

# A theoretical review on **gender disparities** and **glass effects**

Uma revisão teórica sobre as **disparidades de género** e *glass effects*

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**Abstract** | The impact that gender issues have in academics, territories, businesses, governments and societies is notoriously growing. This tendency can easily be understood in most active sectors. The tourism sector is no exception, as women are often underpaid, undervalued and work as part-time employees. Men, on the other hand, tend to occupy higher positions and have greater possibilities for career progression and to achieve managing positions. There are many aspects that justify these differences and cement the gender inequality scenario. By disallowing women to fully develop their potential, businesses and territories are limiting their resources and are unable to innovate and respond to the market's demands in an efficient way. Women often face a dilemma, on which they can see a specific role but they can't reach it due to a combination of barriers. In other words, they face glass effects that have not been totally broken in the present. Therefore, this paper aims at presenting the most common barriers for gender equality with special focus to glass effects, namely the glass ceiling, glass cliff, glass escalator and glass wall. The approach overtaken to analyze these subjects was a solid literature review, focusing on the main discussions amongst each barrier. The two main conclusions presented in this study remit to the large quantity of barriers that women face in the labour market and also to the lack of policies that protect females from discrimination.

**Keywords** | gender, inequality, barriers, glass effects, discrimination.

**Resumo** | O impacto que as questões de género têm na academia, territórios, empresas, governos e sociedades é notoriamente crescente. Esta tendência pode ser facilmente compreendido nos setores mais ativos. O setor do turismo não é exceção. As mulheres são muitas vezes mal pagas, estão subvalorizadas e a trabalhar a tempo parcial. Os homens, por outro lado, tendem a ocupar posições mais altas e têm maiores possibilidades de progressão na carreira e alcançar posições de gestão. Há muitos aspetos que justificam essas diferenças e cimentam o cenário de desigualdade de género. Ao não permitir que as mulheres desenvolvam plenamente o seu potencial, empresas e territórios estão a limitar os seus recursos e são incapazes de inovar e responder às exigências do mercado de forma eficiente. As mulheres muitas vezes enfrentam um dilema, podem imaginar-se numa função específica, mas não podem alcançá-la devido a uma combinação de barreiras. Por outras palavras, elas enfrentam efeitos de vidro que não foram ainda totalmente quebrados. Este trabalho tem por objetivo apresentar as barreiras mais comuns para a igualdade de género, com especial incidência para efeitos de vidro, ou seja, o teto de vidro, vidro penhasco, escada rolante de vidro e parede de vidro. A abordagem ultrapassada para analisar esses temas é uma revisão da literatura com foco nas principais discussões entre cada barreira. As duas principais conclusões apresentadas neste estudo, remetem para a grande quantidade de barreiras que as mulheres enfrentam no mercado de trabalho e também para a falta de políticas que protejam as mulheres contra a discriminação.

**Palavras-chave** | género, desigualdade, barreiras, efeitos de vidro, discriminação.

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## 1. Introduction

Literature on gender-related issues has been growing at a very fast pace on a current basis, as researchers want to fill existing gaps in previous studies. Moreover, there is a greater need to implement gender equality measures on any given local or context in order to promote a fair environment for men and women.

Therefore, it is clear that studies performed in different contexts provide homogenous results. However, the majority of gender studies assess the different criteria and treatment that women perceive on the job market. Two main views emerge from the gender paradigm. On one hand, some authors believe that nowadays women are becoming more represented on upper business roles (Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2012; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Herrera, Duncan, Green, & Skaggs, 2012; Wang & Kelan, 2013; Wigglesworth, 2013). On the other hand, studies state that there are still highly visible gender differences on a global context, on which men are overrepresented in managerial or leadership roles (Kark, Waismel-Manor, & Shamir, 2012; Lovell, 2013; Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Rudnev, 2013; Sung, 2013). However, these two views seem to be distinctive but converge into a single, yet universal conclusion which is the undeniable existence of different criteria according to gender. In other words, gender equality may be a trendy concept but it is far from becoming a vivid reality.

There is also a notorious effort by academics to present specific reasons that explain gender disparities. There is a general consensus on how women tend to earn less and yet work more hours than their male counterparts (González, Santos, & Santos, 2005; Guelke, 2014; Skalpe, 2007). Also, Costa, Carvalho and Breda (2011) prove that women tend to be centered in part-time jobs and do not get access to the same career opportunities as men. Torres and Silva (1998) state that pregnancy and existing children may also be responsible for disallowing women to create future job expectations.

On a parallel approach, these barriers can be considered in two distinct ways. Firstly, issues directly related to women such as pregnancy, marriage, culture and household responsibilities tend to influence the time and capability for women to occupy better roles. However, a second perspective should be considered as women tend to suffer from what is known as "glass effects" (R. A. Smith, 2012). The two major glass effects that affect women are the glass ceiling and the glass cliff (Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, 2014; Ryan, Haslam, & Postmes, 2007). However, there is another effect known as glass escalator. In this case, men emerge as successful leaders on female-oriented and/or female-dominated industries.

The aim of this paper is to address the main issues related with gender discrimination. A systematic literature review was undertaken in order to collect the main data for this article, so that fundamental issues can be explored on a detailed way. Moreover, the tourism sector will be taken on special account as gender differences are notorious. On the first part, the main barriers for women's career progression will be discussed. The second part of the paper aims to clarify and highlight the three glass effects referenced in the above paragraph, in order to further extend the debate on gender disparities. The results obtained in both parts will provide general conclusion on how academics assess these subjects, while aiming to suggest future studies and recommendations that should be followed in order to create fair and equal environments and opportunities for both genders.

## 2. Main gender disparities

Much can be discussed about the different challenges and opportunities that are provided for both genders, but studies tendentially show that women are discriminated against.

Before debating the main barriers for gender equality, one must understand what the word gender

consists of. There is no universal definition for this concept and the aim of this paper is not to approach that inconsistency. Perhaps the clearest and broadest definition was elaborated by Swain (1995, pp. 258-259), stating that gender is a "system of culturally constructed identities, expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity, interacting with socially structured relationships in divisions of labor and leisure, sexuality, and power between women and men". In other words, when addressing gender issues, one must include individual behaviors, attributes, assets, perceptions and constructs that are typically male or female.

Hoyt (2012) explains that even though both genders adopt different leadership styles, women tend to be underrepresented in the most important roles of highly competitive businesses. However, literature shows two different yet complementary perspectives. In some cases, articles prove that there are indeed undeniable differences in leadership, where men are seen as authoritative and women as subordinates (Simão, 2013; Simão & Breda, 2014c). On the other hand, other studies stress that women are starting to appear in leadership roles, but these cases are not much significant in a general perspective (Simão, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to understand that there are a number of characteristics that hinder the future objectives for women entrepreneurs. Next paragraphs aim to point out the main issues for women discrimination according to the literature.

#### **a. Unequal salaries**

Perhaps the main issue that comes up when referring to gender inequalities is the difference between monthly wages according to gender.

Studies show that these differences can be observed in either developed or undeveloped areas (Bullón, 2009; Ferguson, 2011). Though, it is mandatory to understand that the market is changing at a very fast pace and women are becoming much more

involved in all sorts of jobs since there is a greater need to sustain households' expenses. However, when comparing subordinate roles, these differences may reach up to 80% in favor of men (González et al., 2005). Also, the worst cases of unequal salaries are associated with inter-employer wage differences within the same business (Vieira, Cardoso, & Portela, 2003).

Groshen (1987) explains that in some cases women can be found at "high benefit/low-wage" jobs, which provide them with flexible, clean and quiet environments but still pay much less than what technically should be fair. On the other hand, Skalpe (2007) shows that even in leadership roles, women tend to earn 6,7% less than men and yet they tend to be more productive on the long run. Simão and Breda (2014a) studied the food and beverage sector and found out that since men hold most managerial positions, they tend to earn significantly more than their women counterparts. Still, on a conclusive note, Mendes (2005) believes that even in the most important roles, salaries will not be equal in the short run as women who work and hold the same role as men, will not receive as much on a monthly basis.

#### **b. Types of contracts**

Another main bullet point that highlights gender disparities is the different types of contracts that are held by both genders.

Taking the tourism sector into account, Costa, Carvalho and Breda (2010) clearly state that women do not get as many opportunities as men to hold full-time jobs. However, the tourism case proves that women are highly represented in most part-time and seasonal roles (Simão, 2013; Simão & Breda, 2014c). This can be explained by two main reasons. The first one is the business dimension, as most tourism businesses are Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as Costa (2005) showed. Second reason is managers' main motivations to reduce costs,

which emphasizes their interest in recruiting any human resource, provided that he/she can perform a given task in an efficient way (Portugal & Varejão, 2009; Simão, 2013). On another perspective, Jordan (1997) states that since women still perform most household activities, there is a clear need for them to hold part-time jobs with flexible working hours. A different approach was accounted by Simão (2013) when referring to the food and beverage sector, as full time contracts were held mostly by women subordinates. However, the same study showed that there were some differences in terms of employees' salaries, in favor of men.

One of the main conclusions is that men tend to be chosen for full-time jobs since they are less likely to be influenced by family issues than their female counterparts (Thrane, 2008). Next sections aim to fully clarify this statement with other notorious disparities.

### c. Marriage and children

The way that marriage and household responsibilities influence men and women tends to be completely different and there is a greater need to diminish these disparities.

As stated on previous paragraphs, leaders tend to recruit employees that can perform tasks in a fast way, provided that it generates fewer costs for the business. After a global examination of gender disparities, Simão and Breda (2014b) proved that even though in some cases marital status and children are highly connected, they represent two main aspects that tend to exclude women from relevant roles on highly competitive businesses. On a parallel perspective, Simão and Breda (2014c) point out that managers prefer recruiting an employee that is single, since he/she may be able to fully focus on the tasks and also be able to work extra hours to ensure an increase on business benefits.

Wilkinson and Pratiwi (1995) explain that in most families, women are responsible for the

production of food for the whole family, while also performing most household activities. Therefore, it is hard for women to focus on both paid and unpaid work at the same time, forcing them to hold part-time jobs, so they can sustain a stable income and also perform their family obligations. Therefore, couples should be able to split their household tasks on an equal matter. This would be. That is why Torres and Silva (1998) believe women cannot envision careers on highly relevant roles since their stress levels are constantly too high to ensure efficient outcomes on business and family issues. help women to avoid being overloaded with numerous concerns. On a business perspective, Torres, Monteiro and Cabrita (2005) stress that managers are more aware of these issues and may exclude potential women employees because of these barriers.

There is also a need to address the existence of children, which clearly influences women's chances in achieving higher roles on a business structure. Women are directly associated with pregnancy, but also, managers understand that human resources make a considerable difference in SMEs (Simão & Breda, 2014a). In other words, leaders are becoming more aware when selecting and recruiting individuals for a given role and women may end up not filling the criteria due to potential maternity leaves or the existence of children on their household. Yet, women are associated with other absences and that tends to increase gender disparities (Miličević, 2014). Still, in some cases, couples also resort to external resources such as daycares or other family members to sustain their children in order to diminish these profound differences (Torres & Silva, 1998).

On a general note, women are directly influenced by the number of children, pregnancy and marriage. These issues also relate on the contract they hold, since they have to manage their limited time according to paid and unpaid work. Next chapter does not take these issues into consideration but emphasizes on women's individual aspects, proving that gender disparities are fit in a vicious circle.

#### d. Academic and specific qualifications

In this context, two distinct types of expertise can be merged and analyzed. Firstly, school qualifications are compared with individuals' genders. Afterwards, specific skills and experience are observed and comprehended according to men and women, aiming to justify the constant differences in opportunities.

In less developed countries, Ferguson (2011) shows that there is not as much discrimination in accessing schools as there was some decades ago. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCDE, 2012) emphasizes that barriers in terms of education have been totally extinct. However, studies show that women are becoming much more qualified than men (C. Costa, Caçador, Carvalho, Breda, & Costa, 2013; C. Costa et al., 2010; C. Costa, Carvalho, Caçador, & Breda, 2012a, 2012b; Haig, 2004), since they aim to obtain university degrees.

The amount of male dropouts in universities is higher than their female counterparts, proving that men are not as motivated or as interested in completing a degree (H. A. Costa et al., 2013). The main issue in this context is that even though women are systematically more qualified, they still do not get access to the roles they deserve. Taking the study of Simão (2013) into account, there is a certain "woman phobia" by SMEs' leaders. What this means is that managers are afraid of empowering women due to their visible capability of developing tasks in an efficient way. This should work as a boost for establishing gender equality but leaders do not want to compromise their power and governance on their own firms. This also explains the sex segregation and the horizontal and vertical segregation in the tourism industry (C. Costa et al., 2010; Jordan, 1997; Vieira et al., 2003).

On a different, yet relatable, view, in the tourism sector, as well as on any business, human resources have to be able to adapt and develop their own skills in order to fill managers' demands. Sinclair (1997) highlights that in some jobs, academic

qualifications are sometimes ignored or forgotten by employers. In other words, previous experience, skills and expertise are much more valued than actual knowledge. For example, in the case of food and beverage sector, Simão (2013) concluded that academic qualifications are quite low for subordinates and for leaders, but in some cases leaders prefer recruiting men as they are stronger and more flexible than women. Also, Chant (1997) believes that leaders seek human resources that are capable of dealing with issues on the front and on the back office, and, therefore, men gain the advantage on those jobs. Bartram (2009) explains that work experience and women's individual skills also hinder their career ambitions since leaders do not want to invest in continuous teaching and training. However, Rudman and Glick (2001) state that women are generally more sympathetic and kind than men, which, in some cases, may help them achieve better roles and salaries.

Simão and Breda (2014c) conclude that the presence of women in any enterprise contributes to a significant increase in levels of productivity. However, leaders still choose men to fill eventual gaps in their business vision. Academic qualifications are increasing but still are low and undervalued, which tends to keep on favoring men. On the other hand, Hocevar (2007) stresses that it is very difficult for women to possess a diploma and sustain their children while holding a significative role on a business context.

Next chapter focuses on another set of visible and also uncontrollable variables related to society, which tend to foster and increase gender discrimination.

#### e. Culture, stereotypes and social values

Even though literature takes a greater highlight on the previous issues, it is mandatory to understand how culture related barriers as well as society's stereotypes influence gender discrimination.

When addressing cultural issues, most studies discuss how these barriers influence gender disparities. It is clear that a specific area has specific assets and attributes, which create a specific culture. Gathungu and Mwangi (2014, p. 118) also add that culture is related to: “social boundaries of the local communities, reflecting cognitive and culture-based norms and shared meanings”. Therefore, it is clear that there are no universally accepted values, but each community creates a different environment according to individuals’ beliefs, values, roles and behaviors. However, these assets may end up jeopardizing women’s entrepreneurial visions.

Possibly the deepest cultural disparities can be observed when comparing developed and developing countries. For example, Smith (2009) highlights that in developing countries, children have to start working at a very young age so that the family can be fed. In other words, there are considerable interpersonal and intercultural disparities that fit on deep-level dimensions, which tend to boost diversity (Feitosa, Grossman, Coultas, Salazar, & Salas, 2012). A common example that fits these criteria consists on foreign women that choose to leave less developed countries in search for better careers. Awumbila (2006) claims that even though women envision a better environment, they end up finding subordinate jobs and earning considerably less than male workers performing similar tasks. Also, these results are easily observed on an inter-business perspective. Yet, Gentry (2007) stresses that tourism represents a best case scenario for women since it consists on SMEs that are in great need of recruiting human capital.

On a different perspective, Ferguson (2009) suggests that there is lack of governmental and institutional measures to support women. The author compliments this thought by referring to it as “gender-blind” laws, which, indirectly, favor men (Ferguson, 2009). Parker (1996) stresses that African-American women tend to be excluded from leadership roles even though they possess the same, if not more qualifications to hold managerial

roles. On a global level, it is clear that disallowing women to express their opinions and contributions, limits the creation of knowledge on a given location (Berliant & Fujita, 2012). Chant (1997) concludes that cultural issues foster a clear division of tasks, dragging women for domestic, familiar and subordinate roles and suppressing their potential skills and expertise.

It is also mandatory to refer on how stereotypes influence and relate to gender disparities. Stereotypes are built over time and they persist within cultures, locations or individual values and may affect behaviors, actions, experiences and even expressions (Bijlstra, Holland, Dotsch, Hugenberg, & Wigboldus, 2014). A good example of this barrier is claimed on a study developed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2010) which states that 75% of women are employed on the so-called 5 Cs of low-paid employment: cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering and clerical. So, stereotypes are embedded on societies, making individuals and groups subjected to, sometimes, false ideals. Moreover, negative and incorrect expectations and beliefs are constructed according to variables such as gender, ethnicity, age and social classes.

People who suffer from stereotypical discrimination tend to be excluded from most social activities and discussions and may end up not getting their desired employment. Schmader (2010) stresses that stereotypes target negative individual or group attributes, creating a “threat in the air” which disallows the development of their own ideas and visions. Koenig and Eagly (2005) agree that it confirms a negative view according to motivational processes and it is mostly present in men. Even though there is a bond with culture, stereotyping on its own does not boost cultural differences but it may create a negative impact especially on women employees and potential leaders.

Papers focusing on gender and leadership studies found out that society created a “Think-leader-think-male” stereotype which exists in almost every location or business (Bartol, 1974; Day & Stogdill,

1972; Gerber, 1988; Rosen & Jerdee, 1973). In other words, men are seen as natural leaders due to their physical appearance and authoritative personality (Simão, 2013). On the other hand, women are associated with food production and unpaid work. On a global basis, SMEs' managers resort to stereotypical issues to increase gender disparities. Even though much has been done to fight against traditional society's beliefs (Casaca, 2012; Nozawa, 1995; OCDE, 2012), there is still a long way to go before negative stereotypes can be extinguished.

The last issue that requires a special attention by academics and local agents concerns the influence of other social values on gender disparities. Ferguson (2010) claims that social groups, race, religion and nationality can influence women's chances in accessing more relevant roles on a business context as well as participating in local governance. Such barriers prevent women from stating their ideals and methodologies, which slows innovational processes and knowledge creation, especially in less developed areas (Wigglesworth, 2013).

Much has already been discussed about barriers for gender equality. Literature creates two distinctive yet coincident views as some article focus on stating gender differences and others suggest practical and successful solutions. However, even though these solutions may prove to be successful, they may fail according to the business, sector of activity or even the area on which they are implemented. When addressing the tourism sector, women are occupying most roles on tourism-related businesses (Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, & Torres, 2014). Even though, according to authors, this sector and this trend represent an opportunity for women to strengthen their presence in the job market (Chapman & Randell, 2011; Sweeting, Bhaskar, Benzeval, Popham, & Hunt, 2014) there is still much to be done. Men still occupy the vast majority of leadership roles and family businesses are the best chances for women to appear in managerial positions (Simão & Breda, 2014a). Therefore, laws and measures should be applied

on micro and macro scales in order to force entrepreneurs as well as societies to include women in leadership roles.

On the next chapter, three other types of gender disparities will be analyzed and discussed according to existing literature. It is mandatory to fully understand how these issues are represented on a societal and business context, in order to construct potential solutions to decrease gender disparities.

### 3. Glass effects

Previous sections made it clear that there are numerous barriers and challenges that foster gender disparities. Although, much more could be discussed, this article stresses the need to understand the relationship between glass effects and gender differences. The concept "glass effect" relates to the precise characteristics of glass itself: it is possible to see through it but it is impossible to cross it. In other words, it consists on an invisible barrier that separates distinctive roles within an organization, disallowing certain individuals from reaching more ambitious positions.

Possibly the most studied and discussed glass effect is glass ceiling. However, recent literature states the existence of three other glass effects, namely the glass cliff, the glass escalator and the glass wall. Next chapters aim to clarify all four concepts while pointing out clear examples of each effect.

#### a. Glass ceiling

Possibly the first ever glass effect to be studied by academics was the glass ceiling.

The discussion around this subject is endless and without practical solutions this effect will not disappear in any society. It is very hard to pinpoint the exact moment this subject gained a special interest in literature. It is believed that Hymowitz and

Schellhardt (1986) “gave birth” to this subject on an article published on *The Wall Street Journal*, where they reviewed the lack of women leaders on American businesses. The authors state that women are aware of this phenomenon and that no matter which road they choose they will always reach a point where their careers simply cannot progress anymore.

Even though gender differences tend to be understood as common sense, there was a need to deepen and scrutinize the whole concept between the glass ceiling. According to Jellal, Nordman and Wolff (2006, p. 2) the glass ceiling consists on: “an invisible barrier that inhibits promotion opportunities for women, but not for men, and prevents them from reaching top positions.” Therefore, men not only tend to occupy more relevant roles, but are also provided with more opportunities and benefits compared to women. In other words, the glass ceiling allows a specific gender to see and ambition more relevant positions on a given business, but disallows those individuals from achieving the roles they desire.

A particular characteristic associated with the glass ceiling is that gender differences on subordinate roles wages’ are almost inexistent (Rica, Dolado, & Llorens, 2005). However, the same authors agree that in upper roles, women tend to reach a dead-end since they occupy positions that are not promotable. Moreover, Har-Even (2002) explains that bias in upper management prevents individuals who are better qualified from reaching deserving roles. Therefore, women must be much more efficient than men and require less costs with training in order to gain advantage over their male counterparts (Jellal et al., 2006). Basically, the glass ceiling is another form of discrimination within companies that disregards skills, expertise and merit and only attends to expectations, beliefs and stereotypes to choose individuals for given tasks.

On another context, Yukl (2010) explains that subordinates’ view on female leaders may also affect the way a business is lead. In other words, even though women may possess the required skills to

be managers, staff may not perform at full efficiency because they do not believe in their leader, due to societies’ stereotypes. A study performed by Mast (2004) has confirmed this hypothesis, by claiming that men are traditionally seen as leaders, while women are supposed to be followers and are not expected to be on upper positions. This construct is morally and ethically wrong and, in practical terms, skills, experience and qualifications should be the most visible and applicable assets to be evaluated when deciding to recruit a potential candidate.

It is important, however, to emphasize that the glass ceiling is not only women-specific. According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995, p. 7): “top quality people, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, are essential to the health and profitability of businesses”. In most cases, those variables tend to exclude human capital with notorious skills and innovative ideas from higher roles. Lockwood (2004) stresses that employees are capable of performing any job provided that they are given the rightful training and expertise. Therefore, leaders should invest in human capital regardless of beliefs and stereotypes and exterminate the glass ceiling. Still, Simão and Breda (2014c) believe that small family businesses may be a starting point for women to strengthen their leadership views and, in the future, apply their vision on bigger-sized businesses. Even though the glass-ceiling may be slowly shattering, as women are starting to arise in some companies, men still hold the top roles and changes on this trend may not be as fast as governments and societies would expect (Simão, 2013).

On a conclusive note, it is clear that eliminating the glass ceiling would generate a two-way benefit. On one hand, employees would be promoted according to their effort and commitment. On the other hand, businesses could extract much more profitability and efficiency levels from their subordinates. Unfortunately much more has to be done in order to guarantee equal opportunities for all employees. Next chapter refers to another glass effect, namely the glass cliff.

## b. Glass escalator

After considering that the glass ceiling influences women's chances of getting promoted, literature also aimed to appoint other possible sources of discrimination within companies and also within societies.

Most studies on glass effects have focused on male-dominated employment, meaning that subordinate full-time jobs and leadership positions are mainly occupied by men. Williams (1992) provided an innovative perspective on glass effects by claiming that men are starting to gain more representativeness in traditionally women-dominated professions. In other words, men are occupying leadership roles on businesses and sectors that were previously reported to women. Also, men tend to move up vertically in a much faster way, in order to prevent women from reaching managerial roles.

However, Williams (1992) notes that even though the glass escalator tends to benefit men, it also forces them to work much harder in order to keep their current jobs since there is constant pressure to move up in their careers. The same author claims that the glass escalator may work as a tool to boost productivity and morale within some companies (Williams, 1992). Cognard-Black (2012, p. 881) studied this phenomenon in academia and stressed that: "these men may suffer some disadvantage in the form of societal suspicion – chiefly about their masculinity and sexual orientation – economic benefits and opportunity assuage those disadvantages". Still, the story repeats itself as men who are awarded the opportunity to lead, simply won't abdicate from their numerous privileges.

A paper developed by Maume (1999, p. 499) proved that even though men may be: "mismatched to the gender-stereotypical expectations of their occupations", they still face much less discrimination when compared to women. Wingfield (2009) agrees with that view and adds that men's roles, skills and expertise tend to increase their privileges and ability to get promoted. The same author also believes that: "gendered bonds with supervisors are crucial

to riding the glass escalator" (Wingfield, 2009, p. 10). In these cases, men tend to benefit from these bonds and do not necessarily need to possess great expertise to move up in a business hierarchy. So, men who create positive relationships with their colleagues may be more easily awarded with career advancement opportunities which will lead them to managerial roles (Wingfield, 2009).

## c. Glass cliff

Last sections provided a review of invisible barriers that separates subordinate roles from leadership positions on most businesses. However, those are not the only cases of "invisible" discrimination that may occur on competitive markets.

According to Bruckmüller et al. (2014, p. 203), to understand the glass cliff, one must comprehend that it is a "phenomenon whereby women aspiring a top management position find themselves blocked from these positions by seemingly invisible (hence the glass), yet very real barriers (hence the ceiling) that serve to keep the upper echelons of leadership a predominantly male domain". This review confirms that even though women are appearing in top positions, their impact factor is still quite scarce.

Even though that is not a clear definition of the glass cliff, it helps to scrutinize the main idea behind the concept. Roughly speaking, a cliff is an abysmal difference that separates one part from another, which, in most cases, may result on an unexpected downfall. Similarly to the glass ceiling, it is hard to pinpoint the birth of this concept. However, it is believed that a paper developed by Ryan and Haslam (2005) may have been the starting point for this discussion. The authors viewed that in cases where businesses were failing (and chances of reverting this trend would be impossible), women were immediately appointed to leadership roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The choice of letting women lead in these extreme conditions would justify business failure and back up men leader's reputation.

On a more recent approach, Ryan and Haslam (2007) conducted laboratory studies on which participants had to choose a specific manager for a declining business. The result was as expected: women were selected to lead when companies faced crisis moments while men would keep their positions whenever businesses would improve (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). This means, in a way, that women are indeed starting to slowly break the glass ceiling, but this occurs in a negative way, as they are only appointed to lead when it is visibly impossible to avoid failure in a business. Also, Ryan, Haslam and Hersby (2011) confirm the "Think Manager-Think Male" stereotype is associated with the glass cliff as female leaders are negatively evaluated when compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, the same authors introduced a new concept, namely the "Think Crisis Think Female" which compliments the statements on which women are either associated with subordinate or downfall leadership roles.

Therefore, in conclusive terms, Adams, Gupta and Leeth (2009) stress that glass cliffs occur in businesses where women hold precarious leadership positions when compared to men. However, it is also important to state that: "participants who read about an organization whose performance had been poor were more likely to favour a future female leader than participants who read about a successful organization" (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010, p. 434). So, women still face multiple no-win situations which pull them away from managerial roles within competitive and bigger organizations.

The glass cliff is still a rather newly discovered phenomenon but it is indeed present in most businesses and in societies. Much more has to be debated about this issue in order to pinpoint measures to decrease the constant discrimination of women employees.

#### d. Glass wall

The last case of the glass effects refers to the glass wall, which is quite similar, yet different from the glass ceiling.

While the glass ceiling effect consists on a vertical barrier that disallows women from reaching more relevant positions in a business, the glass wall blocks the access to equally important, yet easier to promote jobs. Sneed (2007) explains that this phenomenon is caused by occupational segregation, on which men and women work in different positions or departments. This mostly occurs with roles directly associated and likely to suffer from gender stereotypes, such as civil and mechanical engineering. Saavedra *et. al* (2014, p. 33) stress that glass walls work as a jail for women, since they become: "chained up, under public scrutiny, but most of all subjected to self-vigilance".

The glass wall effect has not been fully debated by academics, but so far what is known is that masculinized environments tend to be unachievable for women. In other words, male dominated jobs will prevail and women may be excluded from any given possibility of promotion within that context. Peterson (2010) concludes that women's behavior may not correspond to what subordinates or leaders expect, which emphasizes the discrimination process that is typical within gendered roles.

In short, academics have to further study this effect in order to present viable solutions to incorporate women in masculinized positions.

#### 4. General conclusions

Although literature has been debating gender equality issues, much is yet to be known and understood by both academics and entrepreneurs. This article aimed to clarify the major variables that represent a threat for gender equality policies.

One important aspect that needs to be retained from this conceptual paper is the existence of different yet numerous barriers that hinder women's importance in the business world. Women face uncontrollable issues that discriminate and exclude them from managerial roles, mostly in bigger-sized firms. The existence of children, pregnancy and marriage significantly influence women's aspirations since these variables tend to be gender-specific. In other words, leaders opt not to recruit an employee that has to go through those occurrences but instead choose men who can be available full-time for a given role. Also, women face higher stress levels associated with household work which excludes them from the roles they aspire.

On a positive note, women are becoming more academically qualified than men. While male students are dropping out of school, female students believe that creating a solid background may work in their favor in the future. However, managers seek employees that possess firm skills, expertise and work experience when they decide to give promotions. Since men have already built their reputation, it becomes much easier to get promoted and further access leadership roles.

The second part of the article emphasized on the four major glass effects that are invisible yet influence, in a significant way, women's opportunities. The glass ceiling is possibly the most occurring phenomenon in societies as women can visualize but cannot achieve more important professions. This happens because they are not granted access to the roles they truly deserve even though they may possess higher academic qualifications and expertise. The glass wall is quite similar, but instead of facing vertical discrimination, women have to deal with horizontal exclusion, on which they are separated from roles that are easier promotable.

However, the glass escalator also proves to be a threat as men are occupying traditional feminine roles and given out opportunities in a much faster way. On the other hand, women who are actually awarded with leadership roles, usually have to face

declining statuses and imminent bankruptcy. This is known as the glass cliff phenomenon and it is possibly one of the best ways for women to prove their skills as leaders. Still, it is impossible to reverse current situations as businesses face unavoidable downfalls. This is a technique used to blame women for business' failure and to prevent them from acquiring any roles or resources that may boost their careers.

Organizations and society itself would benefit from allowing women to assume more relevant roles. It is up to governments and current bosses to boost the female gender in higher ranked positions, in order to increase competitiveness and develop new strategies towards the growth and development of specific territories.

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