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Is the glass ceiling still preventing women rising in leadership? A review of the alteration of the experiences of women in the modern workplace.

MSc Dissertation

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“Real change will come when powerful women are less of an exception. It is easy to dislike senior women because there are so few.”

Sheryl Sandberg

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Abstract

In this Thesis, the possible barriers women face in their career trajectories were examined in an attempt to identify the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women. More specifically, the phenomenon of glass ceiling was examined, and it was attempted to determine whether it still exists and continues preventing women from rising in the corporate ladder. In order to investigate the experiences of women and determine the reasons behind their underrepresentation, the reports “Women in the Workplace” by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn Organisation were used (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). These reports provided insights of the experiences of women in corporate America. According to the analysis conducted in this Thesis, women in corporate America are still underrepresented in leadership positions and they continue to face barriers on their career paths. Based on the information provided in these reports, there is evidence that the glass ceiling phenomenon exists, but further research should be conducted in order to determine whether the difficulties women face in their career trajectories are caused by the glass ceiling phenomenon or other phenomena that might exist as well. The information available in the reports was not enough to conclude with certainty that the glass ceiling phenomenon is the only reason behind the underrepresentation of women but suggested further investigation regarding the phenomenon of the broken rung which was evident in the reports.

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1. Introduction

Women have been and remain underrepresented in the workplace, especially when it comes to leadership positions (Clark-Saboda & Lemke, 2023). According to Sorenson (1984) as cited in Acker (1990, p.139), “The most powerful organizational positions are almost entirely occupied by men, with the exception of the occasional biological female who acts as a social man”, implying that women have to behave differently in order to be able to occupy certain positions that are usually occupied by men.

The underrepresentation of women could be explained with the term of glass ceiling, since qualified people that could advance in the corporate pipeline are unable to do so due to sexism or racism (Babic & Hansez, 2021). Due to glass ceiling, a significant number of possible candidates get neglected due to their gender and talent remains unutilised (Lückerath-Rovers, 2013; Torchia et al., 2010). Glass ceiling is also related to lower job satisfaction and a higher intention to leave for women managers (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

Women face a plethora of barriers at their career trajectories. Gender stereotypes and the assigned gender roles can have a significant impact on the prevention of women from reaching a leadership position (Eagly & Karau, 2002; T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Haile et al., 2016). A masculine organisational culture and gendered HR policies and procedures can also inhibit a woman’s career (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Haile et al., 2016). Another factor that could act as a potential barrier to a woman’s advancement is the lack of network and mentorship that could offer advice and support to a woman aspiring a career (Babic & Hansez, 2021; T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018).

Women tend to get neglected from the Boards of Directors as well. According to Torchia “if a segment of society’s talent is systematically excluded from the boards, not because of talent but gender, then such boards are suboptimal” (Torchia et al., 2011, p. 299). According to Eurostat, almost one third (32.2%) of the directors of large firms in Europe were female in 2022 (Eurostat, 2023). This is a significant increase compared to 8.2% representation in 2003 (Eurostat, 2023). In order to further regulate women’s presence in the Board of Directors, the European Parliament proceeded with a Directive that requires at least 40% of non-executive director positions to be held by the underrepresented sex or at least 33% of all director positions, including both executive and non-executive directors to be held by the underrepresented sex (Directive 2022/2381, 2022).

In this Thesis the scenario that women remain underrepresented in the corporate environment will be examined, both generally but specifically at leadership positions. The barriers women in corporate America face in their career trajectories will be observed and compared to the ones found in literature. In order to get the experiences of women in their working environments, the reports “Women in the Workplace” by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn Organisation will be used (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). “Women in the Workplace”, is a study that examines the representation of women in the American business environment. Several companies take part in the study each year. These studies are part of a long-term partnership between LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, in order to collect and provide information to the companies so they can promote female leadership and develop a workplace based on gender equality.

It is important to define whether women continue to face barriers in their career advancement and whether those barriers are inhibiting them from reaching certain positions in the corporate ladder.

This review is a consolidation and comparison of those reports. More specifically, this Thesis intends to shed light to the following two research questions:

Q1: Does glass ceiling still exist and continues preventing women from acquiring a senior leadership position at their companies in 2023?

Q2: What are the barriers women leaders face in their career trajectories at the workplace nowadays? Have the barriers altered or remained the same as the ones identified from literature?

2. Literature Review

2.1. What is glass ceiling?

There are a lot of definitions that have been used to define the glass ceiling throughout the years of studying and analyzing this phenomenon. The very first reference of the “glass ceiling” as a term, was given by Marilyn Loden at her speech at a business conference in 1978. She didn’t realise that the term she referred to would actually turn to an official term to define the barriers faced by women and other minorities in their attempt to rise in the hierarchy of their companies (Andrew, 2022). According to her own words in the Washington Post in 2018, for the 40th anniversary of the first time she used the term, she claimed that “To be honest with you, I didn’t think it was a big deal... It made sense to me in the moment” (Andrew, 2022).

According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) as cited in Cotter et al. (2001),

“The glass ceiling refers to "artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities." These barriers reflect "discrimination ... a deep line of demarcation between those who prosper and those left behind." The glass ceiling is the "unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements”” (Cotter et al. 2001, p.656).

Purcell et al., (2010), define the glass ceiling as a metaphor, used to “explain the inability of many women to advance past a certain point in their occupations and professions, regardless of their qualifications or achievements”, agreeing with the definition the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission provided in 1995.

Davies-Netzley (1998), sets the metaphor of glass ceiling as the “invisible barriers through women can see elite positions but cannot reach them”. It is then a vertical discrimination usually against women (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

All the afore mentioned definitions, describe the same issue; women face difficulties in order to be able to reach the upper rungs of the corporate ladder. Although these barriers are unseen, they are well-established and prevent women to get to the managerial and leadership positions at the same ease as men would.

When talking about gender inequality discriminations, we usually misuse the term “glass ceiling”. As per the definition of Cotter et al., (2001) the “glass ceiling” is defined as “a specific type of gender or racial inequality that can be distinguished from other types of inequality” (p.656). This specific type of gender or racial inequality can be

found in a plethora of organisations, including large corporations, scientific organisations, law firms as well as in the public sector, and manufacturing and clerical and service jobs (Purcell et al., 2010).

Cotter et al., (2001), in their attempt to properly define what “glass ceiling” is and how to identify the phenomenon, have set four specific criteria in order to make the effect recognisable and avoid confusions with gender inequality. These four criteria are:

1. “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.657).
2. “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.658).
3. “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.659).
4. “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.661).

Further analysis of the 4 criteria, provides a clearer view on the glass ceiling phenomenon. Glass ceiling based on the 1st criterion, does not include any discrimination regarding someone’s past education and training nor from choices made to achieve personal goals. As glass ceiling, are defined the “residual differences” people have “due to race or gender, after controlling for education, experience, abilities, motivation, and other job-relevant characteristics” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.657). The 2nd

criterion represents the attempt of Cotter et al. (2001) to differentiate gender inequality with the term of glass ceiling. In order for glass ceiling to exist, there needs to be an increasing difficulty for women or race minorities to rise to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder. It should be more difficult for an employee to rise from junior level to the middle management level and even more difficult to get to the leadership from the middle management. It is important to note that if there is the same level of gender or race inequalities throughout the organisation, then the term of glass ceiling should not be used, but rather use the terms of gender or race inequality instead (Cotter et al., 2001). On the same note, it is crucial to specify that if the representation of women in leadership level is as low as the percentage of women in general population, then again, the term of glass ceiling can't be used. It is another example of gender inequality. Regarding the 3rd criterion, the promotions to higher positions and the salary raises should be examined in order to define the existence or not of the glass ceiling phenomenon. When this criterion is examined, two factors should be taken into consideration: the number of women and men on entry levels and the exits of women compared to men. It is reasonable that if more men enter the companies at a higher-level position instead of an entry level, then there will be fewer women in higher-level positions. Even if the company promotes men and women at the same rate, more men have entered a higher-level position, leading to a larger number of males at higher level positions from the beginning. The number of women employees who leave the company, also determines the difference in numbers of women compared to men in higher level positions. If women have a higher rate of leaving their companies, it is reasonable that more men will end up in higher level positions. As an example to further clarify the 3rd criterion, Cotter et al. (2001) also referred to the promotion rates. If the promotion rate of women compared to men employees remains the same at all levels

of hierarchy, then this is not a glass ceiling phenomenon but a “constant promotion disadvantage for women” (Cotter et al., 2001, p. 660). Lastly, the 4th criterion implies that when observing a woman’s career trajectory and comparing it to a man’s, the possibility of a man getting a high-status outcome, should increase significantly compared to a woman, with the increase of the years of work experience. When comparing women’s and men’s chances of low status outcome, the possibility is still higher for men, but the difference is not quite significant as when comparing to the possibility of women and men receiving a high status outcome (*Figure 2.1.1*) (Cotter et al., 2001).

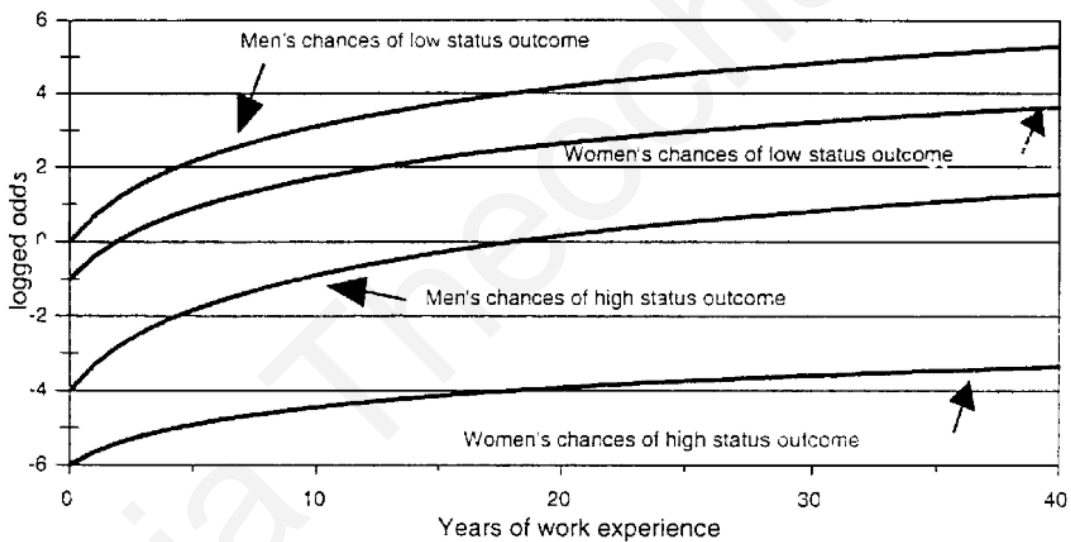


Figure 2.1.1: Gender inequality growing over career. Gender inequality is more evident to high status outcome (Cotter et al., 2001).

According to Cotter et al., (2001), all 4 criteria should be met in order for glass ceiling phenomenon to exist in a workplace.

As mentioned before, the term of the glass ceiling phenomenon exists since 1978 when it was first used by Marilyn Loden and was attempted to further define and recognise in 2001 by Cotter et al. This, in 2023, translates to 45 years since the first reference of

the term and 22 years since a completed attempt to define and recognise this phenomenon was made, a significant amount of time that allowed people to react to the phenomenon and try to eliminate it which leads to the 1st research question of this dissertation:

Q1: Does glass ceiling still exist and continues preventing women from acquiring a senior leadership position at their companies in 2023?

2.2. Barriers a woman faces

A lot of factors have a critical role in the creation and preservation of the glass ceiling. All these factors act as an invisible barrier that withholds women from reaching managerial positions and the upper C-suite level of the organisation they are working for. These barriers can vary from the organisational culture, the socially constructed gender stereotypes and HR policies and procedures, to the way women network and gain social capital, their up-bringing or even to the work-family conflict that is created at higher level positions. A more thorough analysis of the aforementioned barriers that women face in their career trajectories can be found below.

Organisational culture

Often the organisational culture acts as a barrier at the development of women in higher level positions. An organisation where gender stereotypes exist and a more “masculine” management style is enforced, either consciously or unconsciously, can increase the feeling of the existence of glass ceiling (Babic & Hansez, 2021). Women can cope with

a more masculine organisational culture, but they will lack of the sense of belonging to the organization (Acker, 2006).

The lack of support of the female gender in the workplace, withholds the advancement of women (Haile et al., 2016). Even the policies and procedures of the organization can cause gender discriminations and act as a barrier to the advancement of women employees in the upper levels of leadership (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Haile et al., 2016). The possibility of sexual harassment, can also frighten and withhold women from claiming a leadership position (Haile et al., 2016). Sexual harassment incidents have been reported from women across all levels of hierarchy (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Gender stereotypes

One of the biggest barriers that women have to face in their career trajectories are the gender stereotypes (Haile et al., 2016). In the past, women used to have a supporting role to their male colleagues, but fortunately this phenomenon is now descending and more women are getting senior leadership positions (Haile et al., 2016).

The assigned gender roles and the way females and males are expected to act, is a powerful barrier that withholds women from claiming a higher-level position. Gender stereotypes command males to act with aggression and competitiveness while females should act in a caring way for the community with interpersonal sensitivity (Eagly & Karau, 2002; T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014). The way the gender stereotypes command females to act, is opposed to the perception stereotype that management is male (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014).

The implicit theory of “think manager – think male” implies that the perceived as male characteristics of emotional stability, aggressiveness, possession of leadership ability, self-reliance, competitiveness, self-confidence, objectivity, ambition, being well-informed and forceful, are the behaviors that characterise a good manager (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Attitudes like being emotional, mild, affectionate and empathetic are associated with women, compared to being dominant, goal-oriented and competitive which are associated with men and the perception of a good manager (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Since women are perceived to have different characteristics than men, prejudice arises when one evaluates women as potential leaders. Due to the perception that the characteristics of a woman as a leader will be completely different than men, who were predecessors of leadership positions, prejudice against female leaders occurs (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

This perception that management and leadership demonstrate male characteristics acts as a bias on women since a double bind exists. If women demonstrate a feminine leadership style, they are too feminine, while if they follow a more masculine leadership style, that would otherwise be accepted once demonstrated from male leaders, women are too masculine (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018; Oakley, 2000). If a woman acts with more power than expected from the gendered social stereotype, this will be perceived as a threat from men (Acker, 2006). A woman who promotes herself is subject to negative commentary while such behaviour is acceptable only for men and is an indication of competency (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Women experience this double bind and face prejudice for both a more masculine approach to their leadership style and a feminine one (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018).

Gender stereotypes can create the perception that women are not able to become competent leaders (Glass & Cook, 2016; Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). This phenomenon, also known as male chauvinism is an added barrier to the career trajectory of women (Haile et al., 2016). Employers, because of the gender stereotypes that exist, tend to show prejudice towards women in managerial and leadership positions (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018).

Another phenomenon that acts as a barrier to women claiming a higher leadership position, is homosocial reproduction (Glass & Cook, 2016). Homosocial reproduction, also known as homophily, is described as the phenomenon where individuals tend to prefer other individuals with social and cultural similarities to them (Purcell et al., 2010). In the business environment, this phenomenon implies that men tend to prefer other men to occupy leadership positions, since they will form a homogenous group, where the members of the group share the same status (e.g. sex, race, ethnicity) (Kanter, 1977). If male leaders decided to include female leaders in their group, then the group would now become heterogenous and they would have to face the differences another social type brings to the table (Kanter, 1977). Apart from the board, women may be rejected by certain clients as well due to the phenomenon of homosocial reproduction (Purcell et al., 2010).

The fact that there are double standards on the accepted performance of women compared to men, indicates an added difficulty for the career advancement of women. Women should perform higher than men in order to advance. The bar of accepted performance in order to get the higher level position, is set higher than the one for men (Purcell et al., 2010).

Another barrier that can affect a woman's progression to senior leadership positions is their limited access to line role positions. A line role position is critical for the success of the organisation, since these positions are involved in the financial management of the companies as well as the production of either goods or services. Due to their critical importance for the organisation, employees who are in such positions are more likely to progress to a C-suite level position. Since these positions are usually occupied by men, women have limited access to C-suite executive positions (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Oakley, 2000).

HR policies and procedures

HR policies and procedures should also be examined with a critical eye in order to avoid gender biases, since they can act as a barrier to women advancing in the hierarchy of the company (Haile et al., 2016).

Recruitment methods, can be biased due to the perception that some jobs are designed in order to be performed only by women and that some other jobs are only available for men (Haile et al., 2016). Glass ceiling excludes a large number of candidates that should be eligible for promotions because of their sex (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). If informal recruitment through networking is used, women have a disadvantage, since male candidates are more likely to be referred (Purcell et al., 2010).

Job descriptions "assume a disembodied and universal worker" (Acker, 1990, p. 139), but in fact this worker is not universal but is a man. According to Acker (1990, 2006), the universal worker that will eventually fill in the position, has to be devoted to a full-time job without any other obligations. This description can fit only male workers since women are the caretakers of children, which makes them not a great fit to the universal

worker description. Job descriptions can be then described as gender-based and not gender neutral and impersonal as the original perception indicated (Acker, 1990).

Biases are present in the selection processes as well. In order to prove that the process is prejudicial towards women, an experiment was conducted. Two identical application materials were provided for the same job position. The only difference between those two application materials was the sex of the applicant. The selection rates for the male applicant were higher at the jobs that were perceived as more masculine, such as auto sales and heavy industry sales, and for the jobs perceived as gender-neutral, such as psychologist and hotel clerk. Female applicant selection rates were higher than the male applicant's, only in jobs perceived as more feminine, such as a secretary position (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). The experiment proved that certain positions are more difficult to reach for women (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). According to another experiment, clothing could determine whether a woman would be hired for a managerial position. Women applicants who were dressed in a more masculine way were preferred for the position compared to women dressed in a more feminine way (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Bias can be found in the performance appraisal processes as well, since women tend to believe that the evaluation criteria are not objective and do not measure skills and performance of the appraisee in order to define whether he/she is able to progress (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Beehr et al., 2004). Glass ceiling is reinforced due to the presence of the perception of performance appraisal bias (Babic & Hansez, 2021). Even though women are equally competent and share the same scoring at performance appraisals as their male coworkers, they are not selected for promotion. Women have to wait longer compared to men in order to get a promotion and this waiting time seems to increase as they reach more senior levels (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Childhood of women compared to men

The childhood of female leaders is believed to be different than the one of male leaders. The up-bringing of women can act as a potential inhibitor of their carrier (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014). It is believed that when children are growing up with gender roles assigned to them based on their genders, they will eventually end up in a job that fulfils those stereotypic gender roles, already pre-assigned to them (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014). The experiences of a child regarding whether both the parents are working and pursuing a career, can also shape their beliefs (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Childhood play and toys are playing a significant role to the gender role entrapment and gendered stereotypes, affecting the future career of children as well (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). Gender specific toys are picked, for example dolls for girls and cars for boys, that trap the children in gender-stereotyped roles of boys being leaders and ambitious and girls being gentle and nurturing (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). The fact that boys and girls are treated differently regarding risk taking in their childhood play, can affect their self-confidence and the risk-taking rationale they will have at their work (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014). Specifically, full contact team sports enhance a boy's leadership skills and strategic thinking as well as their ability to take risks which provides them with self-confidence in their adult working life (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Work-family conflict

As part of the socially constructed gender stereotypes, women have more responsibilities regarding taking care of their home and families. This role of the caretaker that falls on most women's shoulders, may be one of the reasons women do

not aspire a career (Eagly & Karau, 2002). A possible work-family conflict can reinforce the glass ceiling existence and impact the intention to stay of women employees (Babic & Hansez, 2021). In order to be able to balance work and family, a lot of women prefer sacrificing their careers and decide to work part-time or at flexible positions (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018; Purcell et al., 2010). These positions although they come at a lower salary, they allow women to have more time off to devote to their children and homes (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018).

It is of question though, whether women tend to “opt out” of their jobs or if they are “forced out” of their works, because of the role of the carer they have at home, either for their children or for elderly (Purcell et al., 2010). Men’s perception to this work-family conflict, is that mothers will not have the time needed to devote to their work, especially at a managerial position that comes with a huge amount of responsibility (Davies-Netzley, 1998) and that the domestical chores will have a negative impact on their work performance (Purcell et al., 2010). According to the interviewees of Davies-Netzley (1998), women claimed that they can balance childcare and work responsibilities if they have the required support from either their spouses, a family member or they pay for childcare.

On the other hand, there is a group of women that even decided not to have children in order to pursue their career development (Davies-Netzley, 1998). A significant percentage of women that are high achievers, take the voluntary life choice of not creating a family, while the rest of them decide to postpone the creation of family until they manage to achieve the high level position they desire (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). Men hardly ever have to face this life choice while this is a common decision for women (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Networking – old boys’ network

The lack of networking can act as another form of barrier for women. The fact that women lack of a good network can even be related to the fact that they get a bigger proportion of the domestic labour. Networking usually happens outside working hours, since during working hours the focus is on task completion. Since women have more house obligations, the available time for networking is limited. This limitation reflects on their career trajectory since social capital can act as a reference of the candidates when their claiming a leadership position (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014).

The “old boys’” network formation by men with similar interests and activities inhibits the progression of women leaders. This network can facilitate the promotion of a man compared to a woman (Purcell et al., 2010). Even though men do not find networking as important to get a higher-level position, women believe that social capital and networking are important to get selected. Women find it crucial to have in order to succeed to elite levels and the fact that the old boys’ network exist, makes it harder for them to approach (Davies-Netzley, 1998). This is extremely evident at the Boards of Directors since there is too much of informal networking taking place (S. R. Fitzsimmons, 2012).

Women interviewees reported that they were able to join the “old boys’” network, but in order to achieve it, they had to change their appearance and behaviour, in order to resemble a more masculine one (Davies-Netzley, 1998). Such changes include a more masculine dress code to fit the business attire which potentially included a suit, hair pulled back and a firmer behavior. Women even pick more masculine topics to talk about when in front of men, such as politics and sports (Davies-Netzley, 1998).

Apart from the old boys' network and the housework, another reason that results to women's network to lack of senior leadership contacts at key positions is the fact that women may hold a lower visibility position. Their position does not facilitate the creation of a network that can be helpful in their career progress (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

Lack of role-models and mentoring

Mentoring can have a significant impact on the success of someone's carrier (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). Specifically, mentoring can act as a career development tool that can help women break through the glass ceiling and succeed in their career trajectory with the achievement of the desired promotions, salary raises and job satisfaction (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). Lack of mentorship cultivates a feeling of exclusion from important information and promotion insights for women employees (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

Role models can have a critical role to cultivate leadership mentality. Women usually do not have a support system from a mentor to provide guidance on their next career steps (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Mentoring is crucial if a woman would like to pursue a CEO position (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). The fact that the number of women in leadership positions is increasing is really encouraging to younger women employees since they will now have a female role model to guide them (Haile et al., 2016). Female role models are acting as a live example that a senior position can be achieved by women as well and can provide information to the women aspiring such positions (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Glass cliff

If women manage to overcome the glass ceiling, they may face the glass cliff. Glass cliff is when women have higher possibilities to get promoted to a leadership position, when the company is facing a major crisis (Glass & Cook, 2016; Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

When the position available is considered as a high-risk position, there is less competition to fill this, since male candidates avoid applying for the position. Male candidates consider it as too risky, increasing the possibility that a female candidate will be selected for the position (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Men also have consultation from their networks that they should avoid such positions in order not to risk their careers (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Apart from the decreased competition, female candidates are more likely to be selected to fill a high-risk position since feminine qualities are needed during the crisis. Feminine qualities include emotional sensitivity, strong interpersonal skills, morale building capabilities and a more collaborative leadership style (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). The selection of a female leader, as a non-traditional leader, during crisis, can also signify a new era for the firm to their stakeholders (Glass & Cook, 2016). It can also be perceived as a cultural change for the company (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Glass cliff is considered a barrier since the possible failure at such a high-risk position may damage permanently the carrier of a female leader (Glass & Cook, 2016). Women candidates recognise that such a position can either be their opportunity to get the promotion and prove their abilities as leaders establishing themselves as “transformational leaders and/or crisis managers” or completely ruin their career (Glass & Cook, 2016, p.60).

Lack of ambition and unclear career paths

The gendered societal norms can affect the ambition a woman has about her career trajectory. Women usually do not have a clear career path compared to men and may even have less ambition and self-confidence and self-belief regarding their careers (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). Due to the lack of self-confidence their career choices are more likely to be less risky (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). As emphasised by Sheryl Sandberg, women are reluctant to “lean in” and “take risks or opportunities as they arise” (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014, p. 246).

The analysis of the barriers that women face during their careers, leads to the second research question which is:

Q2: What are the barriers women leaders face in their career trajectories at the workplace nowadays? Have the barriers altered or remained the same as the ones identified from literature?

2.3. Tokenism and gendered organisations

Apart from the barriers that women face on their career advancement, the phenomena of tokenism and gendered organisations can explain the difficulties to women’s career trajectory.

Tokenism and Critical mass

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) talked about the effect that proportions have in social life, as well as in the workplace. As she stated, “proportions are relative numbers of

socially and culturally different people in a group” and that proportions are “a significant aspect of social life, particularly important for understanding interactions in groups composed of people of different cultural categories or statuses” (Kanter, 1977, p.965). In order to calculate the amount of influence caused by either the majority or the minority, one must multiply the strength, the immediacy and the number of the group’s member which explains the importance of the size of the group (Torchia et al., 2010).

According to the proportional composition of the ‘sample’ that is being observed, there have been four group types identified: the *Uniform* groups, the *Skewed* groups, the *Tilted* and the *Balanced* groups (Kanter, 1977).

Starting with the first group, *Uniform* groups refer to the groups of people that are formed by one social type. These groups are homogenous, and all their members share the same status, for example the same sex, race or ethnicity. The ratio of this group is 100:0 (Kanter, 1977).

In *Skewed* groups, one type is the vast majority compared to the other one. The type that is in majority, is called the “dominants”, while the minority group, is called the “tokens”. The “dominants” have the ability and power to drive the group and its culture. On the other hand, the “tokens”, which can be either few people or even an individual if the skewed group is really small in absolute size, are treated as “representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals” (Kanter, 1977, p.966). Regardless of the number of the “tokens” within the *Skewed* groups, their power and the effect they have in the group is limited. The ratio of the “dominants” to “tokens” within the *Skewed* groups, is usually 85:15.

The term “token” implies that there are “some special characteristics associated with that position” (Kanter, 1977, p. 968). The people who belong to the “tokens” of the group, “are people identified by ascribed characteristics (master statuses such as sex, race, religion, ethnic group, age, etc.) or other characteristics that carry with them a set of assumptions about culture, status, and behavior highly salient for majority category member” (Kanter, 1977, p. 968). The difference of the “tokens” compared to the “dominants”, does not lie in their ability to do certain tasks, but rather to the assumptions that are been made about them. “Tokens” are representing their category and are not seen as individuals that belong to a group, but rather someone who is highly associated with a characteristic (Kanter, 1977).

Tilted groups are characterized by a less extreme distribution of the two social types, with a ratio of 65:35. In this distribution, we can no longer talk about “tokens” and “dominants” but rather a minority and majority respectively. The minority is no longer a few people or some “solos”, like the “tokens” were in the *Skewed* group, but rather a bigger group of people. The minority can now form alliances that have impact, since they now have increased considerably in number, compared to the absolute size of the group. This allows the minority to affect the culture that the majority forms within the group. Also, the minority is no longer seen as symbol and representative of its category, they are seen as individual people who have a different type when compared to the type of the majority (Kanter, 1977).

The last group is the “*Balanced*” group with a ratio of 60:40 or even 50:50. Instead of “majority” and “minority”, we now have two equally or almost equally powered subgroups which can belong to different social types, but their types no longer distinguish them. The dynamics of this group are more even, and the culture is now formed by the group as a whole. The power of action is now shifted from the “majority”

to other factors such as structural and personal factors, including formation of subgroups or differentiated roles and abilities (Kanter, 1977).

In terms of performance, it has been observed that *skewed* groups have the lower performance among the groups while *tilted* groups can outperform *uniform* and *skewed* groups (Joecks et al., 2013).

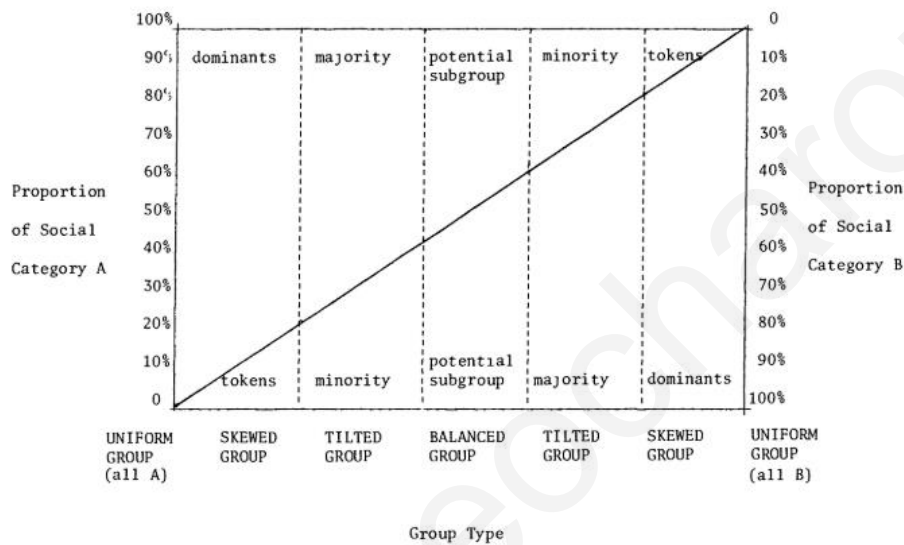


Figure 2.3.1: Group types as defined by proportional representation of two social categories in a membership (Kanter, 1977).

Based on Kanter’s research (1977), tokenism can impact the interactions of women according to three perceptual phenomena: *visibility*, *polarization*, and *assimilation*.

Tokens are rare within the group, meaning that they tend to get more attention to them, compared to the “dominants”, without making any effort leading to higher *visibility* of the moves and attitudes of a token when compared to a dominant, since “tokens” are a small number of people and act as representatives of their social characteristic to the rest of the group (Kanter, 1977).

The phenomenon of *polarization* brings in the spotlight the commons but mainly the differences of a token when compared to a dominant. Since the dominants are

numerically more when compared to the tokens, it is easier for someone to identify and group the similarities of the dominants and compare them to the absence of those characteristics to the tokens. The fact that the token is different from the dominants, can even lead to the isolation of the token, since it is easy to isolate the “different one” compared to the “same lot” (Kanter, 1977).

The last perceptual phenomenon associated with tokenism is *assimilation*. This phenomenon suggests that the characteristics of the tokens will have to change in a way in order to fit within the borders of the characteristics the rest of the group has. When the number of tokens is large enough in order for other behaviours to occur, then there is a possibility that the general characteristics of the group, will alter to include the characteristics of the tokens. In the case where the number of the tokens is small, then the characteristics of the tokens will eventually blend within the general characteristics of the group (Kanter, 1977).

These three phenomena can eventually lead to certain interaction dynamics. *Visibility*, *polarization* and *assimilation* can cause certain token responses. *Visibility* is associated with performance pressure, *polarization* is associated with “group boundary heightening and isolation of the token” (Kanter, 1977, p. 972) and lastly *assimilation* leads to the “token's role entrapment” (Kanter, 1977, p. 972).

In order to further investigate the interaction dynamics associated with the three phenomena, Kanter (1977), decided to proceed with a field study, studying the behavior of the sales force division of one of the Fortune 500 companies who had recently added saleswomen in their human resource. Kanter's (1977) observations of this field study, are presented below.

Higher visibility of the tokens was related with performance pressure, scrutiny and lack of privacy. Women were “over-observed” and each of their actions was judged, maximizing the attention their possible mistakes would take (Kanter, 1977). Apart from over-observation, people assigned to women the role of the representative of all women within the company and highlighted the fact that their actions would affect the other women employees of the company. Their actions were shifted from the individual level to a group level and generalised to how all women would perform (Kanter, 1977). Although their presence was noticed, their achievements and technical knowledge were shadowed behind their physical appearance. Women had to work harder in order to overcome the attention their physical appearance took and let their knowledge and achievements be recognized by the company and clients, adding an extra performance pressure on their shoulders. Paradoxically, apart from the pressure to perform well and better than anyone else, women have another pressure of not performing that well that will lead to making the dominants performance look insufficient. Tokens demonstrated two completely opposite responses to the performance pressures: they either demonstrated overachievement or tried to limit their visibility and blend in the crowd of dominants. The first group worked more and put extra effort. They highlighted their achievements and good work but they also faced threats of retaliation. The second group tried to become invisible and blend in the crowd by changing certain behaviours, such as dressing like men, not attending public events and meetings or even working from home. This group kept a low profile and didn't make their achievements known. These women avoided taking risks or being in the middle of conflicts (Kanter, 1977).

Polarization led to group boundary heightening and isolation of the tokens. The dominants tend to realise their similarities only when a token enters the group. This will further highlight the differences of the tokens compared to the group of dominants, as

well as create stronger bonds of the dominants based on their similarities. As Kanter (1977) observed, men tended to talk about certain subjects that did not include women. As dominants in the group, they highlighted their differences compared to women and talked about their sexual adventures, off-colour jokes, sports and business. When there were women tokens within the group, their male peers exaggerated those topics, highlighting their differences. These differences were evident not only in informal gatherings, but in the training rooms as well. Apart from exaggerating their culture, the dominants reminded the differences of them compared to the tokens, contributing to the heightening of the group boundary. Dominants ask questions such as: "Can we still swear? Toss a football? Use technical jargon? Go drinking? Tell in jokes?" (Kanter, 1977, p. 977), highlighting certain behaviours that are acceptable in their culture, before women joined the group. The token women, had to reassure their peers that the behaviours they used to do before they joined the group, are acceptable by them as well, even if women are not "allowed" to do. These constant differences reminders, not only heighten the cultural boundaries between the tokens and the dominants, but they also teach the tokens to stay in the background and not be part of the culture of the dominants, since they disturb the way things are normally done by the dominants. Another behaviour dominants demonstrate that further isolate tokens, is the secrecy they handle certain activities. Dominants are unsure if they can trust the tokens that they would not expose information that might be damaging to dominants, leading to isolation of the tokens and distancing them from activities that dominants do. Dominants can even challenge the tokens by asking them to pass some loyalty tests. Tokens might even be asked to prove their "willingness to turn occasionally against "the girls"", in order to be "one of the boys" (Kanter, 1977, p.979). With these loyalty tests, dominants will make sure that the tokens will not turn against them. Tokens usually respond to the

boundary heightening in two different ways, they either “accept isolation” (Kanter, 1977, p.980) and don’t participate to certain behaviours of the dominants, or they “try to become insiders” (Kanter, 1977, p.980) and turn against other women in order to be part of the men’s club.

Assimilation, leads to the role entrapment of the tokens, meaning that tokens tend to change their characteristics in order to fit into the assumptions and preexisting generalisations that are associated with their category (Kanter, 1977). In Kanter’s studies (1977), token saleswomen were not treated as equal sales agents as their male peers, but rather as someone’s wife, or a substitution of a male peer or assistants. In order to avoid being treated in a way that resembles the average women, token women need to change the way the token’s professional role is perceived to fit the token’s category. The token’s professional role doesn’t have to fit in the token’s category. If this detachment is achieved, then women will achieve status leveling. Another possible interaction is that the dominants will accept the tokens in the group but they will induct them in the stereotypical roles. There are 4 stereotypical roles that token women were categorised in, in Kanter’s study (1977): the *Mother*, the *Seductress*, the *Pet* and the *Iron Maiden*. In the first category, the women tokens are acting as the mother of a group of male peers. These women act as a nurturing figure to the male peers, as a person that could always listen to the problems of the group and solve them. Women who are characterized as the *Mothers* of the group, face 3 negative consequences on their performance: these women are rewarded for their service and not for the actions taken by their own initiative, they are expected to always listen to the problems of the group and remain unbiased and non-judgmental to them and to be emotional specialists. Paradoxically, these characteristics that are expected from a group of women to have and are supportive to the group, are the same characteristics that are criticised and

unacceptable for women to have in managerial positions. The second role that token women are characterised in, is the role of *Seductress*. In this role, women are viewed as a sexual object. Dominants are competing for the attention of the *Seductresses* and they become jealous when other males get the attention of this woman. In the contrary with the *Mother* role which is “allowed” to split her attention between a lot of “sons”, the *Seductress* can give her attention to only one male, according to the view of the dominant group. A lot of male peers might undertake the role of the protector for the *Seductress*, reminding her and the rest of the group, of her sexual status. The protectors in their attempt to protect her, they actually make her inclusion in the group harder and act as a middleman between her and the group. The third role observed was the one of the *Pet*. Token women categorised as *Pets*, are perceived as “a cute, amusing little thing” which is “taken along on group events as symbolic mascot-a cheerleader for the shows of male prowess that follow” (Kanter, 1977, p. 983). These women often have a good sense of humor. If they make an accomplishment, it is perceived as unexpected, rare and extraordinary. *Pets* are expected to applaud the achievements of the dominants from the outside, they never get to enter the group of dominants. The last stereotypical role is the one of *Iron Maiden*. This category is a variation to host the strong women who don’t fall into any other of the aforementioned categories and show resistance to fit in the categories. These women are usually perceived as dangerous, especially if they are claiming their rights within the group, they show their competencies and don’t allow sexual innuendos. *Iron Maidens* are treated with suspicion and in a more polite way. Tokens usually tend to accept those stereotypical role entrapment, since it is way easier to accept them than make the effort to change the mindset of the group. The acceptance of the stereotypes, comes at a cost: tokens cannot show their competences in public and they will eventually distort themselves in order to fit in the stereotypes (Kanter, 1977).

Yoder (1991) gave emphasis to the fact that numbers are not the only aspect one should research to identify the barriers women face in their workplace. According to her, Kanter's (1977) research was focused on the gender status at gender-inappropriate occupations, meaning looking at jobs that are predominantly masculine (Yoder, 1991). In her research, Yoder examined the impact token proportions in a work group, gender status, occupational gender-appropriateness and occupational prestige have as the possible roots of tokenism (Yoder, 1994). Yoder (1994) doubted that the token number on its own can lead to higher visibility, contrast and role encapsulation and based on her results, these phenomena of tokenism can exist when there is a combination of token numbers and gender status of the tokens regardless of gender appropriateness and occupational prestige. This is in fact evident in the case of men being the tokens. Men tokens can turn their numerical disadvantage in advantage even in women dominant environments due to their tendency to dominate (Britton & Logan, 2008; Yoder, 1994). This leads to the conclusion that it is in fact important to approach tokenism as a gendered phenomenon (Zimmer, 1988).

The interactions of the group are affected by the size of the minority group. When a critical mass is reached, then the influence of the minority group to the majority group is significantly increased (Torchia et al., 2010). Although the theory of critical mass does not state a specific number to act as a critical mass, research has shown that when a group of three people reach agreement, they gain the power to influence the rest of the group (S. R. Fitzsimmons, 2012; Torchia et al., 2010, 2011). When the critical mass of women in the Board is reached, then the focus shifts to the abilities and skills women directors have (Joecks et al., 2013). In order for the tokens to be able to build alliances and avoid tokenism, they need to be more than 20% (Kanter, 1977; Konrad et al., 2008). Applying this principle to the composition of the BoD, three has been identified as the

critical mass, the magic number of women directors at the Board of Directors (Joecks et al., 2013; Torchia et al., 2010).

According to the experiences of the interviewees of Konrad et al. (2008), when there is one woman in the board, she is perceived as the representative of her gender rather than as individual, she struggles to get her voice heard or she is constantly in the spotlight for the wrong reasons. Female director's opinions were asked mostly for softer, "female subjects" such as "work-life flexibility or the status of women in the organization" (Konrad et al., 2008, p.150). Token women are usually not trusted and they usually get isolated (Torchia et al., 2011). It is observed that a lot of the times, the issues were being discussed outside of the BoD meetings, in an informal setting e.g., at a tennis court, excluding the woman director. Since she is not included in those informal gatherings, her attempt to make herself heard at the Board meetings requires more effort than expected. If the woman director succeeds and pitches her ideas to the Board meeting, her ideas are ignored until a male director comes up with the same idea a few minutes later. Then the Board cheers for the innovative and brilliant idea. In the same research, there was an incident where the female director was neglected from external partners since they didn't appropriately introduce themselves and handshake with her. In this incident, she had to raise it as an issue to discover that only one male director noticed the behaviour of the external partner. Her reaction, to raise the issue, was critical in order for the male director who noticed to speak up and highlight what has occurred. As a female CEO stated "I spend time making sure I am heard. I may have to say things two or three times"(Konrad et al., 2008).

A solo woman in the board can still have an impact in the decision-making process of the Board, but she still has to make more effort in order to be heard. If there was a woman in the Board before and she made a positive impact, then a female director, even

if she is the only woman in the Board, will be viewed in a more positive way from the male directors. On the same note, if the predecessor woman director didn't contribute, then the next female director will not be listened and will have to make more effort to get her voice heard at the Board (Konrad et al., 2008). This is in accordance with the fact that one woman in the BoD, is seen as a representative of the female sex, rather than as an individual. Male directors won't be stereotyped in the same way if they replaced another male director (Konrad et al., 2008).

When there are two women directors in the board, there is a significant difference on the impact they can make. They make allyships and since they usually share the same ideas and values, this provides them a larger amount of power in the Board (Konrad et al., 2008). A comment made by a woman director, is less likely to be ignored when there are two or more female directors (Terjesen et al., 2009). Two females in the Board have a larger influence in the decision-making process but they still have to work hard to get their ideas to the Board and eliminate stereotyping (Konrad et al., 2008). The atmosphere in the boardroom changes and allows for a more open discussion (Terjesen et al., 2009). The impact of old boys' network can also be reduced since when there are two or more women in the Board, they tend to use consultants to provide an objective point of view (Terjesen et al., 2009).

Apart from the professional allyship, an allyship in a personal level is also formed. The two female directors provide mental support to each other, share the same experiences and they fight together against stereotyping. They act as a constant point of contact on socializing events as well as Board meetings (Konrad et al., 2008). Although they are allies to one another, they tend to avoid sitting next to each other to the meetings or talk together for a long time to eliminate the perception that women are conspiring. There was a case, where female directors reported that they were perceived as the same

person. More specifically one of the two female directors reported: “I raised a question at a board meeting that caused the board to take some important action. Later on, the board chair thanked the other woman for raising the question. No one said anything to correct him” (Konrad et al., 2008, p.153).

Impact gets higher and things get better when there are three women on the Board (Konrad et al., 2008). It has been characterised as achievement of “critical mass” when there are three female directors at the Board of Directors. Female directors now regain their personal identity rather than being a representative of their gender or “the woman” in the table (Konrad et al., 2008). Women now feel more comfortable expressing their opinions and taking initiatives and are able to think beyond the opinions of men about their opinions (Terjesen et al., 2009). Women directors become more active and better teamwork is achieved (Lefley & Janeček, 2023).

Effective communication is now encouraged across the Board as well as with the stakeholders (Terjesen et al., 2009). The group is now heterogeneous and allows different interactions that can potentially lead to better decision-making (Torchia et al., 2011). Regarding diversity subjects, they shift from women’s responsibility to a group responsibility and more room to discuss them is created when there are three women on the Board (Konrad et al., 2008; Terjesen et al., 2009). Women can also act as a mediator to the strategy of the Board (Torchia et al., 2011).

Gendered Organisations

Another key finding on the difficulties a woman faces in the workplace, was the fact that organisations are gendered. Acker (1990) realised that the fact that organisations are analysed and perceived as gender neutral is not correct. She observed that there are

assumptions about gender in the different documentation and contracts used in the organisations. “To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered, means that 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” (Acker, 1990, p. 146).

The whole organisation logic is considered to be gender-based. A look at the hierarchy, the job descriptions, the job evaluation systems and even the manuals that managers abide by, will show that they are not gender neutral (Acker, 1990). It seems like “organisations and occupations are gendered at the level of culture” (Britton & Logan, 2008, p. 110).

Job descriptions “assume a disembodied and universal worker” (Acker, 1990, p. 139), but in fact this worker is not universal but is a man. According to Acker, the universal worker that will eventually fill in the position, has to be devoted to a full-time job without any other obligations, to be able to work on premises, arrive on time and work extra hours if requested (Acker, 1990, 2006). These expectations are not negotiable unless the worker holds a high-level managerial position (Acker, 2006). This description can fit only male workers since women are the caretakers of children, which makes them not a great fit to the universal worker description (Acker, 1990, 2006). Thus, if a woman decided to work for pay, the assumption was that she would be interested and ideal for a nurturing, supportive position with a lower salary (Britton & Logan, 2008) or a part time job in order to be able to handle her family obligations (Acker, 2006). This reinforced the idea that the jobs were actually gendered (Britton & Logan, 2008). Job descriptions can be then described as gender-based and not gender neutral and impersonal as the original perception indicated (Acker, 1990; Britton & Logan, 2008). The abstract worker is designed not to have any sexuality, emotions and

procreation (Acker, 1990). The elimination of sexuality, emotions and procreation is imperative in order to support the perception that the organisation without them will function properly and avoid disruptions (Acker, 1990). “The “ideal worker” is male, but he is also often white, middle class, and heterosexual” (Britton & Logan, 2008, p. 110). Thus, women and women’s bodies abilities to give birth are stigmatised and defined as unsuitable for a higher-level job position within the organization (Acker, 1990). The whole worth of women’s job is devalued since the other obligations of women will distract them from their full-time job and from being the ideal “gender-neutral” candidate (Acker, 1990).

Apart from job descriptions, hierarchies hide gender-based assumptions as well (Acker, 1990, 2006; Britton & Logan, 2008). The most suited candidate for a higher-level position, is the one who is more committed to their work and can be devoted to their full-time job (Acker, 1990). The “ideal manager” should not have any family obligations, and should be able to work long hours as a well-reasoned, dynamic leader (Britton & Logan, 2008). This description fits only male employees, setting women as unsuitable to get a leadership position (Acker, 1990). Thus hierarchies are gendered and usually men occupy the top leadership positions in the corporate ladder in firms in the United States and in Europe (Acker, 2006). Interestingly enough, men are seen as the ideal manager even at female-dominated jobs (Britton & Logan, 2008). When there are flat team structures within an organisation, it is more possible for women to be treated fairly compared to the more structured, hierarchical organisations, if women can act like men would. This shift in the behaviour of women may include family obligations as well (Acker, 2006). This comes with great agreement with Sorenson’s quote (Sorenson 1984 as cited in Acker, 1990, p. 139) that “The most powerful organizational

positions are almost entirely occupied by men, with the exception of the occasional biological female who acts as a social man”.

Women also have to face hegemonic masculinity. “Hegemonic masculinity is typified by the image of the strong, technically competent, authoritative leader who is sexually potent and attractive, has a family and has his emotions under control” (Acker, 1990, p. 153). A leader and a successful organisation often are perceived to share the common characteristics of being “aggressive, goal oriented, competitive, efficient” (Acker, 1992, p. 568) but being “supportive, kind and caring” (Acker, 1992, p. 568) are not usually used to describe a successful leader or organisation. In order for women to become leaders in their organisations, they have to adapt and change themselves according to the definition of hegemonic masculinity (Acker, 1990).

Since job evaluations are based on a gender-based job description they cannot be considered as gender neutral (Acker, 1990). Job evaluations focus on the evaluation of the job position rather than the skills and competencies of the person holding that position (Acker, 1990). The design of job evaluation systems was based on the values of the managers and the goal was that these systems should lead to a ranking of jobs, based on the managers’ values without major deviations from the rankings already existing (Acker, 1990). The rankings already existing are gender-based and contain gender segregation leading to women having the worst paid jobs at the lower ranks of the corporate ladder (Acker, 1990).

When someone studies the interactions between the employees, “patterns that enact dominance and submission” (Acker, 1990, p. 147) can be observed. Women can be given less talking time, less attention to their opinions and can be treated with

disrespect. They might not even get credited for their ideas but when a man repeats the same idea after them, he will get the credit (Clark-Saboda & Lemke, 2023).

2.4. EU Directive

A recent EU Directive (Directive 2022/2381, 2022) that requires at least 40% of non-executive director positions to be held by the underrepresented sex or at least 33% of all director positions, including both executive and non-executive directors to be held by the underrepresented sex, is in a great alignment with Kanter's tokenism theory, requiring at least 30% of women at the BoD in order to have power and not be viewed as tokens and representatives of their sex (Kanter, 1977).

European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, in their attempt "to ensure the application of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation" based on Article 157(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and according to the permission given to "Member States to maintain or adopt measures providing for specific advantages in order to make it easier for the underrepresented sex to pursue a vocational activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers" on Article 157(4) TFEU, they proceeded with the Directive 2022/2381. This Directive is applicable on all listed companies¹ and excludes the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)².

¹ 'listed company' means a company which has its registered office in a Member State and whose shares are admitted to trading on a regulated market within the meaning of Article 4(1), point (21), of Directive 2014/65/EU in one or more Member States (Directive 2022/2381, 2022).

² 'micro, small and medium-sized enterprise' or 'SME' means a company which employs less than 250 persons and has an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million, or, for an SME having its registered office in a Member State whose currency is not the euro, the equivalent amounts in the currency of that Member State (Directive 2022/2381, 2022).

Specifically, the Directive states that:

“Member States shall ensure that listed companies are subject to either of the following objectives, to be reached by 30 June 2026:

(a) members of the underrepresented sex hold at least 40% of non-executive director positions;

(b) members of the underrepresented sex hold at least 33% of all director positions, including both executive and non-executive directors.”

In order for the listed companies to comply with the Directive, they should make the relevant adjustments in their selection processes of the candidates that would be appointed or elected at the director positions. The candidates’ qualifications should be assessed comparatively and the criteria

“shall be applied in a non-discriminatory manner throughout the entire selection process, including during the preparation of vacancy notices, the pre-selection phase, the shortlisting phase and the establishment of selection pools of candidates. Such criteria shall be established in advance of the selection process”.

The Directive also allows the listed companies to give priority to the candidate of the underrepresented sex to fill in the position, when they have to choose between equally qualified candidates in order to be able to comply with the numbers of the underrepresented sex, “unless, in exceptional cases, reasons of greater legal weight, such as the pursuit of other diversity policies, invoked within the context of an objective assessment which takes into account the specific situation of a candidate of the other sex and which is based on non-discriminatory criteria, tilt the balance in favour of the candidate of the other sex”.

The Directive obliges listed companies to inform the candidate who did not succeed in getting the position and upon this candidate's request, about the qualification criteria of the selection, the objective comparative assessment of the candidates under these criteria and if applicable the specific considerations that the candidate of the not underrepresented sex was selected to fill the position. Member States should take measures according to their national judicial systems that will ensure no breach of Article 6(2) of the Directive, if a candidate of the underrepresented sex proves to court that they were equally qualified with the other candidate.

Member States, based on the Directive, should collect information on the gender representation on the applicable positions and what measures are being taken in order to achieve the goal set by the Directive. This information should be published on the listed companies' websites as well as become available by the Member States. If the listed company did not achieve either of the goals of women representation, they should provide reasoning on why they didn't manage to reach those percentages, as well as a description of the measures that they will take in order to comply with the Directive.

If the listed companies fail to comply with the Directive, they will face penalties. Penalties can include fines or "the possibility for a judicial body to annul a decision concerning the selection of directors made contrary to the national provisions adopted pursuant to Article 6 or to declare it null and void".

The Directive expires on 31st of December 2038 but it may alter or be extended according to the relevant reviews that Commission will perform.

2.5. Benefits from women in the Board of Directors

Since this Directive is imperative to be abide by, it is important to have a look at the benefits women directors provide to the board, to the firm as well as the employees of the companies. Women directors have a lot to offer at the Board of Directors. Their new ideas, communication skills and different management style can contribute to a better firm performance (Torchia et al., 2010; Wiersema & Mors, 2023). Inclusion of women directors at the Board signifies a company that is able to utilise the whole candidate pool and take advantage of the best talent (Lückerath-Rovers, 2013; Torchia et al., 2010). Women inclusive Boards have also been perceived as more accountable (Terjesen et al., 2009).

According to research, a group that is heterogenous, meaning that it consists of people with different backgrounds, perspectives and experiences, can lead to more productive discussions and disagreements, leading to a better results and suggestions at a group level with an increased difficulty to reach consensus though (Wiersema & Mors, 2023). Women in the Board can have a significant impact on the subjects discussed in the Board meetings (Konrad et al., 2008). Female directors provide different perspectives on the subjects discussed (Joecks et al., 2013). Women directors enter the BoD meetings well prepared and have read the relevant materials and financials, contrary to a lot of male directors (Wiersema & Mors, 2023). They tend to ask the hard questions that their male colleagues would avoid, leading to further discussion of the subjects, facilitation of the decision-making process and better decisions taken (Konrad et al., 2008; Torchia et al., 2010; Wiersema & Mors, 2023). This behaviour, asking difficult questions and encouraging debates, was contradicting to the expected behaviour according to gender stereotypes for women, which indicates that women are rational and autonomous (Wiersema & Mors, 2023). Women directors' behaviour has altered positively the

behavior in the boardroom by creating a more open space allowing their male colleagues to express themselves freely (Wiersema & Mors, 2023). The behaviour within the boardroom alters to a more civilised one and the general atmosphere changes in the presence of women directors (Terjesen et al., 2009). Discussions become more transparent and informal, and open dialogues are encouraged (Wiersema & Mors, 2023). This is evident by the answers of the interviewees interviewed by Wiersema & Mors (2023):

“Women are less bothered by their ego and will ask the question because that is the right question to ask and will not care what anybody thinks. ... People are often very relieved ... and I think often men, unless it is a really smart question, they don't want to ask it, which is stupid because then lots of things get assumed that are incorrect because nobody dares ask the obvious question.” (Wiersema & Mors p.23)

“Most men have an easier time showing their weak sides to women as opposed to in front of other men. ... The fact that they are more open I feel has been useful for the collaboration. ... For a company it means that you can look at issues from many different perspectives.” (Wiersema & Mors, 2023, p. 24)

“From someone that has been a director on more than 20 boards in the U.K., U.S., Germany, I have never sat on a board where a woman says nothing, whereas I have sat on boards where men say nothing.” (Wiersema & Mors, 2023, p. 23)

It has also been acknowledged that women directors do not get involved in politics and avoid constantly referring to their own success which further allows for the

conversations to be less politicised and more open (Terjesen et al., 2009; Wiersema & Mors, 2023).

Women facilitate the communication within the Board. Usually, women use their interpersonal skills at a higher level, allowing them to communicate better since they are better listeners, understand someone's need and read their body language at a higher degree. They show attention to the human relationships, they make sure everyone is treated properly and take care of the brand's image as shown from the responses Konrad et al., (2008) gained at their research.

The presence of female directors has also been associated to enhancement of strategic decisions due to the ability of women to take into consideration the impact a decision will have on multiple stakeholders and address it into the strategy of the company (Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Torchia et al., 2010). The connection between women directors and the stakeholders of the company is of great importance to the reputation of the company as well (Lückerath-Rovers, 2013). Women at the Board can also magnify the firm's reputation and attract ethical investors to provide funds to the company (Terjesen et al., 2009; Torchia et al., 2010). A female director's opinion can have a significant value especially if the company sells goods that are targeted to a female audience. They tend to have a better understanding of the marketplace and can consult the Board with their own point of view as customers of the company's products, affecting the profitability of the company (Konrad et al., 2008; Terjesen et al., 2009; Torchia et al., 2010).

Apart from the female customer's needs, a female director also takes care of the female employees of the company. They would ask about the career path of female employees and become mentors of female employees to further support them (Konrad et al., 2008).

The presence of women directors acts as an indicator of the career path a woman at lower level positions can potentially have and contributes to the retention of women (Terjesen et al., 2009). Women directors will act as role models and mentors to the rest of the female employees and their presence at the BoD can signify that an employee gets promoted based on the capabilities and not on gender or on other demographic characteristics and act as a rule of thumb on the do's and don'ts for other women (Lückerath-Rovers, 2013; Terjesen et al., 2009). Women directors have also been associated with higher firm organisational innovation exactly due to the focus they give to the people of their company (Torchia et al., 2011; Wiersema & Mors, 2023).

Moreover, women directors are associated with higher attention to compliance and to do things the right way while male directors were willing to avoid certain processes and risk the compliance of the firm, in order to do things quickly (Wiersema & Mors, 2023). Since women avoid taking risks, they will find a more sustainable way to execute certain tasks (Joecks et al., 2013). Representation of women in the Boards, has also been associated with a decrease in the probability of the company being involved in law violations and an increase in compliance, ethics and moral behavior (Baum et al., 2022). Female directors are more likely ensure that the company is compliant with CSR subjects due to the values they abide by (Baum et al., 2022; Wiersema & Mors, 2023).

The fact that a BoD of a company consists of female directors as well, indicates that a company is gender diverse and is perceived positively from people (Wiersema & Mors, 2023). Matters of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) are concerning the Gen Z when they decide whether to support a company or not. As this generation makes its entrance in the labor market, the organisations need to adjust in order to be able to accompany their needs. Gen Zers are considered to be the generation that does not like to fit and be restricted to one identity and can stop supporting a brand that does not align with their

values (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). They are considered to be the most diverse generation, regarding ethnicity and race, and they strongly believe that all people are equal and need to be treated in an equal manner (Schroth, 2019). According to the McKinsey report (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), Gen Zers will stop supporting and even disparage a brand that have macho, racist or homophobic campaigns. They will also support brands that keep their promises, act according to the values they promote (Ferraro et al., 2023). Women in leadership positions, signify a company that is well aware of DEI matters and is taking actions to support their DEI policies (Kalysh et al., 2016). When there are women directors on the Board, diversity shifts from a “woman’s issue” to a group responsibility (Terjesen et al., 2009).

3. Results

3.1. Women representation in the corporate pipeline

The first area that the researchers focus on, is the gender representation in the corporate pipeline. More specifically, the McKinsey reports, indicate the percentage of women and men in the corporate pipeline in the entry level, in the manager level, in the Senior Manager/Director level, in the VP level, in the SVP level and in the C-suite level. In the following analysis, emphasis will be given on the entry-level positions, the Senior Manager/Director level and on C-suite level but the rest of the percentages are available in *Figures 3.1.1 – 3.1.9* for years 2015 – 2023 respectively.

In the reports of 2016 and afterwards, there is also a breakdown of the percentage in regard to the race of the employee. We obtain a clearer view on the representation of white women compared to women of colour and of white men compared to men of colour. The definition of “of colour” in the reports, includes Black, Hispanic, Asian,

American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and mixed-race people. As overall representation of women, the sum of the percentage of white women and women of colour was calculated in order to have comparable data.

In 2015 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015), the representation of women in entry level positions was 45%, in Senior Manager/Director level was 32% and on the C-suite level was 17% (Figure 3.1.1).

In 2016 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016), there was a slight increase in the total representation of women in entry level position, with 49% representation (32% white women, 17% women of colour). A slight increase was also observed in the representation of women both in the Senior Manager/Director level with 35% total representation (27% white women, 8% women of colour) and in the C-suite level with 20% total representation (17% white women, 3% women of colour). (Figure 3.1.2)

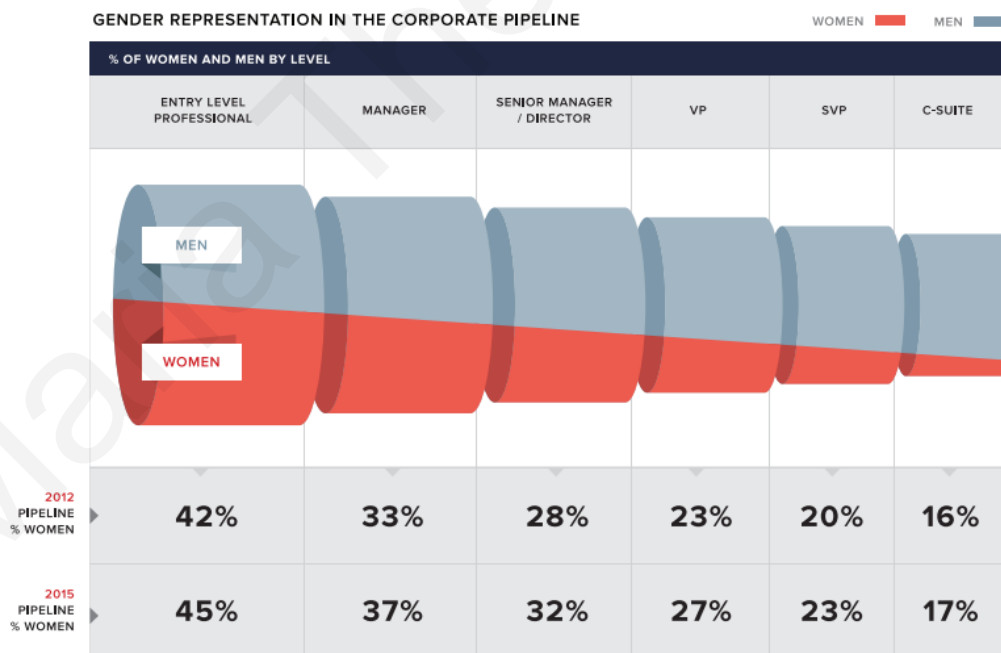


Figure 3.1.1: Gender representation in the corporate pipeline for 2015 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015).

% OF EMPLOYEES BY LEVEL

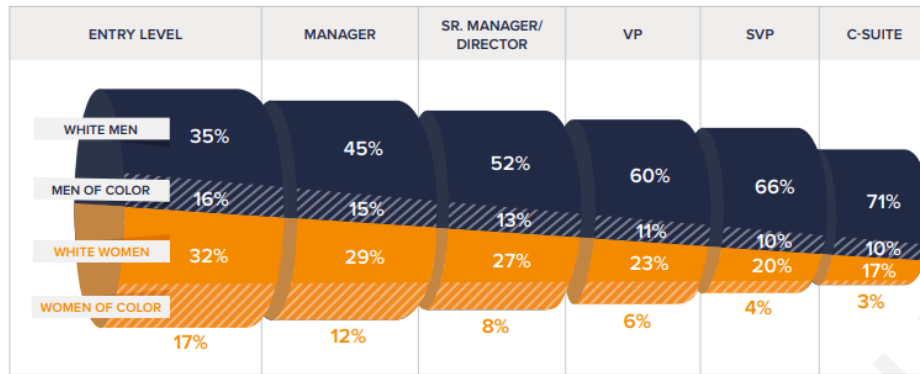


Figure 3.1.2: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2016 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016).

Moving forward to 2017 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017), the increase continues in the entry-level positions with 48% total representation (31% white women, 17% women of colour) and in the C-suite level, 21% in 2017 compared to 20% in 2016 (18% white women, 3% women of colour). The overall representation of women in Senior Manager/Director level was slightly decreased by 1% ending at 34% (26% white women, 8% women of colour). (Figure 3.1.3)

% OF EMPLOYEES BY LEVEL IN 2017

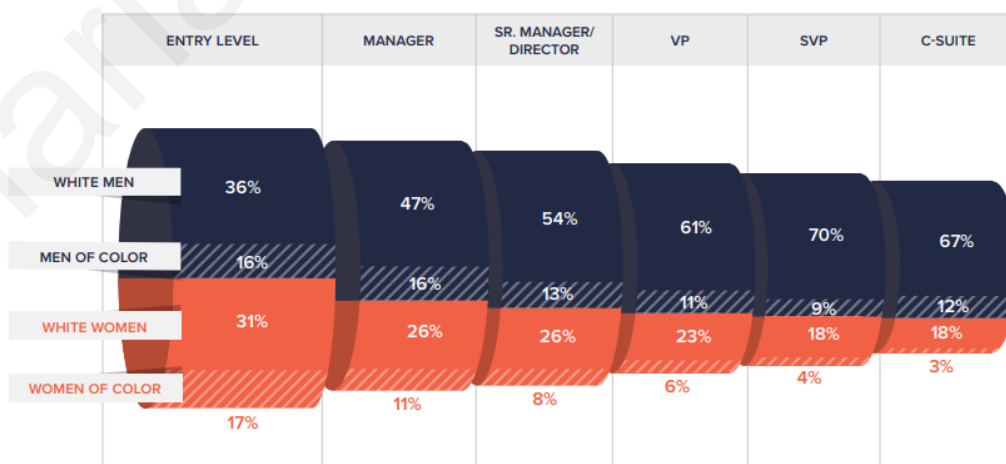


Figure 3.1.3: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2017 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017).

In 2018's report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018), the percentage of the overall representation of women in entry level positions and in Senior Manager/Director level, showed no significant difference. The percentages remained 48% and 34% respectively. The breakdown of the percentages on representation of white women and women of colour, remained the same as well, for both levels. In the C-suite level, there was an increase in the overall representation of women, leading to 23% of women in the C-suite level of the companies (19% white women, 4% women of colour). (Figure 3.1.4)

REPRESENTATION IN THE CORPORATE PIPELINE BY GENDER AND RACE

% OF EMPLOYEES BY LEVEL IN 2018*

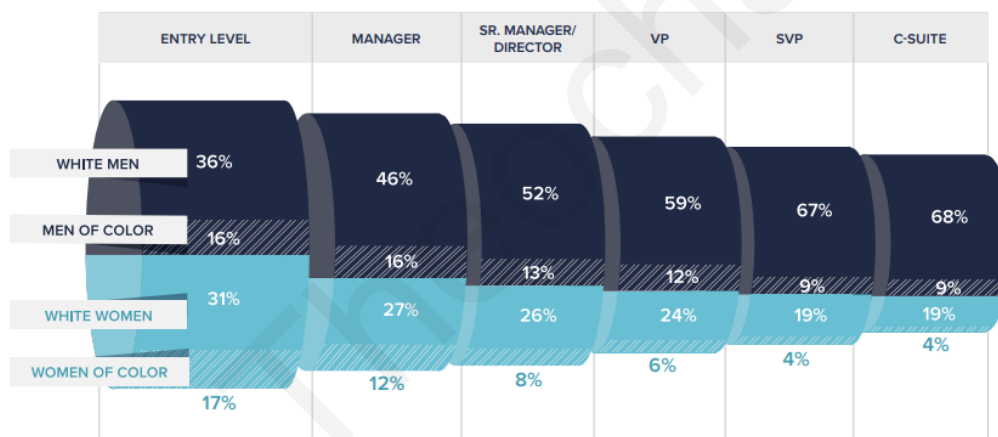


Figure 3.1.4: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2018 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018).

The total representation of women in entry-level positions remains the same in 2019 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019) as well (30% white women, 18% women of colour). There was a slight increase in the overall representation of women in the Senior Manager/Director level by 1% compared to 2018, leading to a 35% representation (26% white women, 9% women of colour). The total representation of women in the C-suite level, slightly decreased by 1%, being 22% (18% white women, 4% women of colour). (Figure 3.1.5)

REPRESENTATION IN THE CORPORATE PIPELINE BY GENDER AND RACE

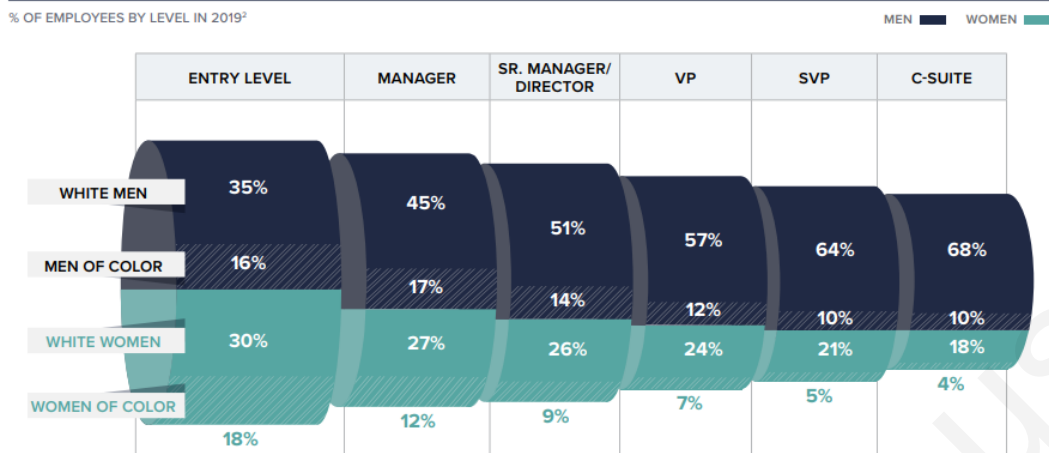


Figure 3.1.5: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2019 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019).

In 2020's report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020), the representation of female employees in entry-level positions, and Senior Manager/Director level, indicated a slight decrease of 1% when compared to 2019, leading to a total percentage of 47% (29% white women, 18% women of colour) and 34% (25% white women, 9% women of colour) respectively. Regarding the C-suite level, it remained the same in total with 22% (19% white women, 3% women of colour). (Figure 3.1.6)

REPRESENTATION OF CORPORATE PIPELINE BY GENDER AND RACE

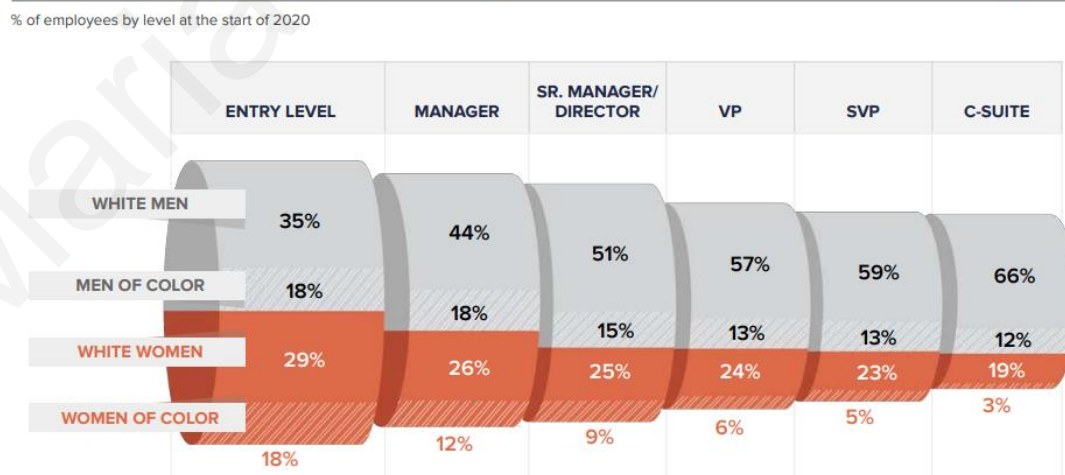


Figure 3.1.6: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2020 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020).

Moving forward to 2021 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021), the representation of women in entry-level remained the same in total, with 47% (30% white women, 17% women of colour), while the percentages of women in Senior Manager/Director and C-suite level showed an increase. Senior Manager/Director level and C-suite level, both had an increase of 2%, leading to a total representation of 36% (27% white women, 9% women of colour) and 24% (20% white women and 4% women of colour) respectively. (Figure 3.1.7)

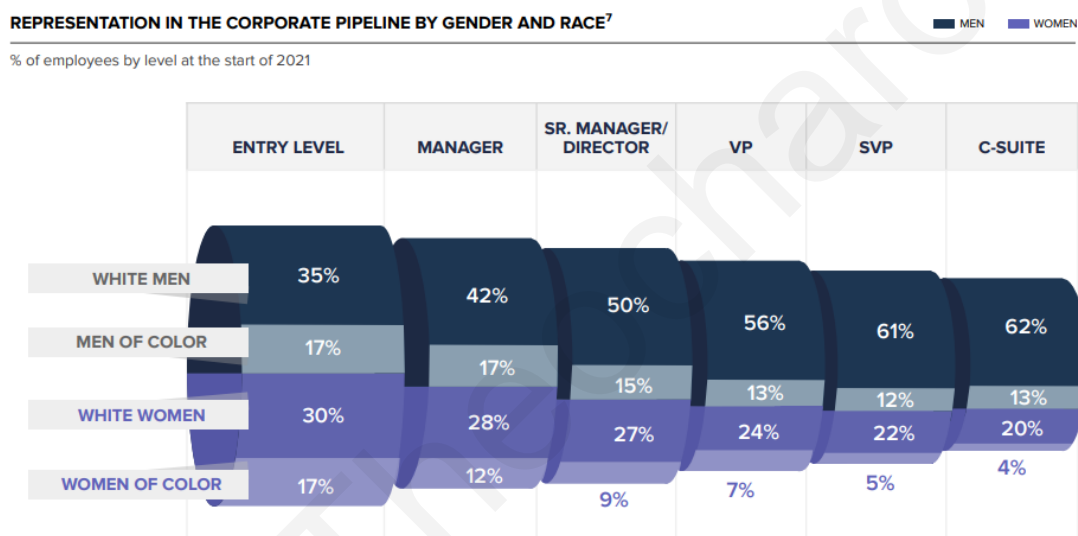


Figure 3.1.7: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2021 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021).

In 2022 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022), the representation of women in entry-level positions, slightly increased when compared to 2021 by 1%. Women held 48% of the available entry-level positions (29% white women, 19% women of colour). Increase in percentage indicated the women representation in C-suite level as well with 26% of the C-suite level being women (21% white women, 5% women of colour). The representation of women in Senior Manager/Director level, showed no difference remaining at 36% (26% white women, 10% women of colour). (Figure 3.1.8)

Coming to this year (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023), the total representation of women in entry-level positions indicated a slight decrease of 1%, leading to 47% representation (29% white women, 18% women of colour). The representation of women in Senior Manager/Director level, remained the same compared to last year, at a total of 36% (27% white women, 9% women of colour). It is worth noting that in 2023, the highest representation of women in the C-suite level was observed with 28% total representation (22% white women, 6% women of colour) (Figure 3.1.9).

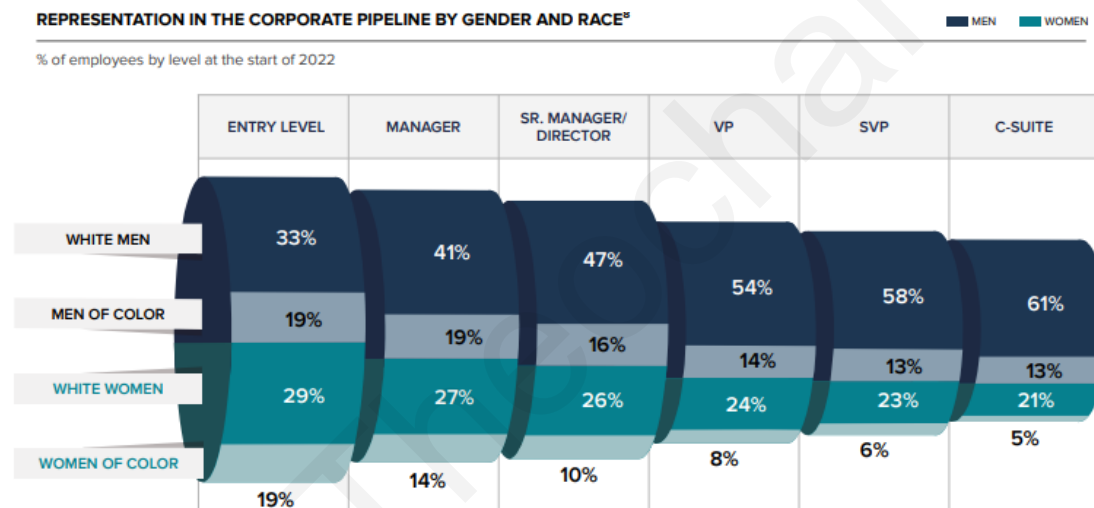


Figure 3.1.8: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2022 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022).

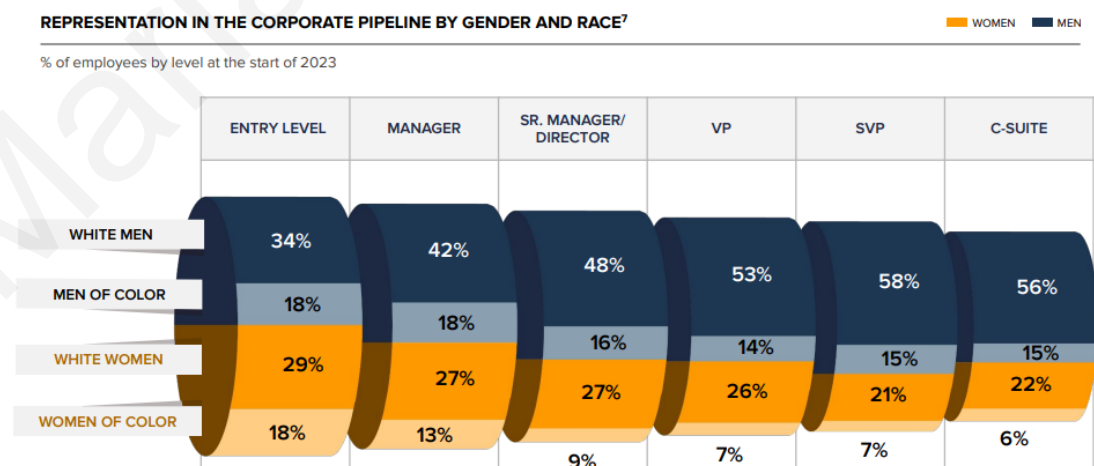


Figure 3.1.9: Race and gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2023 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023).

3.2.Promotion and leaving rates

McKinsey&Co, investigated the promotion and leaving rates of women, in order to determine whether women are leaving their organisations at higher rates or if they are promoted at a lower rate than their male colleagues. The results are presented below per annual report.

In 2015 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015), women were leaving their organization “at the same or lower rates” compared to their male colleagues. It is also worth noting that women, in leadership positions show a higher intention to stay within the company when compared to males in leadership positions. The promotion rate is lower for women compared to men in 2015. If the promotion rate of both sexes was similar, then we could expect a same share of women and men throughout the corporate pipeline. Instead, the expected representation of women is 15% lower when compared to men. More specifically, for every 100 men hired and promoted from entry-level to manager level positions, only 82 women will be promoted at the same level positions.

In 2016’s report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016), the leaving rates of women and men were almost equal. Regarding the promotion rates: “For every 100 women promoted, 130 men are promoted”. What is also important to highlight in this report, especially since it has been identified as a key theme is the observation that women tend to move from line roles to staff roles when they get promoted. As explained in 2015’s report, line roles are “positions with profit-and-loss responsibility and/or focused on core operations” while staff roles are “positions in functions that support the organization like legal, human resources and IT” (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015). It has been observed that line roles, tend to progress to higher levels of hierarchy and eventually at the CEO level, since they are considered as more core roles that have a better understanding of the business environment and core operations

(McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015). In the results of 2016, women held less line roles compared to men, across all levels of the corporate pipeline. This phenomenon is more evident from the Senior Manager/Director level upwards. The highest difference in the percentages was observed in the C-suite level with 48% women in line roles, compared to 67% of men.

Moving forward to 2017's report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017), white women leave their companies at the same rate as white men and the same trend is observed with women and men of colour. If we compare the leaving rates of people of colour to the leaving rates of white people, people of colour have higher leaving rates than white people. The percentages that indicate the intention to stay as well as the percentages of their willing to leave, are almost identical between men and women. Among the employees who are planning to leave, men and women show the same intention to take a role at another company (72% for women, 73% for men) and similarly the same intention to leave the workforce to focus on family (2% for women, 1% for men). When comparing the promotion rates of women to men, to advance from entry-level to manager level in an average company, women are 18% less likely to advance than men. On the contrary, top-performing companies are promoting women and men at almost the same rates (4% difference between women and men). McKinsey&Company defined top-performing companies as "companies that have the highest rating in a weighted composite of three measures". The measures are 1) Representation of women in Manager roles, 2) Representation of women in senior leadership and 3) Average rate at which companies promote women across the talent pipeline.

The trend observed regarding the leaving rates in 2018's report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018) is similar to the previous year' women and men are leaving their

companies at almost the same rate. More specifically, 15% of women and 15% of men left their companies in the last year, while 47% of women and 45% of men are planning to leave their companies within the next 5 years. Among those women and men who are planning to leave their companies, 81% of women and 82% of men show intention to stay in the workforce, while 2% of women and 0% of men are leaving their companies to focus on their family. Regarding the promotion rates of women, for every 100 men, 79 women are promoted (including all ethnicities), for every 100 men promoted, only 84 women are promoted and for every 100 men promoted, only 60 black women are promoted.

In 2019's report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019), there was the first reference that the glass ceiling started to crack. Instead of glass ceiling, McKinsey&Company referred that there was a broken rung. As per their definition, they claimed that broken rung results in "more women getting stuck at the entry level and fewer women becoming managers". According to the report, glass ceiling is not the main obstacle for women to rise in the corporate pipeline, but the broken rung is. "For every 100 men promoted and hired to manager, only 72 women are promoted and hired" (*Figure 3.2.1*). This leads to creating a gap and fewer women are promoted and hired in upper levels of leadership compared to men. In 2019's report two interesting figures were presented, that indicate the broken rung in the manager level (*Figure 3.2.1*), and what an organisation would look like when having the same hiring and promotion rates as shown in *Figure 3.2.2* compared to what organisations would look like if there was an equal representation of women and men.

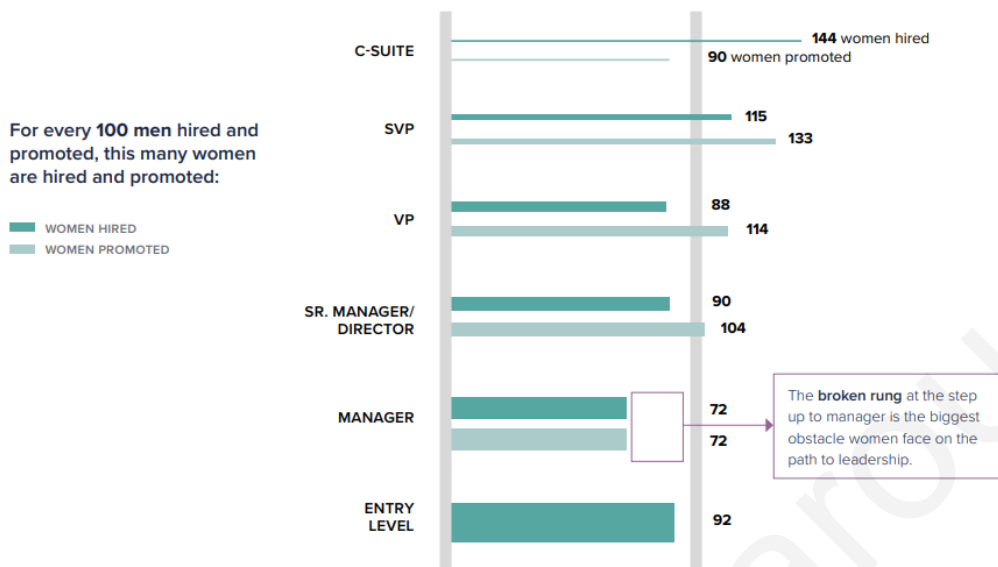


Figure 3.2.1: The promotion and hiring rates of women compared to men. At the manager level, there is evidence of the broken rung (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019).

In 2020's report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020), the broken rung is still evident and keeping women from getting a position in higher leadership. Regarding the promotion rate of women in 2020, "for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 85 women were promoted". The most significant observation of 2020 was that this year was the first year since the beginning of these reports that women indicated a higher leaving rate compared to men. This increase was a result of Covid-19. Covid-19 was a challenging period for humanity, but it was far more challenging for women in the workplace, since 2 million women considered taking a leave of absence or even leave the workforce. The progress of slowly increasing the percentage of women in the workplace shattered, since they now considered leaving their companies at higher rates than men, leading to a smaller number of women candidates in the claim of positions in leadership.

THE CORPORATE LADDER IN PERSPECTIVE:
 IN A TYPICAL COMPANY, THE ABOVE HIRING AND PROMOTION RATIO LEADS TO THIS MANY WOMEN AND MEN AT EACH LEVEL . . .

Each dot represents the number of women and men at each level in a typical company

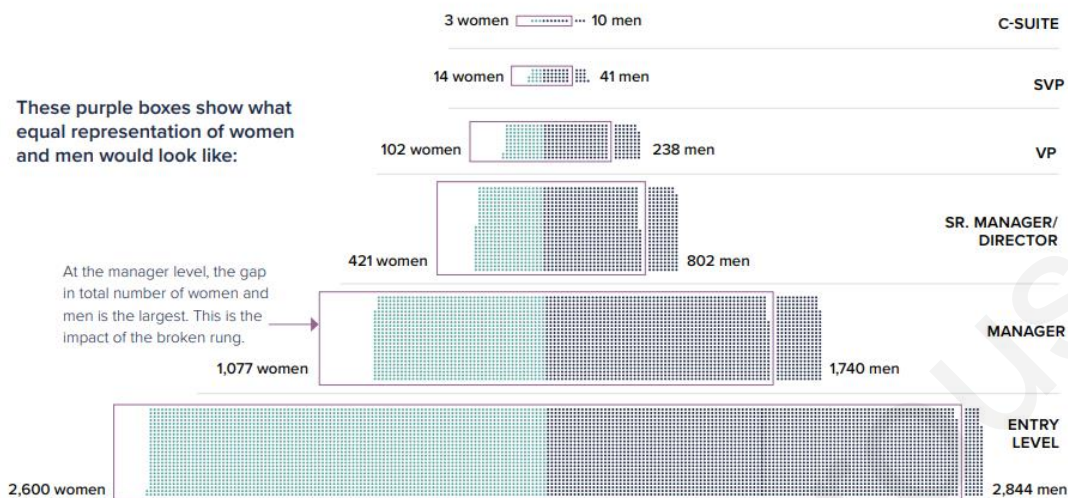


Figure 3.2.2: The graph shows the numbers of women and men per level, for a company with the hiring and promotions rates of the Figure 3.2.1. Purple boxes indicate what equal representation of women and men would look like (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019).

The presence of broken rung is still evident in the report of 2021 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021). As per the definition of the broken rung, it exists “at the first step up to manager”. “For every 100 men promoted to manager, only 86 women are promoted”. In 2021’s report it is remarkable that it was the first time that women of colour were promoted at the same rate as women (overall). Specifically for every 100 men promoted, 85 women of colour were promoted. While the promotion rate for women of colour increased significantly, a lot of women felt burned out, leading them to consider leaving the workforce or even downshift their careers. A significantly high ratio of 1 in 3 women, considered one of those 2 options. This ratio was 1 in 4 women at the beginning of the pandemic.

Key reason of the underrepresentation of women in the corporate pipeline remains in 2022 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022), the broken rung. For every 100 men promoted, 87 women and 82 women of colour are promoted from entry-level to

manager level. According to data from 2021, women are now leaving their leadership positions at higher rates than men (Figure 3.2.3). Broken rung and higher leaving rates are lowering significantly the numbers of women in leadership. The three main reasons identified that make women leaders consider leaving their companies were the microaggressions they face, the fact that they work more but are recognized less and their desire for better work culture. Since younger women under 30 are more likely to aspire a senior leadership position (more than 66% of younger women want to advance in a senior leadership position), companies need to address those issues, otherwise they will face obstacles in recruitment and retention of younger women in their workforce.



Figure 3.2.3: The graph shows leaving rates of women leaders compared to men leaders from 2017 to 2021 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022).

In the latest report of 2023 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023), the higher leaving rates of women in leadership remains. Specifically, women directors not only tend to leave at higher rates compared to previous years, but they are also leaving at higher rates compared to male directors. Regarding the promotion rates of women from

entry-level positions to manager level positions, for every 100 men hired and promoted from entry-level positions to manager level positions, only 87 women get promoted. The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions remains.

3.3. Women experiences and barriers they face in their road to leadership positions

Another key thematic investigated in the McKinsey&Company and LeanIn. Organization reports were the experiences of women in the workplace and more specifically the barriers they face in their road to reach leadership positions. The results are presented below per annual report.

2015 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015)

In this report, the first key theme identified was the fact that women hold line roles³ at the earlier stages of their careers up until the manager level, and they end up in staff roles⁴ from VP level onwards. C-suite executives are usually selected from the line role employees, since these roles have a better view of the firm's core operations. The fact that women hold less line roles as they move upwards in the corporate ladder, can act as a potential barrier of them being selected for a C-suite executive position.

Apart from the fact that women hold less line role positions compared to men, women that hold line roles have lower likelihood to advance compared to women who hold staff role positions. The representation of women in staff role positions is steady across

³ Line roles are positions with profit-and-loss responsibility and/or focused on core operations (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015).

⁴ Staff roles are positions in functions that support the organization like legal, human resources and IT (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015).

the levels while the representation of women in line role positions is decreased significantly. This leads to lower advancement opportunities for women that hold line role positions.

Another theme identified was the aspirations for promotion women have compared to men. When in entry- and middle level, women and men have the same leadership ambition but in senior level, women have less leadership aspiration than men in the same level. Women of all levels, identify stress and pressure as the main reason why they do not aspire a top-level job, while men identify the work-family balance as their main reason of not pursuing a top-level job. When parents of both sexes were asked, they said that they wanted to be promoted at senior leadership positions.

Women's belief that their gender acts as an inhibitor of a possible promotion, raise or an assignment, is evident in this year's report. Women respondents think that they are almost four times more likely than men to have less opportunities for career advancement because of their gender. As women rise in the corporate ladder, their belief that their gender is an inhibitor of their careers increases further. Senior-level women, also believe that their gender not only affected their career as of the moment but it will also affect their future attempts to evolve in the corporate ladder.

House chores and childcare seem to remain a main responsibility for female employees. Women reported that they are responsible for childcare at least nine times more than men across levels, while women stated that they are at least four times more likely than men to do more house chores across all levels. It has been observed that even if both partners work full time, 41% of women reported that they are taking care of the children while 30% of women reported that they were doing more house chores compared to their partners. In this report, it has also been observed that the next generation of couples

are better at splitting house chores and childcare more evenly. Although there seems to be a better split, women under thirty years old reported that they are responsible for the majority of childcare activities.

The last theme identified as a barrier to the careers of women in this report, was networking. Even though both male and female participants agreed that sponsorship is important for their career advancement, the networks of male and female participants differed. The networks were almost equal in size but the professional networks of male participants were consisting of other males, while female participants' networks included mostly females or both females and males. Based on the composition of their networks, men were more likely to be selected in leadership positions, while women's access to senior-level sponsorship was limited. Almost two thirds of male participants claimed that the senior level leaders who have helped them advance were male while a bit over one third of the male participants said that a woman senior leader helped them advance.

2016 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016)

In 2016's report, the first key theme identified was that women are more likely to get penalised when they are lobbying for a promotion or an increase. While the percentage of women employees who are negotiating for a promotion or a raise is almost equal to the percentage of men, women are 30% more likely to be penalised for their decision to negotiate and be characterised as "intimidating", "too aggressive" or even "bossy". Women who negotiate, are 67% more likely to receive those characterisations compared to other women who decide not to negotiate. It has also been observed that even though

women and men negotiate at almost the same rates, the promotion on average will be more likely given to men.

The second key theme identified was the lack of sponsorship and networking. Women have fewer substantive interactions with senior leaders compared to men. These interactions are decreased even more to the senior levels. Women are less likely to be able to get support for a promotion or a new assignment from senior leaders outside of their organisations. Regarding their network, women are three times more likely to have a female network which will not support them in their career trajectory since mostly men hold the senior leadership positions.

Another key theme identified was the lack of feedback received by women employees compared to men. Although both women and men ask for informal feedback at the same frequency, women are less likely to receive it. Despite managers claiming that they do not hesitate providing difficult feedback, it has been observed that women are 20% less likely to receive difficult feedback from their managers that will eventually help them evolve. A possible reason behind this disparity is the fear of the managers that women will have an emotional reaction to the feedback.

The aspiration of women and men to claim a senior leadership position differs. Specifically, 40% of women compared to 56% of men would like to be promoted in senior leadership positions. The main concern of both women and men is the work-family balance while women regardless of whether they have children or not, are more concerned on the pressure they will have at the senior leadership positions compared to men. Even if women have the aspiration of getting in a senior leadership position, they tend to believe that the position will be claimed by a man. Women with the aspiration of getting to top executive positions are more likely to worry about the work family

balance issue. Even if women and men can identify the same benefits from a senior leadership position, like salary increase and opportunities to mentorship, men are more likely to believe that they will be able to make an impact to the business. There is a possibility that women believe that their opinions and contributions are not taken into consideration at the degree a man's would.

The last concern identified in 2016's report is that of house chores and childcare. House chores and childcare appears to concern both sexes. If either a woman or a man has more home responsibilities, they are less likely to aspire a senior leadership position. Specifically, women who share home responsibilities with their partner, are 43% more likely to aspire a senior leadership position, compared to 34% of women who are responsible for house chores and childcare in their households. As it has been reported, "women in senior management positions are seven times more likely than men at the same level to say they do more than half of the housework".

2017 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017)

The first key theme identified in the report of 2017 was again the lower aspiration of women to claim a senior leadership position. Women have a lower aspiration to claim a leadership position compared to men of the same race and ethnicity. Also, both women and men of colour have higher aspirations to claim a senior leadership position compared to white women and men. In alignment with 2016's report, women and men can recognise that the two main key benefits of a senior leadership position are higher compensation and opportunities to mentor, while men see a senior leadership position as an opportunity to make an impact both on the business and on the outside world. The major concern of both women and men is work-family balance and "too much politics".

Another key theme identified was the lack of mentoring and advice on women and their network in general. Women are less likely to receive guidance on how to advance and have less interactions with managers and senior leadership. Women's networks are five times more likely to be consisted of females. Their networks can inhibit their access to people, usually men, that can help them claim a senior leadership position. Women that desire to claim a senior leadership position are less likely to believe that they will be able to actually claim the position compared to men with the same desire.

The third key theme identified referred to the negotiations about promotions and salary raises. While women and men of all races and ethnicities negotiate for promotions and salary increases at the same rates, men usually do not feel the need to negotiate for their salary and promotions since they find that their compensation is already high enough or they are already in the correct position. Even though women negotiating their promotion or salaries are more than twice more likely to receive the promotion or salary increase than women who don't negotiate, they are also more likely to be seen as "intimidating", "too aggressive" or "bossy". It has also been observed that senior-level women are more likely than senior-level men to negotiate their promotions or salaries and have a higher possibility to be seen as "intimidating", "too aggressive" or "bossy".

The last key theme identified was the house obligations and childcare as last year. Women are responsible for the majority of the household obligations. The percentage of women without children who are responsible for the majority of household chores is 54% compared to 22% of men. When women have children, they are 5.5 times more likely than men with children to be responsible for the majority of or even all household tasks. The same trend continues even if women are bringing more than 50% of the family income. The household obligations seem to affect women's aspiration for career growth since women with partner and children have less aspirations to claim a senior

leadership position compared to men with the same family structure. If women are responsible for most of the household obligations, they have fewer aspirations to claim a senior leadership position compared to women sharing responsibilities equally with their partner. Moreover, women in senior leadership positions are 57% more likely to have the main house obligations and their work compared to 38% of men. Even though young women (aged 22 – 29) are more ambitious than relatively older women (30+ years old), they are still not that interested as young men to claim a top executive position, nor they are as confident as young men that they will reach the top executive levels. While young men who live with their partners do all or most of the household chores compared to relatively older men, the trend that young women who live with their partners are still responsible for the majority of household work.

It is also important to highlight the fact that women are significantly more likely than men to believe that their gender “has played a role in missing out on a raise, promotion or a chance to get ahead” and “will make it harder to get a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead” (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017, p. 16). More specifically, 37% of women compared to 8% of men believe that their gender “has played a role in missing out on a raise, promotion or a chance to get ahead”, and 39% of women compared to 15% of men believe that their gender “will make it harder to get a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead” (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017, p. 16).

2018 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018)

The first key theme identified is the lack of support from managers. Women do not have the same access to support (provision of resources and help with the organisational

politics) from their managers compared to men. Because of the lack of support, women lose the positive aspect that comes with support from their managers such as higher promotion rates and retention desire. The fact that women do not socialise as much with their managers outside working hours compared to men, results to lower job satisfaction and intention to stay for women. Women of colour are at a worse position compared to white women since they receive even less support from their managers, while black women receive the least support from their managers. Manager support, like job demonstration and navigation to organisational politics, is less likely to be given to entry-level women compared to entry-level men.

The next key theme identified was again the lack of access to senior leadership. Women are less likely to have access to senior leadership than men. Women reported that they neither had enough interactions about their work with senior leaders, nor they had informal interactions with them. Women are disadvantaged from the lack of these interactions with senior leaders, since they are the ones who can help them with promotions, retention of employees and create the aspiration of career growth. Women of colour reported that they have never interacted with senior leaders neither formally nor informally. When employees have sponsors, they get advice on their careers, make sure their work is known and negotiate for them on new opportunities. Also, employees with sponsors are more likely to have interactions with senior leadership and to desire claiming a senior leadership position. Having a sponsor has a critical role for the career of women.

The third key theme identified were microaggressions such as sexism and racism. Over half of women, more specifically 64% of women, face microaggressions. Women have to prove themselves and they might be doubted at their area of expertise. Black women face more kinds of microaggressions, and they are doubted even further at their area of

expertise and are even asked to prove their competences. It has been observed that women who have to deal with microaggressions at their workplace, they feel that they are not treated fairly and they are considering leaving the company, three times more than women who don't face microaggressions.

The next key theme identified is sexual harassment. One in three women in corporate America had experienced in a different degree sexual harassment (from sexist jokes to inappropriate touches). Over half of women in senior leadership, more specifically 55% of them, have experienced sexual harassment. According to a research, women who deviate from the social gender stereotypes and for example have authority, are not heterosexual and work in male-dominated fields are more likely to receive sexual harassment.

Another key theme identified was the “only” experience. A significant percentage of women, 20% and an even higher percentage of women in senior levels and women in technical roles, 40% are the only woman in the room at their workplace. When a woman is the “only” or the token, is far more likely to face microaggressions compared to women who are not the tokens (80% compared to 64% respectively). It is also more common for token women to have to prove themselves since their abilities will be doubted, they are more likely to face unprofessional behaviour and to not be able to talk about their personal lives at work. Token women have also twice the possibility to be sexually harassed in their workplace. The experience women only have in their workplace is more challenging due to higher scrutiny, heightened visibility and the burden of representing all women at their backs. This leads to performance pressure and a higher possibility to leave the organisation (1.5 times more likely to consider leaving) (*Figure 3.3.1*). Token women are more likely to disagree with the opinion that the opportunities are given to the capable employees and that promotions are fair.

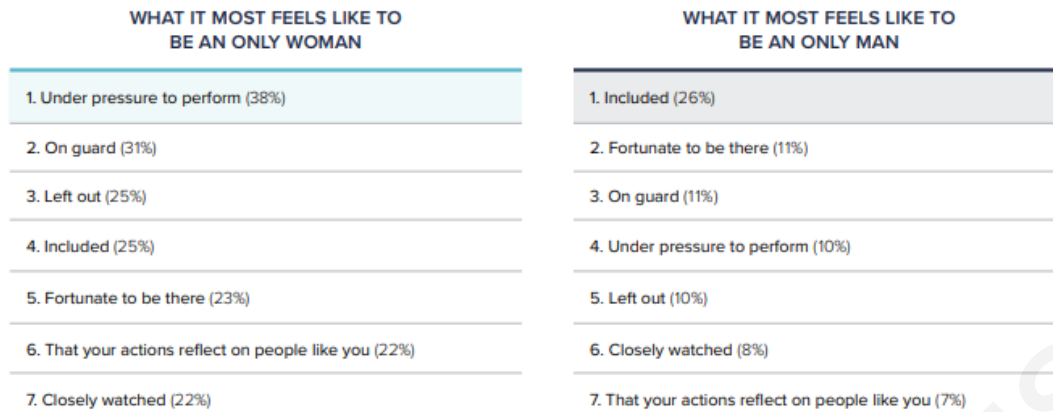


Figure 3.3.1: The graph shows what it feels like to be an only woman compared to what it feels like to be an only man (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018).

Women feel that their gender is responsible for not getting the promotion or the salary raise. They believe that being a woman makes their progression harder to achieve. More specifically, 24% of women compared to 8% of men believe that “their gender has played a role in missing out on a raise, promotion or chance to get ahead” and 29% of women compared to 15% of men believe that “their gender will make it harder to get a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead in the future” (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018, p. 24). Women are less likely than men to believe that the promotions are fair and end up to those who deserve them and that opportunities are going to the employees that deserve them. Women believe that they will have fewer possibilities to end up in a senior leadership position compared to men. Women and men disagree on whether they believe that women are well represented in leadership. When there is only 1 woman in 10 senior leaders, 45% of men agree that women are well represented in the leadership, compared to just 28% of women agreeing with the statement.

The next theme identified follows the same trend as last year: women are as likely to negotiate salary increases and promotions as men but far less likely to receive them especially at the beginning of their careers.

Regarding the aspiration of women to hold a top executive position, women are less likely to desire such position when compared to men of the same race and ethnicity. When they were asked on the benefits of getting a top executive position, women focus on the fact that they will become role models, while men focus on the possible impact they will have on the success of the organisation.

2019 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019)

The first key theme identified as a barrier in women's careers is broken rung. As mentioned in the previous section, broken rung creates a gap since less women are promoted from entry-level to manager level positions which will lead to even less available women to progress from manager level to a director or C-suite level. Broken rung is not recognised as the root cause of the inhibition of the careers of women by neither the HR leaders, nor men and women.

In 2019's report, 1 in 4 women believe that their gender was the reason behind a lost promotion or salary raise and more than 25% of women believe that their gender will be an obstacle in their career progression.

Regarding manager support and sponsorship, this year's report indicates that both women and men receive the same amount of manager support and sponsorship. It is important to note though that women with disabilities and black women believe that they are receiving less support from their managers and less sponsorship compared to the rest of the women (*Figure 3.3.2 and Figure 3.3.3*).

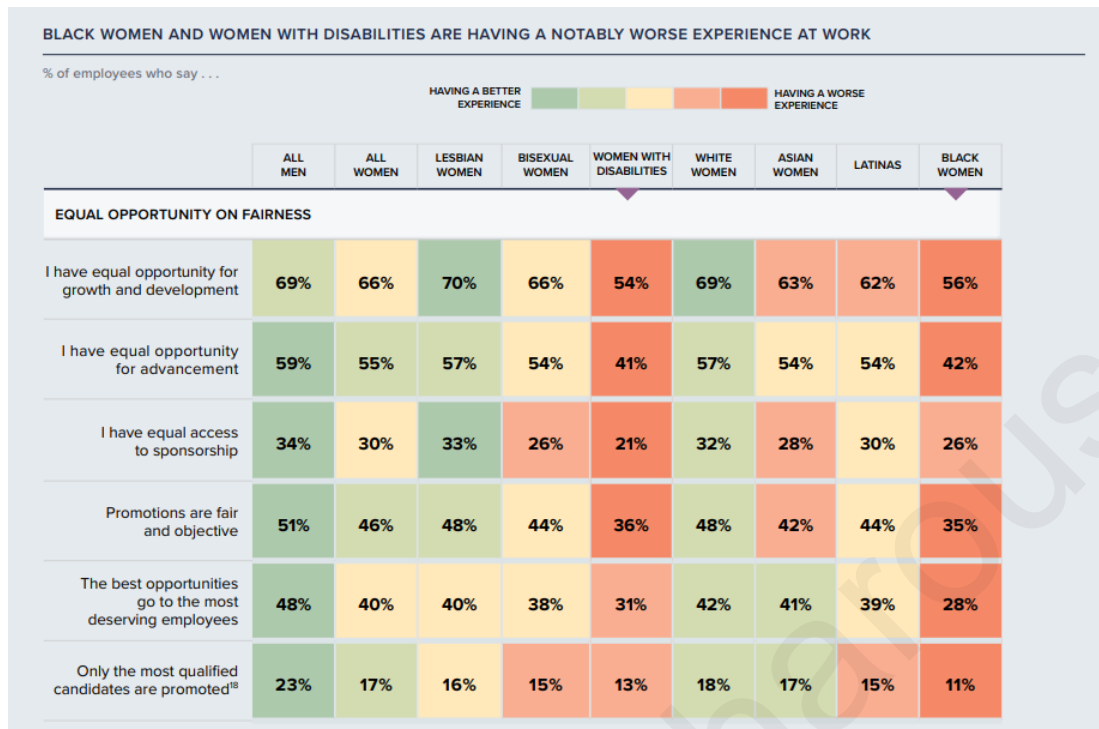


Figure 3.3.2: The graph indicates the comparison of the percentages of the employees who are saying the following statements (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019).

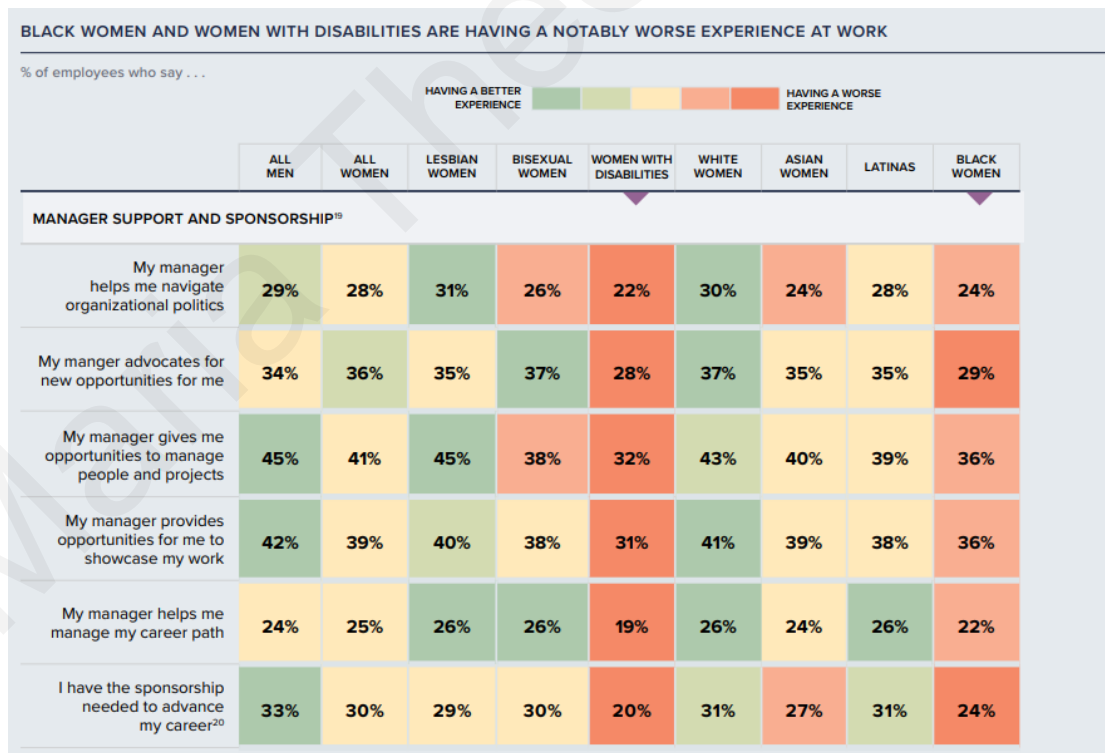


Figure 3.3.3: The graph indicates the comparison of the percentages of the employees who are saying the following statements (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019).

Interestingly enough, 1 in 5 women that needed to take a leave in order to deal with a health issue (either personal or family related), report that it had a negative impact on their careers compared to 1 in 10 men. Women reported twice more often that the leave they had to take had an impact on their financials.

Another key theme identified was the house chores and childcare. Women are more likely to be the mainly responsible partner for both house chores and childcare. The vast majority of women, 81% of them, have a partner who is working full-time, compared to a bit more over than half of the men asked (56%) who have a full-time working partner. On senior level positions, 72% of women have a working partner compared to 37% of men (*Figure 3.3.4*). It is more possible for senior level men to have a stay-at-home partner compared to senior level women. Almost half of working women that have a full-time working partner, 39% of them, are responsible for all housework, compared to 11% of men who have a full-time working partner. There is a trend identified though, that younger women who are in dual-career relationships are more likely to do less household chores compared to older women in dual-career relationships. The fact that the maternity leave in America remains at 10 weeks can also be a barrier faced by many women who want to have both a career and a family.

Microaggressions are evident in this year's report as well. Women have double probabilities "to experience four or more types of microaggressions" compared to men (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019, p. 43). Microaggressions can have several forms for example being questioned in their area of expertise, being interrupted while talking, not given credit for their ideas or even mistaken for someone at a more junior level (*Figure 3.3.5*).

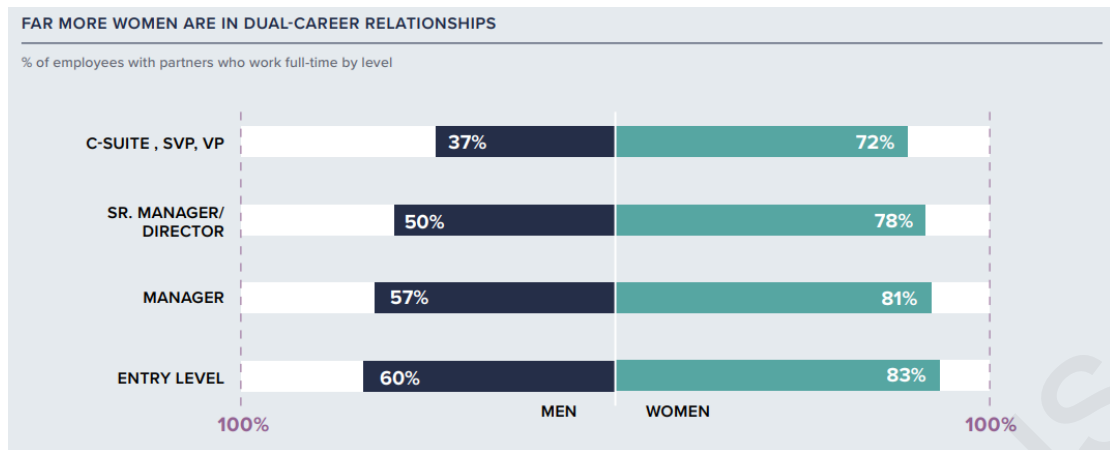


Figure 3.3.4: The graph indicates the comparison between the percentages of women and men that have partners working full-time in the different levels (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019).

WOMEN EXPERIENCE MORE MICROAGGRESSIONS, ESPECIALLY LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN, WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES, AND BLACK WOMEN

% of different groups of employees who say they experience microaggressions

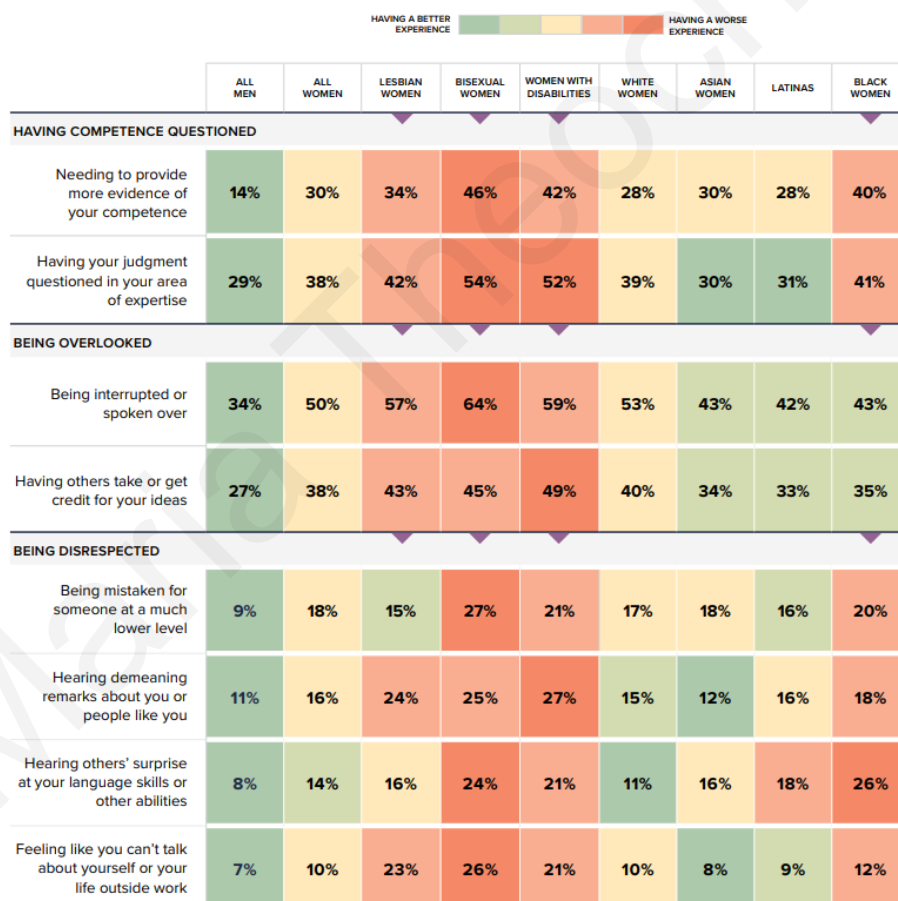


Figure 3.3.5: The graph indicates the comparison between the percentages of different groups of employees that said they are experiencing microaggressions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019).

The same trend with the high percentage of sexual harassments faced by women in their workplace remains. Almost half of the women (41%) answered that they have faced a form of sexual harassment which could include sexist jokes, inappropriate touches and unwanted attempts to have an intimate relationship. When women are in senior level positions, the percentage of them reporting that they have experienced sexual harassment increases significantly to 59%.

The experience of being the “Only” woman is quite common according to this year’s report as well. More specifically, 18% of all women reported being an “Only”, compared to 35% of senior level women. “Only” women are more prone to facing microaggressions in their workplace. Almost half of “Only” women will have to provide more evidence about their competences compared to almost 20% of women who are not “Onlys”. More than half of women “Onlys” have their judgement questioned in their area of expertise compared to almost 30% of women who are not “Onlys”. Women “Onlys” are far more likely to be interrupted when talking compared to women who are working with other women. A significant percentage of more than 30% of “Only” women reported that they were mistaken for someone at an entry level position compared to almost 10% of non-only women who reported the same situation.

2020 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020)

The annual report of 2020 was focused on the effect of Covid-19 to the everyday life of employees. The influence of Covid-19 was evident throughout the report there was only one key theme identified similarly to previous reports.

The key theme identified was the fact that women were more responsible for childcare and household chores. Women and more specifically mothers are more likely to be

responsible for the majority of childcare and household chores. Mothers are more likely to be responsible for the majority of childcare and household chores (three times more likely) since they are 1.5 times more likely to devote extra three or more hours per day to household chores and childcare. This means that the extra time mothers devote for their households per week is equivalent to half full-time job (20 hours). Single mothers have higher possibilities to be responsible for all household chores and childcare. During Covid-19, mothers felt more exhausted from childcare and homeschooling compared to men. Moreover, mothers had to face certain biases, like the bias that mothers cannot be focused and equally productive at both work and childcare. Another bias mothers had to face was the perception that they weren't devoted to their work and were less productive if they preferred flexible work options. Mothers compared to fathers, were more than twice as likely to be afraid of negative judgement of their work because they were mothers. Thus, they even avoided telling their colleagues that they were responsible for childcare. The combination of work and the majority of the household and childcare responsibilities forced mothers to think about either downshifting their careers or stop working at all.

Women in senior level management, faced a lot more pressure to perform to the high standards. Apart from higher standards, senior women had to face harder criticism if the performance was not at the expected level. Senior level women, are usually "only" women, leading to a further increase of the pressure and scrutiny they receive as well as to face microaggressions. Senior level women are 1.5 times more likely to consider downshifting their careers or even leaving the workforce due to Covid-19, compared to senior level men. The main reason for this thought of theirs is burnout for 75% of them. Companies needed to react to that situation because senior level women were connected with gender and racial diversity. Women in senior level positions had an impact on the

company's culture and were more likely to "embrace employee-friendly policies and programs" compared to men in the same positions. Senior-level women acted as a mentor and a sponsor to other women.

2021 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021)

The annual report of 2021 was focused on the higher amount of microaggressions that women, especially women in senior leadership positions face, the lack of allyships and the fact that women are still "onlys", while women of colour are double "onlys".

Women at senior leadership, are twice more likely to be the only woman in the room or at work, compared to entry-level women. The likelihood that women senior leaders will face microaggressions is higher as well. They are more likely to be interrupted while they talk, to be judged at their area of expertise and to receive comments on their emotional state. Microaggressions are evident in men as well, but they do not face them as frequently, nor they receive them at a higher degree when they are in senior leadership positions (*Figure 3.3.6*). Women of colour have to deal with microaggressions more than three times more, compared to white women (*Figure 3.3.7*).

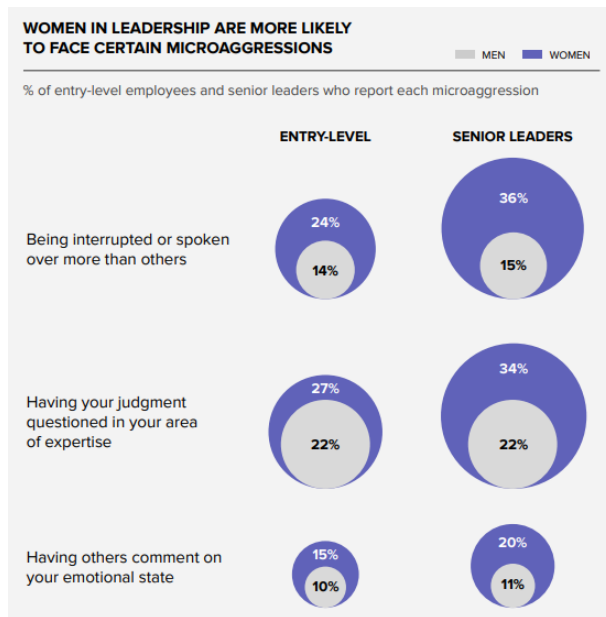


Figure 3.3.6: The graph indicates the comparison of the percentages of the microaggressions faced by women and men in entry-level compared to women and men in senior leadership positions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021).

WOMEN OF COLOR ARE MORE LIKELY TO FACE DISRESPECTFUL AND "OTHERING" MICROAGGRESSIONS²³

BETTER EXPERIENCE ■■■■■ WORSE EXPERIENCE

ALL MEN	ALL WOMEN	LGBTQ+ WOMEN	WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES		WHITE WOMEN	ASIAN WOMEN	LATINAS	BLACK WOMEN
Challenges to competence								
15%	28%	34%	40%	Being interrupted or spoken over more than others	27%	29%	27%	32%
24%	31%	37%	46%	Having your judgment questioned	31%	25%	29%	38%
12%	18%	25%	30%	Having others comment on your emotional state	18%	13%	16%	21%
Disrespectful and "othering" behavior								
6%	8%	10%	13%	Hearing people express surprise at your language skills or other abilities	5%	11%	13%	18%
7%	7%	12%	14%	Hearing or overhearing insults about your culture or people like you	5%	9%	9%	16%
5%	7%	9%	9%	Being confused with someone else of the same race/ethnicity	4%	17%	6%	17%
6%	9%	16%	13%	Feeling like you are expected to speak on behalf of all people with your identity	5%	14%	11%	31%
4%	6%	11%	11%	Having others comment on your hair or appearance	5%	5%	5%	14%

Figure 3.3.7: The graph indicates the comparison between the percentages of different groups of employees that said they are experiencing microaggressions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021).

If a strong allyship existed in the workplace, from white women to women of colour, then they would feel happier at their workplaces, they would have less possibilities to face burnouts and they will be more likely to stay at their workplaces. Women of colour tend to be “double onlys” due to their gender and race. “Onlys” face higher degrees of scrutiny and they have higher visibility: both their successes and failures are magnified. Women of colour, being “double onlys”, tend to be the receptors of higher amount of bias and discrimination, and performance pressure (Figure 3.3.8). The possibility of women of colour to face burnout is even higher.

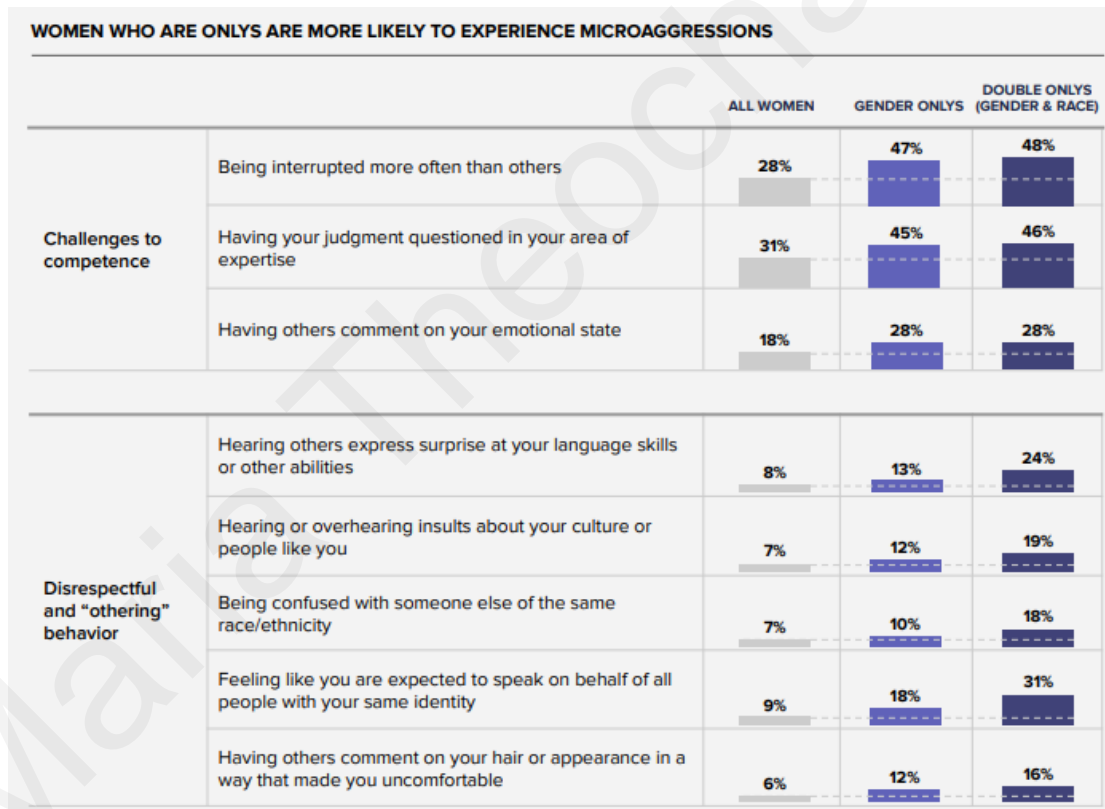


Figure 3.3.8: The graph indicates the comparison between the percentages of all women, gender onlys and double onlys that face microaggressions in their workplace (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021).

When mothers of young children are the tokens in their workplace, the difficulties they face at their workplace are increased compared to women working with other women (Figure 3.3.9). Mother “only” are far more likely to consider leaving their companies or experience a burnout. They are also more likely to receive judgement when they decide to use the working from home or working nonstandard hours benefits. Mother “only” will also avoid talking to their colleagues about the challenges of motherhood and work balance, leading to lack of support in the workplace.

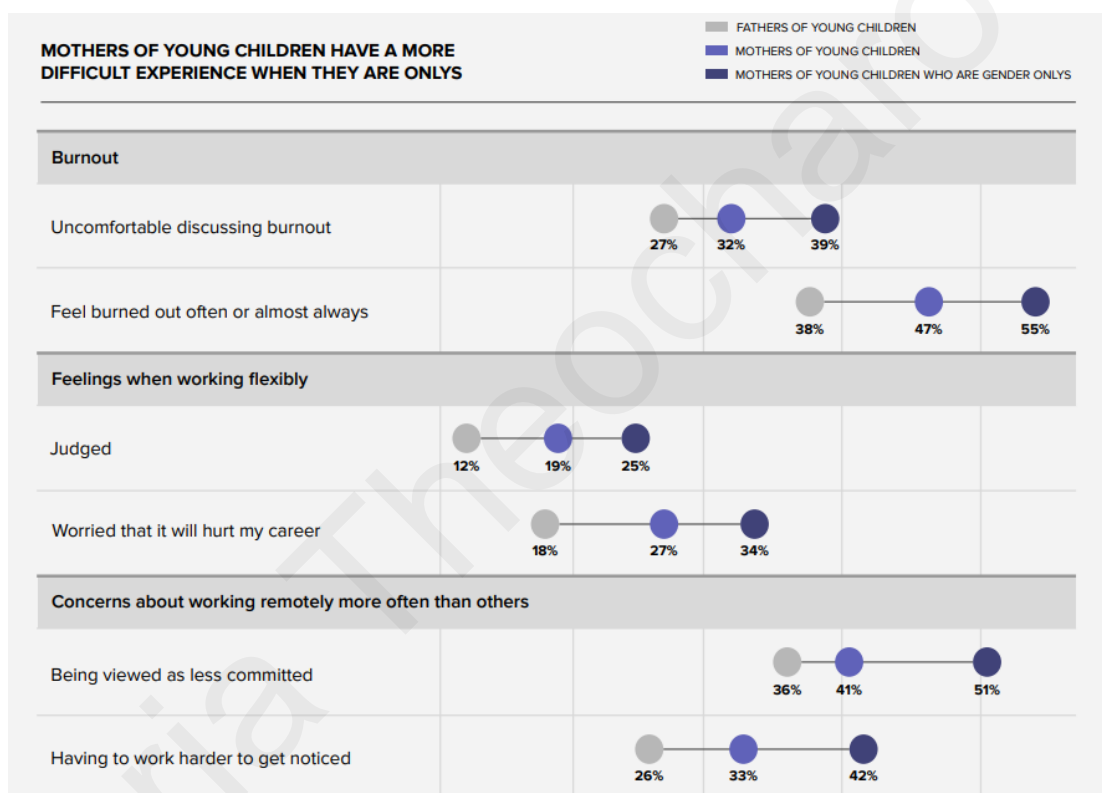


Figure 3.3.9: The graph indicates the comparison of the percentages of the difficult experiences faced by fathers of young children, mothers of young children and mothers of young children who are gender only (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021).

2022 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022)

The first key theme identified as a barrier women face in their advancement are biases as well as lack of support. Women face bias for their gender, race, sexual orientation, a

disability they might have. Women are more likely to report that they received microaggressions at their workplaces. Interestingly enough, there are women who are still getting comments on the way they dress and that they should have an “executive presence” and to dress in a more feminine way (*Figure 3.3.10*).

The next key theme identified was remote working. Although women who work remotely report that they face less bias, less microaggressions and improvement in their mental health, they are more likely get fewer opportunities to advance and be recognised for their work and achievements. Since employees who prefer remote or hybrid working are mostly women (9 out of 10 women do not want to work mostly on-site), they face the possible disadvantage of the loss of promotion and recognition.

Another key theme identified as in previous year’s reports is childcare and housework. Women are responsible for the majority or even all housework and childcare compared to men at the same level. When comparing entry-level employees, women are twice as likely as men to be responsible for all housework and childcare while when comparing senior leadership employees, women are almost 4 times more likely to be responsible for all housework and childcare compared to men in the same level.

				BETTER EXPERIENCE				WORSE EXPERIENCE					
ALL MEN	ALL WOMEN	LGBTQ+ WOMEN ¹⁰	WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES		WHITE WOMEN	ASIAN WOMEN	LATINAS	BLACK WOMEN		WHITE WOMEN	ASIAN WOMEN	LATINAS	BLACK WOMEN
MANAGER SUPPORT³¹													
42%	44%	53%	41%	Manager shows interest in their career	46%	45%	39%	38%		46%	45%	39%	38%
60%	64%	70%	64%	Manager checks in on their well-being	66%	60%	60%	60%		66%	60%	60%	60%
53%	53%	61%	53%	Manager promotes inclusion on their team	55%	52%	48%	47%		55%	52%	48%	47%
SPONSORSHIP AND ALLYSHIP³²													
63%	65%	73%	62%	Has strong allies on team	67%	59%	63%	59%		67%	59%	63%	59%
53%	54%	59%	52%	Senior coworker publicly praised their skills	56%	51%	48%	49%		56%	51%	48%	49%
31%	31%	33%	29%	Senior coworker advocated for a raise for them	33%	24%	27%	23%		33%	24%	27%	23%
MICROAGGRESSIONS³³													
Challenges to competence													
21%	27%	33%	36%	Others get credit for their ideas	27%	25%	24%	26%		27%	25%	24%	26%
24%	31%	39%	47%	Their judgment is questioned	31%	24%	28%	36%		31%	24%	28%	36%
10%	16%	21%	23%	They've been mistaken for someone more junior	16%	15%	16%	19%		16%	15%	16%	19%
Demeaning and "othering"													
5%	7%	9%	8%	Others make assumptions about their culture or nationality	2%	17%	16%	13%		2%	17%	16%	13%
4%	7%	14%	13%	Others comment on their appearance	7%	5%	7%	9%		7%	5%	7%	9%
10%	14%	23%	25%	They've been criticized for their demeanor	15%	9%	14%	18%		15%	9%	14%	18%
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY³⁴													
57%	56%	61%	56%	Don't worry they'll be penalized for mistakes	61%	51%	44%	45%		61%	51%	44%	45%
62%	54%	59%	52%	Feel comfortable disagreeing with coworkers	57%	51%	45%	44%		57%	51%	45%	44%
52%	48%	54%	49%	Rarely feel excluded	52%	44%	39%	37%		52%	44%	39%	37%

Figure 3.3.10: The table indicates the comparison of the percentages of the experiences faced by different groups of employees (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022)

2023 Report (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023)

The first main key theme identified as a barrier in this year's report was the broken rung. The authors claimed that the glass ceiling is not the barrier most women face in their careers but the broken rung. It has been observed for 9 consecutive years that women face difficulties on their progression from entry-level positions to manager level

positions. More specifically, this year “for every 100 men promoted from entry-level to manager, 87 women were promoted” (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023, p. 14). The number of women of colour promoted, was even smaller compares to women this year and to women of colour in 2022’s report: 73 women of colour were promoted from entry-level positions to manager position for every 100 men, compared to 82 women of colour promoted last year. The fact that significantly less women are promoted to the managerial level, creates a gap, leaving a smaller pool of women that would be able to apply for a more senior position later on. The authors identified three observations about the broken rung: broken rung is not created because women are not ambitious enough to ask for promotions, nor they have higher leaving rates, women are more likely to face performance bias because they are hired and promoted based on their previous accomplishments rather than their future potential like men and because of the lower number of women that make it to the managerial positions, there will be less women in the following positions as well, unless the broken rung is fixed.

It has been said that a possible barrier for women is the fact that they do not want to have a career progression. On the contrary, in this year’s report, women have the same desire to be promoted as men, especially when they are at the director level. A significant percentage of younger women are interested in being promoted to the next level, (9 out of 10 younger women) and 3 out of 4 want to pursue a career and become senior leaders. Ambition remains even if women work remotely, in a hybrid mode or flexibly. A significant percentage of 20% of women claim that flexibility increased their intention to stay on the company and maintain their working hours instead of reducing them. Women who have the ability to work hybrid or remotely, report that they are feeling less fatigue, more productive and the feeling of burnout is decreased.

The second key theme identified was microaggressions. Women are more likely to face microaggressions in their workplace. More specifically, they are twice more likely “to be interrupted and hear comments on their emotional state” (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023, p. 17). Microaggressions impact women’s psychological safety and they become more reluctant to share their ideas and concerns. Women facing microaggressions are more likely to be questioned about their judgement and not get credit for their ideas (Figure 3.3.11). Women who face regular microaggressions at their workplaces, are forced to self-shield for their protection. Women tend to change the way they would have behaved in order to face the microaggressions, for example they would avoid talking or they would tone down what they want to say to avoid negative commentary (Figure 3.3.12).

BETTER EXPERIENCE WORSE EXPERIENCE

ALL MEN	ALL WOMEN	LGBTQ+ WOMEN	WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES		WHITE WOMEN	ASIAN WOMEN	LATINAS	BLACK WOMEN
MICROAGGRESSIONS ²⁴								
Challenges to competence								
14%	21%	26%	32%	Others get credit for their ideas	21%	17%	15%	22%
17%	23%	33%	39%	Their judgment is questioned	24%	16%	17%	27%
5%	9%	11%	14%	They've been mistaken for someone more junior	9%	8%	6%	9%
10%	22%	30%	35%	They're interrupted or spoken over more than others	22%	19%	19%	24%
Demeaning and "othering"								
2%	5%	13%	12%	Others comment on their appearance	5%	3%	5%	6%
6%	12%	21%	25%	Others comment on their emotional state	12%	7%	10%	13%
10%	14%	23%	25%	They're criticized for their demeanor ²⁵	15%	9%	14%	18%
2%	4%	6%	6%	They're confused with someone else of the same race/ethnicity	2%	14%	6%	15%
3%	4%	5%	5%	They feel judged because of their accent	2%	7%	10%	8%
5%	7%	8%	9%	Others make assumptions about their culture ²⁶	2%	17%	16%	13%

Figure 3.3.11: The percentages of the different kinds of microaggressions faced by women and men (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023).

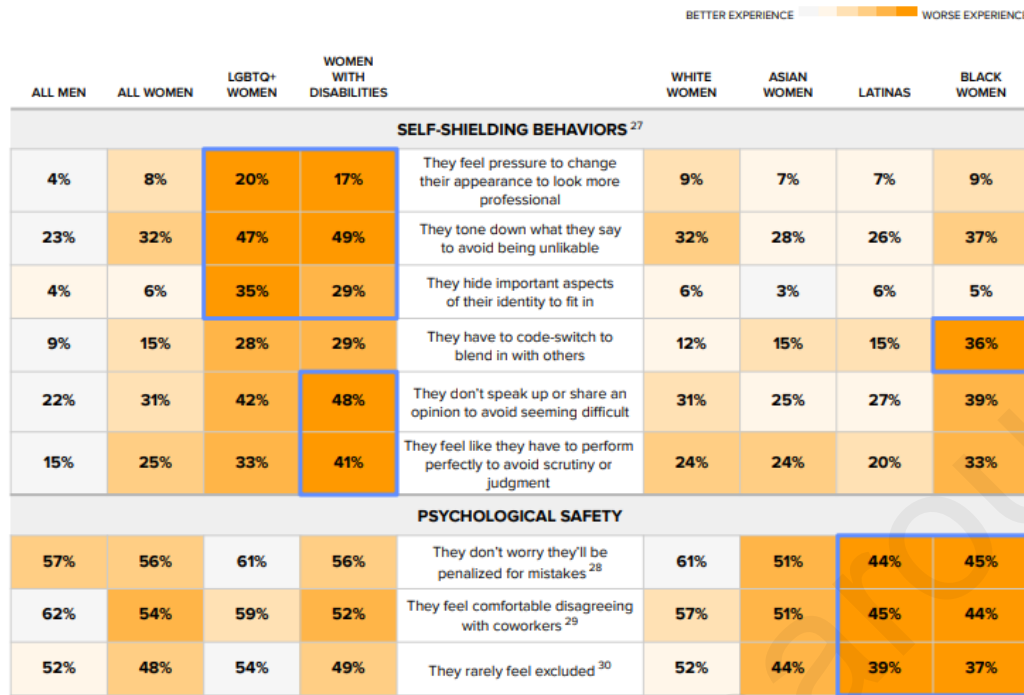


Figure 3.3.12: The percentages of the different kinds of self-shielding behaviours of women and men and the impact of microaggressions in the psychological safety of the employees (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023).

The last key theme identified was flexibility in the workplace. Even though both women and men can benefit from flexibility in the workplace, women are less likely to receive mentorship and sponsorship if they are working remotely compared to men working on-site (Figure 3.3.13). Women working remotely are also less likely to be noticed for their achievements and be rewarded for them compared to if they have worked on-site. Although flexibility is a major benefit for mothers of younger children allowing them to adapt their work schedules accordingly and for women in general since they face less microaggressions and they are feeling more psychological safety, it can potentially harm their careers due to less mentorship available to them. Almost half of the mothers with young children, 38% of them, would have left the company or reduce their working hours if they did not have the flexibility benefit.



Figure 3.3.13: The percentages of women and men who say things are more true on-site than remote or are benefits of on-site work (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023).

4. Discussion

Drawing on the theory about the glass ceiling and on the results from “Women in the Workplace” reports by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org, it is evident that women are still underrepresented in the corporate pipeline and are facing barriers on their career trajectories. Whether those barriers should be identified as a glass ceiling or a broken rung, is something that needs further investigation and discussion.

In order to answer the first research question, the 4 criteria of Cotter et al., (2001) will be used to evaluate the existence of glass ceiling throughout the years of 2015-2023 based on the data from “Women in the Workplace” reports by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

Q1: Does glass ceiling still exist and continues preventing women from acquiring a senior leadership position at their companies in 2023?

According to the 1st criterion: “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.657). This criterion is still applicable based on the available data since in 2017 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017), 37% of women compared to 8% of men stated that “their gender has played a role in missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead”, in 2018 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018), 24% of women agreed with the same statement compared to 8% of men and 25% of women agreed with the statement in 2019 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019). Although the effect of gender seems to decrease over the years, there is still a significant percentage of women who view their gender as a barrier to their career.

Based on the 2nd criterion: “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.658). This criterion is harder to determine whether it is applicable or not. It has been observed that the representation of women in higher levels is lower, but it appears that it is harder for women to reach manager level from entry-level positions while the difficulty, according to the representation, remains at a similar

level when a woman from managerial level position tries to progress all the way up to the C-suite level positions. The representation of women on manager levels and above is very similar across years with slight increases. There seems to be a lower representation of women in C-suite level positions, but it is not that significant when compared to the representation of women in the positions of VP and SVP. More specifically, the representation of women in entry-level positions from 2015 to 2023 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) varies from 45% - 48%, in manager positions from 33% - 41% while the representation of women in C-suite positions varies from 17-28%. This observation suggests that there is increasing difficulty progressing from entry-level to manager level positions and which increases on the progression of women to the following levels. When comparing the representation of women per year (*Figures 3.1.1 – 3.1.9*) the representation of women on VP, SVP and C-suite remain at similar percentages. The gap in the representation of women from entry-level positions to the manager level positions has been identified as a broken rung (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019). Broken rung was evident from 2019 to 2023 and was identified by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn. Organisation as the biggest barrier in a woman's career. This suggests that further investigation should be undertaken to identify whether the broken rung is the main barrier for women progressing instead of the glass ceiling and that the 2nd criterion seems to be partially applicable.

In order to examine the 3rd criterion: "A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels" (Cotter et al., 2001, p.659), the number of entry level women and men as well as the promotion rates and exit rates will be compared.

Women and men are almost equally represented in the entry-level positions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). The changes in the representation of women at the next levels of the corporate pipeline are caused due to the lower promotion rates of women, especially from entry-level positions to manager level positions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) and due to higher leaving rates of women for the years 2020-2023 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

The promotion rates of women are lower when compared to the ones of men and quite similar throughout the years. For every 100 men promoted to manager level, roughly 80 women got promoted at the same level (82 women in 2015, 77 women in 2016, 82 women in 2017, 84 women in 2018, 72 women in 2019, 85 women in 2020, 86 women in 2021, 87 women in 2022 and 87 women in 2023) (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). The promotion rates of women indicate an increase in the last years, but women are not equally promoted yet.

Women were leaving their jobs at similar rates compared to men from 2015 to 2019 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). Covid-19 seems to have increased the burnout of women and their tendency to either leave their jobs or downgrade their careers. In 2020's report, it was the first time that women indicated a higher leaving rate compared to men (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020). The higher leaving rates of women continue in the following reports as well (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021, 2022, 2023). Women report that they are more likely to consider leaving when their work does not have flexible arrangements (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023), to be

able to manage the housework and childcare (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020, 2021), because of burnout (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020, 2021), due to lack of promotion and lack of support (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022), to stop facing microaggressions at the workplace (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022, 2023) and due to being a mother “only” (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021).

The 3rd criterion is partially applicable. Since women were leaving at similar rates with men in 2015-2019 but promoted at lower rates than men, the 3rd criterion applies. It is vague though whether the 3rd criterion is applicable from 2020-2023 since women started leaving their companies at higher rates than men after Covid-19. The promotion rates of women in the next levels of the corporate pipeline should be investigated further to determine whether glass ceiling exists or we are observing a “constant promotion disadvantage for women” (Cotter et al., 2001, p. 660). If the promotion rates of women are similar in the next level promotions e.g. Manager to Senior Manager/Director, Senior Manager/Director to VP etc, then this will be a “constant promotion disadvantage for women” (Cotter et al., 2001, p. 660) and a possible “broken rung” phenomenon (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019) on the promotions of women from entry-level positions to manager level positions.

Regarding the 4th criterion “A glass ceiling inequality represents a gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career” (Cotter et al., 2001, p.661), there should be an increasing possibility of men getting high-status outcome compared to women by increasing the years of experience. This criterion seems to be applicable based on the results gathered from the McKinsey & Company and LeanIn. Organisation, since women view their gender as an inhibitor of their future career (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019).

This analysis leads to the conclusion that there is evidence indicating that glass ceiling might still exist but not all 4 criteria could be completely verified. Further investigation is suggested to examine the gap identified in the promotion rates of women from entry-level positions to manager level positions.

Regarding the 2nd research question, the barriers faced by women who answered in the surveys conducted from McKinsey & Company and LeanIn. Organisation will be compared to the ones found in the literature review.

Q2: What are the barriers women leaders face in their career trajectories at the workplace nowadays? Have the barriers altered or remained the same as the ones identified from literature?

There are a few key barriers identified according to the experiences of the women interviewees. One of them was the fact that women hold line roles up until manager level positions and then they get shifted to staff roles (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016). It has been proved that line roles can progress to the C-suite executive positions, leaving women out of the race for those executive positions (T. W. Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015). Even if women hold line roles they are less likely to be promoted to the C-suite executive positions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015).

Another barrier identified to almost all reports was that women are responsible for all or the vast majority of housework and childcare (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). The majority of women work full time and are still responsible for the lion's share of the household chores and childcare. According to the more recent reports (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023), younger couples are sharing more evenly housework and

younger women are doing less household chores compared to older women. The bias and perception that women who are mothers are not devoted to their jobs can harm the career of mothers (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020).

A significant percentage of women prefers flexible working schedules and hybrid or remote working model in order to be able to balance better work and family (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). Even though flexibility in working hours and hybrid or remote working model is available to all employees there is a bias that mothers who are using this benefit are not devoted to their job and that they are not able to focus both at work and family and be equally productive (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020, 2021). Apart from bias and the perception that mothers who are working flexible are not devoted to their jobs, there is another issue created: lack of mentorship. Women who are working flexible, do not advantage from the mentorship that is available to the employees working on premises and since mentorship is important in their career progress, they harm their careers. Women working remotely do not get feedback as often, do not get involved as much in the decisions and they lack connection to their organization (*Figure 3.3.13*) (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023). Also, they might not be recognised for their achievements (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022).

These results are in agreement with the literature stating that women face a work-family conflict since they are responsible for the majority or even all housework and childcare and because of that they tend to prefer a flexible position or part-time work (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018; Purcell et al., 2010). The same perceptions that Davies-Netzley referred to back in the 1998 still exist: men believe that mothers will not be able to devote the necessary amount of time at work, especially when in a managerial position that comes with great responsibility. It seems like job descriptions still “assume a

disembodied and universal worker” (Acker, 1990, p. 139), that has no other obligations apart from work, which is not true in the case of women.

Women in general seem to have less support and mentorship at their workplace (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2022, 2023). Even though they ask for feedback at the same frequency as their male counterparts, they are less likely to receive it (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016). Women are less likely to receive guidance on how to advance and have less interactions with managers and senior leadership (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017, 2018). These interactions are really important for the advancement of an employee and women are in a tough position by not having access to these (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018). This is in great agreement with the literature stating that women lack of mentoring which can have a significant impact on someone’s career including promotions and salary raises (Lantz-Deaton et al., 2018). Lack of mentorship and recognition seems to still be an issue due to flexible working in the 2 most recent reports (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2022, 2023).

Another barrier identified for women’s advancement was the lack of networking (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). Women had a network that was either a combination of female and male connections while men had a network with mostly male connections. The composition of the network has a significant role in the progress of the employee. It is more likely for men to advance since they have an all-male network (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015). The same trend was observed in 2016 and 2017 and women had the same issue since their networks consisted of mostly female connections but men hold the senior leadership and would have helped them in their career progression (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016, 2017). Women do not have as many interactions with senior

leadership as men. These interactions are helpful with the promotions and can create an aspiration for career growth to the employees (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018). The fact that women lack of a great network and are most probably not going to be recommended for a leadership position, is in agreement with the same observation made by Fitzsimmons et al. (2014).

The experience of women being “Onlys” is in great agreement with the Tokenism theory by Kanter (1977). In a lot of reports, women were the only woman in the room or in the workplace which made it more possible for them to face microaggressions and bias (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Tokens were doubted more compared to other women and had to work harder to prove themselves. They also faced higher scrutiny, they had their abilities doubted and they were more likely to be sexually harassed (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018). Women “Onlys” also had to face higher visibility which is one of the main phenomena related to tokenism according to Kanter (1977) and were perceived as representatives of their gender instead of individuals which was caused by the fact that they were the only women in the room (Kanter, 1977; Konrad et al., 2008; McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018). Women “Onlys” also faced higher pressure to perform, which is associated with the higher visibility token women face (Kanter, 1977; McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2018, 2020). Women “Onlys” had their expertise judged and were more likely to be interrupted while talking or even mistaken for someone at a more junior position (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2019, 2021, 2022). Women “Onlys” were also more likely to receive comments on their emotional state compared to other women (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021). Mother “Onlys” received even more judgement and they were criticized for choosing flexible working (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2021)

Women seemed to have the same aspirations becoming leaders when in entry and middle level, but they had less ambition when in senior levels compared to men at the same levels. Women did not aspire a senior leadership position due to stress and pressure (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2015). Women in 2016's report had again less aspiration to become senior leaders but this time the main reasons were work-family balance and heightened pressure (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016). The low aspiration of women becoming senior leaders continued in 2017 and 2018 as well (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2017, 2018). This changed in this year's report since women have the same desire to be promoted as men, especially when they are at the director's level. Younger women seem to be a lot more ambitious since 9 out of 10 want to be promoted in the next level and 3 out of 4 want to pursue a career and become senior leaders (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023). Lack of ambition seems to not be true for the next generation according to these results, but it certainly impacted the previous generations as stated by Lantz-Deaton et al. (2018).

Gender stereotypes seemed to be evident at the reactions of people when women decided to negotiate on their promotions and salaries. Women were characterised as "intimidating", "too aggressive" or even "bossy" when they decided to negotiate a promotion or a salary increase (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2016, 2017).

These comments can be perceived as evidence of gender stereotypes since the behaviours of aggressiveness, possession of leadership ability, competitiveness, self-confidence, objectivity, ambition, would be more acceptable as male and manager characteristics (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Also, some microaggressions that women face could be linked to gender stereotypes. Such microaggressions can include the perception that women are at a more junior level than their actual level, since women used to have supportive roles to males (Haile et al., 2016), having others commenting

on your emotional state, since according to gender stereotypes women are more emotional (T. W. Fitzsimmons et al., 2014).

The barriers that a woman faces remained the same at a certain degree. The reports did not contain any information about glass cliff and childhood experiences as potential barriers to a woman's career trajectory. The weight of the barriers has shifted from the lack of network and lack of ambition to higher degrees of microaggressions women face, and scrutiny on the fact that they use flexible working arrangements in order to be able to balance work and family obligations. Also, the broken rung should be further investigated as a potential barrier at a woman's career since it seems that it has a significant effect on the number of women that can reach the senior leadership positions.

5. Limitations

This Thesis was based on already available data about corporate America, therefore no customisations were able to be done in order to get additional information to further support certain arguments that could be found in the literature. The fact that the data available were collected from companies in America may not reflect the situation in companies in Europe and specifically in Cyprus but they can be used as a good estimation of the current situation on the glass ceiling, barriers and experiences women face in their working environment.

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