered on the public image in modern society, comparing politicians such as Theresa May in her post Brexit election and the Icelandic Prime Minister Johanna Siguroardottir who was elected after an extreme economic downfall. She then stated that Hollywood creates glass cliffs every day and expects the more of female actresses than male actors vulgarly proclaiming “... *nudity, women are much more openly portrayed nude in film [than men] and all that is ever seen [of men] is the buttocks.*” She continued the conversation into the Me Too Movement (Appendix 1) explaining how “*the women who experienced any type of assault are put in class cliff positions where they have everything to lose to and not much to gain in stepping forward [about the assault].*”

Interviewee K finished the interview with a powerful message: “... *true confidence is the only solution to this problem, trusting in each other is essential to creating the greater change that so direly needs to happen in the working world. If women were to truly come together, I think we would be an undeniable force that could move mountains. We can play our strengths and work together... just truly embracing our femininity and working alongside men to make something even bigger than any gender issues that can be discussed in today’s modern society.*”

4.4. Post-interview

The 13 individuals who offered to partake in this research provided very different insights on their opinions and experiences in respect to women in leadership. Every interviewee added value to conversation and created the means for discussion, being open to being challenged and being asked about uncomfortable situations. There were unequivocal differences in the interviews done in person versus over the phone or written responses, even in the mere side discussion that arose from the questions. Nevertheless, identifying the existence of the glass cliff was critical and successful in these interviews and will be further interpreted in the next chapter.

5. Discussion

The following discussion aims to review the literature analyzed in the background chapter of this thesis. The background chapter of this thesis provided the fundamental principles that are needed to continue the conversation about female leadership and the opportunities facing women rising

in the corporate world. After having predefined the different associations that coincide with the glass cliff phenomenon, the paper investigates the psychological phenomena that surround the creation of glass cliff situations in the first place. This directed the requisite to conduct personal interviews with a diverse range of people in different paths of life, reflecting on their own experiences and opinions about female leadership. Since the glass cliff is not caused through a single source, the substantiation of the surrounding existing research was furthered on in the preceding literature review and extenuatingly discussed in the interview sessions.

5.1. Major findings

This chapter distinguishes the major findings of the research conducted for this thesis. It will highlight the variety of gender discrimination facing women in the working world today. From the glass escalator to understanding the groundwork that creates glass cliff positions, this chapter will highlight how the main causations- implicit theories, TMTM, TCTE, status quo bias, stereotypes, sexism and group dynamics- contribute to the existence of the glass cliff.

5.1.1. Glass Escalator

Discussing the path to leadership with the interviewees alongside the precipitative literature review, the differences for men and women on ascending the corporate ladder are protrusive. From the enduring existence of the glass ceiling which continues to restrain women from corporate promotion due to male preconceptions and in reprehensible stereotyping of women (Hefferman, 2002) to the glass escalator imparting more leadership opportunity towards men working in female-dominated fields by receiving management positions in occupations such as education, nursing or social work (Broner et al., 2013, September 30). As a teacher in Cambridge, Interviewee E described her institution as female dominated and despite her role as head of her faculty she voiced that her “*senior leadership is very male dominated and there is explicit sexism.*” She continued to explain that she felt the promotion process hired several premature individuals [men] before taking into account a woman for the position.

Women facing obstacles on the way to leadership positions was a common matter in the discussions with interviews. The mature group interviewed approached the explicit divergences in the path most eloquently, coming to the conclusion that “[*for men*] the path is just very implied... they know what is expected of them... and they don’t overthink all the problems they could face” (Interviewee K). However, as Interviewee F pointed out, is important to acknowledge that men might not have to overthink the problems they could encounter because those problems simply do not exist for them. Essentially, that is what the glass ceiling, glass escalator and glass cliff illustrate; as women are entering new frontiers of managerial leadership, they face new, imperceptible barriers that restrict their capabilities.

5.1.2. Creating the glass cliff

The glass cliff phenomenon states that a woman is more likely to rise in leadership during poor company performance (M. K. Ryan & Haslam, 2005, M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007) and that crises cause society to look toward female leadership (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011). When introducing the glass cliff phenomena to the thirteen interviewees that partook in this thesis research, a plethora of insights and points of view were shared. These narrowed down to the impact that gender stereotypes have on societies point of view of female, overt sexism and the tainted stigma between female leaders.

Implicit theories

The implicit theories observed stated that there is an incompatibility in perception of beliefs about what it means to be a good leader and what it means to be female. (Agars, 2004; Eagly & Karaus, 2002; Heilman et al., 1989; Schein, 1973, Schein, 1975, Schein, 2001). More critically, the theories from Agars (2004) and Eagly and Karaus (2002) about gender and management are perilous as they are powerfully descriptive (Heilman, 2001) meaning that they create the foundation for the mannerisms in the workplace and the expectations of how women should act and perform. The thirteen interviews conducted all considered the misrepresentation of male characteristics in leadership and furthered on how society is impacted by the misperceptions. This included touching base on associations like the TMTM and TCTF correlations.

Think Manager—Think Male

After Schein (1973) proved that there is a direct correlation between the perceptions of what it means to be a good manager and what it means to be a woman, many researchers have replicated and furthered the research existing. Including Eagly et al. (1992) who assessed the mannerisms of assertiveness between men and women, the man was seen as a leader when being assertive and the woman was seen as pushy. As Interviewee C described the stereotype of women CEO's as "sassy and smart... with court heels..." which supports the existence of the TMTM principle since men are not judged negatively on the same actions a woman may do, including the point of workplace attire. As Interviewee K explained that "when someone [hiring manager] views a feminine woman they do not associate manager styled qualities with her" hence they will consider her differently when deciding the next steps in leadership.

Think Crisis—Think Female

Think crisis think female is a foundational element of the existence of the glass cliff (M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Confirming that women are more desired in a management position during a company's time of poor performance, these risky positions hold more potential for a woman to join the

ranks of leadership (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011). The interviewees most frequently referred to the TCTF principle when relating it to women they had seen take on these positions like Marissa Mayer and Theresa May. Interviewee M and Interviewee I shared stories about friends that had experienced this phenomenon at work, where women were advanced in their careers because of a carping situation within the company. Interviewee F referred to these women as the "daring angels" who were willing to the job that others [men] were not.

Status Quo Bias

If something is not broken, there is no need to fix it; this statement is groundwork of the status quo bias which specifies people's reluctance to change something if there is no immediate need for it (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988). The Status Quo Bias was immediately identified by Interviewee J who stated that the "most dangerous sentence in the English language is "because we have always done it this way." He related the western corporate culture to management philosophy as whole, which made him understand the how status quo bias is applicable to issues women face when rising to leadership.

In a historical context, society has been heavily influenced by male-dominated leadership which has instinctively created a masculine stereotype about leadership (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004; Eagly, 2007). This prejudice was previously confirmed by Schein (1973), Schein (1975) studies, where he analyzed how gender stereotypes affect the perceptions of what it means to be a good manager. His study revealed that the descriptive qualities associated with men were congruent with the descriptive terms associated managers; whereas, the terms associated with women were not associated with being a good manager. The impact that these stereotypes have on the perception of women in the workplace was extensively identified in the conversations conducted. The younger generation disclosed how they feel starting their career paths in terms of what is expected of them, fully aware of the likelihood that they will have to work harder than their male colleagues to receive the same amount of respect or leadership opportunity. Furthermore, Interviewee H represents the common case of women taking on "masculine" traits to succeed in a male-dominated environment, which can be a subconscious or conscious coping mechanism to react to the discrimination. This sentiment places women in a lose-lose situation, if they want to be good managers then they have to give up on their femininity vice versa insinuating that to be a "good" woman one cannot be a good manager.

Stereotypes

While discussing the stereotypes associated to leadership and women adapting to the masculine workforce, politics quickly made itself into the conversation. Interviewees noted that the stereotypes can impact how a woman executes her role, for instance Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany,

who embodies relatively masculine characteristics and is defined as a powerful leader. Alternatively, Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand, encompasses a more feminine approach in leading her country and delegating discussions, this included having a child during her time in office being the first woman as head of a country to do so in thirty years¹⁴. Whether a woman succumbs to the stereotypical behavior of managerial roles can be dependent on the industry or background surrounding the position at hand. To offer another insight, one can attempt to understand why these women present themselves so differently by referring to Geert Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions. As seen in Figure 2 Germany has a very high score in the masculinity dimension tied with the United Kingdom and New Zealand falling eight points lower. When comparing the political leaders, Merkel and May have very different leadership characteristics to Arden; they come across to the public as very masculine women and *"are characterized by strength and resilience"* (Interviewee I). Hofstede describes masculine societies as *"People rather 'live in order to work' and draw a lot of self-esteem from their tasks. Managers are expected to be decisive and assertive. Status is often shown, especially by cars, watches and technical devices."*¹⁵ Hofstede's definition of the masculine society is an undeniable account of the stereotype associated to men in the modern western world. Interviewee J's comment that he found *"female leaders to be more ruthless than male leaders"* is therefore justifiable if that is how society illustrates masculinity.

Women rising into leadership face not only the prejudice within the working environment but an entire societies perception of what management looks like. After all, one could argue that in most governments there is a need for an internal reflection of the male to female ratios in place. According to the UN Women Permanent Missions calculation, as of January 2019, there are 11 female Heads of State and 10 women are serving as Heads of the Government.¹⁶ Out of 195 countries, that is a bare equivalent and the women taking on these political leadership positions vary immensely in character and leadership style.

Hostile and benevolent sexism

Unfortunately, hostile sexism in the workplace has not been eradicated therefore, it is one of the many facets adding to the existence of the issues that women face in the workplace. There are *"dinosaurs"* in certain industries that will hinder the progression of women into leadership until the end of that era. Hostile sexism is a blatant causation of the glass cliff; it implies that some women appointments in the workplace have the intention to disadvantage a woman and to see women fail while overcoming the hurdles of the corporate world (M. Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Interviewee A's presumption that *"men believe they are superior without knowing*

their [women's] qualities first" insinuates that as a 20-year-old medical student, she is still confronted with prejudiced views against women in the workplace. While the subtler art of discrimination is conveyed through benevolent sexism, where the woman is rewarded for her work but to a position that sets her up to fail (Cuddy et al., 2004; Glick & Fiske, 2001). While none of the interviewees reflected on having experienced benevolent sexism themselves, they did mention that in public positions such as political roles come with a substantial amount of sexism.

The times are changing, many industries are opening their eyes and arms to the assets women can be in companies today. While the majority of companies maintain a male-dominated upper management, there are more women in leadership positions than ever before (Catalyst, 2009; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). Additionally, there is institutional regulation pushing for advancement of women to boards like the California Senate Bill 826 (SB 826) necessitating a female board member on every board of directors in a public company. As Interviewee K had said *"quotas stand for opportunity... they are needed as the stepping stones of progress"* which agrees with Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) which states that the association of leadership and masculinity may be changed with higher representation of women in leadership positions. Having a quota in place for hiring standards can be misleading as well, whether it be in hiring regulations or benevolent methods of promotion. Interviewee K gave an example: if company A that has fifty percent women employed, where fifty percent of those women are secretaries and the board of directors consists of only men the *"opportunity for women to rise into leadership positions would still be minimal"*. Whereas, if company B has two women on a board of six members however only has thirty percent women in the organization, company B would be considered as *"more egalitarian"* than company A in terms of possibilities for women to rise to leadership positions. The argument between companies A and B makes it difficult to understand how beneficial quotas can be in the workplace, more importantly because they can negatively impact the social perspective of the women hired as they might not be deemed as hired by merit which could have negative reprimands. Nevertheless, Interviewee L said it well *"quotas are not the ideal way to promote women into workplaces however; in certain industries, they are needed for women to get their foot in the door."*

In-group favoritism

Interviewee J turned the conversation by adding the social factor that aligns to ones need to feel accepted and significant. *"Men develop cliques... around soccer, football and beer. If you are not part of this circle you are a threat and you do not receive the support of the group"* which is where a different sense of comradery is built that is therefore naturally reflected in the workplace. Just like women, the social factor matters immensely. If a woman feels threatened socially, she will go out with her friends and demote the person who is

¹⁴New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern's baby premieres among world leaders.

¹⁵Country Comparison, n.d..

¹⁶Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation, n.d..

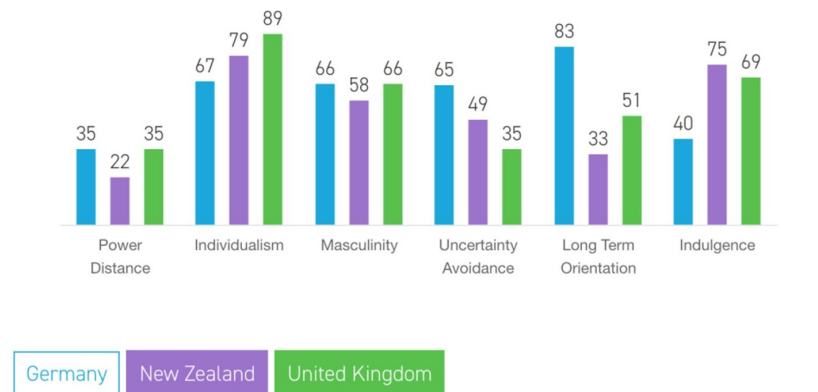


Figure 2: Hofstede model of cultural dimension comparing Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Hofstede, 1967)

making her feel vulnerable, the gossip then leads to exclusion and judgement from the group which if the person is in the vicinity can immediately be observed. As Interviewee I phrased it, “*by putting another person down in conversation, they are protecting their social position.*” The same situation happens in the workplace, if a woman in an authoritarian position feels threatened she will lash out in a way that deems fit for the time and place. However, this does not explain the overall sentiment that women are often reluctant to help another woman progress in her career. Women are skeptical of other women’s abilities as well as their own, whether it is a matter of insecurity or inferiority is undefined but Interviewee H argues that it is women perception of themselves that hinders their further performance. Interviewee K described it as “*lack in true confidence,*” and Interviewee M believes that some “*women want you to climb the ladder the same way they did... experience what they experience.*” Moreover, Interviewee G explained it is “*unfair to put a woman a gravel road while men are taking the smooth paved path towards the same destination, no wonder women end up a bit more tough when arriving at the destination [leadership position].*” It is no longer a one sided discussion where men see women a certain way, it has become a universal perception that women are different to the qualities needed to be a good manager. Understanding why women can be so rancorous towards other women is another subject that can be further researched as it directly correlates to the impact that gender stereotypes can have on the progression of women in the workplace.

5.2. Meaning of findings

After having thoroughly analyzed the literature surrounding its existence in combination with the participation of the individuals involved in the qualitative research, the major finding of this thesis is the existence of the glass cliff and how it is created. By combining the insights collected from the interviews with the existing research, this discussion will be based on the glass cliff’s existence and how it is addressed

in the workplace, moreover, how it should be addressed in the future.

The glass cliff is not caused by one mere feature of modern societies perspective on women in the workplace, it is a combination of a plethora of different theories and biases that when collectively analyzed portray how glass cliff positions are created. It is imperative to realize that the *how* is directly correlated to the *when* of glass cliff positions creation, when certain themes are observed in the workplace such as implicit theories, biases regarding gender stereotypes and the status or unabashed sexism, the likelihood that these aggregations create leadership hurdles for women to advance is much higher. Per contra, identifying *why* glass cliff positions was indubitably the more challenging aspect of the research conducted, it summoned down to surrounding principles. The existence of the outside factors such as the biases, are the forefront of why the glass cliff exists, understanding why those factors still exist was not withstanding in the research conducted.

5.2.1. The path to leadership

Parsing into the causational factors of contention for women in modern society working towards the managerial roles revealed that the glass ceiling, glass escalator and glass cliff create a triad that encompasses the different struggles that women experience while climbing the corporate ladder into leadership positions as seen in Figure 3.

The triad identifies the core pillars that cause complications for women working their way up into leadership positions within an organization. To assume that she will encounter one of the three principles on the path to leadership would be an aberration, however if she does encounter an obstacle because of gender on the way, the likelihood that it is one of these three principles is prodigious.

The path to leadership for men and women was proven to be different before the research of this thesis further confirmed it. What researchers identified as the glass ceiling, was considered as a difference in approaches towards hir-

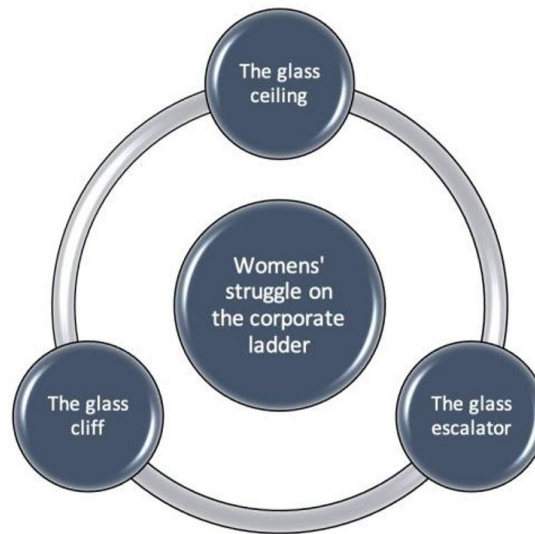


Figure 3: The hurdles women encounter on the path to leadership (Data compiled by author)

ing organizational management. As it was nicely put by one of the interviewees, the paths can be differentiated in the approaches taken- men with a transactional approach and women with a transformational one. Furthermore, the glass escalator was confirmed by one of the women working as a teacher, a female- dominated industry where the leadership is still very male dominated despite its faculty existing of a majority of women. The glass cliff as defined by Haslam and Ryan was confirmed through a profusion of examples and theories provided by the participants of the research, reflecting on personal experience and expertise as well as referencing larger scope positions seen in the media headlines of today.

5.2.2. The effect of Stereotypes

A further finding of this thesis paper and a critical attribution to the creation of glass cliff positions regards the stereotypes surrounding gender roles and managing capabilities. As first discovered by Schein (1973), Schein (1975) then further confirmed by a substantial amount of researchers including Haslam and Ryan, there is a direct correlation between the perception of genders and the ideology of what makes a good manager. This is the underlying foundation that creates the chasm between men and women when addressing progression into organizational leadership. Several interviewees agreed that the misperception of how women are and what they are capable of, is the driving point to extant hindrance of women to managerial positions. Historically speaking, the male- dominated culture of leadership shaped these perceptions of quality managing skills being associated to masculine character traits (Schein, 1973). This further includes women's perception of themselves and towards each other; women are also affected by the gender discrimination showing that they do not necessarily believe they can break through the triad principles themselves there-

fore falling victim to the discrimination. Women have the choice of adapting to the expectations of masculine leadership qualities or they can challenge their path by adopting a more feminine approach or "*transitional*" as Interviewee M called it. If women were to hold themselves in a different limelight, they may further change the stigma of the current workplace, which was the perspective that Interviewee H was providing. She claimed that it's a matter of personal choice on how the workplace treats one, this includes the matter of opportunity. Lastly, women can be malicious towards each other in the workplace, in attempts to conserve their own image or position. This was discussed several times, where some of the participants noted that gender discrimination is not a matter of men and women, it is fueled by both sides and needs to be changed from both sides as well.

5.2.3. The impact of quotas

Withal, the surfeit conversations about quotas have to be considered as major finding of this research. While the focus was not on the effects or perceptions of quotas for female representation in the workplace, the participants heavily reiterated their importance. It was proven that the higher representation of women in leadership positions, may lead to changes in the stereotypes currently surrounding leadership and masculinity (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004). Further concluding from this research paper, that quotas are the necessary stepping stone in certain industries to advocate women getting into the senior ranks of management. This surrounds the extensive conversations about institutional regulations such as the SB 826 requiring female board members on public board of directors registered in the State of California, United States (SB 826). This was one of the more controversial aspects in the research conducted but it proved to be essential in understanding the reasons of difficulty for women climbing the corporate ladder and for the creation of glass cliffs.

The major findings in the research conducted confirmed the literature reviews' perspective on nearly entirely. It verifies the current situation of what the path to organizational leadership looks like for a woman in the 21st century and it provided the insights from three contrasting reference groups: the younger generation, the middle generation and the mature generation. By considering the different phases of life, it was evident to see how the past has shaped the current situation and how the current situation will change future. The topic of female leadership is very efficacious and its forefronts will see immense changes in the next decades, on an institutional level and social perspective.

5.3. Relation to prior work

The amalgamation of the research conducted for this thesis with the prior existing research provides a benefit to understanding the causation and existence of the glass cliff. By summarizing the works of M. K. Ryan and Haslam (2005), M. Ryan and Haslam (2007) in proving the existence of glass cliff positions alongside the foundational elements of Schein (1973), Schein (1975) studies that proved the stereotypical bias of what it means to be a manager in regards to gender. The research that the qualitative interviews of this paper proved is the aftermath that the glass cliff phenomenon has on men and women in the workplace, moreover on society as whole. The interviewees shared their own encounters with gender discrimination and glass cliff positions, which thereby validates the ramification that corresponds to how female leaders are perceived today. By understanding the individual experiences that the interviewees reflected on, patterns in the different age assimilations were visible which provided the means for understanding the impact that the glass cliff has on the different phases of a career and investigating how the stigma towards women in leadership was created. A decade after Haslam and Ryan's findings, the effects of the glass cliff are still valid and present in the modern workplace which therefore sets the relation between the research conducted for this thesis to the prior existing work.

5.4. Validity of work

To assess whether the qualitative research was valid, this section will assess the four criteria of validity- objectivity, reliability, internal validity and external validity- to ensure that the research conclusive. First to assess the objectivity of the research, one must speculate whether the study is replicable. In this case, the study is replicable because the same interview question set can be used in another setting; however, the results of the research could vary dramatically. Due to the qualitative insights that the participants shared, any new participant of different demographic or experience set, will change the projections of the research. It would be important to note the differences in gender, age, education, profession and demographic background to further understand certain conclusions drawn out during the research process. To assess the reliability of the research, one must cultivate on the steadiness and measurement accuracy of the data collected.

Anew, the answers collected from the participants were under different settings as some interviews took place face-to-face and others were on the phone or via email. These differentiating factors in collecting data naturally skew the measurement perception of the project as one cannot read the body language or interpret the subtle gestures over the phone in comparison to in person; more importantly, the person analyzing the research is ordinarily not an objective person. In terms of internal validity, the variables tested for were constant which allowed for general pattern identification in the results. This concludes that I was able to measure what I wanted to measure. Lastly, the external validity accounts for the generalizability of the results, beyond this context. The interviews were not detail oriented nor demographically inclined, meaning that the conclusions drawn up in this report general in the term of results and can be applied to several broader perspectives.

6. Conclusion & Contribution

Women taking on leadership positions in the workplace has been an imperative matter internationally for decades. Breaking free of the limitations placed on them, women are rising to vanguard the path to leadership for every woman to follow. This thesis was dedicated to understanding the glass cliff, thereby bringing to life Eleanor Roosevelt's quote *"A woman is like a tea bag: you never know how strong she is until she gets into hot water"*¹⁷. It rings true in its foundation as it precludes women's tendency to thrive during a time crisis, which is essentially what the glass cliff phenomenon states. By researching the root cause of the glass cliff, this thesis defined how, why and when these positions are established furthering on how to approach the transformation essential to changing the workplace in modern society.

This chapter will aim to summarize the key findings determined from this thesis. It encapsulates the literature review, research findings and coherent discussion in regards to the analysis. It will further depict the potential limitations regarding the existing information and provide insight into future research that can be conducted pertaining to female leadership positions and overall management styles in respect to gender.

6.1. Conclusion

When investigating the glass cliff phenomenon, it was easy to presume the different aspects that permit its existence. However, after thoroughly analyzing existing research followed by personally investigating the causations behind glass cliff positions, it proved to be obscure to separate the *how*, *why* and *when* glass cliff positions are created. Therefore, the following four paragraphs may be repetitive in its conclusions. Nevertheless, the culmination of how the future workplace should be and how the glass cliff can be approached remains intrinsically captivating.

¹⁷(Ayres, 1996, p. 199)

6.1.1. The research

This thesis was written to explore the causation of glass cliff positions in three measures. First, by understanding *when* glass cliff positions emerge based on analyses of historically held positions of women in the corporate world. Then, by examining existing studies and executing qualitative interviews, this paper evaluated *how* and *why* these glass cliff positions are created in today's society. By exploring these elements, the research aimed to conceptualize the ideal working environment for men and women in modern society and address how gender discrimination can be addressed in the workplace.

6.1.2. When Glass Cliff occurs

Glass cliff positions occur when an environment fosters gender discrimination towards women in managerial positions. *When* stereotypes about what it takes to be a manager appear, more specifically, the male qualities needed to be a good manager prosper (Schein, 1973, Schein, 1975) the stigma towards women attempting to rise to a leadership position is created. This can be strengthened through blatant and benevolent sexism in the workplace, that lays the groundwork to disadvantage a woman climbing the corporate ladder. Conversely, when group dynamics and status quo bias present themselves converse to female leadership, creating the glass cliff is inevitable since this stigma restricts women from achieving a promotion during a time of normal company performance. *When* these different associations are intact, the capacity for a glass cliff position is created.

6.1.3. How Glass Cliff occurs

The glass cliff phenomenon occurs through the harboring of gender discrimination in the workplace. By perceiving the stereotype of men being better equipped leaders (Schein, 1973) as true, one fuels the foundation that gives life to existence of glass cliff positions. The stereotypes, biases, unabashed sexism and group dynamics featuring women at a disadvantage when it comes to managerial positions are the acumen that grow the negative sentiment of women in leadership. The aggregation of this sentiment in the workplace makes it difficult for women to be promoted under normal conditions which therefore makes them the more qualified individual to take on a precarious position. This evolution of playing towards women's characterization of being understanding, helpful and sophisticated (Schein, 1975) generates the path of creating a glass cliff position. The think crisis-think female (Schein, 2001) association is quintessential to the existence of the glass cliff and explains how the positions are created.

6.1.4. Why Glass Cliff occurs

The why behind the glass cliff phenomenon maybe the transparent attribute to understanding its existence. Historically, leadership positions have been filled by men and modern society has been subconsciously conditioned to associate

leadership qualities with the stereotype of masculinity (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004; Eagly, 2007). *"The single most important hurdle for women in management... is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male"* (Antal & Izraeli, 1993). The explanation given by Antal and Izraeli is the same conclusion drawn from the interviewees of the research conducted for this thesis, it's the historical context that has driven society to perceive leadership in a masculine manner.

6.1.5. Idealistic Workplace

When discussing the future of women leadership and the ideal working environment, the participants of the study reflected an interesting pattern. They used the word *nurture* and *supportive* in describing the environment they would prefer to work in, this specifically reflected on the type of leadership they wish to see. Both of those terms were characterized as female descriptive terms (Schein, 1973) and appeared to match to similar qualities defined as desired of managers regardless of the performance of the company (M. K. Ryan et al., 2011). This proves that the working environments desired by employees and fellow leaders is one that supports and nurtures the others, something that would be described as a feminine approach. Essentially, the research conducted presumes that if men and women were to act more *"feminine"* in their leadership styles, their colleagues would appreciate it. As Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) had hypothesized, that a higher representation of women in positions of organizational leadership could lead to changes in the associations between masculinity and leadership.

Essentially, by women stepping into the essence of their leadership skills and men granting the space for women to thrive in their fashion, the stigma currently held to female leadership will change. This requires both men and women to come together to stand for equal opportunity, embracing the qualities that make them different and more importantly, the same. It's easy to see differences but in retrospect, men and women are not as different as one might presume, more importantly they are both entirely human. It will take every single person to stand up and provide the means for equal promotion to one day eliminate glass cliff positions. Instead of making leadership opportunities a lose-lose situation for one party, by playing to each other's strengths, a win-win situation can be created in the workplace.

6.2. Limitations

To ensure a perceptive research analysis, one must consider the limitations of their research. The primal reservation this paper encountered would be the pool of participants interviewed during the qualitative study. Due to the restricted access to a certain demographic of people, the concoction of participants was based on the writer's access and the participant's willingness to contribute to the research. This resulted in the majority of the participants being European, more specifically, British. Furthermore, their backgrounds were relatively dispersed; to get a more vivid image of an

industry one may consider focusing on only that industry to gain more expertise to draw more precise conclusions. In regard to the gender balance, there were four men and nine women interviewed which reflects a natural shift in opinion, especially in regard to a topic where gender is the key factor of influence. The next study may consider only researching one gender or keeping the intake of research equal between the genders. Furthermore, the subjectivity of the interviewees can be undermined due to their demographic background and their relationship to the author. Due to a majority of the participants coming from a personal development background they may have a prejudice towards the topic of female leadership.

More objectively speaking, the sample size was small with only thirteen participants. A larger sample size will allow for more distinct, statistical conclusions to be drawn; however, a more quantitative approach may be considered for a larger sample size. Ultimately, the time frame of this research was also a limitation. In comparison to a yearlong study, the eight-week research period scurried the process of collecting information which therefore also restricted the access to certain participants.

6.3. Future Research

Future research regarding the glass cliff phenomenon has a vast amount of opportunity. Analyzing in depth what the driving factors are behind women accepting glass cliff positions, if daring to say, even enjoy them. Then discovering and analyzing the glass cliff positions in depth by including sample groups that have experienced the glass position, not just seen it from a third perspective. This would also provide further insight on the possible ways eliminating the glass cliff in the workplace with the commitment of men and women.

When generalizing into female leadership as whole, there is extensive research that can be conducted on the workplace in regards to how women treat each other in the workplace. Arguing whether glass cliffs, glass escalators and glass ceilings are the only issue hindering women's advancements into leadership, whereas the reluctance of women to help other women is not uncommon. Out of the eight women interviewed for this thesis, all eight stated that they had experienced negative female leadership in the past. Why would women not want to help other women? Is the fear of being out beaten or surpassed by a fellow woman bigger than the comradery that could propel them further? Further embarking on the dissonance many women associate with female networking events and the general perception of women amongst women is undiscovered. The idea behind women standing the in the way of each other's success is similar to that of a glass window; one woman has reached the top and could help another woman in their position, however chooses to look through the window instead of exchanging the knowledge both are exposed to.

Women's leadership will continue to be topic of discussion and research for the next decades. Eventually, there will be the first board of directors consisting only of women and there will be bountiful research analyzing their success or

downfall. Furthermore, the social roles of women are changing in society and as the millennials arrive in the management positions, a new era of leadership will replace the current pillars of the corporate ladder.

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