

# GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MANAGEMENT. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES\*

Felicia Cornelia MACARIE  
Octavian MOLDOVAN

## Abstract

This paper reviews the permanently expanding literature on gender discrimination in management, focusing on women in decision making positions from both the public and private sphere. Different psychological mechanisms (such as stereotyping, attribution or equity), that are not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather complementary, determine individual manifestations in the form of discrimination (ranging from formal to informal, covert to overt and so on) against females. As a result, women are either underrepresented in top management (under normal conditions) or overrepresented in risky managerial positions (in periods of organizational crisis or downturn).

Furthermore, even in the limited number of sectors where women represent more than half of the labor force (such as nursing, primary education or social services) men have better odds of being promoted, due to formal or informal assistance received from mentors of the same gender. Albeit rather incremental shifts toward a better representation of women in decision making positions can be observed in the last decades, both statistical and experimental data show that there is still a long way until their representation in managerial positions will reflect their involvement in the workforce.

**Keywords:** gender discrimination in management, women in decision making positions, psychological mechanisms of discrimination, the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, the glass elevator.

## Felicia Cornelia MACARIE

Associate Professor, Public Administration Department, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
Tel.: 0040-263-233.419  
E-mail: cornelia.macarie@yahoo.com

## Octavian MOLDOVAN

M.A. student, Management of Public Services, Public Administration Department, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
Tel: 0040-744-891.466  
E-mail: octavianmoldovan@ymail.com

---

\* This paper is part of a larger project no. 2254/PNII/IDEI/2008, "The Impact of Gender on Organizational Culture of Public Organizations. Study of the Presence of Women in Top Public Organization's Management", financed by the Romanian National Council for Research in Higher Education (CNCSIS).

## **1. Introduction**

When we started writing this article, our motivation was based solely on academic curiosity and on the desire to shed some light on the ugly duckling of management known as gender discrimination, but as our research went on, the need to approach the issue in a holistic way became evident. Irrespective of which management book, article, or even theory we would focus our attention on, the issue of gender discrimination in management is unfairly ignored. Some could argue, at this point, that the ignorance of the issue is easily justifiable by the fact that gender discrimination in the labor force is a 1960s or 1970s topic, which presents little importance for modern day researchers and practitioners due to the low impact such behaviors could have on the efficiency or efficacy of management. Others could argue that the gender equality movement had (and has) such an importance and force at the international level and across of levels of society that we do not need to offer special attention to it, or that the problems connected to gender discrimination have already been solved. We beg to differ from those who manifest the above mentioned opinions; although gender discrimination as a research area is not exactly a spring chicken, its effects on management have been clearly ignored and, in practice, the negative aspects of gender discrimination still affect employees and managers around the globe.

Beyond the fact that gender discrimination in management can have negative effects on both public and private organizations in “the real world”, the “Ivory Tower of Academia” is not exactly immune to the phenomena or fully conscious or knowledgeable about it. With this paper we intend to address the latter issue, namely to reach a theoretical understanding of gender discrimination in management and to probe, as much as possible, the extent of the aforementioned phenomena. What is gender discrimination and how does it manifest? What are the mechanisms or causes that lead to gender discrimination and under what forms gender discrimination is presented? Who is discriminated and why? What is the extension of the phenomena in the contemporary world and how did it develop through time? These are all questions to which we will try to offer some answers through the literature review presented in this paper, as our explicit aim is to present a holistic perspective on gender discrimination in management.

## **2. Theoretical considerations on gender discrimination**

Discrimination is traditionally considered to refer to those negative and unfair actions meant to restrict or deny the equal treatment of individuals and groups (Allport, 1954, p. 51). In general, discrimination is perceived as (1) the process of differentiation among persons in order to reach a decision, taking into account legitimate criteria such as merit or potential, or (2) the process of differentiation among persons based on characteristics that are not adequate or relevant for the activity for which the differentiation is made (Dipboye and Colella, 2005, p. 2).

Gender discrimination is covered by the second meaning and presupposes a discriminatory treatment, based on subjective criteria (gender), in the processes

of selection, compensation, promotion, professional training and recognition of professional merits. Furthermore, gender discrimination can take subtler and informal forms, such as social exclusion, isolation and the avoidance of interpersonal contact (Dipboye and Colella, 2005, p. 2). Discrimination is an unfair behavior that translates into practice prejudices (negative attitudes towards the member of a certain group) and stereotypes (cognitive state regarding outside groups, including the association of certain traits to certain individuals based solely on their membership of that particular group) (Dipboye and Colella, 2005, pp. 1-2).

Gender discrimination in the workplace can take the form of either “disparate treatment”<sup>1</sup>, when individuals are intentionally treated differently based on their gender, or of “disparate impact”, when the members of a certain group are negatively affected by the decision making procedures or the existing work practices (Cleveland, Vescio and Barnes-Farrell, 2005, pp. 150-151). Depending on the degree of visibility, another distinction can be made between formal/overt discrimination which is legally punished (in most modern democracies) and informal/covert discrimination whose manifestations are less explicit or masked as other types of behaviors (e.g.: paternalistic behavior, humor and language used to conceal male domination over women) (Cleveland, Vescio and Barnes-Farrell, 2005, pp. 150-155; Dovidio and Hebl, 2005, pp. 11-35; Collela and Stone, 2005, pp. 227-254).

On the other hand, Bell, McLaughlin and Sequeira (2002) make a distinction between overt discrimination, sexual harassment and glass ceiling, treating all these as forms of gender discrimination. Direct discrimination refers to those situations in which gender is used as the main criterion in taking job-related decisions (hiring, promotion, dismissal, salary differentiation, and so on) (2002, p. 66). Sexual harassment can take two forms: (1) *quid pro quo*, when a person with decision making power uses its position to obtain sexual favors by either promising certain benefits, or making threats, and (2) the creation of a hostile environment by persons with decision-making power or colleagues (2002, p. 67). The glass ceiling limits women’s access to positions that provide power and status within the organization (see section 3) (2002, p. 68).

---

1 Examples: the refusal to hire a certain candidate because of his/hers gender, the reluctance to appoint a woman in a position that provides opportunities for career promotion, lower salary offered on gender criteria or interviewing a woman using questions that would not be asked if she were a man. To elaborate on the disparate treatment that can occur in the interview phase of a hiring procedure, female candidates often face a set of more personal (private) questions than male candidates, pertaining to their relationship status (e.g. “Are you involved in a long term relationship?”), marriage (e.g. “What is your opinion on marriage?”; “Do you and your partner have any plans for the future?”) or childbearing (e.g. “What is your opinion on childbearing?”, “Do you plan to have children in the foreseeable future?”). Such questions can be used to screen out female candidates that plan to enter family life or bear children; for an employer, any one of these situations presents a risk as their future employee could either resign (in order to offer more attention the newly established family) or enter maternity leave.

Concerning gender discrimination in management<sup>2</sup>, the specific literature presents three different theories that identify distinct mechanisms which could explain the source of discrimination. In the following we will describe the three mechanisms that, in our opinion, are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary as they all contribute to a better understanding and analysis of gender discrimination in management and all of them combined (in different forms) might determine individuals to discriminate against women.

According to the stereotyping theory, women's advancement into managerial positions is interrupted or limited by the discrepancies perceived between women's characteristics and those characteristics – usually men's characteristics – traditionally correlated with managerial success (Terborg and Ilgen, 1975, pp. 352-376; Baroudi and Truman, 1992, pp. 4-5). Women are generally perceived as empathic, intuitive, devoid of aggression, emotional, dependent, oriented towards group, not competitive, less ambitious, devoid of entrepreneurial spirit and as lacking the desire to be in a leadership position. By associating feminine characteristics with women and masculine characteristics with men (and successful leaders), women's opportunities to climb the organizational ladder are limited.

According to the attribution theory, workplace success or failure is due to stable, objective factors (intelligence, professionalism, skill) or variable, subjective factors (chance or luck) (Terborg and Ilgen, 1975, pp. 352-376; Baroudi and Truman, 1992, p. 5). In general, when the performance of individuals meets the employer's expectations, it is attributed to stable factors; conversely, when the performances do not meet or exceed the employer's expectations, the unexpected result (positive or negative) is attributed to variable factors. The discriminatory treatment arises when the results obtained by female managers exceed the expectations and are explained by variable factors (it is assumed that the favorable external context and not skills or ambition allowed her to do more), whereas when their performance does not meet the expectations, failure is explained by stable factors (it is assumed that the female manager lacks professionalism or skills, and that is why she could not achieve the goal – external factors, outside her area of influence are disregarded). On the contrary, exceeding the expectations in the case of a male manager is explained by stable factors (it is assumed that his abilities have been underestimated and that the better results are due exclusively to his work and actions and not to chance or favorable developments in the external environment), while his performances that do not meet the expectations are attributed to either external factors (it is assumed that although the male manager is very well trained and did his best, the goals were not reached

---

2 It is premature to provide a definition of gender discrimination in management taking into account that this article will treat various types of discriminatory behavior. Because the latter presupposes different actions and have distinct and sometimes opposite characteristics, we do not aim at offering a comprehensive definition, but rather at understanding the phenomenon.

due to external elements outside his area of influence, thus he is not to be blamed or sanctioned). Because of this discriminatory interpretation of success and failure, female managers are denied career promotions or downgraded more often than their male counterparts that obtain similar results.

The equity theory proposes that individuals should evaluate their investments/inputs (education, experience) and results, compare them to those of other persons in similar conditions and, based on this comparison, they should assess the degree of satisfaction with their work place (Terborg and Ilgen, 1975, pp. 352-376; Baroudi and Truman, 1992, p. 6). If they find the results of this evaluation to be fair, individuals should be satisfied; on the contrary, if they perceive disproportionate differences, individuals should act in order to eliminate the source of inequity. It is worth mentioning that inequity can create a feeling of discontentment/dissatisfaction among individuals that are not directly affected by the perceived inequity. Based on the aforementioned theory, there is the possibility for women to be disproportionately rewarded compared to men (better salaries, career advancement opportunities) even when they obtain the same results, if those employers prejudiced against women consider that female managers have made a greater effort in order to make up for the lack of qualifications (investment/input). Unfortunately, the same negative preconceptions (female managers are ill prepared) can result in limited rewards for women, if only the perceived inputs and not the obtained results are taken into account (starting from the perception that men are better prepared, it is deemed that their results should be more valuable and therefore men should be rewarded accordingly).

Gender discrimination in management, as a result of the abovementioned mechanisms, is described in the relevant literature with the help of several concepts: (1) the glass ceiling referring to the underrepresentation of women in management positions, (2) the glass cliff referring to the overrepresentation of women in precarious management positions, and (3) the glass escalator which refers to the greater opportunities for promotion enjoyed by men in female dominated professions. In the next sections, we analyze these types of discrimination, both from a conceptual point of view and by tracing their evolution in time.

### **3. The glass ceiling (the underrepresentation of women in management)**

Historically, the first identified form of gender discrimination in management has been the glass ceiling. The concept of glass ceiling can refer to (a) the invisible, but impenetrable barrier preventing women from reaching managerial positions irrespective of their achievements or merits (The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995a, p. iii; 1995b, p. 4); (b) an analogy describing the subtle and transparent barrier that prevents women from climbing the organizational ladder (Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1998, p. 17); (c) the underrepresentation of women in the higher echelons of the organizational hierarchy (Haslam and Ryan, 2008, p. 530); (d) the invisible barrier that blocks women's advancement in positions of higher management (Gelfand *et al.*, 2005, p. 93); (e) the situation where the vertical mobility of men in male dominated domains is higher than women's vertical mobility in the same domains (Hultin, 2003, p. 32).

The definitions proposed by the literature are quite general and lack analytical precision, thus, in order to avoid any misunderstandings we adopt and promote a set of four criteria or characteristics that can be used in order to identify the glass ceiling phenomenon. Firstly, the glass ceiling must lead to inequalities and differentiations that cannot be explained by characteristics that are relevant to employees' work (such as education, professional experience, abilities or motivation), but solely by making references to an employee's gender (Cotter *et al.*, 2001, pp. 656-658). Even though some characteristics relevant for the work of employees can be easily identified and measured (education, years of experience and abilities), some characteristics, such as the existence of an informal mentor, family issues or career prioritization, a death in the family (and so on), can influence the performance of the employee, but cannot be as easily identified and measured (Cotter *et al.*, 2001, p. 657). Secondly, the inequalities caused by the glass ceiling grow exponentially with the hierarchical structure as discrimination will have stronger consequences at higher hierarchical levels – the higher the level, the harder will be for a female to penetrate the glass ceiling (Cotter *et al.*, 2001, pp. 658-659; Wright, Baxter and Birkelund, 1995, p. 428; Kay and Hagan, 1995, p. 304). Thirdly, inequalities caused by the glass ceiling do not refer only to the present ratio of women to men in higher management positions, but also to the probability of reaching those positions (Cotter *et al.*, 2001, p. 659). The degree of representation of both genders in higher hierarchical levels depends on the entry level (if men embark on a career ladder from a better position than women, they will be dominant in higher management in the context of similar promotion conditions) and the proportion of those leaving the institution (if women start their career with the conception whereby their promotion possibilities are limited, there is the chance that they will change the work place much more often than men and consequently, the latter will find it much easier to get promotions even in the absence of discriminatory practices). The fourth characteristic of the glass ceiling is that the unequal practices it describes become more significant, in terms of impact and extent, over time (Cotter *et al.*, 2001, p. 661). From a personal perspective, the effects of this type of discrimination become stronger as women advance in their careers. If obtaining a medium management position can be relatively difficult because of various discrimination practices, obtaining a higher management position can pose even greater problems, and so on. Also, after a certain period of time, one can be reticent to seek advancement if she considers that the effort made will not be fairly rewarded.

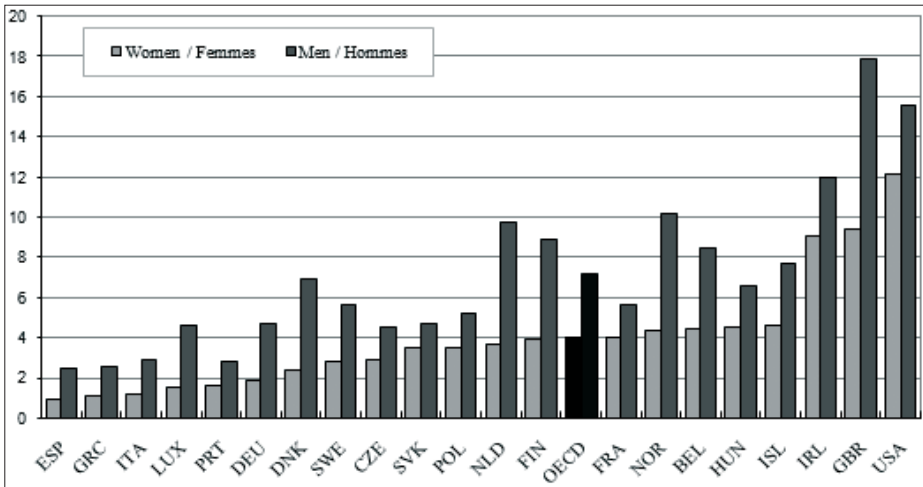
Even though there is no objective reason for women not to reach top management positions in an organization, women are prevented to reach those positions because of the discriminatory practices within organizations and societies. Depending on the national or organizational culture, the glass ceiling can be closer or further from the top within an organization, but irrespective of its location, the base (the positions with limited prestige and low rewards) is formed mostly by women. More than often, women's access to top-level positions is restricted from the moment they become



members of an organization by their integration in non-strategic departments (human resources, public relations) that are not considered a recruitment pool for top managers. Also, women are excluded from the formal or informal networks that can provide the necessary social capital for advancement into senior management positions (Wirth, 2001, p. 24). To conclude, while throughout the last decades women's interest in career has increased considerably (the percentage of women enrolled in forms of tertiary education and average age for marriage have both risen), this transformation in individual psychology has not been reflected in the number of women reaching the higher echelons of organizations (Wirth, 2001, p. 26).

Although the literature that focuses on the existence of the glass ceiling is quite extensive, we must warn that most researchers and researches originate in the USA (and therefore a cultural bias could be suspected) and that most empirical evidence comes from single case studies. According to Bell, McLaughlin and Sequeira, in the US only 30% of manager positions are occupied by women, while over 95% of top management belongs to men (2002, p. 68). In spite of women representing 47% of the private workforce in the US, only 34% of manager positions are occupied by women, with few prospects for change (Gelfand *et al.*, 2005, pp. 93-94). In the case of top companies in the USA, 95%-97% of the top managers of Fortune 1000 Industrial and Fortune 500 companies are men (The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995b, p. 9). The proportions remain the same even in the case of the most important 2000 companies in industry and services; women in high management positions do not exceed the level of 5% (The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995b, p. 9). Korabik observes a similar stratification in China, mentioning that "the more important the job, the fewer the women" (1992, p. 204).

Arulampalam, Booth and Bryan (2007) reach a similar conclusion in their study analyzing the gender differences in salaries over 6 years (1995-2001) in 11 member states of the EU: if one uses salary as an indicator or a proxy for the hierarchical level occupied in the organization, the glass ceiling is present in Europe, both in the public and private environment as female employees are constantly less paid than male employees. At the global level, even though women represent 40% of the total work force, they occupy only 20% of the management positions and somewhere between 2% or 3% of the higher management of top companies (Wirth, 2001, p. 25) According to the Gender and Sustainable Development Report issued by The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2008), the low level of representation of women in management positions, both in the public and private sectors, represents an inefficient use of human capital; even though women represent 40-50% of the workforce, less than 8% have top management positions (Figure 1; OECD, 2008, p. 29) and this percent is dwindling. The highest proportion of women in management positions can be found in the USA, UK and Ireland, while at the other extreme there are the Southern European states, such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** The ratio of female to male employees in management in OECD countries (2004)

Source: OECD (2006, p. 23; 2008, p. 30).

Women’s representation in the boardrooms of major companies in OECD countries constitutes clear evidence for the existence of the glass ceiling: over 46% of companies do not have women in their boards, 31% have one woman and only 23% have more than one woman (OECD, 2008, p. 30). Almost a quarter of the board members in Norway and Sweden are women, while in Japan, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Spain and Hong Kong women represent less than 5% of the members (Table 1). The low representation of women on company boards, even in OECD countries, can only support the conclusion that the glass ceiling remains an omnipresent phenomenon in top management. Furthermore, an analysis of post-communist countries conducted by Newell and Reilly, using data from late 1980s and mid 1990s, “suggests that, in general, the gap in pay between men and women in the transitional countries remains low by international standards” (2001, p. 14). Such a finding would suggest that advanced economies are more inclined toward gender discrimination (if the pay gap between men and women is used as a proxy for gender discrimination). However, their finding must be further scrutinized, as even the authors admit that their paper presents some limitations due to the conventional methodology used (they rely heavily on the existence of well-determined and stable Mincerian earnings equations, but such equations provide “good fits to data sets from established capitalist economies” while they obtained poor fits in the estimated models reported in their paper) thus a degree of caution should be exercised in interpreting their results (Newell and Reilly, 2001, p. 14). Also, the authors argue that using age as a “proxy for labor force experience may result in a higher adjusted gender wage effect” and that this “could be taken to suggest that the actual adjusted pay gap estimates are, if anything, lower than those reported” (Newell and Reilly, 2001, p. 14). However, they ignored a crucial aspect: the latest data used in their analysis is from 1997, thus what they observed as lower



pay gap between men and women could be a residual effect of communist policies<sup>3</sup>; such residual effects would have faded once these countries made advances towards the standards of market economies.

More recent data from a report regarding the situation of men and women in decision making positions in the central public administration, issued in 2011 by the Romanian Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection (Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale, p. 3) draws attention that: the middle level of decision making at the central level is “feminized”, as the pyramid of power is dominated both at the top and at the bottom by males. Furthermore, in the case of local authorities, more than 80% of decision making positions are occupied by men. Such developments, in a post-communist country, contradict the aforementioned findings of Newell and Reilly.

**Table 1:** The representation of women in company boards in OECD countries (2004)

| Country     | The percent of women in boardrooms<br>(the number of women /<br>total number of members) | Country         | The percent of women in boardrooms<br>(the number of women /<br>total number of members) |
|-------------|--|-----------------|--|
| Norway      | 26.2   | Switzerland     | 6.0  |
| Sweden      | 19.9   | Singapore       | 6.0  |
| Finland     | 14.3   | The Netherlands | 5.9  |
| USA         | 12.7   | Austria         | 5.8  |
| Canada      | 11.1   | Belgium         | 5.3  |
| New Zealand | 9.9  | Hong Kong       | 4.5  |
| Denmark     | 9.3  | Spain           | 4.1  |
| Australia   | 9.3  | Luxemburg       | 3.8  |
| Germany     | 8.0  | Ireland         | 3.8  |
| UK          | 7.5  | Italy           | 2.6  |
| Greece      | 7.4  | Portugal        | 0.7  |
| France      | 6.4  | Japan           | 0.6  |

Source: OECD (2008, p. 31)

Even when we take into consideration similar positions in public institutions, women remain underrepresented against the background of their percent of the total workforce (Table 2). In Europe, only 20-30% of the decision making positions are occupied by women, while two thirds are occupied by men. In the Baltic States, the UK, Ireland, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Sweden, women make up almost 50% of

3 To quote from the authors (2001, p. 0): “Under socialism women spent more time working, on average, than their Western counterparts. The system of wage and price setting more or less ensured that both adults in a nuclear family would have to work in order to maintain a basic living standard. There was no unemployment in the sense of joblessness. This was partly due to the social stigma that attached to unemployment but has also been attributed to the way hard plan targets and soft budget constraints combined to produce continuous excess demand for labour. Women were accorded a wide range of rights and privileges at work, some of which were formal. In the Soviet system for instance, maternity leave was fully paid and women were legally protected from overly physical and dangerous work. Enterprise kindergartens, schools and health care facilities were fairly commonplace in larger enterprises”.

the labor force and occupy 30% of the above mentioned positions. A more equitable representation of women can be generated by public policies aimed at supporting those mothers choosing to return to work (Wirth, 2001, p. 33).

The greatest discrepancy between the percent of women in managerial, legislative and official positions (23%) and women’s proportion of the work force (47%) is to be found in Denmark, while in countries such as Italy, Greece or Switzerland women are underrepresented in both categories. Even though these countries are known for the high level of women’s involvement in politics and complex systems of social assistance, women continue to be excluded and discriminated in the private sector, which is why the number of those overcoming the glass ceiling remains low (Wirth, 2001, pp. 33, 35). In the absence of women’s involvement in politics, it is estimated that their representation in decision making positions would be even lower; in this context, economic development does not automatically improve the situation for women.

**Table 2:** Women in decision making positions (Europe, 1998-1999)

| Country         | The percent of women occupying legislative, official and managerial positions | The percent of the total workforce occupied by women |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Austria         | 25  | 45   |
| Croatia         | 25  | 47   |
| Czech Republic  | 24  | 44   |
| Denmark         | 23  | 47   |
| Estonia         | 35  | 49   |
| Germany         | 26  | 43   |
| Greece          | 25  | 38   |
| Hungary         | 33  | 47   |
| Ireland         | 33  | 40   |
| Italy           | 19  | 37   |
| Latvia          | 39  | 48   |
| Lithuania       | 39  | 49   |
| The Netherlands | 23  | 43   |
| Poland          | 34  | 46   |
| Slovakia        | 32  | 46   |
| Slovenia        | 18  | 32   |
| Spain           | 31  | 37   |
| Sweden          | 39  | 48   |
| Switzerland     | 20  | 45   |
| UK              | 33  | 46   |

Source: ILO (2000, pp. 187-240)

An analysis of the evolution of the women’s representation in managerial positions (Table 3) over a decade reveals a slight improvement of their situation, but the progress is slow as over 60% of decision-making positions remain occupied by men. In most countries, the situation in 2002 is not different from that in 1993: in Hungary, Poland, the UK, Spain, Belgium, the Czech Republic and Denmark the situation of women has remained the same with a slight (positive or negative) change of 1%. Lithuania stands out due to a significant increase of the percent of women in management

positions (from 37% in 1996-1999 to 44%), as well as due to the high rate of women's representation in management. Other significant increases in the analyzed period can be observed in Germany (9%), Ireland and Slovakia (9%), Romania and Austria (5%), The Netherlands (6%) and Slovenia (3%). Regarding the cases for which limited data is available, we notice average increases (3-6%) in Moldova, Sweden, Portugal, Norway, Switzerland and Italy, but also decreases, such as Latvia (5%). Even though the situation in Italy seems to have improved between 1996 and 2002, the representation of women in managerial positions remains under average, with almost 80% of the managerial, legislative and official positions being occupied by men.

**Table 3:** The percent of women of the total number of managerial, legislative and official positions (1993-2002)

| Country         | 1993-1995 | 1996-1999 | 2000-2002 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Lithuania       | #         | 37        | 44        |
| Moldova         | #         | 37        | 40        |
| Ukraine         | #         | 37        | 37        |
| Estonia         | #         | 35        | 37        |
| Latvia          | #         | 42        | 37        |
| Germany         | 26        | 28        | 35        |
| Hungary         | 34        | 36        | 35        |
| Poland          | 35        | 34        | 34        |
| UK              | 33        | 33        | 32        |
| Slovakia        | 23        | 30        | 32        |
| Spain           | 32        | 33        | 32        |
| Romania         | 27        | 28        | 32        |
| Sweden          | #         | 28        | 31        |
| Belgium         | 32        | 31        | 31        |
| Portugal        | #         | 29        | 32        |
| Austria         | 24        | 28        | 29        |
| Slovenia        | 26        | 26        | 29        |
| Norway          | #         | 24        | 28        |
| Switzerland     | #         | 22        | 28        |
| Ireland         | 19        | 33        | 28        |
| Czech Republic  | 25        | 25        | 26        |
| The Netherlands | 20        | 23        | 26        |
| Croatia         | #         | 24        | 26        |
| Greece          | #         | 25        | 25        |
| Denmark         | 23        | 24        | 23        |
| Italy           | #         | 18        | 21        |

# Data unavailable

Source: ILO (1999, p. 187-240; 2003)

The lack of significant progress reflects both the complexity of the phenomenon and the difficulties one encounters when dealing with this type of discrimination. The social and cultural attitudes prejudicial to women, as well as the economic changes

brought about by the economic crisis and transition can constitute possible explanations for the underrepresentation of women in management (Wirth, 2002, p. 37).

#### **4. The illusion of breaking the glass ceiling: the glass cliff**

Despite the progress made in the representation of women in top management, especially the appointment of Fiorina Carleton as the CEO of Hewlett Packard (Meyer, 1999), it would be premature to assume the disappearance of the glass ceiling. In our opinion, it is not only the percentage of women appointed to superior positions that is important, but also the characteristics of those positions, and the context in which women overcome the glass ceiling. Statistical analyses can provide only a general perspective on gender discrimination in management, ignoring details of utmost importance, details that can be revealed using more qualitative or experimental methods.

Ryan and Haslam (2005, pp. 81-90) analyzed the performance of 100 companies, before and after the appointment of women or men in management positions, and reached the conclusion that appointments differ according to gender and context. The companies that have appointed men in their boards or other top management positions enjoyed stability or growth, before and after the appointment. In the majority of cases, the companies appointing women were less successful and experienced financial hardships before women's promotion to higher hierarchical levels. The glass cliff is a concept used to describe the phenomenon whereby most women overcoming the glass ceiling are appointed in risky positions (Haslam and Ryan, 2008, p. 531). These positions do not improve the status of women or eliminate the preconceptions about women in management, but on the contrary, they contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and discrimination. The two phenomena, the appointment of women in top management positions and the weak performance of the respective companies, are rarely treated separately and the perception of a causal link between the two elements strengthens discrimination and gender preconceptions, as individual view the appointment of females in top management as the cause of hardships at company level, and not the other way around. Furthermore, companies in difficult economic conditions as well as the appointment of a female at the top levels of a company tend to attract public attention; if the company situation is maintained at precarious levels or worsens there is a high possibility that the newly appointed female manager will be used as an escape goat, thus perpetuating negative stereotypes (Haslam and Ryan, 2008, p. 531).

The literature identifies certain domains or positions specific to female managers that are characterized by restrictions (limited opportunities for promotion), lack of authority (Wright, Baxter and Birkerlund, 1995), and low salaries and other forms of rewards (Kulich, Ryan and Haslam, 2007, pp. 582-601). Frankforter (1996, pp. 121-132) and Powel (1980) expose another important hypothesis: even when women attain high management positions, the latter are within human resources departments (where stress and interpersonal conflicts are encountered more often), and not in production and other departments valued in the organization and which serve as a recruitment base for upper managerial positions.

Trying to confirm the existence of the glass cliff, Haslam and Ryan (2008) have conducted several experiments. In the first experiment, 95 master level students of a British university have been asked to choose a financial director for companies operating in various fields and which were experiencing either growth or decline. The candidates had similar qualifications, professional experience, age, but different gender. Even though the participants in the experiment have generally preferred appointing women for management positions (70.5% of the students endorsed this option, Table 4, study 1), this trend was stronger in the case of the companies in decline. If the company was in a negative situation, 86.4% of students endorsed a female candidate, but when the company was growing, only 56.9% have considered the feminine candidate more suitable<sup>4</sup>.

The purpose of the second experiment was to test the existence of the glass cliff outside the context of corporations. In this study 85 high school students were asked to make a hiring decision regarding the organizer of a music festival that either enjoyed popularity, or was in decline. Like in the previous study, the candidates of opposite gender had a similar background. The results of this experiment were in the same lines with those of the earlier experiment: if the festival was a success in the previous year and enjoyed favorable publicity, 62.2% of participants opted for the male candidate, while 37.8% chose the female candidate. The situation was opposite when the festival did not enjoy the same level of success: 75% of participants endorsed the female candidate and only 20% preferred the male candidate (Table 4, study 2).

**Table 4:** The likelihood of appointing women in management positions against the background of the previous performance of the organization

| Study | Gender of candidate | Company performance |         |       |
|-------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|-------|
|       |                     | Growth              | Decline | Total |
| 1     | Male                | 29.4%               | 11.4%   | 21.1% |
|       | Female              | 56.9%               | 86.4%   | 70.5% |
| 2     | Male                | 62.2%               | 20.0%   | 42.4% |
|       | Female              | 37.8%               | 75.0%   | 55.3% |

**Note:** The total percent does not sum up to 100 because, in its initial phase, the study included a third (male) candidate. Because his professional training and experience was inferior to the other two candidates, the number of participants that opted for him was low and consequently, the author excluded him from the subsequent studies.

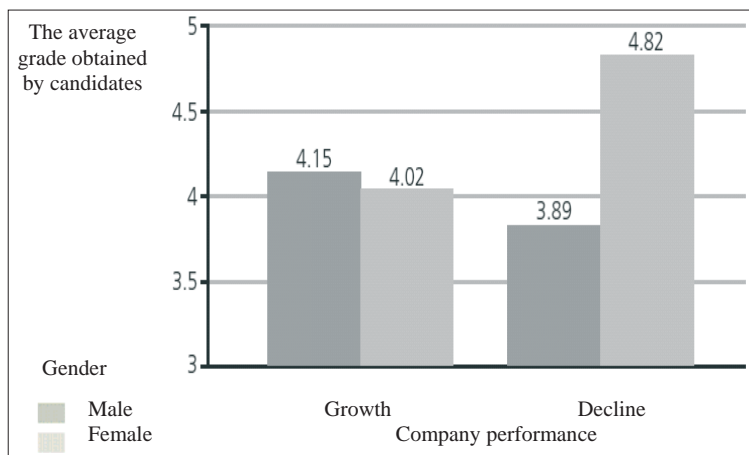
**Source:** Haslam and Ryan (2008, pp. 534, 537)

In a third study, 83 business men and women that were participating at a conference hosted by a British university have been asked to evaluate a male and a female candidate for a management position in an international company (Haslam and Ryan, 2008, p. 539;

<sup>4</sup> The participants' gender did not show statistically significant influence on their options (candidate evaluations) in any of the experiments reported by Haslam and Ryan (2008).

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2007, p. 5). Yet again, the candidates had different genders, but similar qualifications and experience and two hypothetical situations were presented, with a company expanding and declining. The participants were asked to grade the candidates with a mark between 1 (the candidate was considered inadequate) and 7 (the candidate was considered capable and adequate). The results of the experiment corroborate the results of the previous experiments. When the company was growing, the male candidate got a higher grade (4.14 compared to 4.02), but when the company was in decline the female candidate was preferred (4.82) to the male candidate (3.89) (Figure 2). Even though in the first case the difference is relatively small, in the second case the difference is of almost one percent, statistically significant (Haslam and Ryan, 2008, p. 539).

**Figure 2:** The perception of candidates of opposite gender applying for a management position



Source: Adapted after Haslam and Ryan (2008, p. 539); Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2007, p. 5).

Based on these studies, Haslam and Ryan (2008, pp. 537-538) concluded that the selection of candidates in management positions is influenced both by the gender of the candidates and the performance of the organization. The probability for a woman to be appointed in a management position increases if the organization experiences a period of economic decline, while men tend to be appointed in management positions if the company is economically stable or is experiencing growth. Moreover, the studies prove that the glass cliff is not a phenomenon typical to company boards (as previous evidence suggested), and that it can be reproduced in the laboratory where key variables (experience, education, the nature of the position) can be taken into account (Haslam and Ryan, 2008, p. 542). Also, this phenomenon refutes previous theories whereby (1) women choose and prefer risky management positions, and (2) women’s presence in top management can lead to crises within the respective organizations (Ryan, Haslam and Postmes, 2007, pp. 182-197).



Even though the risks exposed by the glass cliff phenomenon should not be ignored and underestimated, there are certain benefits deriving from it. Positions considered precarious in certain contexts by men can be seen as opportunities by women because they remove other barriers (the existence of male candidates) that limit their access to the respective positions. Moreover, accepting risky management positions should not necessarily lead to negative repercussions: the manager who takes over the organization in the context of a crisis and successfully deals with the related challenges gains a privileged status in the organizational culture. The myths and anecdotes created around female leaders who rose to prominence due to their professionalism and remarkable aptitudes in moments of crisis can change conceptions regarding the role of women in management. Even though unlikely, one should not dismiss the possibility that the example of a few women taking over the leadership of an organization in crisis and reversing its downward trend might generate a cascade effect that might change prejudices and stereotypes not only within the organization, but also at the societal level.

### **5. When men are the minority: the glass elevator**

Most studies about gender discrimination in management have focused on the experiences of women in male dominated environments. Both researchers and advocates of social changes have directed their efforts towards exposing the hardships women encounter when they integrate in male dominated fields and try climbing the organizational ladder (Williams, 1992, p. 253). However, there is another side of the coin and researchers should also pay attention to the case of men trying to integrate and adapt to environments dominated by women (Williams, 1992, p. 253). Statistically, this phenomenon is less widespread, but this should not prevent researchers from analyzing it. Reskin and Roos (1990, pp. 20-21) have identified no less than 33 professions where the representation of women has increased by 10% in the period 1970-1980 and only 3 professions where men's representation has increased as sharply.

Williams (1992) is one of the few researchers that have focused on men working in fields that are dominated by women. Between 1985 and 1991, Williams interviewed 100 persons from four different professions (medical assistance, elementary school teachers, librarians, social workers) usually associated with a larger presence of women. The objective of the study was to analyze (1) the barriers men have to deal with when they go through the hiring procedures, (2) the support given to men by supervisors, colleagues and clients, and (3) the reaction coming from the external environment. While previous studies suggested that men in female dominated professions are confronted with the same problems as women in male dominated fields (Jacobs, 1989, p. 167), William's study refutes this theory and advances a new hypothesis.

Even though some form of discrimination exists, this is different from the type of discrimination women generally encounter. Men in female dominated professions are

usually guided towards administration and management departments and, even when they begin their career at the lower hierarchical echelons within the organization, they encounter a glass elevator (pressure and opportunities to advance towards the upper levels of an organization). While women are supervised by the opposite gender, men in the fields analyzed by Williams were supervised by persons of the same gender as the managerial and administrative positions were mostly occupied by men. Contrary to women in male dominated professions (which are usually informally excluded or isolated), men in Williams's study enjoyed the support of a network of male mentors in management positions. These informal networks constituted by men in fields usually considered feminine promote their members to top positions where they enjoy higher prestige and financial rewards. The only type of negative discrimination men in female dominated professions face originates in the external environment under the guise of stereotypes and prejudices. However, this discrimination does not have any impact on their professional track. Therefore, the conclusion of Williams's study is that men in professions considered typically feminine do not encounter a glass ceiling, but rather a glass elevator that facilitates their promotion and professional advancement (Hultin, 2003, p. 32).

Hultin (2003) tests the hypothesis of the glass elevator by using information from the Swedish Level of Living Survey. The author carried out a longitudinal analysis, following the evolution of 3119 individuals (1535 men and 1584 women) between 1965-1991 in three distinct types of professions: male dominated professions (where less than 30% of positions are occupied by women), mixed professions (where women represent between 30 and 70% of the work force) and female dominated professions<sup>5</sup> (where less than 30% of the positions are occupied by men). The results of the study confirm the glass elevator phenomenon. Over that period, in the female dominated professions, 12.7% of men and only 5.6% of women were promoted. In the mixed domains, the difference is even larger: only 2.5% of women were promoted in contrast to 7.9% of men (Hultin, 2003, p. 46). In the male dominated professions, there is a difference between the rates of promotion, but it is small and statistically insignificant: 7.5% of men and 7.1% of women obtained a promotion.

---

5 Going beyond "female dominated professions", a very recent article offers data which may allow us to stipulate the existence or emergence of female dominated sectors, as they represent almost two thirds of the total workforce employed in a sector. According to Hințea (2011, p. 189), in Romania, in 2010, from the total number of public sector employees, 36.14% were men and 63.86% were females. Furthermore, when referring to the middle management of central public authorities, their overwhelming presence in the public sector is not proportionately represented. In 2010, out of 18 ministries (or assimilated bodies), in only 5 ministries women represented close to 60% of decision makers (while in the same number of ministries, men occupied around the same percentage of decision making positions); overall, at this level of analysis, 4850 positions (50.83%) that involve some level of decision making are occupied by women, while 4691 positions (49.17%) are occupied by men (Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale, 2011 pp. 6, 19).

## 6. Conclusions

The evidence we gathered presents a rather gloomy picture, as gender discrimination seems to be still present in management, mostly affecting women that aspire to climb to the upper levels of the organizational hierarchy. Psychological mechanisms such as those suggested by the stereotyping, attribution or equity theory determine discriminatory attitudes and behaviors against females. Generally speaking, women are either underrepresented in top management (the glass ceiling) or overrepresented in risky managerial positions (the glass cliff). Common sense would imply that women are better represented in the upper hierarchy in the limited number of sectors where they represent more than half of the labor force, but even there men have better odds of being promoted, mostly due to informal mechanisms (the glass elevator).

Without downplaying the importance of the steps taken in the last decades toward a better representation of women in decision making positions, both statistical and experimental data show that there is still a long way until their representation in managerial positions will reflect their involvement in the workforce. Why were these steps less successful than expected? First of all, we must take into consideration the fact that most discriminatory behaviors/attitudes are informal, thus changes in the legal framework had a rather limited impact both on individuals and society. Better measures/instruments would be those which try to influence individuals, organizations and even societies at a psychological level, referring to culture, values and other informal aspects of everyday life. Laws, rules and regulations against gender discrimination (or which encourage affirmative actions) are nonetheless necessary, as they represent the basis for a better representation of women in management and actively discourage explicit actions against them. However, on that basis, we need to build another level. In order to encourage present or future male managers to promote and accept amongst them equally well trained females, we cannot (and should not) intervene only with “the hammer of the law” because finer tuning is necessary and more appropriate (awareness campaigns, training seminars, good practice examples, and so on).

The need for further interdisciplinary research in this field is obvious, but both the research methodology and data collection instruments can be improved. Focus groups, in which female managers can share their experiences among them and with a trained researcher, extensive interviews and direct observations have been mostly ignored by academics interested in this field. Crucial qualitative (and also quantitative) data could be gathered using these research instruments, in an attempt to understand how women managers see themselves, how were they treated while climbing the organizational ladder, which difficulties they encountered, what are their aims/goals and what is their specific approach on management.

Last but not least, we encourage women managers to step up, strengthen their ambition and continue to strive for better and equitable representation in management. Furthermore, if they encounter discriminatory behaviors, women should stop flying under the radar in order to avoid further repercussions, and become the much needed

whistleblowers (with the condition that someone should be at the other end of the table to hear them and take appropriate actions).

### References:

1. Allport, G.W., *The Nature of Prejudice*, New York: Addison-Wesley, 1954.
2. Arulampalam, W., Booth, A.L. and Bryan, M.L., 'Is There a Glass Ceiling over Europe? Exploring the Gender Pay Gap across the Wage Distribution', 2007, *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, vol. 60, no. 2, pp. 162-186.
3. Baroudi, J.J. and Truman, G.E., 'Gender Differences in the Information Systems Managerial Ranks: An Assessment of Discriminatory Practices', 1992, Center for Research on Information Systems, Information Systems Department, Leonard N. Stern School of Business, New York University, Working Paper Series No. STERN IS-92-5.
4. Bell, M.P., McLaughlin, M.E. and Sequeira, J.M., 'Discrimination, Harassment, and the Glass Ceiling: Women Executives as Change Agents', 2002, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 65-76.
5. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, *Women in the Boardroom: The Risks of Being at the Top*, London, 2007.
6. Cleveland, J.N., Vescio, T.K. and Barnes-Farrell, J.L., 'Gender Discrimination in Organizations', in Dipboye, R.L., and Colella, A. (eds.), *Discrimination at Work: The Psychological and Organizational Bases*, Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005, pp. 149-176.
7. Colella, A., and Stone, D.L., 'Workplace Discrimination towards Persons with Disabilities: A Call for Some New Research Directions', in Dipboye, R.L., and Colella, A. (eds.), *Discrimination at Work: The Psychological and Organizational Bases*, Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005, pp. 227-254.
8. Cotter, D.A., Hermsen, J.M., Ovadia, S. and Vanneman, R., 'The Glass Ceiling Effect', 2001, *Social Forces*, vol. 80, no. 2, pp. 655-682.
9. Dipboye, R.L. and Colella, A., 'An Introduction', in Dipboye, R.L. and Colella, A. (eds.), *Discrimination at Work: The Psychological and Organizational Bases*, Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005, pp. 1-8.
10. Dovidio, J.F. and Hebl, M.R., 'Discrimination at the Level of the Individual: Cognitive and Affective Factors', in Dipboye, R.L. and Colella, A. (eds.), *Discrimination at Work: The Psychological and Organizational Bases*, Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005, pp. 11-35.
11. Frankforter, S.A., 'The Progression of Women beyond the Glass Ceiling', 1996, *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 121-132.
12. Gelfand, M.J., Nishii, L.H., Raver, J.L. and Schneider, B., 'Discrimination in Organizations: An Organizational-Level Systems Perspective', in Dipboye, R.L. and Colella, A. (eds.), *Discrimination at Work: The Psychological and Organizational Bases*, Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005, pp. 89-118.
13. Haslam, S.A. and Ryan, M.K., 'The Road to the Glass Cliff: Differences in the Perceived Suitability of Men and Women for Leadership Positions in Succeeding and Failing Organizations', 2008, *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 5, pp. 530-546.
14. Hințea, C.E., 'Reform and Management in Romania. Strategy and Structural Change', 2011, *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, vol. 34, pp. 177-196.

15. Hultin, M., 'Some Take the Glass Escalator, Some Hit the Glass Ceiling? Career Consequences of Occupational Sex Segregation', 2003, *Work and Occupations*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 30-61.
16. ILO (International Labour Organization), *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, 2000.
17. ILO (International Labour Organization), *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, 1999.
18. ILO (International Labour Organization), *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, 2003.
19. Jacobs, J., *Revolving Doors: Sex Segregation and Women's Careers*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.
20. Kay, F.M. and Hagan, J., 'The Persisting Glass Ceiling: Gendered Inequalities in the Earnings of Lawyers', 1995, *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 46, pp. 279-310.
21. Korabik, K., 'Women Hold Up Half the Sky: The Status of Managerial Women in China', in Wedley, W. (ed.), *Advances in Chinese Industrial Studies*, vol. 3, Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1992, pp. 197-211.
22. Kulich, C., Ryan, M.K. and Haslam, S.A., 'Where Is the Romance for Women Leaders? The Effects of Gender on Leadership Attributions and Performance-Based Pay', 2007, *Applied Psychology: An International Review Special Issue*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 582-601.
23. Meyer, M., 'In a League of Her Own', *Newsweek*, August 2, 1999.
24. Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale (Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection), 'Situția femeilor și a bărbaților în poziții de decizie în administrația publică centrală', 2011, [Online] available at <http://www.mmuncii.ro/ro/articole/2011-11-10/print-2373-articol.html>, accessed on January 9, 2012.
25. Newell, A. and Reilly, B., 'The Gender Pay Gap in the Transition from Communism: Some Empirical Evidence', The Institute for the Study of Labor, Discussion Paper No. 268, 2001, [Online] available at <ftp://repec.iza.org/RePEc/Discussionpaper/dp268.pdf>, accessed on January 9, 2012.
26. OECD, *Gender and Sustainable Development: Maximizing the Economic, Social and Environmental Role of Women*, 2008, [Online] available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/1/40881538.pdf>, accessed on January 9, 2012.
27. OECD, *Women and Men in OECD Countries*, 2006, [Online] available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/52/37962502.pdf>, accessed on January 9, 2012.
28. Powell, G.N., 'Career Development and the Woman Manager: A Social Power Perspective', 1980, *Personnel*, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 22-32.
29. Reskin, B. and Roos, P., *Job Queues, Gender Queues: Explaining Women's Inroads into Male Occupations*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.
30. Ryan, M.K. and Haslam, S.A., 'The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions', 2005, *British Journal of Management*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 81-90.
31. Ryan, M.K. and Haslam, S.A., 'The Glass Cliff: Exploring the Dynamics Surrounding the Appointment of Women to Precarious Leadership Positions', 2007, *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 549-572.
32. Ryan, M.K., Haslam, S.A. and Postmes, T., 'Reactions to the Glass Cliff: Gender Differences in Explanations for the Precariousness of Women's Leadership Positions', 2007, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 182-197.
33. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, *Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital, A Fact-Finding Report*, Washington, D.C., 1995a.

34. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, *A Solid Investment: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital, Recommendations*, Washington, D.C., 1995b.
35. Terborg, J.R. and Ilgen, D.R., 'A Theoretical Approach to Sex Discrimination in Traditionally Masculine Occupations', 1975, *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, vol. 13, no.3, pp. 352-376.
36. Vinnicombe, S. and Colwill, N., *Femeile în management*, București: Teora, 1998.
37. Williams, C.L., 'The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions', 1992, *Social Problems*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp. 253-267.
38. Wirth, L., *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling. Women in Management*, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2001.
39. Wright, E.O., Baxter, J. and Birkelund, G.E., 'The Gender Gap in Workplace Authority: A Cross-National Study', 1995, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 407-435.