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Article

Metaphors Describing the Gendered Organization in the Career Advancement of Women: An Integrative Review

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Abstract: Worldwide, gender equality remains a barrier for women seeking career advancement in corporations. Despite the globalization of corporate social responsibility programs, women have not achieved positional parity with men within the managerial hierarchy. The purpose of this integrative review was to investigate the breadth of the gendered organization literature, summarize the evidence, and inform future research about the career advancement of women in privately owned and publicly traded corporations. Twelve databases were searched between January 1990 and December 2023 for published evidence. Of the 1914 documents screened, 55 articles were included in this review. The gendered organization literature is slowly evolving as a critical area for management research even though fully developed substantive and formal theories are lacking. However, gendered organizations can be conceptualized for theoretical development as a constellation of metaphors embedded in the corporate culture. These metaphors include firewalls, glass ceilings, glass cliffs, glass escalators, labyrinths, queen bees and beehives, and sticky floors. Notably, few intervention studies were reported in the literature. Corporate social responsibility programs had a surprisingly limited impact on eliminating deep-seated structural attributes contributing to gendered organizations. Therefore, management scholars need to engage in theoretical development and research to advance a comprehensive theory of the gendered organization, and studies should investigate why the identified metaphors continue to adversely impact the career advancement of women despite the presence of corporate social responsibility programs. Finally, existing evidence needs to be translated into intervention recommendations for policymakers and corporate leaders.

Keywords: women; leaders; gender; gendered organization; firewall; glass ceiling; glass cliff; glass escalator; labyrinth; queen bee; sticky floor; corporate social responsibility; integrative review



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1. Introduction

The gendered organization (Acker 1990) describes a constellation of invisible hierarchical barriers and organizational factors that prevent women from advancing into corporate management positions (Morrison et al. 1987). According to Acker (1990), these organizations perpetuate social injustice through a gendered lens where “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (p. 146). Thus, in terms of an advancing theory of gendered organizations (Britton 2000; Britton and Logan 2008), gender is relevant as organizations “carry characteristic images of the kinds of people that should occupy them [management roles]” (Kanter 1977,

p. 250). For this reason, researchers often investigate gender equality within the context of corporate social responsibility (Nkomo and Rodriguez 2019; Tran 2016).

Management scholars need to define the epistemology of the gendered organization (Britton 2000). According to Pullen et al. (2017), the “gendered organization operates beyond and beneath the level of ideas and debates, infiltrating everyday experience as we are moved by mundane gendered encounters that generate affective experiences in our [female] bodies” (p. 106). There is ample evidence of systemic gender inequality in the workforce that contributes to an earning gap and limits the career advancement of women in corporations (Acker 2006; Amore and Garofalo 2021; Biswas et al. 2021; Blau and Kahn 2007; Cook and Glass 2014; Fitzsimmons and Callan 2016; Gasparini et al. 2015; Smith 2002). As a result, privately owned and publicly traded corporations (Gioffré et al. 2021; Jung and Mun 2016; Rincón et al. 2017) are addressing gender equality (Mun and Jung 2018) through corporate social responsibility programs (Biswas et al. 2021; Riyadh et al. 2019; Vogel 2005) in order to actualize social justice for women.

Although these corporate social responsibility initiatives are increasing the pressure for gender equality in corporations (Riyadh et al. 2019), greater gender diversity in governance may not result in more women advancing in the managerial hierarchy of gendered organizations (Dworkin and Schipani 2018). As such, the relationship between gender equality and the career advancement of women needs to be further investigated in the context of corporations in the new economy (Williams et al. 2012). The purpose of this integrative review was to investigate the breadth of the gendered organization literature, summarize the evidence, and inform future research about the career advancement of women in privately owned and publicly traded corporations. The empirical and theoretical evidence about gendered organizations was identified, organized, analyzed, and integrated into a heuristic model to inform theory development, guide scoping and systematic reviews, and provide recommendations for new research.

2. Review Methods

Because evidence synthesis (Rousseau et al. 2008, Sheldon 2005, Tanskanen et al. 2017) is advancing as an integral component of evidence-based management (Briner and Denyer 2012; Pfeffer and Sutton 2006; Roshanghalb et al. 2018; Rousseau 2006), integrative reviews complement scoping and systematic reviews as a rigorous and transparent approach (Toronto and Remington 2020) to develop a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (Dhollande et al. 2021). Although a scoping review is useful to determine the coverage of the extant literature on a topic (Munn et al. 2018), an integrative review provides a more flexible approach to summarize multiple types of literature (Whitemore and Knafl 2005), including theoretical and empirical evidence. Thus, the key output of an integrative review is findings that contribute to building knowledge and informing research (Broome 1993).

2.1. Integrative Review Method

To identify and describe the concepts related to gendered organizations, this integrative review was systematic and comprehensive rather than extensive and exhaustive. Further, as a pre-investigation review, it was broad in scope in a substantive area (Nathaniel 2022) to identify the extant literature for a grounded theory study (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Similar to a scoping review (Arksey and O'Malley 2005), this integrative review followed five steps: (1) problem identification for research question development, (2) a structured database search to identify the relevant documents, (3) document evaluation to select the relevant articles for inclusion, (4) charting the data to integrate the evidence into results, and (5) summarizing the results and presenting the findings.

2.1.1. Step 1. Problem Identification for Research Question Development

The problem of interest was the career advancement of women in relation to the gendered organization. As such, the research question guiding this integrative review was

the following: “What is known about the phenomenon called the gendered organization in the extant literature regarding the career advancement of women in corporations?” Given this research focus, the review was intended to identify the concepts associated with gendered organizations as a complex phenomenon.

2.1.2. Step 2. Structured Database Search to Identify the Relevant Documents

Because a search of the management literature (Hiebl 2021) requires a sample selection that is structured (Rousseau et al. 2008), comprehensive (Cronin et al. 2008), and transparent (Torraco 2005, 2016), the literature included in this review was determined by a search of the appropriate databases for the topic using an evidence-based search strategy described in the next sections.

Database Search. For this review, twelve databases were searched for articles published between January 1990 and December 2023. The twelve databases included Academic Source Complete, Business Source Premier, and JSTOR (for humanities and social sciences literature); ABI/Inform Collection, ProQuest, and the Web of Science (for management literature (Hiebl 2021)); PsycINFO (for organizational behavior literature (Atewologun et al. 2017)); Scopus (for Latin American management literature (Aguinis et al. 2020)); CINAHL and PubMed through MedlinePlus (for health sciences literature, including organizations); and Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect, and Wiley Online Library (for publisher databases with major collections of business and management journals). In addition, Google Scholar was searched to identify relevant grey literature, including non-indexed research literature (Gusenbauer 2019). Finally, techniques such as “pearl growing” (subject terms or citations from a study used to find other studies) and “citation chasing” (retracing research of authors or groups of authors) (Booth 2008) were used to identify potentially missed articles.

Search Strategy. The search strategy determined the overall outcome, validity, and explanatory power of this review (Gusenbauer and Haddaway 2020). For all databases, primary search terms and keywords were defined and combined with Boolean operators. A broad primary-level search strategy was used across the databases: (gender OR gendered) AND (business OR firm OR company OR corporation OR organization OR workplace) AND (women OR woman OR female OR feminine). Then, search terms were used for a second-level search strategy that narrowed the retrieved articles to focus on career (career OR job OR position) and advancement (advancement OR progression OR promotion). Finally, search terms for a third-level search strategy were used to further narrow the articles retrieved to publicly traded corporations (corporation OR company) in the context of outcomes related to gendered organizations (inequality OR inequity OR discrimination OR prejudice). Delimiters were used in the search strategy to eliminate a considerable number of documents in areas unrelated to this review, such as documents focused on gender in entrepreneurship, family businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and government agencies.

Document Screening. The citations for the documents identified during the database searches were downloaded directly into EndNote (version 21) as groups sets. Then, the citations from each group set were consolidated into a new consolidated group set after duplicate citations were removed. A title review was completed in EndNote as abstracts were missing for many downloaded citations. Next, incomplete citations were updated to continue with the abstract review. Finally, the EndNote file was uploaded into JBI SUMARI (System for the Unified Management of the Assessment and Review of Information) (Munn et al. 2019) for abstract screening by two reviewers.

2.1.3. Step 3. Document Evaluation to Select the Relevant Articles for Inclusion

The documents included in this integrative review were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: (1) empirical or theoretical evidence; (2) focused on gendered organizations; (3) privately and publicly traded corporations; and (4) addressed women, or men and women, in supervisory roles, such as managers, leaders, or board members. Articles were excluded if they (1) were published before 1990; (2) did not report empirical

or theoretical evidence (e.g., commentary, editorial, reviews); (3) were not focused on gendered organizations; or (4) were not published in a peer-reviewed source.

2.1.4. Step 4. Chart the Data to Integrate the Evidence into Results

A standardized format was used to extract the information from the articles for charting in Microsoft Excel. The extracted information included the country and region of origin, publication year, journal, research aims or objectives, study design, sample size, demographic data, setting, definitions, theoretical frameworks, primary and secondary variables, measurement instruments, main findings, and results. Content analysis was used by the researchers to identify categories in the literature and to integrate the diverse evidence into a summary of the results.

2.1.5. Step 5. Summarize the Results and Present the Findings

The results of this integrative review were summarized to describe the gendered organization and to present a heuristic model. The findings were discussed in the context of the extant literature. The literature was critiqued, and recommendations were presented for theory development, policy interventions, and future research.

3. Results

The database searches yielded 4491 documents. Of those, 2577 duplicate documents were removed, and 1914 documents were reviewed. After reviewing titles, an additional 944 documents were excluded, leaving 970 documents for abstract review. Most excluded articles at this point were outside the topic area (e.g., military, police, prostitution, sports, and universities or headlines from magazines and newspapers). After reviewing the abstracts, 94 documents were included in the full-text review. Once inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to those remaining documents, 55 articles were included in the review for analysis. The selection process is detailed in Figure 1, where a PRISMA flow diagram (Tricco et al. 2018) was adapted for an integrative review.

Of the 55 articles included in this review, 42 were empirical and 13 were theoretical articles. Most research articles ($n = 29$) were reported from 12 developed countries, including 11 articles from the United States, 4 articles from the United Kingdom, 2 articles each from Belgium, Canada, Italy, and the Netherlands, and 1 article each from Australia, France, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey. There were three international research articles with data from multiple developed countries. There were also 10 articles from seven developing countries, including Bangladesh ($n = 4$), Brazil ($n = 1$), India ($n = 1$), Ghana ($n = 1$), Peru ($n = 1$), Saudi Arabia ($n = 1$), and South Africa ($n = 1$).

The empirical articles included 30 quantitative, 11 qualitative, and 1 mixed-methods study designs. Of the 10 research articles from developing countries, nearly half had qualitative designs, but few were quantitative. Finally, the 13 theoretical articles were primarily conceptual, and no articles reported a formal literature review. Most of the theoretical articles ($n = 10$) were from the United Kingdom ($n = 5$) and the United States ($n = 5$), and the remaining were from other developed countries, including Austria ($n = 1$), the Netherlands ($n = 1$), and Turkey ($n = 1$). There were no theoretical articles from developing countries. Supplemental Table S1 provides a complete listing of the articles included in the results by country, and evidence type.

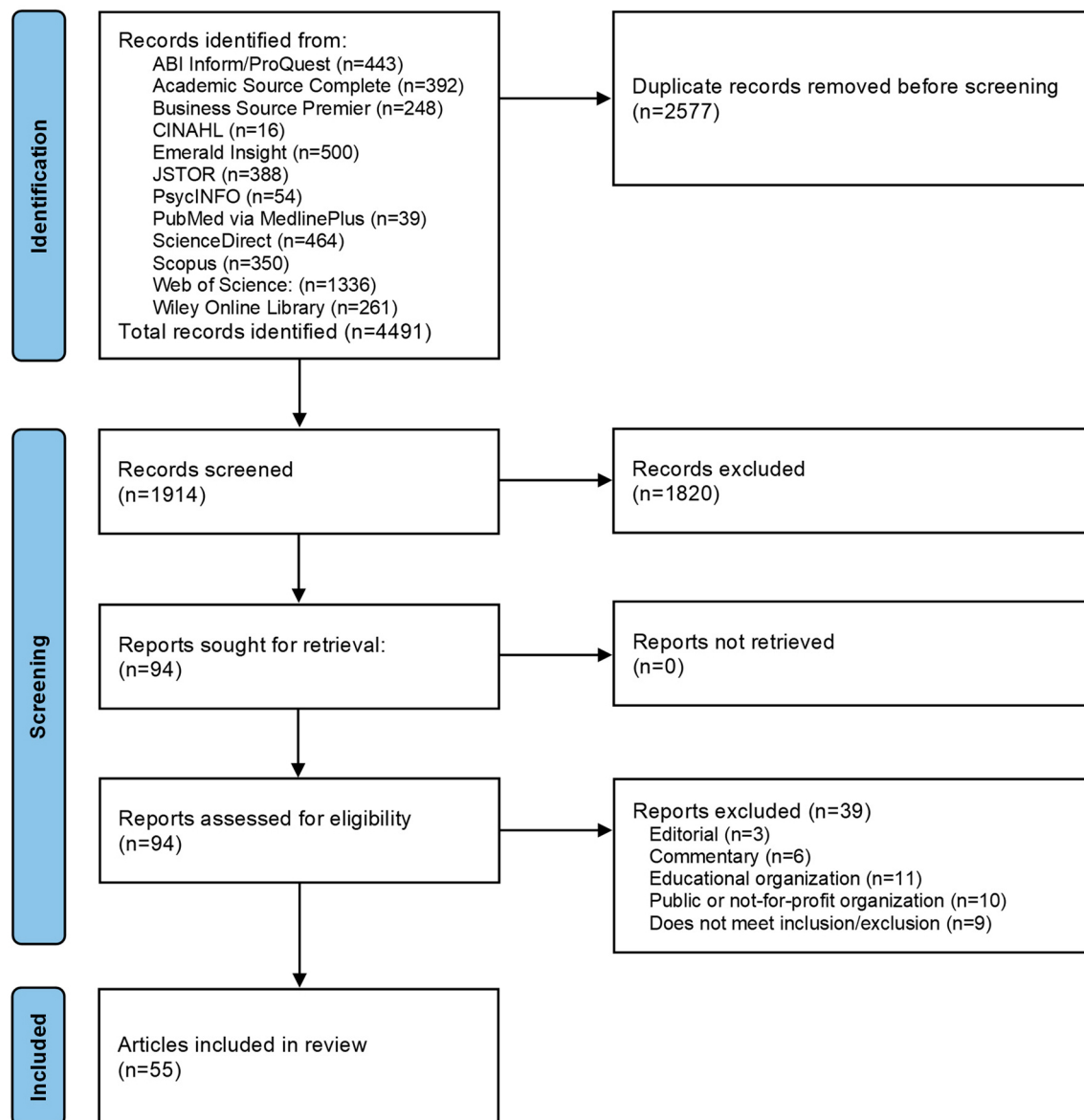


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram Adapted for an Integrative Review.

3.1. Metaphors for the Gendered Organization

The principal finding of this integrative review indicated that the gendered organization is a phenomenon experienced by women that limits their career advancement in corporations and manifests through coexisting structures, processes, practices, and behaviors that prevent them from becoming leaders. The gendered organization was conceptually described by seven metaphors with mechanisms of action that prevent the career advancement of women: firewalls (Andersson et al. 2022; Bendl and Schmidt 2010), glass ceilings (Afza and Newaz 2008; Ahmed et al. 2010; Amakye et al. 2022; Avolio et al. 2023; Babic and Hansez 2021; Barnett-Verzat and Wolff 2008; Bendl and Schmidt 2010; Biagetti and Scicchitano 2011; Carbajal 2018; Christofides et al. 2013; Davies-Netzley 1998; Carli and Eagly 2016; Elacqua et al. 2009; Erskine et al. 2021; Faruk 2021; Hoobler et al. 2009; Ibarra et al. 2013; Kee 2006; Kisi 2019; Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle 2020; Maume 1999; Nazmul et al. 2016; Ng and Sears 2017; Purcell et al. 2010; Ragins et al. 1998; Scicchitano 2014; Sharma and Kaur 2019; Van Vianen and Fischer 2002; Wiswall and Zafar 2017; Wrigley 2002), glass cliffs (Bruckmüller and Branscombe 2010; Haslam and Ryan 2008; Kisi 2019; Mashele and Alagidede 2022; Ryan and Haslam 2005; Ryan et al. 2007, 2008; Ryan and Haslam 2007), glass escalators (Mason 1997; Maume 1999; Ng and Wiesner 2007; Ryan et al.

2007; Williams 1992), labyrinths (Eagly and Carli 2007; Carli and Eagly 2016; Hoyt 2010), queen bees and beehives (Abalkhail 2020; Arvate et al. 2018; Baykal et al. 2020; Corwin et al. 2022; Derks et al. 2011, 2016; Faniko et al. 2016; Mavin 2006, 2008), and sticky floors (Baert et al. 2016; Biagetti and Scicchitano 2011, 2014; Booth et al. 2003; Christofides et al. 2013; Faruk 2021; Kee 2006; Scicchitano 2014). The articles from developing countries were primarily focused on glass ceilings (Afza and Newaz 2008; Ahmed et al. 2010; Amakye et al. 2022; Avolio et al. 2023; Faruk 2021; Nazmul et al. 2016; Sharma and Kaur 2019), but some focused on glass cliffs (Mashele and Alagidede 2022), queen bees (Abalkhail 2020; Arvate et al. 2018), and sticky floors (Faruk 2021). The metaphorical elements defining the gendered organization are presented as a heuristic model in Figure 2 and summarized in the following sections organized by metaphor.

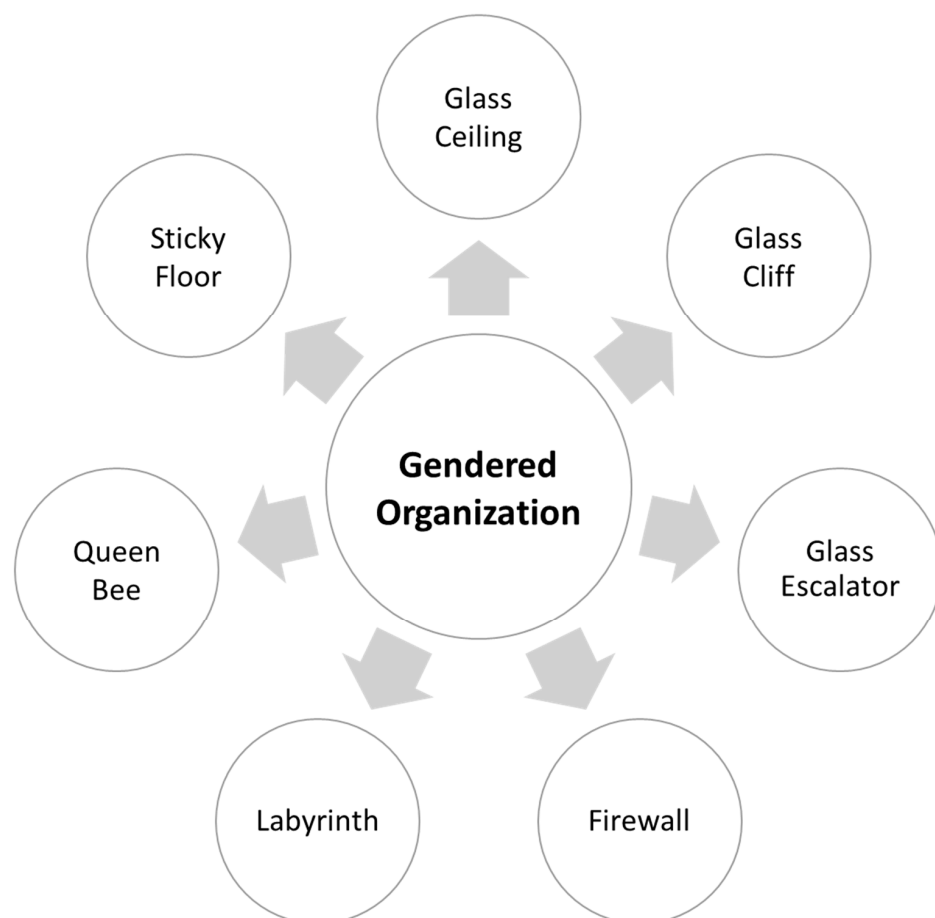


Figure 2. Heuristic Model of the Metaphorical Elements Defining the Gendered Organization.

3.1.1. Firewall

Organizational barriers and cultural constraints surround women because discrimination is an ongoing process (Bendl and Schmidt 2010) with “everyday doings” of gendered norms and power relations (Andersson et al. 2022). In a case study at a Swedish truck company, Andersson et al. (2022) observed that organization normative ideals existed as informal layers of a firewall. For example, an engineer was “identified as someone with a longstanding passion for technology, often identified as a heterosexual man with a wife, two kids, living in a house in a specific middle-class area of the city” (p. 149). Thus, the typical perspective of an engineer resulted in “doing discrimination” (Bendl and Schmidt 2010) because it guided the decision-making toward discrimination for selecting and promoting engineers. Since the research about firewalls was limited to a Swedish setting, its applicability to other countries and cultures remains unknown.

3.1.2. Glass Ceiling

For decades, the glass ceiling has been reported in the occupational and work literatures (Hoyt 2010; Maume 1999). The glass ceiling is considered the status quo for gender discrimination because it describes the invisible barriers in organizations (Bendl and Schmidt 2010) “through which women can see elite positions but cannot reach them” (Davies-Netzley 1998, p. 340). According to Babic and Hansez (2021), the “glass ceiling refers to the fact that a qualified person wishing to advance within the hierarchy of his/her organization is stopped at a lower level due to a discrimination most often based on sexism or racism” (p. 2). Although the glass ceiling is only one factor related to the gendered organization, it was the metaphor most widely reported in the literature (Kisi 2019), and more studies than expected were from developing countries. Similarly, wage distribution studies focused on gender were reported in the literature. Wider gender gaps at the top wages were attributed to the glass ceiling effect (Biagetti and Scicchitano 2011; Christofides et al. 2013; Kee 2006; Scicchitano 2014; Wiswall and Zafar 2017), but that gap was narrower in some sectors (Barnet-Verzat and Wolff 2008).

Multiple factors were reported that support the glass ceiling and were grouped as interpersonal (Elacqua et al. 2009), personal (Afza and Newaz 2008), situational (Elacqua et al. 2009), social (Ahmed et al. 2010), and organizational (Babic and Hansez 2021). Researchers in India (Sharma and Kaur 2019), for example, reported that women managers (n = 553) perceived that the glass ceiling effect resulted from organizational (disparate treatment, negative work environment, gender discrimination, and biased corporate practices) and societal (family priorities and responsibilities and work–family imbalance) factors rather than personal (lack of self-esteem and challenge aversion) factors. In Ghana, women leaders reported that prejudices and stereotypes placed excessive pressure on them to perform better than their male colleagues (Amakye et al. 2022). However, older women leaders benefited from motherhood, which is a respected role within ubuntu (Amakye et al. 2022) (defined as the universal truth of a society based on authentic relationships that results in humanity through collectivism). However, younger subordinates reported being disadvantaged by their age more than gender (Amakye et al. 2022), which may be tied to age discrimination in the context of masculine leadership styles (Carbajal 2018).

The lifestyle preferences of women may partially explain the glass ceiling effect (Wiswall and Zafar 2017). Lifestyle preferences were linked to indirect discrimination, or second generation bias, since women were given positions above the glass ceiling that men would most likely decline or perceive as very difficult to succeed at (Ibarra et al. 2013). In a related Belgian study of women managers (n = 320) (Babic and Hansez 2021), work–family conflict mediated the effects of the glass ceiling on job strain and job engagement and partially mediated the effects of the glass ceiling on job satisfaction and intention to quit. When women reported less work–family conflict than men, managers still believed that women had more conflict, and they viewed women as having a poorer promotability profile (Hoobler et al. 2009). The glass ceiling effect perceptions of Indian women were associated with lower work engagement, particularly for married women, who had the lowest work engagement (Sharma and Kaur 2019). Regarding promotion in an organization, age was positively significant for Black and White women but not men, and years of service negatively influenced women but not men (Maume 1999). These findings suggest that the contemporary literature is beginning to recognize that the career advancement of women is more related to their intersectionality than just their gender (Erskine et al. 2021).

In a large national study of women executives in Fortune 100 companies, women believed that the best strategies for breaking through the glass ceiling were to consistently exceed performance expectations, develop a style that made men comfortable, seek difficult or high-visibility assignments, have a respected mentor, and network with influential colleagues (Ragins et al. 1998). In another study, men preferred competition, effort, and work pressure more than women at lower levels of the organization, but this gender difference disappeared for managers (Van Vianen and Fischer 2002). In a study investigating women leaders, five major factors contributing to the glass ceiling were denial, gender role

socialization, historical precedence, women turning against other women, and corporate culture (Wrigley 2002). Further, a psychological process called negotiated resignation was suggested to help women “continue in their current jobs and accept the discrimination at least enough to fit in and carry on” (p. 52). A perceived glass ceiling had little impact on the job satisfaction of Bangladeshi women, but it significantly influenced their decision to change employment unless they were married or believed they had a good network (Nazmul et al. 2016).

The glass ceiling effect was reported to be influenced by macro-level factors, such as chief executive officer gender, recruitment strategies targeting women, internationalization, and foreign ownership. Ng and Sears (2017) noted that although corporations “exercise discretion with respect to hiring and advancing women in the workplace, they may also be constrained by the external environment” (p. 144). However, women with economic or political power similar to men were reported to overcome gender barriers to achieve board positions (Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle 2020). This outcome was partially attributed to the “shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that constitute the culture within a given national context interact with empowerment forces in ways that affect gender diversity on corporate boards” (p. 342). Given that gender inequities are often built into the culture, this finding may explain the pervasiveness of the glass ceiling in developing countries. For example, when evaluating the perspective of women board members, Avolio et al. (2023) “confirmed the presence of the glass ceiling” (p. 95) in corporations listed on the Lima Stock Exchange. Despite recommendations for more research focused on the effectiveness of workplace policies and human resource interventions for gender equality (Purcell et al. 2010), there was little evidence in the literature of such studies.

3.1.3. Glass Cliff

The glass cliff extends the metaphors of the glass ceiling and the glass escalator (discussed in the next section) by describing the precarious promotion of women leaders during periods of crisis in the gendered organization (Kisi 2019). Ryan and Haslam (2007) described this situation as institutionalized discrimination in the “form of ingroup favoritism such that more attractive positions are reserved for fellow ingroup members (i.e., in the form of ‘jobs for the boys’) while outgroup members are left to occupy those positions the ingroup does not want” (p. 559). The cliff effect results from a male rather than a female history of leadership when a new leader is selected at an organization under crisis conditions (Bruckmüller and Branscombe 2010). Female leaders may be willing to accept greater risk to access an executive role.

In their archival analysis of large corporations, Ryan and Haslam (2005) concluded that “women are particularly likely to be placed in positions of leadership [on the glass cliff] in circumstances of general financial downturn and downturn in company performance” (p. 87). Women were also more likely to be appointed to the boards of companies with consistently poor performance in the previous five months. Yet women were less likely to receive resources because they were expected to use their superior people skills and distinctive leadership style (Ryan and Haslam 2005, 2007; Ryan et al. 2007). Similarly, women were thought to have better skills to manage the stress of crisis situations (Haslam and Ryan 2008). Women leaders “inspire followers to look beyond considerations of narrow self-interest and to work together for the interest of all” (Mashele and Alagidede 2022, p. 505). These findings suggested that promotions into leadership can be dangerous for women during organizational instability because they may lead to performance criticism and a high risk of failure (Bruckmüller and Branscombe 2010; Haslam and Ryan 2008; Ryan et al. 2007, 2008).

3.1.4. Glass Escalator

The glass escalator describes the invisible process where men ascend the career path more rapidly than female colleagues in heavily female-dominated professions (Maume 1999; Williams 1992). In an analytical study, Mason (1997) reported the preferential promotion of

men in heavily female-dominated professions but suggested this may be an “unintended consequence” of equity programs (p. 172). The glass escalator was also noted to provide a hidden advantage for men in female-dominated professions (Williams 1992) in the context of the gendered organization. For example, Ng and Wiesner (2007) reported discrimination against women in female-dominated occupations and more rapid promotions for men, who benefited from a structural advantage. Men were also reported to have access to a glass escalator in other circumstances (Ryan et al. 2007). Finally, women were described as “crowded into sex-typical occupations, in which their work efforts are devalued and ignored, causing their careers to lag behind White men” (Maume 1999, p. 502). This area of the literature was closely related to the metaphor of the labyrinth since men have an express route for advancement while women encounter obstacles.

3.1.5. Labyrinth

The labyrinth describes the gendered career pathways required for men and women to climb the organizational hierarchy (Eagly and Carli 2007). While the climb for men is often homogeneous, including pleasant weather and straight paths, women often encounter adverse weather conditions and complex turns, including dead ends. The tailored experience for women resulted in a lack of anticipation about which path to take and what obstacles they might encounter (Carli and Eagly 2016). According to Hoyt (2010), the obstacles hidden in the labyrinth included the other metaphors, such as the glass ceiling. The key point about the labyrinth metaphor is that the career advancement route is neither direct nor simple for women in gendered organizations (Eagly and Carli 2007; Carli and Eagly 2016).

3.1.6. Queen Bee and Beehive

The queen bee metaphor describes how “women who have been successful in male-dominated organizations sometimes behave in ways that impede rather than help the advancement of other women” (Faniko et al. 2016, p. 903). This metaphor is often applied as a derogatory label to senior women leaders who have succeeded in male-dominated work environments despite being devalued and negatively stereotyped (Derks et al. 2011). As such, the metaphor advances the “blame the woman” perspective (Mavin 2006, 2008) that ignores the gendered inequities embedded in the organization (Derks et al. 2016) and negatively impacts women. The metaphor also explains how women leaders improvise and adopt strategies to navigate their advancement in gendered organizations. The key point is that the woman may be conditioned by the environment.

Women leaders were more likely to form sisterly relationships with solidarity behaviors that facilitate the professional development and career advancement of subordinate women (Mavin 2006, 2008). However, the relationships can become conditional, disconnected, and fragile in the context of discrimination in male-dominated work environments (Abalkhail 2020). In a gendered organization, senior women leaders may be unwilling to mentor female subordinates (Derks et al. 2016) and oppose policies that promote gender equality for women earlier in their careers (Faniko et al. 2016). Yet, later in their careers, senior women leaders were more likely to support subordinate women perceived to be worthy of their support (Faniko et al. 2016). In one study, the presence of a female chief executive officer suggested a negative relationship with the number of female senior leaders, despite a favorable trickle-down effect from the board (Corwin et al. 2022). As such, the researchers suggested that there was a beehive effect since the trickle-down was influenced by executive power, board vigilance, and environmental munificence.

According to Derks et al. (2011), “women who show evidence of the queen bee phenomenon do not do so because of their inherent predisposition to compete with other women, but because they see this as a way to pursue their ambitions in sexist organizational cultures” (p. 530). For example, women leaders may self-group at a distance as a strategy to protect their status by assimilating to the masculine norms of the gendered organization. At this point, the woman leader has “come to see their gender as a liability to career success” (Derks et al. 2016, p. 458). Queen bees also promoted men who fit the leader stereotype

of the organization rather than selecting and promoting more qualified women (Corwin et al. 2022). This finding may explain the queen bee effect that results in a higher turnover intention of subordinate women (Baykal et al. 2020). When the queen bee experiences a social identity threat (Baykal et al. 2020) in the hierarchical complexity of a gendered organization, they will sting when threatened by other women (Mavin 2006).

Queen bees are negatively judged because their behavior differs from other women, characterized as gender-identifying and self-modest, who are at lower levels of the organization (Faniko et al. 2016). The presence of the queen bee provides “evidence of female misogyny by women in management . . . where women either threaten to or actually succeed in, de-stabilizing the established gendered order by either displaying ambition toward senior management or by actually succeeding in a move into senior management” (Mavin 2006, p. 72). However, a study from Brazil comparing public municipalities and private organizations concluded that when favorable conditions afford female leaders with power and managerial discretion, “female leaders are ‘benevolent’ and create opportunities and a pro-female condition for other women” (Arvate et al. 2018, p. 547). Given these findings, the queen bee phenomenon requires more theoretical development to identify queen bee characteristics, describe the climate supporting the beehive, and empirically measure associated outcomes.

3.1.7. Sticky Floor

The sticky floor metaphor describes women stuck in low-paying positions without upward mobility. Despite career ladders and professional development opportunities in organizations, women seem to be held back in low-paying jobs at the lowest levels (Kee 2006). Frequently, the sticky floor is investigated in the context of wage distributions, where the wider gender gap at the bottom is the sticky floor (Biagetti and Scicchitano 2011, 2014; Booth et al. 2003; Christofides et al. 2013; Kee 2006; Scicchitano 2014) in the same way that the wider gender gap at the top is the glass ceiling. In a study from Bangladesh (Faruk 2021), the sticky floor effect was reported to be stronger and much wider at the bottom, and discriminatory rewards were a ‘dominant feature’ of the wage gap. Importantly, even though women are promoted similarly to men in many organizations, the women were observed to be stuck at the bottom of the wage scale for a new position (Booth et al. 2003). The sticky floor has also been attributed to women not being interviewed as often as men when they apply for jobs (Baert et al. 2016). The sticky floor is a small but emerging area of the literature investigating the wage gap as it relates to profiles, positions, and promotions.

3.1.8. Other Metaphors

In the reviewed literature, additional metaphors were used with limited frequency and included the concrete ceiling (Erskine et al. 2021; Hall et al. 2012; Holder et al. 2015), glass door (Cohen et al. 1998), glass floor (Barnet-Verzat and Wolff 2008), glass slippers (Ashcraft 2013), leaky pipeline (Bilimoria et al. 2008), and velvet ghettos (Guillaume and Pochic 2009). These less common but emerging metaphors are briefly summarized in relation to the previously discussed metaphors.

The concrete (or black) ceiling extended the glass ceiling effect to the experience of Black women by recognizing that their intersectionality resulted in greater exclusion from promotion than other groups of women (Erskine et al. 2021; Hall et al. 2012). Researchers reported that Black women were minimized in predominantly White institutional cultures because embedded discrimination led managers to perceive Black women as unprofessional, incompetent, and hostile (Hall et al. 2012; Holder et al. 2015). The essential point for differentiating the ceiling type, glass or concrete, was the added complexity of considering the intersectionality of women.

The glass door describes the initial hiring barriers that prevent women from entering an organization (Cohen et al. 1998). However, the metaphor seems quite similar to the sticky floor effect. In a Belgian study, women received fewer invitations to interview than men when applying for jobs, and they received fewer callbacks when invited to

interview (Baert et al. 2016). The glass floor also describes gender inequality at the lowest organizational levels since women with less educational qualifications have the least likelihood for advancement (Barnet-Verzat and Wolff 2008). For some metaphors, there seem to be overlapping characteristics associated with ill-defined concepts or inadequately developed research. Therefore, clear and concise definitions are needed to understand the major tenets of a metaphor, to identify the discrete differences, and to explain the mechanisms of action.

The glass slipper was proposed in a conceptual paper as “the alignment of occupational identity with embodied social identities as it yields systematic forms of advantage and disadvantage” (Ashcraft 2013, p. 13). The associative view of the work–practitioner relationship is consolidated through the glass slipper metaphor to describe the “fit” between the social identities of people, such as gender and race, with the collective occupational identity of organizations and management. As such, Ashcraft (2013) justified uniting work and diversity research agendas such that “occupations come to appear ‘naturally’ possessed of features that fit certain people yet are improbable for others” (p. 6).

Similar to the glass ceiling, in one study, French women were forced into traditional “velvet ghettos” that narrowed their careers to specialized fields, such as communication, finance, and human resources, and were provided limited opportunities to access top management positions (Guillaume and Pochic 2009). Further, women continue to be forced into gendered corporate career paths because of a work–life reconciliation influenced by their geographic mobility, time availability, and dual-career relationship. According to Guillaume and Pochic (2009), the contemporary “flexible availability” inherent in family-oriented young women managers with children was “interpreted by their line managers as a self-limitation and their explicit withdrawal from the competition for power” (p. 33). In the context of availability and being family-oriented, the leaky pipe metaphor further described women who choose to exit their careers at different stages (Bilimoria et al. 2008) to accommodate external conditions, such as having children, relocating for the career of a spouse, or caring for elderly parents.

3.2. Research Areas Intersecting with the Metaphors

When reviewing the literature, multiple research areas were frequently identified in relation to the metaphors of the gendered organization. These areas—wages, recruitment, leadership styles, and corporate social responsibility—were applicable across multiple metaphors. The areas are briefly summarized in the next sections.

3.2.1. Wages

In a study investigating promotion, pay, and gender, women were as likely as men to be promoted, but they received lower wages (Booth et al. 2003). More recently, the U-shaped pattern of wage distribution observed for Italian (Biagetti and Scicchitano 2011) and Spanish (Scicchitano 2014) women represented discernable sticky floor and glass ceiling effects that may be explained by differences in rewards. In a study of the wage gap across 26 countries of the European Union, differences across countries were observed, but the wider and smaller gaps at the tops and bottoms of countries were not explained by the available variables in the data (Christofides et al. 2013). The researchers posited that country-specific policies related to work and family life and gender equity may be responsible for the between-country variations. In another study, at least 25% of the gender wage gap was explained by early career college-educated women being more willing to trade work flexibility and job stability for lower earnings growth (Wiswall and Zafar 2017).

3.2.2. Recruitment

In a survey of 278 corporations, the presence of a female chief executive officer was associated with an increased recruitment of women (Ng and Sears 2017). The gender of the chief executive officer was also positively associated with the percentage of women in management ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$), and recruitment practices targeting women for manage-

ment was positively associated with the percentage of women in management ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$). Corporations with international operations were negatively associated with the percentage of women in management ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.01$), and there was a negative relationship between foreign corporate ownership and female representation in management ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$). However, the researchers reported no interactions between foreign ownership and internationalization and other predictor variables that could explain women manager representation.

3.2.3. Leadership Styles

Some studies reported that the relationship between women leaders and their leadership style influenced their career advancement. Specifically, the behaviors of women executives were closely aligned with transformational leadership characteristics (Bilal et al. 2021; Saint-Michel 2018; Stempel et al. 2015; Suranga Silva and Mendis 2017) and influenced by sociocultural factors (Abolade 2014; Lincoln 2012). For example, female chief executive officers were reported to have masculine leadership styles despite different preferred styles (Carbajal 2018). Female leaders have been associated with such characteristics as caring, supporting, and nurturing that align with transformational leadership. In contrast, men have been reported to be aggressive, decisive, and assertive (Koenig et al. 2011). In a case study about the glass cliff, transformational women leaders were reported to be highly effective in crisis situations, and transaction leaders were less effective (Mashele and Alagidede 2022). Finally, in a meta-analysis of leadership styles, evidence strongly suggested that women leaders are more transformational (Eagly et al. 2003) than their male counterparts.

3.2.4. Corporate Social Responsibility

Internationally, public policy strategies and corporate social responsibility programs have tried to address the gender equality gap for women in the workplace. Despite ranking third in opportunities for women according to the World Economic Forum (Hausmann et al. 2011), the Norwegian government approved a law requiring the boards of public limited-liability corporations to be at least 40% women (Ahern and Dittmar 2012). Ideally, the long-term impact of the law would result in more women in top corporate positions, narrowing of the gender gap in earnings, and more women board members with better qualifications (Bertrand et al. 2018). However, there has not been a trickle-down effect as anticipated. The number of women middle managers has not increased since the implementation of the law (Strom 2019). Furthermore, an increased intention of women to enter business careers has not been realized as anticipated. Similarly, researchers in Australia (Gould et al. 2018a, 2018b) reported a small nonlinear trickle-down effect between women board members and women senior-level executives in a longitudinal study (between 2003 and 2012) of publicly traded organizations ($n = 1387$). No impact was reported for women at other levels of the management hierarchy. This finding may be the result of senior executives distancing themselves from other women in the organization (2022). Unfortunately, the current literature suggests that corporate social responsibility programs have had a limited impact in minimizing the deep-seated structures and masculinized cultures that contribute to contemporary gendered organizations.

4. Discussion

The gendered organization has been described by management scholars as the central influence grounding the inequality (Britton 2000; Martin 1992; Martin and Collinson 2002; Mumby and Ashcraft 2006), discrimination (Acker 2006; Biswas et al. 2021; Burgess and Borgida 1999; Cook and Glass 2014; Fitzsimmons and Callan 2016; Kiser 2015; Vasconcelos 2023; Webber and Giuffre 2019), and oppression (Britton and Logan 2008; Fletcher 2004; Pullen et al. 2017; Steinfield et al. 2019) of women in corporate cultures that are weaponized by gender-biased structures, processes, and practices (Acar and Sümer 2018; Ellemers 2014; Hoyt 2012; Kalaitzi et al. 2017; Purcell et al. 2010; Stephenson et al. 2022). Yet,

women are considered to be gender equality agents since their access to corporate power deconstructs the gendered organization for the benefit of all women (Stainback et al. 2016). For this reason, corporate social responsibility programs are believed to be an important intervention to eliminate barriers and create the conditions essential for the career advancement of women into higher levels of the organizational hierarchy. The results of this integrative review indicated that the current literature provided sparse evidence to support this perspective.

According to Chugh and Sahgal (2007), employees across an organization typically believe that “male is equal to manager” because gender stereotypes and sex role orientations are cemented into the management power structure as a masculine construct. Even when women are promoted into senior management positions, they are often described as she-males because they “usually resemble the men in power” (Grant 1988, p. 57). Once women are promoted, however, their ability to progress is sharply reduced, limiting them to lower rather than higher leadership positions (Burgess and Fallon 2003). In recent studies, women promoted to senior management positions experienced a U-shaped gender wage gap despite having the same characteristics as their male counterparts (Biagetti and Scicchitano 2014; Scicchitano 2014). The gender wage gap was suggested to result from sticky floor and glass ceiling effects.

Because women are associated with being caring, supportive, and nurturing and men are associated with being aggressive, decisive, and assertive (Koenig et al. 2011), there is a disproportionate number of men holding senior executive positions in organizations. This reinforces the male culture and contributes to gender bias networking. As such, people remain surprised to see a woman in charge (Kruse 2022; White and Burkinshaw 2019). In addition, cultured gender norms cause women to encounter firewalls that protect power by requiring women to move through layers of screening to access networks essential for professional advancement (Andersson et al. 2022). In a study of Belgium organizations, Babic and Hansez (2021) reported that an organization’s gender culture resulted in work-to-family conflicts that mediated the effects of the glass ceiling on job strain and engagement. Indirect discrimination is also problematic for women since they are given positions that men will most likely decline or perceive as very difficult to achieve success (Ibarra et al. 2013).

The gender gap for women advancing in management may be partially explained by lifestyle preferences. According to Wiswall and Zafar (2017), early career college-educated women are willing to trade work flexibility and job stability for lower earnings growth. In another study, women considering their initial corporate employment were more concerned about family and health while their male counterparts were more concerned about position and salary (Sheppard 2018). Further, men tended to focus on achieving higher earnings growth at the expense of work flexibility and job stability. These findings highlight the lifestyle difference where men focus more on promotion and wages and women focus on flexibility and stability. Finally, lifestyle preferences were also related to indirect discrimination, as women are offered positions that men do not want (Ibarra et al. 2013).

Ample evidence has shown that systemic gender inequality in the workforce contributes to an earning gap and the limited career advancement of women in corporations (Acker 2006; Amore and Garofalo 2021; Biswas et al. 2021; Blau and Kahn 2007; Cook and Glass 2014; Fitzsimmons and Callan 2016; Gasparini et al. 2015; Smith 2002). Despite attempts by governments to legislate solutions, advance reporting transparency through corporate social responsibility guidelines, and implementing corporate strategies that promote gender diversity, the literature suggested that favorable results most often materialize at the governance level or, somewhat less, in the senior executive levels of organizations (Bertrand et al. 2018; Min 2022; Mun and Jung 2018; Scicchitano 2014; Storvik and Schone 2008). As such, gender equality remains a problem for most women seeking advancement into corporate management positions.

Published data from high-income countries with strong regulatory reforms and modern corporate social responsibility programs indicate minimal advancement in the number

of corporate management positions filled by women. Despite better representation of women in corporate governance and more women emerging as senior executives in developed countries, there has not been the anticipated “trickle-down” effect (Gould et al. 2018b; Perilleux and Szafarz 2022) for the career advancement of other women. Instead, trickle-down effects, when observed, were strongest in male-dominated industries at lower organizational levels and female-dominated industries at higher organizational levels (Ali et al. 2021). As such, the career advancement of women remains difficult at most organizational levels.

Critique of the Literature

For all countries included in this integrative review, the primary focus of research investigating the gendered organization was the glass ceiling effect in relation to corporate governance and the executive leadership levels of organizations. The literature also addressed the relationship between the glass ceiling effect and corporate social responsibility. Most of this research focused on board members and executive, or “C-suite”, leaders in the context of organizations operating in developed countries. There were surprisingly few studies focused on reporting public policy initiatives and human resource management interventions, and even fewer evaluation studies. With a couple of exceptions, the literature lacked evidence from developing regions of the world. In those studies, articles focused almost exclusively on executive leaders and rarely addressed middle and lower levels of management. For example, the only study identified from Latin America focused on women in governance. When comparing the type of research designs from developing and developed countries, there was an appreciably greater focus on qualitative research in developing countries than in developed countries.

Despite some exuberance about corporate social responsibility positively impacting the career advancement of women, the theory of gendered organizations (Acker 1990), as proposed in 1990, has slowly evolved within the management literature such that it remains theoretically and empirically underdeveloped (Britton 2000). This situation may be explained by the masculine culture of business schools, which contributes to the problem instead of solving it. In business schools, women experience overt discrimination in “chilly climates” (Krishna and Orhun 2022; Lanier et al. 2009; Reilly et al. 2016) because traditional masculine structures are maintained by cultures “shaped by societal factors and steered by those [men] who hold power” (Gooty et al. 2023, para. 8). According to Fotaki (2011), business schools are “complicit in perpetuating the failure of ‘diversity management’ as they undermine the very practices they ostensibly teach” (p. 50). Because gendered organizations “tend to move back towards an equilibrium when confronted with change” (Bleijenbergh 2018, p. 132), business schools are unlikely to create an environment that supports women management scholars interested in developing research related to the metaphors or advancing the theory of gendered organizations. Recently, there have been calls for business schools to shift the conversation from a “fix the women” mentality to a “fix the system” approach to tangibly embrace gender equality (Gooty et al. 2023). When business school leaders choose to “reform their own institutions by actively combating the deeply ingrained sexism that prevails” (Yarrow and Davies 2022, p. 16), the research agendas and theory development in gendered organizations can be safely advanced by women management scholars.

5. Conclusions

As suggested by the results of this integrative review, the literature regarding gendered organizations in relation to the career advancement of women in corporations is slowly evolving as a critical area for future management research. In the literature, the gendered organization was defined by metaphors, a constellation of concepts embedded in organizational cultures, that included firewalls, glass ceilings, glass cliffs, glass escalators, labyrinths, queen bees and beehives, and sticky floors. Surprisingly, there were no fully developed substantive and formal theories to inform a comprehensive theory of gendered

organizations. These theories are essential to deconstruct the metaphors that persist in organizations and cause gender inequalities and inequities. For this reason, theoretical development is needed to better understand the metaphors and guide new research areas to understand the complexities of the contemporary gendered organization. This work should focus on describing the mechanisms of action for the metaphors, individually and collectively, that adversely impact women. Importantly, such research should also include studies that investigate national nuances and their relationships to the context and culture of corporations operating in the developing world.

Because this integrative review found little evidence about effective interventions to achieve gender equality for the career advancement of women, researchers also need to identify the deeply embedded structures and processes that maintain the metaphors and describe the gendered organization. Although corporate social responsibility initiatives resulted in more women serving as board directors and senior leaders of corporations, there were no appreciable improvements in the career advancement of women at other levels of the managerial hierarchy. For this reason, corporations should disclose the outcome data of their corporate social responsibility program initiatives for gender equality and career advancement in their annual reports to shareholders. Furthermore, regulatory agencies and investment organizations should require increased transparency in gender equality data reporting for corporate social responsibility programs.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/admsci14090196/s1>, Table S1: Review Articles by Country and Evidence Type.

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