Working Paper

Unravelling the Glass Ceiling Phenomenon Using Critical Hermeneutics

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ABSTRACT

The glass-ceiling phenomenon is a well-discussed topic in gender research under management studies. However, the phenomenon had been captured in research using mostly quantitative research designs. Even though few papers had used qualitative designs, they were increasingly limited to interviews, analyzing archival data, ethnographic studies and case studies. This paper attempts to unfold the glass-ceiling phenomenon by employing critical hermeneutics, an interesting methodology used for textual interpretations in the interpretive paradigm. Three books had been chosen for this study, all authored by women leaders of reputed organizations. Hermeneutics had been performed on the texts of these books by placing them in the broader social context of workplace gender discrimination. Excerpts from these books had been matched to understand the deeper meaning of the superficial words. No study had previously employed this method to analyze the glass-ceiling phenomenon. The limitations and future research directions had also been discussed.

Keywords: glass-ceiling, gender discrimination, gender inequality, critical hermeneutics.

INTRODUCTION

In a male-dominated business environment, it is unfortunate that many women had been forced to consider ambition to be a "dirty" word. Gender-discrimination is a grave issue in many organizations. Discrimination comes in terms of pay, position and also prestige associated with such positions. In this paper, we attempted to capture this gender based inequalities as precisely

as possible. Although several forms of gender discrimination are prevalent in organizations, like the *sticky-floor effect, glass-ceiling effect, glass-cliff effect* etc., we have focused on the glass-ceiling effect alone in this study. The glass-ceiling phenomenon explains the invisible barrier that every woman needs to break to reach the upper echelon of the corporate hierarchy. This paper aims to unravel the puzzle pieces of the glass-ceiling phenomenon using *critical hermeneutics* – a fascinating methodology in the interpretive paradigm.

The paper has been divided into the following sections – the literature review section that speaks of the broader social context, followed by the methodology section that elaborately describes *critical hermeneutics* – the method used in this study, after which comes the data that has been used in the analysis and finally, the discussion section, which is the primary focus in the paper.

The literature review section of the paper attempts to break out all parts of the *glass-ceiling phenomenon* puzzle. This phenomenon forms the central context of this study and thus, it is elemental to put forward all facets of this effect that had already been explored in previous researches. These puzzle pieces had been matched with the eleven excerpts identified from three books authored by three prominent women leaders – Stella Rimmington, former Director-General of MI5, Sheryl Sandberg, the current Chief Operating Officer of Facebook and Cecile Richards, the former President of Planned Parenthood. All the three ladies had been able to break through the invisible glass-ceiling above them and had, in turn, became inspirations for thousands of other ambitious women who desire to be victorious in their professional life. Also, each of these three women were leaders in their respective organizations at three different points in time. Thus, the experiences Rimmington had in her initial days of work in 1968 had been found to be very different from what Sandberg and Cecile Richards had said in their books. Richards had drawn massive inspiration from her mother. This study has an implicit indication of this time-variant social development. Also, this study is the first to use *critical*

hermeneutics as a methodology to unravel the various facets of the glass-ceiling effect and link it to texts authored by women leaders. In that way, it is a novel attempt to enrich the already existing literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A glass ceiling phenomenon is a distinctive form of inequality that impedes women and ethnic minorities' advancement in a corporate environment. Extensive research has shown that an invisible glass ceiling exists above women and minorities in their professional world. What makes such a form of discrimination unique is that it exists more prominently at higher levels of occupation (Maume, 2004). Discrimination is made not only based on gender alone but also on the basis of race and ethnicity. For the purpose of this paper, we shall discuss the glass ceiling phenomenon pertaining to gender discrimination only. Existing empirical studies have shown that the existence of the glass ceiling is not specific to any culture or nation but is a problem faced by women worldwide – be it in Uruguay (Bukstein & Gandelman, 2019), Lebanon (Harb & Rouhana, 2020), Italy (Castagnetti & Giorgetti, 2019), Korea (Cho, Lee, & Jung, 2014), Spain (Scicchitano, 2014), Japan (Chiang & Ohtake, 2014), Morocco (Nordman & Wolff, 2009), Canada (Chênevert & Tremblay, 2002), Germany (Hannan, Schomann, & Hans-Peter, 1990), China (Chi & Li, 2008) and even in the U.S. labor market (Le & Miller, 2010).

While the existence of discrimination has been widespread and evident, it is interesting to explore the cause of such gender inequality in the corporate environment. Surprisingly, most of the gender differences had primarily been seen to stay unexplained in many pieces of research (Khitarishvili, 2019). The main observable characteristics were insufficient to explain the gender discrimination in organizations(Sohn, 2015). This unexplained part also accelerates as one moves up the earning distribution curve (Sohn, 2015). What seems fascinating is that

even a rise in education only impacts productivity and not the wage cost for women (Kampelmann, Rycx, Saks, & Tojerow, 2018). Thus the gender pay gap that persists even with a rise of education speaks for the glass-ceiling effect faced by women in a situation that apparently seems to be reducing the discrimination. Some studies highlight that gender inequality exists fundamentally because of gender-specific human capital (Tverdostup & Paas, 2017) requirements of firms and labor-market characteristics (Barnet-Verzat & Wolff, 2008) of an industry. Thus it is the characteristic of the occupation that creates such gender discrimination. On the contrary, few researchers saw that the gender gap is mainly due to differences in observed characteristics rather than the differential characteristics between men and women (Jellal, Nordman, & Wolff, 2008). Several researchers have seen strong evidence of promotion bias in firms, especially at the upper levels of occupations (Auster & Prasad, 2016). Surprisingly, specific organizations' promotion strategies were radically different for men and women (Sabatier, 2010). A significant driver of such bias is also a high degree of the perceived magnitude of ideological asymmetry(Auster & Prasad, 2016), a lesser degree of masculine cultural preference (Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002), meta-stereotypical behaviors (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2013), variations in the relative economic status of women (B. J. Newman, 2016), gender-related effects of self-monitoring (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002) and gender-specific self-conceptions (Cech, 2013). Also, productivity-related characteristics (Ge, Li, & Zhang, 2011) and even motherhood (Dambrin & Lambert, 2008) & childcare (Månsson, Elg, & Jonnergård, 2013) sometimes speak for the gender differentials and promotion bias at the upper echelon of the corporate ladder. Bosses often defer women employees' promotions as they happen to have a preconception that women will suffer from higher work-life conflict (Hoobler, J. M., Wayne, S. J., & Lemmon, 2009). Women are given fewer promotions than their male counterparts in the upper occupational levels and mostly women leaders are hired and less promoted in firms (Lyness & Judiesch, 1999). Lack of social

support from their male colleagues and paucity of mentoring and networking opportunities also strengthens the glass-ceiling, making it altogether challenging to break (Cohen, Dalton, Holder-Webb, & McMillan, 2020). Women perceive lower return to their job-experience, job-tenure and education (Xiu & Gunderson, 2014). Research has shown that women's job satisfaction even starts decreasing at higher-level management positions (Lup, 2018). When seen in congregational leadership, the nature of the invisible glass-ceiling, unlike in traditional organizations, is purely religious that blocks a woman from ascending to the top of the leadership position, a phenomenon called "stained glass-ceiling" (Adams, 2007). Similarly, in political organizations, the party's ideological nature and the socio-economic development of women in a society impact the number of women leaders in the parliament (Reynolds, 1999).

It often seems that women who had been able to break this invisible glass-ceiling create a cascading effect that can make life easier for their predecessors in the firm (Dowd, Liddle, & Blyler, 2005). However, it is not always the case. Previous research has seen that women leaders who engage in such diversity-valuing activities are negatively rewarded with worse performance ratings (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017). Such a penalty discourages women leaders from bringing a change they wish to create in the organization. However, diverse decision-makers surely increase the *possibility* of women being promoted to a leadership position (Cook & Glass, 2014b). A primary way of reducing such gender discrimination is transparent firm policies regarding accurate and realistic performance feedback availability (Snyder, Verderber, Langmeyer, & Myers, 1992). An increase in institutional status also plays an essential role in reducing gender inequality (Blevins, Sauerwald, Hoobler, & Robertson, 2019). A woman's career expectation and work-family balance influence her career advancement and commitment towards the organization (Liu, Shen, & Gao, 2020). More family-friendly policies (Smith, Smith, & Verne, 2011) (Datta Gupta, Smith, & Verner, 2008) and work-life human resource practices (Dreher, 2003) in an

organization are thus negatively correlated with the gender gap in a firm's upper tier. There is no way one can disagree that career interruptions are more prominent in a woman's professional life. Research has even explored how a male partner's working hours negatively impact a woman's promotion probabilities (Baerts, Deschacht, & Guerry, 2011). It is alarming when research shows that most male colleagues are oblivious that their female colleagues face discrimination. There are two possible consequences of this ignorance – either the male employees engage themselves in benevolent sexism after becoming aware of the existence of gender discrimination, or they continue with their egocentric bias (Hernandez, 2018). Neither of these actions reduces gender inequality; instead, such behavior only adds fuel to the fire. Thus, more than institutional and social support, well-drafted national and international policies should be implemented if the motive is to reduce the gender-gap in firms (Windsor & Auyeung, 2006). Again, policies like Equal Employment Opportunities (M. A. Newman, 1996) and gender-quotas (Bertrand, Black, Jensen, & Lleras-Muney, 2019) are less likely to achieve the purpose of reducing gender-bias as the discrimination that is although prominent throughout the wage distribution, faces the problem of "swimming upstream," i.e., the differentials are amplified at the higher-earning levels. Such policies, at times, legitimizes the gender-discrimination (Brown & Diekman, 2013). Thus, a segmented equity or block equity can only mitigate this gender-gap.

The problem does not end at once when a woman successfully moves beyond this glass-ceiling. Such women leaders often land up in precarious leadership positions when the firm faces a crisis (Morgenroth, Kirby, Ryan, & Sudkämper, 2020) or the firm is showing a weak performance (Cook & Glass, 2014) - a phenomenon termed as the *glass-cliff effect*. But not every time things are so gloomy. Research has also proved that women outperform men when promoted to a leadership position in an organization. A firm's efficiency has been seen to increase in companies (Garcia-Blandon, Argilés-Bosch, & Ravenda, 2019), and such

organizations led by women executives tend to become more ethical (Luo, Peng, & Zhang, 2020).

Interestingly, the glass-ceiling phenomenon that is undoubtedly detrimental to women's professional lives is advantageous to their male colleagues. This entire issue creates a *glass-escalator* for men moving up the corporate hierarchy (Maume, 1990). However, if a firm succeeds in breaking this glass-ceiling effect for women employees, other problems like sexual harassment and sexism are expected to decrease simultaneously (Bell, McLaughlin, & Sequeira, 2002). It will also decrease the perceived gender-inequality in firms while increasing women's job satisfaction at top-management positions (Semykina & Linz, 2013).

The above discussion gives an overarching idea of the glass-ceiling phenomenon. Evidence from previous researches had shown the widespread presence of this effect across firms. We intend to perform critical hermeneutics by employing this idea of glass-ceiling as the study's core context. We wish to make it very clear at the outset that we accept that the glass-ceiling phenomenon exists in organizations. This acceptance can be considered to be our presumption while performing critical hermeneutics.

METHODOLOGY

We used critical hermeneutics to unveil the glass ceiling effect faced by women in their professional environment. Hermeneutics is identified as a tool for performing methodological analysis of various forms of texts. It is often equated to the philosophical concept of *verstehen,* thus indicating subjective comprehension (Habermas, 1972). The linguistic roots of hermeneutics is in the Greek word *hermeneutikos* that means to make the obscure more obvious employing explanation and clarification of texts (Bauman, 1978). Prasad (2017) pointed out that the hermeneutic tradition has immense potential to provide researchers a robust tool to

comprehend the organizations and management's complexities. Yet, it has remained a heavily unexploited tool in the interpretive tradition (Prasad, 2017).

The philosophical underpinning of hermeneutics is majorly concerned with authentic textual interpretation. It attempts to bring out the actual message or *spirit* of a text (Prasad, 2017). As had been put forward by Dilthey (1976), a text, besides being just an author's product, is also an outcome of the author's broader cultural context. Thus it becomes imperative to interpret a text by linking it to the broader context from which it has originated. On the other hand, Gadamer (1960) emphasized the interpretation process, where he had mentioned about prejudices that become unavoidable preconditions of interpretation. He calls for a productive prejudice of interpreters over the unproductive ones (Gadamer, 1960). The primary aim is to close the gap between an interpreter and the context in which the author wrote the original text, thus aiming for a *fusion of horizon* (Gadamer, 1960). This understanding was taken in a critical direction by Habermas (1990) & Ricoeur (1971; 1991), wherefrom the term *critical hermeneutics* first emerged. The method of *critical hermeneutics* is concerned with the unveiling of power relations and domination that forms a fundamental essence of the formation of texts (Prasad, 2017). The principal intention of this methodology of critical hermeneutics is to proceed beyond the text's superficial appearances to unwrap the proper understanding of what lies beneath the cursory text (Habermas, 1990).

We have used this method of *critical hermeneutics* to "read" the texts presented by women executives to put forward the discrimination they faced while moving up the corporate ladder. We aim to analyze the words put forward by women leaders in the backdrop of the glass ceiling phenomenon that acts as the context in this study. This phenomenon of glass-ceiling had been shown by previous researches to be gloriously evident in various organizations around the globe. For this purpose, we chose the original writings of three women executives who were at the upper echelon of various reputed organizations at different times. This critical analysis will

help us understand the presence of the invisible glass-ceiling and the stance of successful women executives towards this gender discrimination in firms.

We chose three books for this study – "*Open Secret: The Autobiography of the Former Director-General of MI5"*, by Stella Rimmington; "*Make Trouble: Standing Up, Speaking Out, and Finding the Courage to Lead--My Life Story"*, by Cecile Richards; "*Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead"*, by Sheryl Sandberg & Nell Scovell. We intend to analyze the writings of these women leaders in their original forms. This intention became the primary rationale for choosing books authored by the women executives themselves rather than other textual materials, like newspaper articles, magazine articles, blogs etc. which are often edited by the writers of the text.

The method of critical hermeneutics was applied to analyze the authors' texts in these books. Such analysis intends to unveil deeper meanings and uncover underlying realities of the cursory texts in the context of the glass-ceiling phenomenon. The next section of the paper puts forward the excerpts of the books that had been used to perform the critical analysis. The analysis attempted to close the *hermeneutic circle* by building a linkage between these excerpts and the glass-ceiling effect discussed in the literature review section of the paper. Positioning the excerpts from the three books into the glass-ceiling phenomenon theory provided a deeper understanding of the authors' real intentions. Such detailed scrutiny essentially fulfilled the purpose of this study.

DATA

The data chosen for this study are excerpts from books authored by the women leaders themselves, which will enhance the trustworthiness of the study. We went through all the three books and had chosen excerpts that can be best used for this study.

Book 1: "Open Secret: The Autobiography of the Former Director-General of MI5"

Authored by the former Director-General of MI5, Stella Rimmington, this book provides a clear picture of gender discrimination in the late 20th century. She joined MI5 in 1968 as Junior Assistant Officer despite having the necessary degree and experience to be recruited as an officer. The book is an excellent documentary on her journey of breaking the glass-ceiling and become the first lady in the organization to hold the Director General's post. MI5 is the U.K.'s security agency operating as the Secret Intelligence service of the nation. Rimmington held the position of Director General of MI5 from 1992-1996, a time when not many women were seen at the executive position in organizations. In this book, we find minute details of her professional as well as her personal life, which made it even more clear that it is far less easy than what one thinks for a woman to "balance" home, family and career. We chose five excerpts from the book to unveil the discrimination faced by women employees in the late 20th century.

Text A: "I felt like a real outsider. I could not quite see how or where I was going to fit into this very curious set-up. It was indeed, as the recruitment process had made clear, unashamedly male-dominated. The men were the 'officers' and the women were the 'other ranks' in military parlance, and there were still quite strong military overtones …….. not much regard was paid to your qualifications or ability if you were a woman. The nearest the women got to the sharp end of things in those days was as support officers to the men who were running the agents." (Rimmington, 2011)

Text B: "But I don't think it ever occurred to my male colleagues that they were discriminating against us and in those days it was not really questioned inside the

Service. And to be fair to them, even I, coming in from the outside, did not question it at first.” (Rimmington, 2011)

Text C: “I had already started to feel disgruntled about my second-class status. By then, I knew enough about the Service and the people in it to know that I was just as capable as many of the men, if not more, and I resented being given less responsible work to do and above all being paid less than they were. I couldn’t stand working for people who were less competent than I was…..The last straw for me came one day when a nice young man arrived in my section to share my office. He had just come down from university, with a BA in something or another and he was about twenty-three. He had been recruited as an officer. There was I, having been in the Service already for three or four years, having previously had a career in another profession, aged thirty-seven or thirty-eight and still only an assistant officer.” (Rimmington, 2011)

Text D: “I waited until it was the time for my annual interview with my personnel officer and I took the opportunity to ask what was the reason that prevented me from being an officer……. ……I do not think it had ever occurred to him that a woman might want to become an officer in MI5. He certainly had no idea that I was nurturing a grievance. After all, no doubt the women he knew stayed at home and did the flowers, so why was this woman, who had already broken all known conventions by returning to work with a baby, now demanding to be treated as if she were a man?

He muttered about all the things one could not do as a woman, which made one less than wholly useful." (Rimmington, 2011)

Text E: "At this stage it did not occur to me to look for another job. I was focused on trying to break through the glass ceiling of the job I had and that involved persuading the men in charge to let me try my hand at agent-running, despite the fact that no woman in MI5 had ever done that work. The first response I got from my bosses was a delaying tactic……. Eventually, when both the Director of the Counterespionage Branch and the Assistant Director in charge of the agent section were less conservative and more open minded than others had been, the barriers fell. I was posted to the 'joint section'as it was called, trying to recruit human sources of information on some of the Warsaw Pact countries. I was delighted with this." (Rimmington, 2011)

Book 2: "Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead"

Authored by the current Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, the book is indeed a must-read for all women who wish to be leaders in their professional life. She claims that this book is neither a memoir nor a self-help book and is equally directed towards men as it is towards women. Sandberg had been a prominent leader in Google before she was appointed by Zuckerberg in 2008 for the position of COO of Facebook. She had been remarkable in her professional life and has brought good fortune to the organization. Throughout the book, in several instances, she has put forward why women are still struggling to reach the top of the corporate ladder and also has attempted to provide precise solutions and

directions. The following three excerpts from the book bring forward the gender discrimination that, according to her, women need to cope against in any organization.

Text F: "There's no doubt that women have the skills to lead in the workplace. Girls are increasingly outperforming boys in the classroom, earning about 57 percent of the undergraduate and 60 percent of the master's degrees in the United States.This gender gap in academic achievement has even caused some to worry about the "end of men."But while compliant, raise-your-hand-and-speak-when-called-on behaviors might be rewarded in school, they are less valued in the workplace. Career progression often depends upon taking risks and advocating for oneself—traits that girls are discouraged from exhibiting. This may explain why girls' academic gains have not yet translated into significantly higher numbers of women in top jobs. The pipeline that supplies the educated workforce is chock-full of women at the entry level, but by the time that same pipeline is filling leadership positions, it is overwhelmingly stocked with men." (Sandberg,2013)

Text G: "The gender stereotypes introduced in childhood are reinforced throughout our lives and become self-fulfilling prophesies. Most leadership positions are held by men, so women don't expect to achieve them, and that becomes one of the reasons they don't. The same is true with pay. Men generally earn more than women, so people expect women to earn less. And they do. Compounding the problem is a social-psychological phenomenon called "stereotype threat." Social scientists have observed that when members of a group are made aware of a negative stereotype, they are more likely to perform according to that stereotype……. … For women, feeling like a fraud is a symptom of a greater problem. We consistently underestimate

ourselves. Multiple studies in multiple industries show that women often judge their own performance as worse than it actually is, while men judge their own performance as better than it actually is." (Sandberg,2013)

Text H: "I believe this bias is at the very core of why women are held back. It is also at the very core of why women hold themselves back. For men, professional success comes with positive reinforcement at every step of the way……….I have seen this dynamic play out over and over. When a woman excels at her job, both male and female coworkers will remark that she may be accomplishing a lot but is "not as well-liked by her peers." She is probably also "too aggressive," "not a team player," "a bit political," "can't be trusted," or "difficult." At least, those are all things that have been said about me and almost every senior woman I know………..This experiment supports what research has already clearly shown: success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women.3 When a man is successful, he is liked by both men and women. When a woman is successful, people of both genders like her less. This truth is both shocking and unsurprising: shocking because no one would ever admit to stereotyping on the basis of gender and unsurprising because clearly we do." (Sandberg,2013)

Book 3: "Make Trouble: Standing Up, Speaking Out, and Finding the Courage to Lead-My Life Story"

Authored by Cecile Richards, an American activist and the former President of Planned Parenthood, this book directs ambitious women to stand up and gather the courage to speak up

for their rights. She held the President's position from 2008 to 2018 at Planned Parenthood that is a non-profit organization based out of the U.S., which provides reproductive health care to women globally. The book includes Richards's life struggles and her advice to women to put forward unhesitantly their demands for equal rights and privileges. We found the following three excerpts from the book to be most appropriate for this study.

Text I: *"If there's one common theme that runs throughout my life, it's strong, kick-ass women. My grandmothers, each in their own very different ways, were tough and pioneering. My mother broke the mold. And at every job I've ever had, I've tried to work for someone who could teach me something—and more often than not, that someone has been a woman. For all of these inspiring women, it wasn't as if the world just threw open the door and invited them in. Each one has been a disrupter in one way or another. They've made trouble, broken the rules, and challenged authority."* (Richards, 2018)

Text J: *"Then there was the conversation about a job in Washington where my future employer said, "I know you have three kids at home, so maybe you just want to work part-time?" "Nope," I replied, "I need this job, and my husband and I are both working full-time." It wasn't until later that I found out my "progressive" employer was paying my male colleague, working the same job, nearly twice what I was earning. Why didn't I think enough of myself to raise hell at the time?........ ... .Now the floodgates are open. Women are talking publicly about subjects that were once off- limits, and refusing to tolerate the sexual assault and harassment that have been accepted for far too long and there's no going back. As Mom used to say, "You can't unring a bell." It shouldn't be up to women to dismantle the patriarchy, but we can't*

sit around and hope someone else does it either. Feminist is not a passive label; it means speaking out and standing up for women everywhere, and also for yourself. One woman calling out an injustice is powerful enough; when we raise our voices together, we can shake the status quo to its foundation." (Richards, 2018)

Text K: "Standing in that health center in Sarasota, I was witnessing something incredible: the extraordinary power of women reaching across generations to link arms and fight together. Women who never imagined becoming activists are standing alongside fiercely determined women young enough to be their granddaughters. In times like these, it's not enough to pass the torch. It's going to take all of us—the trailblazers, the leaders of tomorrow, and all the troublemakers in between—to light the way forward. The future is ours to shape, and that fills me with hope." (Richards, 2018)

All the above texts will be used in the subsequent section to link it back to the puzzle pieces unfolded in the glass-ceiling effect literature.

DISCUSSION

We aim to close the *hermeneutic circle* in this section by establishing a linkage between the texts and the broad context – the glass ceiling phenomenon. All three books had given ample evidence of the gender-discrimination that exists in organizations.

The excerpt in *Text A* from Stella Rimmington's autobiography shows how much the workplace had been heavily male-dominated in 1968 when she first joined MI5. Despite having enough experience and qualifications, she was not recruited for a post that she deserved; instead, she was given just a support role in the organization. The only rationale for this differential treatment was that she was a woman and hence deserved less pay and less responsible position than any man having the same degree and experience as her. A strong evidence of *sticky-floor effect* is visible in this case. The difference in pay structure and position between the male and female employees in an organization also shows what is said in the literature to be less return to education and experience for women. Indeed it was more pronounced at the time when Rimmington had joined the firm.

Text B indicates that the male employees in the organization clearly were unaware of the existence of gender discrimination. It reflects the egocentric bias that exists among people in a male-dominated environment. When Rimmington says that she herself, at that point in time, never questioned the gender discrimination happening in the organization, it also indicates the meta stereotype mentioned in the literature. Such self-acceptance of a lower grade than men in an organization equally reflects gender-specific self-conceptions within women at a workplace.

Although there happened to be substantial gender inequality in an organization, not all women raised their voices against such differential treatment. Breaking the glass-ceiling only happens when women at a workplace first realize that there indeed exists an invisible barrier in their path towards the top of the corporate hierarchy. As can be seen in *Text C,* Rimmington speaks about a tremendous promotion bias that was prominently present in the firm. She has mentioned how the promotion factors were weirdly different for men and women working under the same roof. Such a biased attitude of the then management made her more frustrated. Her frustration towards the authority can be well spotted in *Text C,* where she unhesitantly mentioned that she was extremely dissatisfied with her second-class status in the organization. This undoubtedly

indicates the increasing job-dissatisfaction among the ambitious women workforce in the late 20th century. Such lack of low reward characteristics discourages many women even from dreaming about being leaders in any firm. Such a demotivated workforce makes the glass-ceiling even more robust and rigid, which becomes more challenging to break. Here comes the need to question the authority and raise voices against gender discrimination. It is only after that the barrier fell for even Rimmington. Her question to the personnel officer, as can be seen in *Text D,* compelled even the authority to introspect their promotion policies. The personnel officer at the meeting was utterly taken aback by the mere expectations of a woman. As Rimmington mentions, never before had any woman asked the officer such a question regarding promotion. It took the officer a few minutes to frame an appropriate answer for her. Also, in this particular excerpt, where Rimmington said, *"why was this woman, who had already broken all known conventions by returning to work with a baby, now demanding to be treated as if she were a man?"* it becomes quite clear why in literature motherhood had been said to be a major barrier in a woman's professional life. This also prompts the question of increased work-life conflict in a woman's life. This thought frequently emerges in the employers' minds before putting in a woman's name for promotion – mostly if she happens to be associated with childcare.

It is never easy for women to break through the glass ceiling in the workplace. She needs to prove herself much more than her fellow male colleagues in order to get the same promotion. This has been said by Rimmington in *Text E,* where she says how finally her supervisors agreed to give her a promotion. This indicates that more open-minded people will only be able to help women break through the invisible barrier. It can also be well connected to *Text I,* where Cecile Richards says that it never happened that the world had just thrown open its doors for women. It truly takes a fair amount of struggle for women to break-through the glass-ceiling in the workplace. Only real troublemakers can reduce the issue of gender discrimination in the long

run. Therefore, it is essential to question the so-called "normal" rules of patriarchy to bring equality both in the workplace and society. In her book, Richards had made this point continuously, asking women to become activists and speak out for their rights. As can be seen in *Text J* that since it's no longer a secret that gender discrimination does happen in organizations, it is essential that all women raise their voices and break the glass ceiling not only for them but for all their predecessors. Nothing can be more fortunate if the entire glass-ceiling concept is crashed down to debris in the near future. For this, women of all ages need to come together and "create trouble" to disrupt the apparent normal. The call for more female activists can be seen in Richard's book and also has been put forward in *Text K*. Women of all generations are required to come arm in arm and speak aloud until the muscular walls of patriarchy get entirely shattered. As has been shown in *Text F* by Sandberg, one thing that needs to be comprehended is that it is not the abilities of women that are lacking, but the inability of women to speak out is what increases the inequality in an organization. It is thus important to first break the strong beliefs regarding women's inferior self-conceptions and only then will they be able to raise their voices. Women need to move beyond gender-specific self-monitoring behaviors.

Sandberg had put forward in her book and can also be seen in *Text G-* women tend to have a more external locus of control and men more internal locus of control. Even when given to do self-evaluations, men tend to evaluate themselves more favorably than women. Such gender-specific differences indeed exist, but the problem arises when women unconsciously give in to patriarchal bargaining. There are fewer women leaders because the society had convinced women that they do not have the ability to lead and women had accepted that. Also, the male-dominated workplace does not want women to speak out and women who speak are negatively rewarded. This becomes a primary reason why in literature, we find that the Equal Employment opportunity scheme cannot necessarily solve the problem. The issue of gender-discrimination

increases as one moves up the corporate ladder where more command is required for a person holding a position. As in a patriarchal environment, it is not desirable that women raise their voices; it becomes quite self-explanatory why the glass-ceiling phenomenon exists altogether.

But not all blame should be given to the males in the workplace that they alone create discrimination. This has been very nicely explained in the experiment of Howard and Heidi and had been discussed by Sandberg in her book. For women, success and likeability are negatively correlated, unlike men, which makes the situation more tensed. What is said as "A woman in another woman's biggest enemy" is another reason why the concept of the glass-ceiling phenomenon is probably still being discussed heavily. It says that even with more women leaders on board, the problem won't get solved for the other women. This had been captured in *Text H* and it indeed brings sad news. However, if analyzed carefully, the reason behind this is the acceptance of women that men are better and more capable leaders. It is because women had been made to believe that men are stronger in every field of life. Hence, when a woman starts leading, it comes as a surprise to both the genders and they tend to like her less for breaking the conventional rules of the society. This worsens the condition and strengthens the big stumbling block that lies in a woman's professional life. It will require women to stand together and break this status quo. Instead of fighting against each other, women need to fight against the whole system of patriarchy in order to bring equality.

To all the three women leaders whose work had been discussed here, there are two major ways to reduce gender discrimination in the workplace. Firstly, making people of both genders aware in the first place that there indeed exists discrimination, and secondly, by raising their voices against biases. Only more women in leadership positions can break the invisible barrier for all other women aspiring to be corporate leaders. What is evident in all the three books is that when a woman breaks the glass-ceiling for herself, it should have a ripple effect and weaken the barrier that lies over all other women in the organization.

This section attempted to link the excerpts back to the glass-ceiling phenomenon theory – completing the *hermeneutic circle*. It can be seen that each book and each author who remain inspirations to all ambitious women across the globe had spoken about gender discrimination in the workplace. It is also interesting to see how each book, mostly life-stories of the three women leaders, had discretely addressed each puzzle piece laid open in the literature review section. As hermeneutics ask to link the apparent text to the broader social context in which the author is writing, this study does the same. It successfully links the texts in the books authored by the women leaders of reputed organizations to their broader social milieu, i.e., the glass ceiling effect experienced by each ambitious woman in her workplace.

CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination is a social evil that women still face in the 21st century. However, change is happening, although gradually. As can be clearly seen in this study itself, the discrimination that Rimmington said to have experienced in her initial days of work was way more than what Sandberg experienced in her time. Things have certainly changed over time and it is women who had brought this change – all by raising their voices and questioning the standard rules of the authority that look normal only superficially.

Previous research had unfolded several facets of this inequality but had never used *critical hermeneutics* to unravel the puzzle pieces of gender discrimination in the workplace. As seen in this study, all three women leaders whose work had been used had faced discrimination in their respective organizations. The apparent words they used in their books had more profound meanings and contained more agony than what it looks to have appeared. The puzzle-solving phenomenon should not end here. We call for more studies in the future to use this methodology. Employing critical hermeneutics on company policies can uncover the outlook of organizations and their top management. Future research can look upon the gender-

discrimination by interviewing the male employees of a firm and capturing their perspective on this issue. Also, the economic benefit of reducing gender inequality can be an interesting area for future study.

This study, which is essentially a qualitative analysis, certainly suffers from a lack of generalizability issues. It cannot and should not be said that all organizations have gender-discrimination problems prevalent. However, we attempted to make the study strongly credible by using books authored by women leaders themselves. This also worked towards the triangulation of data sources. The other limitation can be that we have used only three books. We intend to perform hermeneutics on more books as well as other textual materials in future studies. Lastly, we had initially entered into the analysis process with a presumption that gender-discrimination exists within firms. Although this is a fundamental axiom in hermeneutics, many can consider this as our limitation.

It is no news that women face more career interruptions than men in the corporate world. Policies of organizations and attitudes of fellow employees should be tailored accordingly to support women through their topsy-turvy ride of life. Many firms and several top management had now been looking into this issue seriously. There are many things humankind is doing right, but there are things that can be done better. We sincerely hope this study helps both genders understand the issue of discrimination better and help them in their endeavour towards the reduction of such inequality.

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