**An Experimental Study Examining the Glass Cliff in Middle Management Levels**

**ABSTRACT**

In this study, I have examined whether the gender biased decision making mechanisms leading to Glass Cliffs for female leaders at the top echelons of organizations, also occur at the middle to upper middle management levels within organizations. My model considers competing hypotheses based on emerging, contradictory research on the Glass Cliff phenomenon. Counter to the tenets pertaining to the Glass Cliff phenomenon but consistent with Implicit Leadership Theories, this experimental study conducted on 202 participants revealed that, when compared to the female candidate, the male candidate was more likely to be assigned to the higher risk position.

**Keywords:** Glass Cliff, middle management level

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**INTRODUCTION**

According to recent studies conducted by Ryan and Haslam (2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008), there formed a new phenomenon called the “Glass Cliff”. Women at the higher echelons of organizations are being placed in higher risk positions when compared to their male colleagues (Ryan & Haslam, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008). The female leaders are being offered top leadership positions in corporations that have been performing poorly prior to their arrival (Ryan & Haslam 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008). The higher risk leadership positions held by female leaders are considered more prone to failure so these female executives are leading the corporations in crisis mode. Recent archival research conducted by Adams, Gupta and Leeth (2008) has come up with contradicting results showing no support, claiming women came to power in their respective organizations at times of relatively good performance. However, Haslam and Ryan have conducted numerous studies demonstrating the presence of the Glass Cliff phenomenon.

Some of the plausible explanations can be related to risk aversion and subtle or implicit gender biases. Women tend to be more risk averse when compared to men (Brynes et al., 1999). The literature also suggests that female leaders are more scrutinized (Eagly et al., 1995) and perceived as less effective as leaders than men (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 1992; Heilman, 2001; Schein, 2001). Such hindrance to the female leadership within organizations may force female leaders to take on less desirable positions in their organizations. Similarly, when intergroup dynamics are viewed, female leaders tend to be outgroup members in the predominantly male organizations. Discrimination against outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) can be manifested as assigning fellow ingroup members into more desirable positions (Powell & Butterfield, 2002), in this case leaving the less desirable positions for the female leaders. On the other hand, Feminine Leadership Advantage (FLA) associated with particular positive traits of women in contemporary organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003) can place the female leaders on Glass Cliffs. However, it is equally important to note that female leaders may not get assigned to higher risk positions as a result of the decrease in the overtly sexist attitudes (Swim, Aiken, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). According to Hebl, King, Glick, Kazama, & Singletary (2007), women can also be subject to contrarily negative expressions of sexism in terms of benevolence and hostility.

However, these recent studies have mostly investigated the Glass Cliff phenomenon at the executive and at the board level overlooking the middle to upper middle management leadership levels. Does the same gender biased decision making process apply to the middle to upper middle management level leadership positions in organizations assigning female leaders to higher risk positions? If the same biased decision making process occurs at middle to upper middle management level, does perceived leadership effectiveness of the leader mediate this occurrence? If this gender biased decision making mechanism exists, it can contribute to the pipeline problem affecting female leadership at the top level management positions. Female executives make up only four percent of S&P 500 companies (Catalyst in 2016). This new, subtle and unintentional form of gender discrimination called the Glass Cliff phenomenon can be one of the underlying reasons for this barrier at the middle to upper middle management level. It may be that women are appointed to higher risk positions more so than men do at the lower levels in order to be able to advance their careers. Raising awareness to the Glass Cliff phenomenon at the middle to upper middle management levels is important in order to have a more robust pipeline for prospective female CEOs.

In this study, I reviewed the Glass Cliff phenomenon as introduced by Ryan and Haslam and explore the theoretical framework. Inferring from the extant literature, I positioned my research building on Ryan and Haslam’s theorizing of this phenomenon. Then, I presented some empirical evidence from the experimental study I have conducted using an online respondent pool to examine the gender biased decision making process leading to this phenomenon at the middle to upper middle management level leadership positions. Contrary to the Glass Cliff phenomenon, the results have exhibited that the male candidate was more likely to be assigned to the higher risk position. I concluded with contribution to literature as well as the implications for theory and suggestions for direction of future research.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**The Existing Literature on the Glass Cliff**

The Glass Cliff phenomenon occurs when women are leading corporations in crisis mode, experiencing bad performance already prior to the appointment of the female executive or the female board member (Ryan & Haslam, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008). Likelihood of failure during the crisis mode management exposes the female leaders to negative criticism as well as being blamed for the negative outcomes that were taking course well before their appointment to the position (Ryan & Haslam, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008). The research on this phenomenon has primarily been conducted by Ryan & Haslam and their colleagues, offering an understanding how and why female leaders are more likely to be assigned to higher risk leadership positions. While it is possible that female leaders are more likely to choose higher risk leadership positions as a result of intergroup dynamics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Powell & Butterfield, 2002) in an effort to prove themselves in predominantly male organizations (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), the literature mostly focuses on why female leaders are more likely to be assigned to higher risk leadership positions.

**The Glass Cliff Phenomenon as Second Generation Gender Bias**

Although hostile and benevolent sexism still exists (Ryan & Haslam, 2007) such overt and hostile form of sexism – trying to disadvantage women purposefully – has dwindled (Swim et al., 1995) throughout the years. Hence, the female leader being assigned to the higher risk position at the middle to upper middle management levels can be the result of prejudice manifesting itself as a gender bias based on the perception of the female leader. This is another reasonable explanation as Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory (RCT) suggest (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000).

Second generation gender biases are subtle and have “something in the water” context to them preventing the potential female leaders’ upward mobility within their male dominated organizations (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb 2013). There is no intention to exclude, disadvantage or harm any individual directly (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb 2013), however well disguised, difficult to detect obstructions within work cultures, norms and practices present in many organizations are likely to impede the female leaders’ career advancement. Assigning the female leader at the middle to upper middle management levels to the higher risk leadership position can be perceived as a second generation gender bias, an exclusive action rather subtle and unintentional yet unknowingly discriminatory since the female leader is assigned to the higher risk position rather than a choice being presented to her and being accepted by her. This may contribute to the pipeline issue, disrupting the female leaders’ ability to climb the corporate ladder.

**Theoretical Explanations of Why the Glass Cliff Occurs**

There are two key theoretical perspectives explaining why this phenomenon exists: a) Gender bias & discrimination directed toward female leaders; and b) FLA.

**Gender Bias and Discrimination Toward Female Leaders.** While approaching the Glass Cliff phenomenon as discrimination against female leaders, taking a critical view, I question the intentionality of the organization. When the female leader is assigned to the higher risk leadership position, the organization may view her as a means to an end. Expecting her to endure the crisis regardless of the outcome and assigning the blame to her throughout the process (scapegoatism – Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Some of the less negative approaches can take effect as the manifestation of being seen unfit and as less effective as a leader when compared to men in accordance with RCT (Eagly et al., 1992; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002) as well as Think Male – Think Manager Association (Heilman, 2001; Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001). According to Schein’s 1973 and 1975 studies, both male (1973) and female (1975) managers expressed that men were more possessive of features of successful managers. Similarly, supported by the implicit leadership theories (Heilman, 2001; Ayman & Korabik, 2010) and RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002), this perception of the male manager being more successful than the female manager has been rather long-lasting (Eagly 2005, Schein 2001) as well as well understood and established (Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001) affecting the way individuals act and expect others to act in accordance. Thus, a male leader is perceived to be more qualified than a female leader for an inherently masculine managerial position (Schein 2001). The lack of congruence between being a successful leader and being a woman has impacted female leaders’ careers in an undesirable way. In that aspect, the Glass Cliff phenomenon can also be viewed as an extension of the Glass Ceiling phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Lack of congruence between being a leader (her leader role) and being a woman (her gender role) forces the female leader to try to overcome the prejudice as a result (Eagly & Karau, 2002). RCT of prejudice toward female leaders suggests that “perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to 2 forms of prejudice: a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles; and b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman” (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women are perceived as being more communal, facilitative and friendly by nature to accommodate their domestic roles, and are not perceived as fit and effective leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000).

If failure of the female leader can be an inevitable occurrence since the higher risk position is associated with failure as suggested by Ryan and Haslam (2005a, 2005b, 2007), then she is perceived to do worse than a male leader. Again, RCT proposes that female leaders are favored less than men and evaluated to do worse than men especially when they fail (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This negative association with the failure can be examined as the result of the prejudice toward the female leader in the society as per RCT states (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Thus, overall the attitudes are less positive toward female leaders making it difficult for them to become leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Hence, when assigned, the female leaders accept the less desirable higher risk leadership positions to advance in their organizations.

**The Perceptions of Feminine Leadership Advantage (FLA).** Examining the Glass Cliff phenomenon under a positive lens, one should realize that this phenomenon may be existent because of the perception of female leaders’ being more communal, supportive and considerate (Ridgeway, 1982; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women seem to have higher influence (Ridgeway, 1982) when they portray these feminine traits. Thus, female leaders may be assigned to higher risk leadership positions because they are considered better at managing change and seen more fit to handle times of crisis (Ryan et al., 2007).

As women started to spend more time at work, they have assumed the personal characteristics required to succeed in these newly acquired roles (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). The changing face of the traditional top down hierarchical organizations, embracing the importance of supportive relations and collaborations across many levels, favored the skills and abilities incorporated with the transformational leadership style (Bass & Avolio, 1994). More and more, the feminine traits associated with transformational leadership style are being noted as great for business compared to masculine traits (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003).

Consequently, the transformational leadership style is advantageous for it is mostly congruent with the female gender role’s demand for being supportive and considerate (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003). In addition, the gradual change in leadership roles is slightly more consistent with the female gender role than the traditional characterizations of the leadership, providing environments welcoming women’s managerial competence (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Female leaders have become the symbols of new types of leadership connoting greater effectiveness and synergy than leadership of the past (Adler, 1999). Therefore, assuming that women are communal, supportive and considerate, assigning a female leader can possibly be viewed as more feasible and beneficial during times of crisis. The Glass Cliff phenomenon may be borne out of FLA.

Consistent with FLA (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003), Think Female – Think Crisis Association has shown researchers that women in general are better equipped with crisis management skills when compared to men, making the female leaders more desirable in times of crisis (Ryan et al., 2007). Therefore, it is very likely that the female leader at middle to upper middle management levels is assigned to the higher risk position simply because she may be perceived to be better equipped with the job requirements.

**Why Are Women Less Likely to Be Assigned to Glass Cliffs?**

Alternatively, the female leaders are less likely to be assigned to higher risk leadership positions. Based on the literature of gender bias and discrimination toward female leaders, this is also likely scenario.

**A Similar Phenomenon – Challenging Developmental Work Experiences.** The female leader’s point of view may be different than others. She may perceive the high risk position as a challenging Developmental Work Experience (DWE) while from the outside it may be perceived as the Glass Cliff phenomenon. Therefore, the point of the perceiver can be viewed as one of the main differences between the concept of challenging DWEs and the Glass Cliff phenomenon. Some female leaders may learn and adapt from the experience they gain the first time they encounter the Glass Cliff and then use this valuable experience as a learning tool for future encounters. Hence, the next time the female leader encounters the Glass Cliff, she may then perceive it as a challenging DWE because of the previous experience.

Challenging DWEs are usually “demanding, stimulating, new, and calls on their ability and determination” (De Pater et al., 2009) while the Glass Cliff phenomenon lacks the element of “new” as per Ryan and Haslam state. The DWEs are considered experiences of the individual from challenging tasks (King et al., 2011). A challenging work experience is an effective tool presenting the individual with the opportunity to learn (McCauley et al., 1994) by creating a situation in which there is a gap between the skills and abilities one currently has and those that are required by the situation (King et al., 2011). In the Glass Cliff phenomenon, the corporations have been performing poorly prior to the arrival of the female leader (Ryan & Haslam, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). The poor performance prior to her arrival is a vital aspect in this phenomenon. The challenging DWEs are not directly related to failure from previous attempts. In order to clarify the distinction between the Glass Cliff phenomenon and challenging DWEs and to position this study in the Glass Cliff phenomenon literature, the newness – lack of previous failed attempts as well as the different point of views – the perceiver being the female leader versus others should be viewed as the two important boundary conditions. Also in this study, I refer to higher risk positions rather than tasks.

Although I am attempting to make this distinction between the Glass Cliff phenomenon and challenging DWEs, I realize that it may not be clearly applicable since they are similar. Recognizing this, I think it is difficult to rule out the rationale to have the male leader being assigned to the higher risk position. Therefore, the female leader may be less likely to be assigned to higher risk positions.

**Gender Bias and Discrimination Toward Female Leaders Revisited.** Expressions of sexism in terms of benevolence and hostility towards the female leader can cause the male leader get assigned to the higher risk position. Drawing from the Ambivalent Sexism Theory, the recent research has found that women can face expressions of sexism mirroring beliefs that they should be sheltered and valued (i.e., benevolence) and are inferior (i.e., hostility) when compared to men (Hebl et al., 2007). These beliefs may limit the female leader’s exposure to the challenging opportunities altering her range of work assignments in a less challenging way impacting their career advancement unconstructively (King et al., 2011). If the female leader is perceived to be less effective than her male counterpart, the male leader is likely to be assigned to the higher risk position. The assumption here is that congruence of leadership roles with leaders’ gender enhances effectiveness demonstrating that men are more effective than women in more masculine terms (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). Not being perceived as effective leaders at the middle to upper middle management levels, thus female leaders are not given these challenging opportunities, may contribute to the pipeline problem once again.

Referring back to RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002), men are more agentic, independent and assertive by nature to accommodate their employment roles in the society (Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000) thus viewed as more effective leaders. In addition to RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the Think Manager – Think Male Association (Schein 1973, 1975, 2001) coupled with the ILTs can take effect. Based on this explanation female leaders may not be placed in higher risk leadership positions.

**HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

While there is ample research demonstrating the existence of the Glass Cliff phenomenon at the upper most leadership levels, it is not clear if/how the same dynamics may reveal themselves at lower levels in organizations. The underlying assumption is that the theoretical explanations of the dynamics at the middle to upper middle management levels are likely to be similar to the theoretical explanations of the dynamics at the highest levels of organizations. If this phenomenon is present in the middle to upper middle management levels in organizations for potential female leaders, it is possible to associate it with the pipeline issue the female leaders face. The Glass Cliff phenomenon at the middle to upper middle management levels can be one of the reasons why we do not have many female executives. Therefore, examining this issue is vital in order to understand the various obstacles women face on the path to greater leadership.

**Gender and Job Assignment**

Drawing from the findings of Eagly & Karau (2002), as well as the findings of Schein’s seminal papers (1973, 1975 and 2001), prior literature suggests that the female leaders are perceived less effective when compared to their male counterparts. Supported by both RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the Think Manager – Think Male Association (Schein, 2001), the female leader is likely to be perceived as less effective and seen as unfit as a leader. This negative approach – caused by the gender bias and discrimination toward the female leaders – may be one of the main reasons for the female candidate being assigned to the higher risk position.

On the other hand, as a positive shift, this occurrence can be caused by the perceptions of FLA (Eagly & Carli, 2003), presenting the other end of the spectrum, suggesting that women – being transformational leaders in addition to being supportive and communal (Eagly & Carli 2003; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003). Women are perceived as better fit for leadership during crisis, associated with the Think Female – Think Crisis concept (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Hence, the female candidate is likely to be assigned to the higher risk leadership position since she is perceived as a more effective leader in accordance with FLA (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Considering both the negative theoretical explanations arising from the gender bias and discrimination toward the female leader, and the positive theoretical explanations attributed to the perceptions of FLA, I hypothesize that the female candidate in the middle to upper middle management levels may be assigned to the higher risk position.

**H1a) Female leaders are more likely to be assigned to higher risk positions compared to men at the middle to upper middle management levels.**

Since there are many different and opposing views of the Glass Cliff phenomenon supported by RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002), Think Manager – Think Male association (Schein 1973, 1975, 2001) and Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Hebl et al., 2007), I introduce a competing hypothesis stating that the female leaders in the middle to upper middle management positions are not being placed in higher risk positions.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that when there is an open position available for the candidates, it is likely to match the candidate that is perceived to be more fit and more effective as a leader to the opportunity. Being perceived as more effective leaders in general as per RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002) suggests and matching the preconceived ILTs supported by the Think Manager – Think Male association (Schein 1973,1975, 2001), the male candidate may be assigned to the higher risk position.

An alternative reason for assigning the male candidate to the higher risk position can be based on the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Hebl et al., 2007) reviewed in previous section. The female candidate may be sheltered and valued (i.e., benevolence) and is believed to be inferior (i.e., hostility) when compared to the male candidate (Hebl et al., 2007). If others have such beliefs and attitudes towards women, the male candidate is more likely to be assigned to the higher risk position. Hence, I hypothesize that the female candidate is less likely to be placed in the higher risk leadership position when compared to the male candidate.

**H1b) Female leaders are less likely to be assigned to higher risk positions compared to male leaders at the middle to upper middle management levels.**

**The Impact of Leadership Effectiveness**

To provide some insight into why both the male and the female candidates are equally likely to be assigned to the higher risk leadership position, I have examined leadership effectiveness as a plausible causal link. The review of the proposed relationships between gender, leadership effectiveness and the assignment of the higher risk position, are presented as a preliminary and non-comprehensive aspect of this study.

**Gender and Leadership Effectiveness.** According to RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and Think Manager – Think Male Association (Schein 1973, 1975, 2001), the male candidate is preferred since he is perceived more fit and more effective as a leader. In addition, the Female Leadership Advantage (Eagly & Carli, 2003) and Think Female – Think Crisis Association (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2007) suggest that the female candidate is preferred, since she is perceived to be a better fit during times of crisis. These competing schools of thought present the two different sides of the story. The variations in the perceived leadership effectiveness for both genders may contribute to the outcome, resulting in being assigned to the higher risk position. Thus, the perception of the leaders’ effectiveness is a vital aspect affecting how both candidates are equally likely to be assigned to the higher risk position.

**Leadership Effectiveness and Job Assignment.** To investigate the link between leadership effectiveness and being assigned to the higher risk position, Implicit Leadership Theories as well as the Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness were reviewed.

It is beneficial to recognize that people make assumptions, have perceptions and prior expectations; and based on these, they form cognitive models of the leadership process (Foti & Lord, 1987; Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1993). As a possible result of socialization, employees assume and expect certain traits, behaviors and abilities of the ideal leader leading to cognitive representations (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). The cognitive representations of the ideal leader are referred as Implicit Leadership Theories. Consequently, these ILTs are expected to reflect the employees’ cognitive schemas of the ideal leader (Foti & Lord, 1987; Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1993), affecting the way male and female leaders are treated in the workplace (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). In addition to being perceived more effective as a leader when compared to the female candidate as per RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the male candidate is also more likely to match those ILTs formed cognitively as a result of the Think Manager – Think Male Association (Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001). In line with this approach, I predict that the male candidate is more likely to be assigned to the higher risk position.

Another approach to examine the link between leadership effectiveness and being assigned to the higher risk position is the Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness. The Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness suggests that leadership effectiveness is based on two key aspects; leader’s attributes and his or her situational control (Ayman, Chemers & Fiedler, 1995). The leader’s attributes can be defined as leadership style, such as the leader can be relationship (transformational) or task (transactional) oriented (Ayman et al., 1995). Situational control is the ability to influence and gain control (Bass, 1991). Based on both of these factors (leadership style and situational control), the female leader is more likely to be perceived as a better fit, being more effective during times of crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Hence, according to this approach, the female leader is more likely to get assigned to the higher risk position.

The fit between the job and the leader is vital for any decision maker such as an executive or a hiring manager involved in selecting and training employees in organizations (Fiedler, 1996). Based on the existing literature, the fit can be explained by: a) Preconceived ILTs; and b) Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness.

If, in fact there is a relationship between the gender of the applicant and the assignment of the task, the existing literature suggests that one of the possible factors can be the perceived leadership effectiveness of the candidate. Therefore, I hypothesize that the perceived leadership effectiveness will mediate the occurrence of Glass Cliffs.

**H2) This occurrence is explained by the perceived leadership effectiveness of the leader. Perception of the leaders’ effectiveness mediates this relationship between these variables.**

**METHODOLOGY**

**Procedure**

Participants were randomly chosen from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk to collect data inexpensively and speedily (Goodman et al., 2013) as well as reliable as traditional methods (Buhrmester et al., 2011). The survey switched the gender of the candidate every time a respondent participated, guaranteeing random assignation as well as the equal number of respondents for the different gendered candidate groups. The groups were exposed to the male or the female candidate in addition to the two versions of the same job description differing in terms of risk. One of job descriptions were high risk in terms of cost and schedule and the other one was low risk as control for the groups. The constraints provided in the two versions of the job description were demonstrated in time, and budget. A five point Likert Scale is used for the items of the survey with the exception of three questions asking the participants to assign the candidate to a position, pick the gender of the applicant and the position the participant perceives riskier.

Out of 265 participants, the final sample size was reduced down to 202 respondents. Four respondents had no work experience. There were 115 males and 86 females. One person was identified as other. There were 162 White, 20 Asian, 13 Black, 4 Native American and 1 Pacific Islander respondents. Two respondents identified their race as other.

ANOVA analyses were conducted to: a) Compare the perceived leadership effectiveness of the male and the female candidate; and b) Compare the perceived leadership effectiveness and the job offer. Then regression analyses were employed to test H1a and H1b. The mediation test using Sobel-Goodman method was applied for H2. Some additional analyses using logistic regression with binary mediation was also conducted.

Insert Table 1 here

Overall, a total of 38% of respondents have assigned the higher risk position. Female respondents make up approximately 12% of this while male respondents make up a quarter of the sample so it is interesting to see that the female respondents pick their own gendered candidate Mary for the lower risk position more frequently. Also the female respondents have assigned the lower risk job to their own category of gender at higher rates. However male respondents have assigned the male candidate Robert to the higher risk position more often than the female candidate Mary. Insert Table 2 here

**Manipulation & Engagement Checks**

The experimental study had two manipulation checks in addition to a reinforcement check. Any failure of these checks resulted in exclusion of the respondent from the final sample. The items of the scale for perceived risk are adopted from Featherman & Pavlou’s 2003 paper and Martins, Oliveira & Popovic’s 2014 paper (Cronbach’s α=0.80). The respondents were asked to pick the job they perceived as higher risk. The risk was manipulated in terms of team members (junior versus senior), time (short versus long time) and budget (big versus small) constraints.The other manipulation check was the candidate’s gender. The respondents needed to recall the gender of the candidate they were exposed within their group.There was an engagement check asking the respondents how they are feeling combined with a statement to mark the requested answer. A code word was given at the end of the study for guaranteed completion to receive credit for the effort and time of the respondents.

**Measures**

Dependent Variable (Job Offer) is the position the respondent assigns the candidate. Position 1 was the higher risk position coded as 1. Position 2 was the lower risk position coded as 0. Independent Variable – Candidate’s Gender – the respondents were asked to pick the correct gender for their group. The female candidate was coded as 0. Mediating Variable is the Perceived Leadership Effectiveness with the scale adopted from Rosette & Tost’s 2010 study. The items have a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.72 and were measured on a 5 point Likert-type scale anchored by 1-strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree. Scores were reverse coded to demonstrate higher score as higher perception of leadership effectiveness. The scores ranged from 2.5 to 5 (M=4.2, SD=.6). The control variables included in the study are the respondents’ work experience and gender.

Insert Table 3 here

**RESULTS**

The comparison of the average perceived leadership effectiveness of the male and the female candidate has revealed that the relationship between the candidate’s gender and the perceived leadership effectiveness was marginally significant (p=0.06) at 5% level of confidence. Another ANOVA analysis examining the link between the high risk position and the perceived leadership effectiveness, has revealed a p=0.05 at 5% level showing the positive significant relationship. These preliminary ANOVA analyses have demonstrated that the candidate that is perceived to be more effective leader, is more likely to get assigned to the higher risk position.

The results from the regressions with Sobel-Goodman mediation test have reported an R squared of 10 % demonstrating that the relationship between gender of the candidate and the job assignment (c path) was marginally significant (p=0.084). Having coded the male candidate as 1, this result shows that male candidates are more likely to be assigned to higher risk position supporting H1b, hence not supporting H1a. The relationship between the gender of the candidate and the leadership effectiveness (a path) was marginally significant (p=0.081). When the DV (job assignment) is regressed on the mediator (perceived leadership effectiveness) representing b path and the IV (candidate’s gender) representing c’ path, both p values were statistically significant (b path 0.004 and c’ path 0.036). The proportion of total effect that is mediated was 20 % (p=0.13) and the sign was negative. Thus, the mediation effect of leadership effectiveness was statistically insignificant with approximately 20% of the total effect of candidate’s gender on job assignment at 5% level.

Similarly, the results from the logistic regressions with binary mediation test have reported an R squared of 8 % demonstrating that the relationship between gender of the candidate and the job assignment (c path) was marginally significant (p=0.083). Having coded the male candidate as 1, this result shows just as the first analysis have shown, that male candidates are more likely to be assigned to higher risk position supporting H1b hence not supporting H1a. The relationship between the gender of the candidate and the leadership effectiveness (a path) was marginally significant (p=0.081). When the DV (job offer) is regressed on the mediator (leadership effectiveness) representing b path and the IV (candidate’s gender) representing c’ path, both of the p values were statistically significant (b path 0.005 and c’ path 0.032). The proportion of total effect that is mediated was 21 % (p=0.17). The sign of the indirect effect was negative. Thus, the mediation effect of leadership effectiveness was statistically insignificant with approximately 21 % of the total effect of candidate’s gender on job assignment at 5% level.

**DISCUSSION**

According to the collected and analyzed data, the male candidate was assigned to the higher risk position at higher rates when compared to the female candidate. Also, the results suggest that the concepts of leadership effectiveness and fit are very important when it comes to selecting employees for a position. People are likely to assign the position to the candidate that they perceive as a better fit and more effective as a leader.

Focusing on the female candidate and drawing in from the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Hebl et al., 2007), RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and Think Manager – Think Male Association (Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001), this research study has unveiled a different outcome showing that the female candidate was less likely to be assigned to the higher risk position. Thus, the experimental study has shown that the gender biased decision making mechanisms that lead to the Glass Cliff phenomenon at the highest level of organizations, do not exist at the middle to upper middle management levels for the female leaders. Contrary to Ryan and Haslam’s numerous studies, the results of the current study have demonstrated some evidence that the same gender biased decision making mechanisms, leading to the Glass Cliff phenomenon at the top levels of organizations, are not likely to exist in the middle to upper middle management levels for female leaders.

The alternative explanation for the current study’s results counter to the Glass Cliff phenomenon can be based on the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Hebl et al., 2007), as well as RCT (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and Think Manager – Think Male Association (Schein 1973, 1975, 2001), predicting the male candidate being assigned to the higher risk position. Based on these theoretical perspectives, assigning the male candidate to the higher risk position was foreseen since he was likely to be perceived more successful and more fit for the position.

Therefore, the current study’s main contribution to the extant literature of gender bias and discrimination towards female leaders is that the Think Manager – Think Male Association (Eagly, 2005; Schein, 2001) is in effect at the middle to upper middle management levels for female leaders, providing a plausible explanation to why they are still likely to encounter obstacles giving way to the pipeline problem. An incremental contribution of this study to the theory and existing literature can also be viewed as the first step to differentiate the Glass Cliff phenomenon from challenging Developmental Work Experiences. The point of the perceiver as well as the concept of newness can be viewed as the starting point to provide distinction between these similar concepts.

**CONCLUSION**

Through my unique conceptual framework as well as methodology, I have attempted to examine this phenomenon at the middle to upper middle management levels. Supported by the results of the experimental study, I have concluded that the gender biased decision making process of assigning the female leader to the higher risk position does not exist at the middle to upper middle management levels. Often, the female leaders at middle to upper middle management levels are less likely to emerge as leaders within their own organizations in order to win the internal CEO tournament (Ibarra & Hansen, 2009). Thus, some of the female leaders may choose to move on and look elsewhere for career advancement becoming CEOs and board members within other organizations that are in crisis mode (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Therefore, it may be beneficial to focus on reinforcement of implementing organizational policies within institutions to create optimal work environment for the female leaders, rather than focusing on the female leaders.

The data collected and analyzed in this research paper suggests that the gender biased decision making mechanism, leading to the Glass Cliff phenomenon at the highest levels in organizations, is not an occurrence at the middle to upper middle management levels for female leaders suggesting that the female leaders are not very likely to be assigned to the higher risk positions at higher rates when compared to the male leaders. However, this may still contribute to the pipeline problem that the female leaders face. Since the distinction between the Glass Cliff phenomenon and the challenging DWEs may not be clear, it is a plausible argument that the female leaders in the middle to upper middle management levels are not provided these kinds of opportunities to gain valuable experience (De Pater et al., 2009).

For future suggestions, the Glass Cliff phenomenon and challenging Developmental Work Experiences should be compared. Conducting more rigorous studies to clarify the underlying dynamics will help contribute to the theory.

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**Descriptive Tables**

Table 1 – Percentages of positions assigned by candidate’s gender

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Candidate’s Gender | Low Risk Position | High Risk Position | Total |
| Female | 70 (35%) | 32 (16%) | 102 (51%) |
| Male | 55 (27%) | 45 (22%) | 100 (49%) |
| Total | 125 (62%) | 77 (38%) | 202 (100%) |

Table 2 – Percentages of high risk position assigned by respondent’s gender

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Candidate’s Gender | Female Respondent Assigning High Risk | Male Respondent  Assigning High Risk | Total |
| Female | 11 (14%) | 21 (27%) | 32 (41%) |
| Male | 14 (18%) | 31 (40%) | 45 (58%) |
| Total | 25 (32%) | 52 (67%) | 77 (100%) |

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics for variables of interest

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min – Max |
| Offer | .3811881 | .4868853 | 0,1 |
| Leader Eff | 4.205446 | .6056287 | 2.5 – 5 |
| Gender C | .4950495 | .5012177 | 0,1 |
| Gender P | .5841584 | .5234278 | 0,1 & 3 |
| Work | .980198 | .1396654 | 0,1 |

**Regression Analysis with Sobel Goodman Mediation & Bootstrapping**



**Regression Analysis with Sobel Goodman Mediation & Bootstrapping Continued**



**Regression Analysis with Sobel Goodman Mediation & Bootstrapping Continued**



**Logistic Regression Analysis with Binary Mediation & Bootstrapping**

**Logistic Regression Analysis with Binary Mediation & Bootstrapping Continued**



**Logistic Regression Analysis with Binary Mediation & Bootstrapping Continued**

