

### The Myth of Equality: Glass Ceiling vs. Glass Escalator

In further exploration of occupational sex segregation, an examination of the “glass ceiling” and “glass escalator” effects provides further understanding of the prevailing inequalities between women and men in the workforce. In particular, women’s and men’s career opportunities in sex-segregated occupational contexts continue to perpetuate the “glass ceiling” effect, while men benefit from the “glass escalator” effect.

The term *glass ceiling* symbolizes barriers that are based on attitudinal or organizational bias preventing qualified women from advancing higher in their organizations (Danziger & Eden, 2007; Powell, 1999; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). Danziger and Eden (2007) posit, “the glass-ceiling barrier sustains and reproduces occupational inequality between the sexes, even when individuals possess similar education, skills, and competence levels” (p. 130). Schilt’s (2006) synthesis of the scholarly literature concerning the pervasiveness of the glass ceiling depicts the disparities between women and men in white- and blue-collar workplaces in which women continue to trail behind in opportunities and advancement. In further support of the glass-ceiling effect, Davies-Netzley (1998) and Kaley (2009) contend that, in comparison to men, women continue to cluster near the bottom of organizational and professional hierarchies, receive lower wages, and have limited advancement opportunity in the workforce.

With the proliferation of women in the workforce in recent decades, women increasingly have acquired managerial and professional

occupations in various sectors (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; Davies-Netzley, 1998). In 1999, Hewlett-Packard appointed Carleton Fiorina as CEO, the first female chief executive officer of a Fortune 500 company. Heralding the dismantling of the glass ceiling, Fiorina claimed that "women face no limits whatsoever. There is not a glass ceiling" (Meyer, 1999, p. 56). In the same year, Catalyst Inc. (1999), in a report on the experiences of women of color in corporate America, underscored the persistence of the glass ceiling and concluded that women of color suffer from greater underrepresentation than do majority-group women. While women like Carleton Fiorina have ascended to executive-level positions, they have "cracked" but not shattered the glass ceiling.

In recent work by Reece and Brandt (2008), they argue that, although a woman may hold a managerial and/or professional position, which "reflects a twenty-five year pattern of gain in education and job status," women in general continue to be underrepresented in high-ranking jobs (p. 385). While executive-level positions are visible to women in the workplace, the glass ceiling phenomenon blocks their advancement and promotion. Further, women working in male-dominated fields such as business, medicine, law enforcement, and engineering face unfavorable treatment and impediments within organizational career mobility (Hultin, 2003). Attitudinal and organizational biases that persist, whether overtly or covertly, have economic consequences, both in lost productivity and turnover costs (Ragins, 1998). Women who face barriers in terms of advancement often leave to work in another organization or start their own business. While acknowledging the remarkable progress made by women in the workforce, Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) also criticize the discouragingly slow pace of women's advancement to top-level positions in which "many women [are] jumping off, becoming frustrated, and disillusioned with the business world" (p. 127). Consequently, the maladaptive nature of organizations is inclusive of women but remain more accommodating to men (C.L. Williams, 2009).

Unlike women who bump up against the glass ceiling in the workforce, men ride the "glass escalator" to ascend the hierarchy specifically within female-dominated organizations. The term *glass escalator*, coined by the sociologist Christine Williams (1992, 1995) refers to

the promotion of men over women into management in female-dominated positions such as nursing, social work, elementary school teaching, and librarianship (Hultin, 2003; C. L. Williams, 1992, 1995). C. L. Williams (1992) contends that throughout the 20th century, these fields have been identified as women's work. According to Hultin (2003), "men in these positions are able to ride a 'glass escalator' up the internal career ladders and at a speed that their female counterparts can hardly enjoy" (p. 31). In female-dominated lines of work, men escape negative consequences of tokenism and are treated advantageously by employers, employees, and coworkers (C.L. Williams, 1992). The cultural reproduction of men's advantages in the workforce is "not a function of simply one process but rather a complex interplay between many factors such as gender differences in workplace performance evaluation, gendered beliefs about men's and women's skills and abilities, and differences between family and child care obligations of women and men workers" (Schilt, 2006, p. 468).

While women are disadvantaged in male-dominated workplaces, men benefit from their status in female-dominated fields. In particular, the pay structure of men in female-dominated professions favors men (Budig, 2002). Cognard-Black (2004) asserts that "gender as a major structural stratification mechanism privileges men in various setting compositions" (p.134). Such is the case in female-dominated lines of work in which the glass-escalator hypothesis rests on notions of discriminatory processes in the workplace (Hultin, 2003). The glass escalator provides a dual benefit for men, a patriarchal dividend or the advantages men in general gain from the subordination of women in the workforce (Connell, 1995, p. 79). Whether in male-dominated or female-dominated fields, men are accorded prestige and outpace women in advancement to positions of authority and pay (Schilt, 2006).

A recent trend garnering scholarly interest is the large number of men entering female-dominated fields. Sally Lindsay (2007) has coined this as the **masculinization of women's work**, meaning the movement of men into women's occupations. An example of this is in the field of nurse anesthesia. According to Lindsay (2007), the nurse anesthesia field has "evolved from a low-status, women's specialty to a high-status profession where males comprise nearly half of all the

employees" (p. 429). The masculinization of women's work is a process of gender transformation in which more men are present in such fields as nurse anesthesia, and the occupation comes to be viewed as men's work (Lindsay, 2007; Lupton, 2006). Through the transformation process, the female-dominated field goes through three stages: infiltration, invasion, and takeover (Bradley, 1993). While Bradley's typologies provide a descriptive process, Lindsay (2007) argues that they do not fully capture why the process evolves. Lindsay (2007) offers four key themes that explain what draws men into these professions:

1. First, during times of social and political change, men are inclined to enter women's work for security or because they have few other alternatives.
2. A second factor identified in the masculinization of work is pay and opportunity to move up the career ladder quickly.
3. Changes in work conditions are a third factor influencing the masculinization of an occupation.
4. A fourth and related factor in the movement of men into women's jobs is the technological change. . . . Once a job becomes more technically oriented, men tend to gain a foothold (pp. 431–432).

These four factors illuminate the gradual masculinization of women's work and have implications about the maintenance and reinforcement of the glass escalator. Furthermore, what is yet to be studied in this area of inquiry is the socializing influence female-dominated fields over time may have on men. The myth of equality (i.e., glass ceiling and glass escalator) suggests that discrimination does not exist; however, it coexists with sexual harassment in the workplace.