NAME: MEKWUNYE JEMIMAH OLUWATUMIKE

MATRIC NUMBER: 17/SMS09/056

IRD 318

GENDER STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WHAT IS GLASS CEILING? IS BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING POSSIBLE IN AFRICA AND WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

A glass ceiling is a metaphor used to represent an invisible barrier that keeps a given demographic from rising beyond a certain level in a hierarchy. The metaphor was first coined by feminists in reference to barriers in the careers of high-achieving women. In the US, the concept is sometimes extended to refer to obstacles hindering the advancement of minority women, as well as minority men. Minority women often find the most difficulty in "breaking the glass ceiling" because they lie at the intersection of two historically marginalized groups: women and people of colour. East Asian and East Asian American news outlets have coined the term "bamboo ceiling" to refer to the obstacles that all East Asian Americans face in advancing their careers. Similarly, a set of invisible obstacles posed against refugees' efforts to workforce integration is coined "canvas ceiling”. The glass ceiling, a phrase first introduced in the 1980s, is a metaphor for the invisible and artificial barriers that block women and minorities from advancing up the corporate ladder to management and executive positions. In 1991 the US Congress found that, despite a dramatically growing presence in the workplace, women and minorities remained underrepresented in management positions in business and that artificial barriers were inhibiting their advancement.

Breaking the glass ceiling is complex and requires action on several fronts. Federal and state governments, employers, academic institutions, and women themselves are essential players in breaking down barriers that are holding women back.

Glass ceilings are often the result of unconscious bias – instinctive, underlying beliefs about ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, social class, religion, and so on. This may be largely unintentional. However, in some cases, glass ceilings have become a systemic problem – an inherent part of company culture, but one that many organizations [turn a blind eye to](https://www.mindtools.com/community/BookInsights/WillfulBlindness.php)   . Elsewhere, glass ceilings are intentional, showing up as overt discrimination or [bullying](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_84.htm)   , as a form of "power play” these instances, people "at the top" may deny that a glass ceiling exists, simply because they haven't experienced it themselves. Or, they fear that acknowledging it would threaten their positions. Either way, they'll likely want to preserve the status quo.

Government has many tools at its disposal to addresses current barriers in the workplace that hold women back. The government can act as a catalyst for promoting gender equality perspectives and practices by heightening awareness of gender inequality, the benefits of gender equality, and the adverse impacts of gender inequity on women, children, families, communities, the business sector, and the nation as a whole. Governmental policy and legislation can dismantle discriminatory practices and artificial barriers, and programs and projects can further the understanding of the best interventions for breaking down barriers. In addition, monitoring and enforcement of existing legislation against gender discrimination must be real in order to break down barriers that hold women back.

Comprehensive, organization-specific programs that address breaking down structural, organizational, and cultural barriers are essential. This includes setting voluntary targets for female representation on boards, executive committees, and senior management and engaging in active outreach and recruitment of women. To overcome structural barriers, employers need to establish flexible work arrangements and work-life balance polices, and create effective pipelines that identify, develop, and promote women. Creation of mentoring programs within organizations is an important avenue for helping women move up the career ladder. Such programs should identify successful leaders of both sexes to serve as mentors to raise women's aspirations and to identify goals and pathways that move their careers forward.

Leadership development approaches need to be designed that not only help women develop critical leadership skills but also help them identify and leverage their strengths, become comfortable in taking risks, increase their confidence, and provide tools and techniques for circumventing existing barriers. Women themselves need to create their own social capital by developing networks of support, seeking sponsors within their workplace organizations, securing mentors, promoting themselves, and communicating the value that they bring to the workplace.

While overt discrimination has been driven out of organizations, subtle gender discrimination still exists and accounts for the lack of movement in shattering the glass ceiling. Such discrimination, exemplified in various work practices and cultural norms, is so entrenched in organizations that it is difficult to detect, and only incremental steps aimed at changing bias can chip away at the barriers that keep women from moving into senior levels.

Myerson and Fletcher propose a strategy of implementing small wins and incremental changes within companies. Companies, they maintain, have instituted practices of assimilation (i.e., having women adopt more masculine attitudes), accommodation (i.e., offering programs such as mentoring, flexible work arrangements, and alternative career tracks), and leveraging gender differences (i.e., sensitivity training). These practices have helped but can only go so far, they note. To move further, they maintain, companies must implement approaches that systematically identify and destroy embedded roots of discrimination that are due to cultural patterns. Cultural patterns that undermine equity include how work gets done, what activities are valued, and how assumptions about competence are made.

Results of the McKinsey study show that having top management commitment (i.e., CEO support) is not sufficient in making strides in gender diversity. Frequently, the study found, top management support did not trickle down through the organization. This suggests that companies have work to do to change attitudes and cultural bias within the company. Furthermore, companies that succeed in changing the gender dynamic have a critical mass of initiatives that they rigorously monitor and drive through. In other words, these companies walk their talk and make gender diversity part of their culture.

Another potential obstacle for this new wave of women in leadership roles is the danger of the “[glass cliff](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/smj.2161).” This phenomenon happens when women achieve leadership roles during periods of downturn, crisis, conflict or failure within the organization. These are high-risk leadership assignments for which women and diverse leaders may take the blame if the organization or situation does not rapidly improve under their leadership. So, women may break through the glass ceiling to reach top leadership roles, only to fall off of the glass cliff if the organization does not recover from the problems they inherited.

The first thing to realize is that the glass ceiling is no reflection of your value as a person or as an employee. The very nature of glass ceilings means that even if you've positioned yourself to meet every demand of a role, you'll still be denied the opportunity. So, we assume here that you understand and have the [key competencies](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_94.htm)   and self-confidence required for the upper levels of your organization, but that you are still being denied advancement.

REFRENCE

A Report on the glass ceiling initiative." United States. Dept. of Labour, 1991.

Keneally, Meghan. "Hillary Clinton's Progress Trying to 'Shatter That Highest, Hardest Glass Ceiling.'" ABC News, November 9, 2016.