

Shattering the Illusion of the Disappearance of the Glass Ceiling in Journalism: A case study approach to presenting the inside story

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Abstract

Journalism as a profession is arguably one that has high ideals and principled values at its heart, not least through its function as the fourth estate. However, the media can be reluctant to voluntarily undertake any examination and open dialogue in terms of its own professional practices – particularly in relation to the issue of gender equality and the advancement of women into management roles. This paper will present the findings of an extensive study into gender equality in journalism and challenges the hypotheses of some commentators that the glass ceiling has long since been shattered in media organizations. The methodological approach was influenced by phenomenology, which gives value to the relevance of ‘experience’.

This case study focuses specifically on the profession of journalism in the United Kingdom and examined the experiences of women journalists who worked in different types of media between 1968 and 2013. It involved a mixed methods approach commencing with a survey completed by 176 female journalists, of whom 29 were interviewed. The findings show that the majority of those who have worked in the profession during this timescale are of the view that the glass ceiling in journalism continues to exist, although to a varying extent in different types of journalism. The data shows that the hypothesis that such barriers on the grounds of gender are no longer an issue in journalism is a myth – with opportunities open only to a few ‘token’ women. The conclusions reached are that, in the experience of the participants, due to the continued existence of the glass ceiling, women journalists have limited career options: either to make a move sideways or to leave the profession altogether. It is concluded that the status quo is being maintained by the continued existence of a heavily male-dominated culture in the profession.

Introduction

“The beauty of a career in journalism is that it now offers something for all women. They benefit from its flexibility, bending work round family commitments and empowering themselves to come close to achieving that female Holy Grail: having it all. Because of this, I have no doubt we’ll see the number of women influential in journalism swell even more over the next couple of decades. But if there is no increase in those occupying senior editorial positions, or even fewer as time goes by, it will be through their own personal choice and nothing to do with a glass ceiling that has long since been shattered” (Moore 2009, 9).

This description of journalism by British journalist Jane Moore portrays a profession that offers a good career for women and has achieved the status of being a ‘female-friendly zone’ by the twenty-first century. But, as Walker (2013) observed, it is unusual for the media to hold a mirror up to itself and

examine its own practices in such a manner. “A group of people whose business is communication hardly ever communicate about themselves, at least, not in any disciplined and critical fashion” (Ibid.).

This paper aims to challenge the hypothesis, that the glass ceiling has long been shattered in journalism, by capturing an authentic insight into the experiences of women who have worked in the profession in the United Kingdom since 1968. According to Pugh (2000), the years between 1968 and 1970 were the time when women’s liberation, often referred to as the ‘second wave of feminism’, began to emerge in the UK (as it did in North America, Australasia and across Europe). Therefore the timescale has significance in terms of women’s expectations from a career, which was underpinned by a right to equality laid down in the statute books, commencing with the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Montgomery 2006).

The Glass Ceiling as a Concept

The term ‘the glass ceiling’ was first used in the mid-1980s in the USA to describe invisible barriers that have kept women from promotion to upper management particularly in the business world – although it is interesting to note that the expression was initially used in an article about a magazine editor i.e. a journalist rather than a businesswoman as is the context in which the term is commonly used now.

“The phrase glass ceiling was first used in 1984 in an Adweek profile of Gay Bryant, who at the time was the editor of Working Woman magazine. In that profile, she was quoted as saying, ‘Women have reached a certain point – I call it the glass ceiling ... in the top of middle management and they’re stopping and getting stuck’” (Boyd 2012).

The concept was brought to popular attention through the findings of the longitudinal studies conducted by Morrison, White and Van Velsor (1987, 1992), which examined the corporate environment for women working for Fortune 100 and also the Fortune 500 companies in the USA. “The glass ceiling is a composition of transparent barriers that prevented women from rising above a certain level in the institutional hierarchy” (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor 1987, 13).

In the United Kingdom, the term came into common usage in the early 1990s. Journalist and campaigner Lesley Abdela wrote about the ‘glass ceiling’, although her main focus was on the world of politics (including the 300 group campaign). She argued that it was time for a “shevolution” (Abdela 1991, 1) and wrote about bad practice and the illegal nature of the practice of blocking women’s promotion to top positions in local and national government.

“The Americans coined the phrase ‘the Glass Ceiling’ to describe the manifestation (if that’s the word for something near-invisible) whereby women can’t seem to move up the ladder, beyond the lower and middle ranges in major organizations. Beneath the ceiling, thousands of women are bumping heads, watching males no more skillful or experienced than themselves leapfrogging into top management or senior posts” (Abdela 1991, 15).

Since this time, the term has come into common usage to describe the continued perception that the level at which women fail to rise in terms of promotion in their careers is disproportionate and unfair when compared to the experiences of their male counterparts. The debate about women and the existence of a glass ceiling preventing promotion to senior management positions has continued to be topical in the UK, as it has in other parts of the world. The Economist published a “glass ceiling index” to mark International Women’s Day in 2013 (The Economist 2013) in a bid to assess on a global scale where women had the best chance of equal treatment at work – with New Zealand scoring high in its five indicators. The United States came 12th in the index, while Britain was positioned way behind coming in 18th place. The research used indicators that assessed the impact upon women as follows: the number of men and women respectively with tertiary education; female labour-force participation; the male-female wage gap; the proportion of women in senior jobs; and net child-care costs relative to the average wage. It can be seen from this research that this is not an issue that is exclusive to a single or a small selection of countries, but it is a challenge facing professions globally.

In terms of specific experiences of women in middle and high-level posts in the United Kingdom, several assessments have been undertaken to gauge the existence and the significance of a glass ceiling blocking opportunities for women. Two studies carried out by the UK Government, namely the ‘Unleashing Ambition’ report (Milburn 2009) and the subsequent progress report, ‘Panel on Fair Access to the Professions’ (Milburn 2012) concluded (after looking across professions) that the glass ceiling had not been removed.

“Across the professions as a whole, the glass ceiling has been scratched but not broken. The professions still lag way behind the social curve. If anything, the evidence suggests that since 2009, taken as a whole, the professions – despite some pockets of considerable progress – have done too little to catch up” (Milburn 2012, 3).

Further reports conducted in the British business sector also reached similar conclusions. The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM 2011) polled 3,000 of its members in 2011 and found 73 percent of female respondents felt barriers still existed for women seeking senior management and

board-level positions in the UK. This compared with just 38 percent of men who believed there was a glass ceiling.

“The report, *Ambition and Gender at Work*, suggests women's managerial career aspirations lag behind men's at every stage of their working lives, and that they have less clarity over traditional career direction than men. At the start of their careers, 52 percent of male managers had a fair or clear idea that they wanted to work in a particular role, compared with 45 percent of women managers. Only half of women said they expected to become managers, versus two-thirds of men. Even among the under-30s, gender aspirations remained entrenched, with 45 percent of men and 30 percent of women expecting to become managers or leaders” (Snowdon 2011).

The 2012 ILM report (ILM 2012) examined the experiences of women in banking and found that there was clear evidence of a range of barriers that were impeding women's career progression in the industry. A third (31 percent) of women in junior roles stated that they thought a glass ceiling existed for women where they worked. That statistic rose to 61 percent of women in middle management roles. While the survey found that the reverse was true for men – who did not see it is a major issue with 31 percent of men at junior level said a glass ceiling existed in their organization, dropping to 23 percent of men at middle management level.

“The banking industry, at its more senior positions at least, is still dominated by men. This means the number of potential female role models at senior level is comparatively small. Perceptions are central to tackling the glass ceiling. If women already feel that it is more difficult to make it to the top than it is for men, then a lack of female role models is only likely to reinforce that belief” (ILM 2012, 15).

In terms of consideration of the state of affairs regarding the number of women in leading roles in FTSE 100 companies, concerns have also been raised. The UK Government aims to have 25 percent of FTSE 100 directors to be female by 2015 (BBC 2013) – although most of these gains have been achieved through companies having hired female non-executive directors (Monaghan and Goodley 2013). While in terms of women at the top of FTSE 100 companies, the situation has undulated at comparatively low levels. The announcement in October 2013 that Angela Ahrendts was due to depart from Burberry to Apple in mid-2014 was seen by some commentators in the UK – in what McNair (2009, 67) described as “meta-journalism or journalism about journalism” at least – as a negative step as it left only two women in charge of the country's biggest companies (Carolyn McCall at EasyJet and Alison Cooper at Imperial Tobacco) (Peacock 2013). However, a month later the figure altered to four following the announcement of the pending appointment of Liv Garfield to be chief executive of water company Severn Trent from spring 2014. (Monaghan 2013) The announcement was described as a “one in, one

out' game of count the female bosses" by commentators. (Monaghan and Goodley 2013). The appointment of Inga Beale as the first female chief executive of Lloyd's of London in December 2013 – the first in the financial institution's 325-year history (Treanor 2013) – was also hailed as newsworthy as it was ground-breaking, which implies that there remains an element of novelty around a woman undertaking a top job in a high-profile organization.

It can be seen therefore that in professions that are traditionally viewed as the most powerful in the UK, that women are not succeeding apace in any of the efforts made to gauge the state of the glass ceiling.

The Glass Ceiling and Journalism

With regards to examining the particular situation in relation to the profession of journalism, it has been concluded that there are several barometers for assessing the situation. One perspective is to look at the number of women who have broken the glass ceiling, with the benchmark for assessing the ceiling being gauged in terms of statistical evidence of the number of women who have made it into management roles. The second gauge is to look at perceptions of those experiences captured through research, as well as anecdotes from professionals who are embedded in the professional culture of journalism. These can be clearly defined as quantitative as opposed to qualitative approaches but it should be observed that the second stance opens up the debate to a much wider group of people and therefore, potentially could produce richer, more informed results.

Journalism, the Glass Ceiling and Statistics

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was little evidence of women in journalism as they were largely seen as consumers rather than as producers of news (Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004). However there were some exceptions in terms of women entering journalism and, to an even more limited extent, women were occasionally making it to more senior roles. Notably Rachel Beer was made editor of the Observer in 1891 and, according to Coren and Negev (2011) she became editor of the Sunday Times two years later although "neither paper has ever employed any female editor since then" (Franks 2013, 2).

Over the next century the situation improved, although only marginally. By the 1990s, a total of eight women had become editors of national Sunday newspapers – although by 1998 all had been

replaced and only one woman had become the editor of a national daily, with several titles having had a female deputy editor (Delano 2000). So overall when newspapers are examined in their entirety up to this point, it remained to be the case that there was a lack of women who had risen to senior roles in newspapers – particularly within the nationals. (Walter 2010). This resulted in claims that the proverbial ‘glass ceiling’ had not been broken by the end of the twentieth century.

Despite marginal improvements it is clear that by the early years of the twenty-first century there was a little further progress in journalism’s top jobs. In 2003 The Sun, the country’s biggest selling newspaper, appointed Rebekah Wade as its first female editor (Leonard 2003), a role that she held until 2009. By the end of 2013, only three of the eighteen Fleet Street national titles were being edited by women (Halliday 2013) – of whom only one was an editor for a national daily and that was Dawn Neesom at the Daily Star (Franks 2013). The other two appointments – also made in 2013 – were Victoria Newton as editor at the Sun on Sunday and Lisa Markwell at the Independent on Sunday. Both of these publications and appointments are arguably less prestigious as they are top posts on weekly national newspapers, as opposed to daily publications. There have been a number of more recent cases where women have been appointed as deputy editors, including Emma Tucker who was made deputy editor of The Times in 2013.

“Tucker said the appointments showed that newspapers were leaving behind the historical gender imbalance on Fleet Street. . . . I can honestly say that any young woman starting at the Times today would not have that problem. There are so many senior women at the Times doing inspiring things. . . . Even in my 20 years in journalism the times have changed phenomenally. It's now recognized that .women make a really positive contribution" (Halliday 2013).

To set this in context, research carried out by the London-based ‘Women in Journalism’ group established that women did not have much of a presence in terms of producing high-profile content for national newspapers. The study found that women had on average just 22 percent of the front-page bylines across nine national newspapers. The Daily Express had the most equal split of male and female bylines on 24 front pages, while in contrast more than 90 percent of the Independent's 70 cover bylines were male (Women in Journalism 2012).

Statistics for women in top roles in broadcasting have been found to be similarly sporadic, as has been the practice of keeping records on appointments according to gender. According to Chambers,

Steiner and Fleming (2004), independent television organizations do not keep records on gender breakdowns in recruitment and promotion.

“However, the BBC, the largest (and public) broadcasting organization, has a policy of affirmative action for women and ethnic minorities which has been improving the recruitment and promotion practices of the organization” (Ibid., 96).

According to Baracela (2009) however, only 36 percent of the BBC's upper echelons were female “a figure, says the BBC Trust, that has seen no improvement over recent years” and of the workforce at board level at ITV, the UK's largest commercial television station, only 14 percent were women.

Radio is an enclave of journalism that has traditionally been seen positively in terms of the number of women it employs at all levels, due to its image of being more ‘female friendly’ than other forms of journalism (Keeble 2001; Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004). Yet, research conducted by Sound Women (2011) found that women made up 34 percent of senior managers and only 17 percent at board level in UK radio industry, also suggesting that it too is a type of journalism that has glass ceiling issues.

In terms of the broadcasting industry generally, a more positive and improving outlook has been presented more recently. A census of employment of the creative industries showed that women made up over half (51 percent) of broadcast management in 2012, compared to 36 percent in 2009 (Creative Skillset 2012). However it must be acknowledged that the term ‘broadcast management’ is a general one and does not necessarily mean more women at board level in British broadcasting organizations. It can also be observed from the same study (Ibid.) that with regards to television in particular, women made up 45 percent of the workforce generally – which was the same level that it had been in 2004.

Discussion of Perspectives of a Glass Ceiling in Journalism

It can be seen therefore that any debate about the glass ceiling has tended to develop out of the facts and statistics as they have become available and the perspectives given tend to emerge in direct response to what has been presented. However these reflections are worthy of closer consideration as often occur as part of heated discussion and can potentially provide a different perspective on the facts being presented.

By the end of the twentieth century some commentators acknowledged that there was a lack of equality for women in journalism but felt that change was afoot.

“The higher one goes in the profession, therefore the fewer women one finds, and those women earn significantly less on average than their male counterparts. . . .The broad cultural impact of three decades of feminism is now being felt in the media industry – a new generation of women entering the profession from uni slowly makes its way up the career ladder” (McNair 1999, 18).

Much of the debate focused on women in management roles in newspapers as opposed to in broadcasting organizations. McNair (2009) went on to conclude that there was no longer a glass ceiling in the journalistic profession due to the appointment of a female to a top role in journalism i.e. the fact that Rosie Boycott had been appointed as the first female editor of a daily newspaper in 1996, *The Independent*, and had then moved onto the editorship of *The Express*. More recently, the appointment of a woman to a senior role continues to be lauded as a sign that the glass ceiling has gone for good. As a new senior executive at *The Times*, Emma Tucker indeed also saw her own appointment to a deputy leadership role at a national broadsheet as a positive step for other women (Halliday 2013). British journalist and television presenter Jane Moore also felt confident to proclaim that the concept of a glass ceiling was irrelevant for women in journalism as it “has long since been shattered” (2009, 9).

However, the counter-argument to these perspectives is that such appointments can be viewed as ‘token’ and have arguably not led to a revolution for women in leading posts in journalism. North (2009) argued that this was not the case and that it should not be seen as such simply down to the fact that there had only been a handful of women editors, heads of department and media owners globally. Ross (2001) had argued that the glass ceiling was still in existence and more than a decade later it does not appear that any significant change has been achieved.

This conflict of perspectives seems to derive from the fact that there had been an “...increasing proportion of women entering journalism in recent years [and] has resulted in a more or less even split between the sexes” (Journalism Training Forum 2002, cited in Harcup 2009, 32) albeit not at management level.

“There maybe more women in journalism, but they are not always in the most powerful positions, as Anne Perkins notes, “The higher up a newspaper hierarchy you travel, the fewer women there are to be seen” (Perkins 2001). Even a female national newspaper editor told researchers that ‘much of journalism is still a boys’ club, with women struggling for professional acceptance” (quoted in Journalism Training Forum 2002),(Harcup 2009, 33).

According to Walter (2010) when newspapers are examined in their entirety, there remained a lack of women who had risen to senior roles in newspapers – particularly within the nationals.

In terms of debate about the number of women in the boardrooms of British broadcasting organizations, discussion has not proved to be so rife. There has been wide-reaching discussion about the issue of ageing in broadcasting generally in the UK, encompassing a particular focus on journalism. The ‘Commission on Older Women’, chaired by the Rt. Hon Harriet Harman MP, turned its attention to broadcasting in 2013 and this was indicative of the level and extent of the wider debate on women and journalism. Its interim report revealed that there were many experiences where women were leaving jobs in television by their mid-thirties, and therefore they were potentially missing out on opportunities for experienced staff at the top level of the profession.

“Evidence shows that within the TV industry, 45 percent of women leave their jobs by the age of 35. The majority of men (75 percent) working in TV are 35 years of age or over compared to 52 percent of women” (Commission on Older Women 2013, 35).

Franks (2011) had written about the attitudes of the BBC towards the advancement of women within the organization in the 1970s and also explored the ‘glass ceiling’ concept in relation to the BBC specifically. The fact that she subtitled her research ‘Not So Much a Glass Ceiling as One of Reinforced Concrete’ is a clear indicator in itself. It does therefore appear that the balance has not been totally redressed.

More recent research by Franks (2013) has highlighted the experience of Jana Bennett, one of the women who reached the highest levels of British media during her career in broadcasting.

“She reflected upon her experience as a pioneering woman: ‘You have to keep taking these steps forward and no organization should think it is there yet. Why should there be a 30 percent target for boards if women are half the population? Organizations should be mindful that their investment doesn’t walk out the door’. She doesn’t believe in quotas but believes in targets, adding: ‘Other countries are ahead of the UK. I think there’s a bamboo ceiling rather than a glass ceiling: it stretches but doesn’t really break’” (Broadcast 2012), (Franks 2013, 37).

Therefore it can be concluded that there has been discussion of the issue of a glass ceiling in journalism in the UK, although there is a lack of a unified perspective about its state, bolstered by sporadic statistics across the profession in this regard. This therefore presented an opportunity for

conducting further research into whether the glass ceiling had been shattered or not, using the profession of journalism as a case study.

Methodology

The data collection process involved a mixed methods approach including: a survey completed by 176 female journalists and a further 29 face-to-face interviews selected from the survey participants. The women had worked in different types of journalism around the UK and had all entered the profession between 1968 and 2013, therefore the most experienced had worked in the profession for almost 45 years – across five different decades – and were between 22 and 65-years-old. Their professional experience was as follows: 132 of the journalists had worked in newspapers at some point during their careers; 85 in magazines; 53 women in radio journalism; and 35 in television journalism. It is a common career path for journalists to cross between different media (Bull 2007) and specifically between print and broadcast media (and vice-versa) at different points in their careers (Harcup 2009). This is possible due to the transferrable skills and the common fundamental principles that create a “unifying thread” (Gopsill and Neale 2007, 232) that cross different media. The data analysis involved statistical analysis of the quantitative elements of the results and content analysis of the qualitative findings, which were quantified using predetermined categories in a systematic manner (Bryman 2012) using a ‘thematic analysis’ approach as put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006 cited in King and Horrocks 2010).

The methodological approach adopted for the study involved a reflection upon phenomenology and the value of “lived experience” (Holloway 1997, 68). Barnhurst and Nerone (2009) noted that the use of history as a map was a useful tool in documenting journalism and in analysing professional practices within journalism. “For many scholars today, history provides an indispensable tool for critiquing professional journalism by showing its contingency and entanglements” (ibid., 17).

It is argued therefore that collating the experiences of journalists is of value to assessing the existence of a glass ceiling in the profession of journalism in the UK.

Findings - Views on the Glass Ceiling in Journalism

The research commenced with the survey, which asked the journalists to consider issues related to the glass ceiling and opportunities for promotion. These were then further analyzed according to the type of journalism in which the women had most recently worked.

They were first asked to consider the following statement: 'The glass ceiling has been broken for women in journalism in terms of management opportunities'. Only 2.3 percent (n=4) strongly agreed with this statement, 22.4 percent (n=39) agreed, a further 20.1 percent (n=35) neither agreed nor disagreed and the highest percentage 35.6 percent (n=62) stated that they disagreed with the statement. A further 19.5 percent (n=34) of the sample strongly disagreed (see Figure 1).

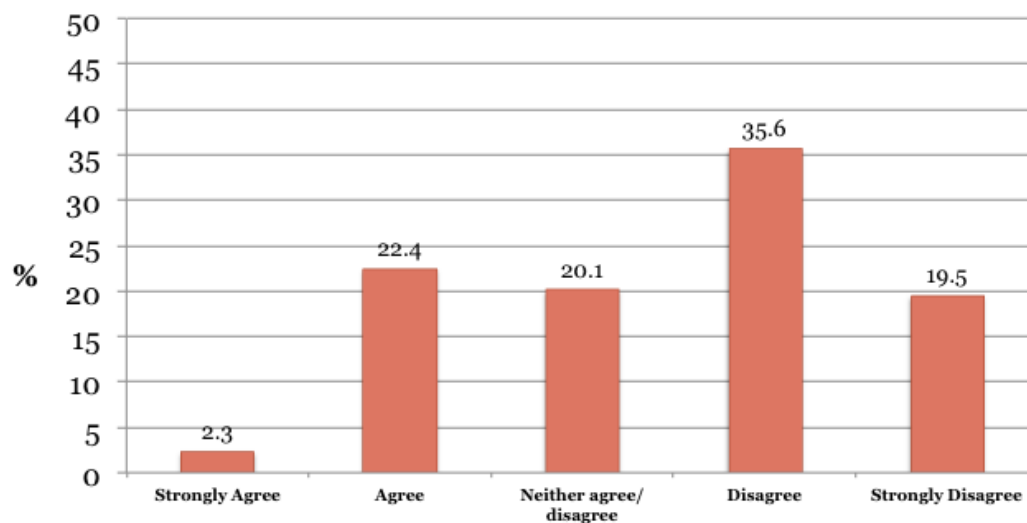


Figure 1: Do you agree that the glass ceiling has been broken in journalism? (n=176)

The results were then further analyzed through cross-tabulation in terms of the type of journalism in which the women worked. Figure 2 shows that of those that disagreed with this statement, it was those who worked in magazines (41 percent) who disagreed the most, followed by 35.9 percent in newspapers, 28.6 percent in television and a further 25 percent who worked in radio journalism.

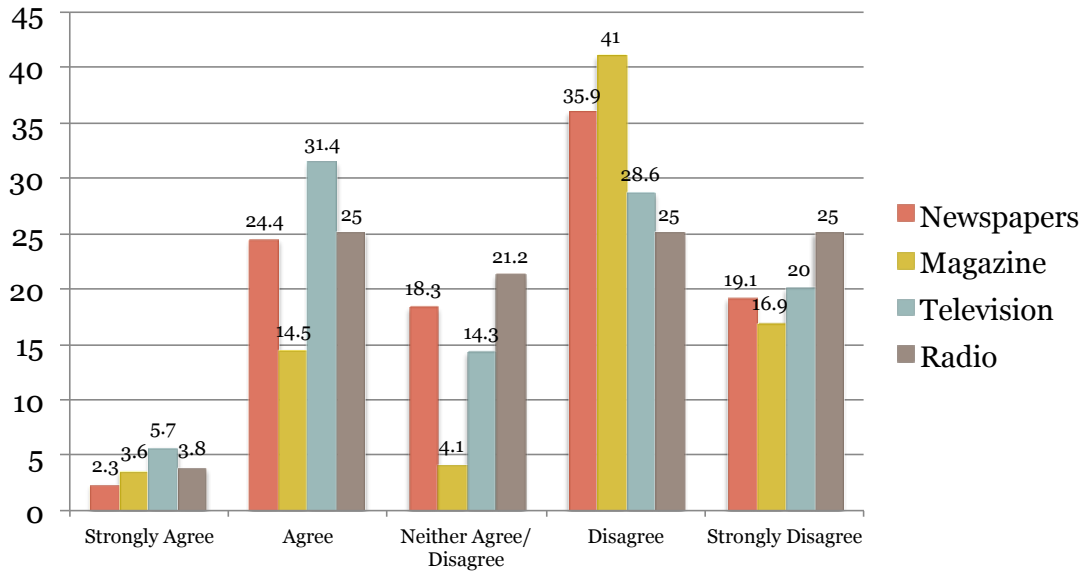


Figure 2: Do you agree that the glass ceiling has been broken in journalism? (Type of Journalism) (n=176)

The survey also asked the journalists ‘Do you agree or disagree that a lack of opportunities for women to be promoted to management positions’ is an obstacle for women? Almost half (48.6 percent) disagreed that there was a lack of opportunities for women to be promoted in the profession and that this was an issue for them (Figure 3).

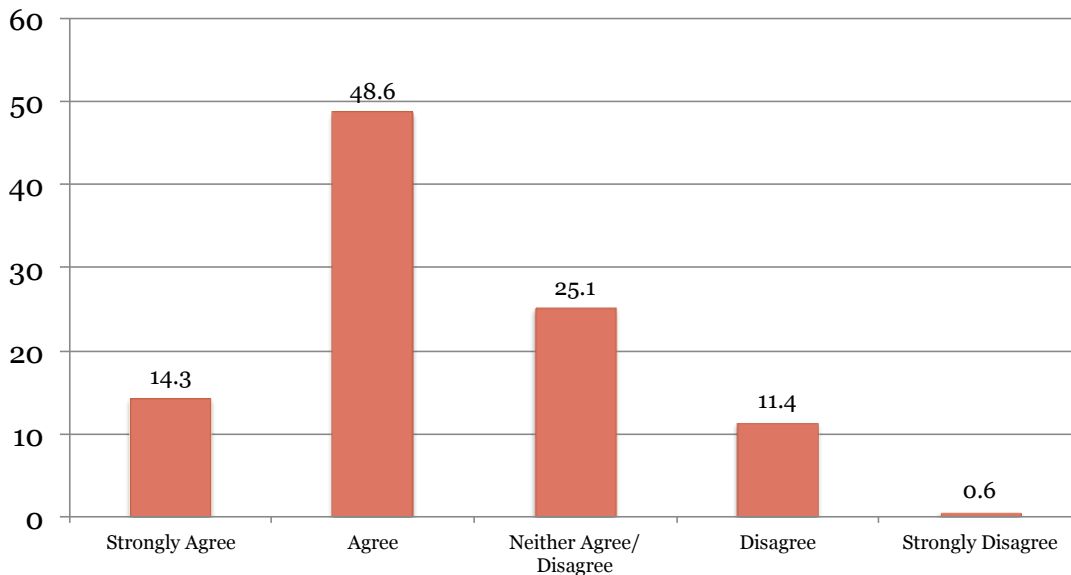


Figure 3: Do you agree or disagree that there are a lack of opportunities for women to be promoted to management positions? (n=176)

Further analysis of the data according to the type of media organization that the journalists worked for showed that it was those who worked in television that agreed at the highest rates (57.1 percent), followed by newspapers at 48.9 percent, then radio journalists at 47.2 percent and magazines at 46.4 percent (Figure 4).

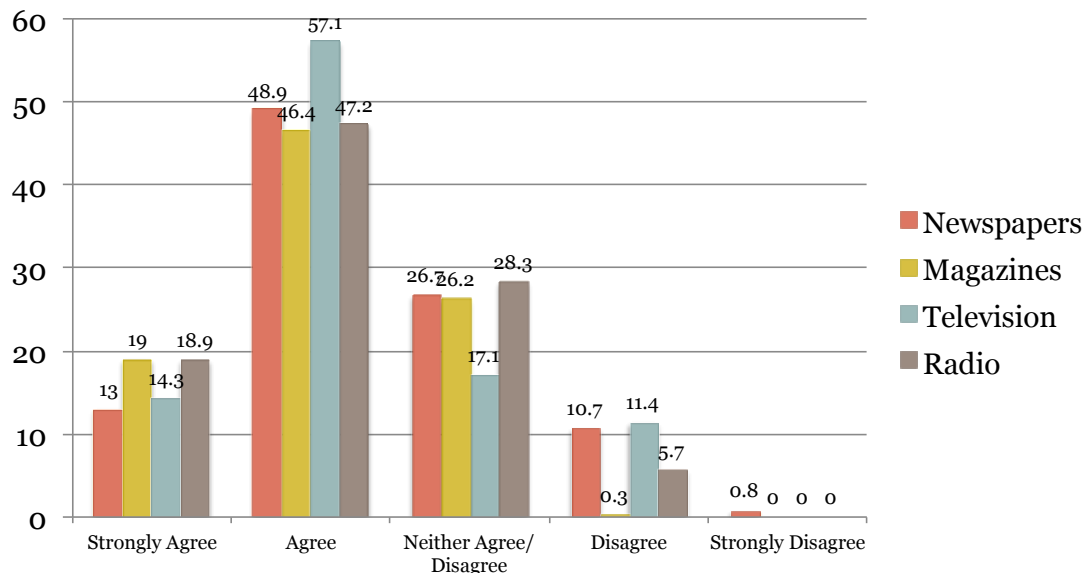


Figure 4: Do you agree or disagree that there are a lack of opportunities for women to be promoted to management positions? (Type of Journalism) (n=176)

Experiences of Journalists and the Glass Ceiling

The interview stage of the research allowed for further discussion of the issues that had been highlighted in the survey. Many of the women argued that it still existed as an obstacle to equality for all women in British society, generally speaking, and there was particular recognition that it was an issue in industry, retail, finance, politics, as well as journalism.

“Women can only get so high and then her career stops at a certain point and whereas for men there is maybe a ‘sunroof’ for men and they can keep on going up [laughs]” [national newspaper journalist, 27].

“Well, women can get so far and no further and I think that is still the case. Just because we had one female Prime Minister doesn’t mean that the glass ceiling is broken. She was the worst thing in my opinion, she didn’t help women at all, she pulled up the ladder when she got there. And I think that a lot of women who get to that level are not typical, if you look at them. They don’t always help other women, in fact, quite often they create a problem for other women that don’t want to be that ballsy, bitchy type, you know? So, yes, there is a glass ceiling, some people have managed to get through it, it’s still not easy” [regional newspaper journalist, 35].

In terms of the profession of journalism specifically, the women were very vocal about the presence of a glass ceiling in the profession, as they had experienced it. “I think there's a real pay gap between women and men and I am struggling at present to get up to the next level in my career - there's still a definite glass ceiling particularly in the BBC” [radio journalist, 28].

“In the first five to ten years in journalism, if a woman has not moved up into some kind of management then they are probably hitting the glass ceiling and will need to move sideways into subediting or move across into another newspaper. I think that the positions are already filled and there are probably people waiting for those positions and they are probably male – they are in a lot of deputy positions and they will be first in line for these jobs. I do feel that women will be passed over in management positions in favour of the men because they have been waiting in the wings for years anyway” [local newspaper journalist, 45].

There was also the suggestion that the glass ceiling was not an issue for those who did not have children, although these women did acknowledge that there was potential for it to be in the future.

“I think you do hit the glass ceiling when you come to child-bearing age and I think now, at this time in my career, then ‘yes’, all of the possibilities are open to me because I am single and have no ties and no dependants, there is nothing really to set me apart from my male counterparts” [television journalist, 25].

The point was also raised that management did not suit everyone and possibly some women would find the management track uninteresting, which would take them away from the writing which had attracted them to the profession in the first place.

“I’ve been offered more executive positions but I don’t like them, I like ‘writing’. . . women are less bothered about status and power, they are more interested in doing something that they actually ‘like’. I certainly could have progressed, I’ve been deputy editor for magazines and sections and I could have had the editorships if I wanted them. I was offered one post in particular and I left, as that would have been me on a production/management track, and I could have gone onto more senior jobs from that, I have no doubt about it, but it would have meant going onto jobs I didn’t want to do. I hate going to meetings, writing budgets, looking at flat plans, fighting with the advertising department, going for drinks with sponsors, none of the things that I enjoy doing in any way whatsoever. So at every stage I have pulled back from that” [national newspaper journalist, 48].

Qualitative Analysis of the Journalists’ Experiences

The qualitative data produced during the interviews was content analyzed using coding categories along a thematic manner (Braun and Clarke 2006; King and Horrocks 2010; Bryman 2012).

The analysis of the women's responses to the question about their perspectives of the term 'glass ceiling' and of the concept of such a barrier existing for women to be promoted revealed that there were a number of factors that the women saw as relevant to this issue. The largest components of the responses related to the women being 'aware' of the glass ceiling i.e. that they had had specific knowledge or experience of it (see Figure 5).

The categories were created to capture both expectations and experiences as it was observed during the process of analysis that some of the interviewees had had specific expectations of whether there was a glass ceiling (or not) before they entered the profession, or associated it with a specific type of journalism. In some cases, their expectations and experiences were at odds and therefore these were categorized separately as either 'expectations' or 'experiences'. In relation to this question, it can be seen that 50 percent of the respondents had had a negative experience in terms of the glass ceiling, while the level of negative expectation had been 10.71 percent. In contrast, there were 32.14 percent of the interviewees that had had a positive expectation in this regard, while 10.71 percent had had a positive experience. A total of 46.43 percent referred specifically to print journalism during the interviews while a further 10.71 percent referred to broadcast journalism, and 17.86 percent mentioned opportunities being limited to 'specialisms' within the field of journalism.

There were references also to the high number of men working in their profession when considering the state of affairs in relation to the glass ceiling. A total of 39.29 percent spoke specifically of the relevance to the glass ceiling debate about the profession being 'male dominated', while 32.14 percent talked of issues about the glass ceiling in relation to the impact of having 'dependants' i.e. of starting a family on their careers and the potential for promotion opportunities thereafter. A further 21.43 percent talked about the requirement for women to have a strong personality (or to act like a man) and/or to be seen as 'one of the boys', which was categorized as 'personality'. A total of 17.86 percent of the respondents raised issues related to 'ambition' when discussing the glass ceiling i.e. of the necessity for having a fixed goal and determination to succeed. In addition, there were references made to the need for compromise (21.43 percent of responses), the issue of pay was raised in 14.29 percent of answers and also matters related to working hours (10.71 percent). A further 7.14 percent of respondents to this question spoke of a lack of solidarity among women, which they believed had an impact on the glass ceiling issue.

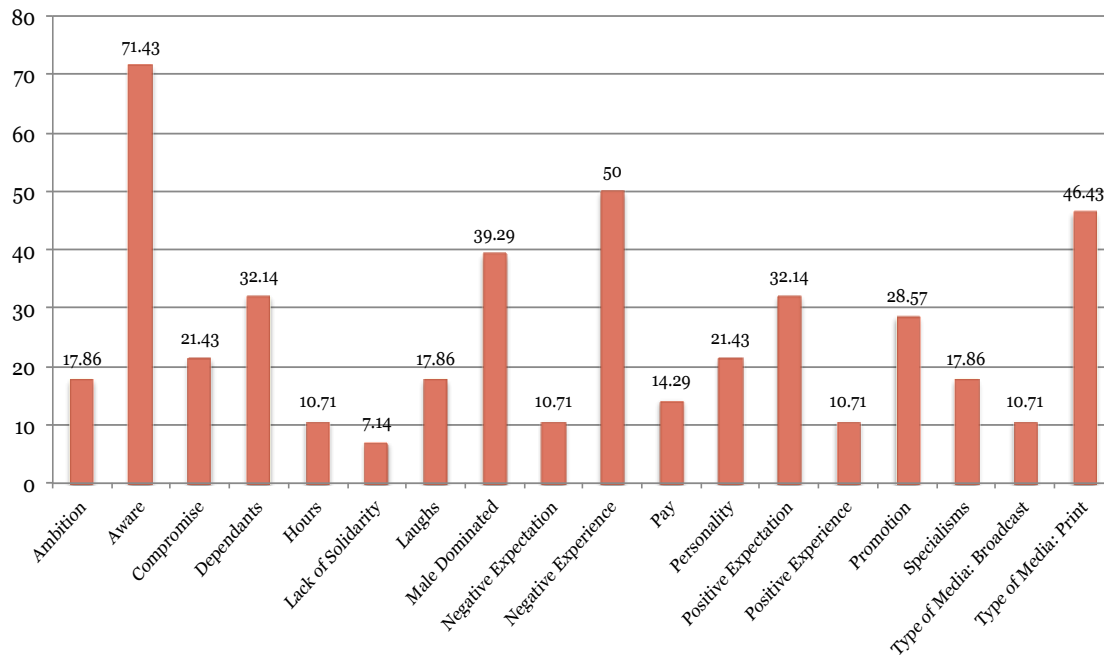


Figure 5 - What does the term 'glass ceiling' mean to you? Is it still relevant for women? (n=29)

When analyzed according to the type of journalism for which the women worked, the biggest issue evident in their responses was about them being 'aware' of the glass ceiling concept 'aware' (and/or having knowledge or experience of the glass ceiling), which was raised by 85.71 percent of the journalists that worked in newspapers. While discussion of the glass ceiling being relevant to print journalism specifically, this was raised most often by the magazine journalists – who spoke about it in three-quarters of their responses (75 percent). Of those women working in television journalism, two-thirds (66.67 percent) of the interviewees talked about their personal awareness and experience of the glass ceiling, categorized using the term 'aware'. For the journalists working in radio, 66.67 percent referred to being 'aware' and/or having had specific experience of the glass ceiling in their responses.

With regards to expectations in terms of the glass ceiling, the newspaper journalists had the highest expectation of a negative view of the profession in terms of there being a glass ceiling (16.67 percent) while of those working in magazines half (50 percent) had the highest level of positive expectation of the glass ceiling issue. The reality of their experiences were gauged by the 'negative experience' code with 64.29 percent of newspaper journalists interviewed having a negative experience, followed by 50 percent in magazines and also half of the radio journalists. The lowest level of negative experience was highlighted by a third (33.33 percent) of the television journalists. In terms of specific

references made to positive experiences for the female journalists, 33.33 percent of those working in radio spoke about a positive experience in terms of the glass ceiling debate.

Discussion

The majority view of the survey respondents was that the glass ceiling in journalism in the UK had not been broken and to the contrary it was still firmly intact, as almost three-quarters of the interviewees were aware of the 'glass ceiling' and half of them had had specifically negative experiences in this regard. These statistics therefore only serve to reinforce the view of Ross (2001) and Walter (2010) that the glass ceiling remains.

Furthermore, the fact that there have been some appointments at top-level in the media has not served to resolve the issue overall. As Delano (2000) and North (2009) stated, just because there had been only a few women editors (of national newspapers) then the glass ceiling remains unsmashed. It also sits at odds to the views of McNair (1999) and Moore (2009) that change has been afoot in the last decade and therefore that there is no longer cause to discuss the glass ceiling issue in relation to journalism. The research in fact shows that there has been some stagnancy in this regard and the results can be seen as potentially shattering this illusion.

According to the types of journalism that the women worked, it can be seen from the responses that there was engagement in the debate on the existence of a glass ceiling in every area of the profession addressed. Therefore it can be further concluded that no type of journalism – be it print or broadcast – has smashed the glass ceiling or at least this is the experience reported by women employed in the profession.

It was interesting to note that it was the women who worked in magazine journalism who disagreed at the highest levels that the glass ceiling had been broken. This is an area of journalism in which women have long been employed at higher levels than in other areas of journalism (Keeble 2001) and has been promoted as an attractive career for women as it is "at the 'softer' end of journalism" (NCTJ 2009). While all of the women were in the majority in agreeing that there is a lack of opportunities for women to be promoted to management positions, it was those who worked in television that agreed it was the biggest issue. This is in keeping with the statistics published by Baracela (2009) that showed

only 36 percent of the BBC's upper echelons were female and at board level at ITV only 14 percent were women.

With print journalism being commonly connected with issues related to the glass ceiling (McNair 1999; North 2009; Walter 2010) it may not be surprising that the levels of awareness of the glass ceiling was an issue at the highest levels among the female journalists that worked in newspapers. The newspaper journalists also discussed more than any other type of journalist having personally suffered negative experiences of facing promotion and career progression opportunities during the interviews. This would therefore reinforce the view of token appointments being made in newspapers and is in direct contrast to the stance of Moore (2009) that the glass ceiling has been shattered and the view of Emma Tucker that “newspapers were leaving behind the historical gender imbalance” (Halliday 2013).

In contrast, specific references to positive experiences of the glass ceiling for female journalists were raised by a third of those who worked in radio – at the highest rate when compared with any of the other types of journalism, although these statistics are at similar levels to the Creative Skillset research which found that women made up 34 percent of senior managers in radio (Sound Women 2011).

Reasons for the Glass Ceiling in Journalism

With the majority view of the survey respondents being that the glass ceiling has not been broken, it is worth considering the data in terms of the issues that were raised as relevant to the glass ceiling in order to assist in identify reasons why this transparent barrier is still in existence.

The key issue that was identified by the data participants as being directly related to the existence of a glass ceiling for women in journalism was the fact that the profession continued to be widely regarded as male-dominated (McNair 1999; Sebba 1994 cited in Keeble 2001; Gill 2007). Therefore opportunities for promotion for women to middle and senior management positions in journalism are directly hindered by the fact that there are more men working in the profession than there are women.

Chambers, Steiner and Fleming (2004) identified that such “cultural barriers” were directly connected to the glass-ceiling conundrum.

“As Newman (1995:24) states, a senior management culture based on male work patterns and ethos results in the expectation that women appointed to senior management will be nonconformist and fail to ‘fit in’ and that they will therefore exit rapidly, resulting in a few positive female role models at the top. Accordingly senior roles may be unattractive to women who are then reluctant to apply for open posts. This leaves management unchanged and predominately male” (Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004, 89).

Another issue associated with the glass ceiling by the interviewees included the impact of having children upon a career in journalism and also it served as a gauge as to whether women had achieved gender equality generally in society. As this research found, the issue of having dependants was seen as directly related to the glass ceiling, with the female journalists seeing opportunities for promotion as tailing off when women have children which acts as an obstacle for women. As Walter (2010) observed, personal lifestyle details are often considered as relevant for working women of all professions although they are arguably disregarded as irrelevant for their male counterparts and this would appear to be the case in terms of journalism. It is interesting to note the findings of the research on this matter, as it appears that any major change in this regard is being eluded. This is despite the number of women going into journalism rising (Cole, cited in Franklin 2006) and so by rights these women should by now have the experience to start to seek out management roles. The situation is shown by the research to have remained stagnant and that there has not been any great improvement for women in this respect. It would seem therefore that regimented views on working hours continue to make it a real challenge for women to maintain full-time roles in journalism. As Van Zoonen (1994, cited in Conboy 2004) identified that the problems surrounding women and journalism were not simply in representation or of personnel “but are embedded within the gendered structure of media production”.

“Some of this structural bias has to do with the male traditions of the work but in more invisible ways it has to do with the very patterns of what has become valued as good journalism within institutions, particularly with regard to hard news” (Ibid., 146).

It can therefore be seen that the findings set in context are a result of a ‘habit’ rather than due to good practice.

Conclusion

The key issues that arose in this paper are that in order to make a considered view of the state of a glass ceiling in any profession, there is a need not only to look at the statistics but also to capture the experiences of the professionals involved – and this should include those at all levels of the profession

and not just be limited to the few who have 'made it' to the top. It is therefore considered that a case study approach i.e. looking at a specific profession within a geographical territory can provide detailed results that are of value and are informative.

It is clearly evident that this study has shown that in journalism in the UK there have been suggestions that the glass ceiling has been shattered and this message has occasionally been shared based on the observations that a few token women have achieved positions of power and status at different points in time.

The impact of the continued existence of a male-dominated culture in journalism is perceived to be directly related to this situation as it creates a number of challenges – and realistically obstacles – for women. It would appear that there is a tendency to retain this culture. Potential ways of addressing the issue are for the profession to increase the number of opportunities open to women throughout their careers and to continue to encourage female journalists to see a future for themselves in the profession, whether or not they have a family.

It is therefore concluded that discussion about the glass ceiling is rife both generally and in terms of specific professions, however while there maybe debate the challenges aired are not being addressed and this is resulting in a situation where there is inertia, which is in itself an obstacle to progress. This paper has therefore served to add to the debate and take an over-arching perspective of a broad range of journalists at different stages of their careers, and who have worked in different types of the profession. It calls for the profession to acknowledge that it is an illusion to state that the glass ceiling has been shattered due to a token number of appointments of women and it is time to come up with a strategy that leads to action and change as the issue of the glass ceiling has now well and truly come of age.

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