

*Seminar: Cultural theory*

*Prof. Dr. Nico Stehr*

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*“Men tend to outweigh women in most leading positions in science, politics and the economy. Explain and discuss indicators and reasons for such gender differences, for example among German managers, university professors, politicians etc.”*

Author:

Mareike Katharina Besecke

Möwenstr.58

88045 Friedrichshafen

E-Mail: [m.besecke@zeppelin-university.net](mailto:m.besecke@zeppelin-university.net)

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## **1. Introduction and theoretical subsumption**

The following assignment tries to explain and discuss reasons as indicators for the statement that men tend to outweigh women in most leading positions in science, politics and economy. I have chosen this topic because I am interested in the reasons for such gender differences and how it was possible to achieve such a significant gender difference concerning leading positions in Germany. Journals and newspapers often quote different and sometimes controversial empirical studies concerning that matter to explain how gender differences in leading positions are perceived and caused. Accordingly, this phenomenon has certain dimensions and is discussed in several disciplines like sociology, cultural studies and economics. The assignment will concentrate the research on the German economy, to give empirical data from praxis and to exclude several possible influences, and social constructivism, to work on the topic with a theoretical approach. Therefore it will present two studies, which examine the Glass Ceiling phenomenon. The studies are made by the Accenture Consultancy and Sonja Bischoff and shall give an empirical basis to the topic. Afterwards the assignment will take up the social constructivism trying to explain and discuss how the phenomenon could be established.

The Glass Ceiling Phenomenon describes a specific approach to the quantitative superiority of men in leading positions. It is a metaphor for the concept of the advancement of certain groups, particularly women, in companies, administrations or other institutions until an invisible border, which group members may find difficult to cross (see Priddat 2004:172). This vertical barrier would be informal, “refers to less tangible hindrances” and is followed by high power- and responsibility-positions (Accenture 2006:4). Glass Ceiling describes a career restriction, but not a general discrimination phenomenon (see Landon-Lane 2003). The phenomenon has become famous in the USA in the 1970’s.

The reasons and factors which could cause Glass Ceiling are diverse and numerous. The actual study “The Anatomy of the Glass Ceiling – Barriers to Women’s Professional Advancement” is inquired by Accenture, a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company (Accenture 2006:19). Also Priddat refers in his research to a study from Accenture (see Priddat 2004). The study examines the worldwide perception on the unofficial barrier to upper management.”

The second study “Männer und Frauen in Führungspositionen der deutschen Wirtschaft”, which was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sonja Bischoff, establishes six main hindrances which women perceive while their career advancement.

As the studies so will the assignment concentrate on the quantitative inferiority of women in leading positions in the German economy, even if women also seem to be inferior in number in science and politics as chapter two will stress. Even if cultural traditions and current legislation differ among countries, women continue to be underrepresented in senior corporate management in every country. Nevertheless, the assignment will confine

itself on the geographical area of Germany to be precise in involving indicators. Therefore it will only examine the studies limited to this country, even if the Accenture study also examines seven other countries. It will do so to exclude varying cultural and confessional influences. The Accenture study sums up that “cultural traditions about the role of women certainly continue to influence attitudes and behaviour patterns of both men and women, and such traditions may change much more slowly in the broader society than in the environment of many modern corporations.” (Accenture 2006:18). What the empirical data will offer shall be discussed in its origin on the basis of the social constructivism.

## **2. Description and interpretation of empirical studies**

### **2.1. Empirical social research**

#### **2.1.1. Politics**

The former US-Foreign Secretary Madeleine Albright once said: “I do not believe that the world would be totally different, if it was ruled by women. Who thinks so, might have forgotten what happened in those days.” (Albright 2006:157).

This statement shows explicitly that a change of gender in Albright's eyes, even if it would cause a little change, would lead to a similar world as the present situation. Implicit she perceives a mainly menly ruled world. Whether Albright's view is shared or not, the following assignment will sum up facts and perception concerning science, politics and economy, which approve the quantitative superiority of men in leading positions.

The former Federal Minister of Women, Family and Health in Germany Rita Süßmuth claims that within the CDU a women quota exists (Süßmuth 2006:1). She refers to the CDU-percentage of 25 female politicians in the new elected Landtag in North-Rhine-Westphalia and adds: “Mit der Kanzlerkandidatur ist wirklich der Vorstoß zum Vorhof der Macht gelungen.” (Ibid.) While touching the women movement in the 1960's and 1970's, which in her eyes, at first had an impact on the CDU at the Parteitag 1985, she argues that the problem in these days was the arrangement of family and occupation (Ibid.). Now the problem is circumvented as Süßmuth recognizes many young female university graduates in the party without children (Ibid.).

#### **2.1.2. Science**

A work field without a certain women quota could be science. For instance Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker, president of Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), referred to the actual percentage of female professors with a full chair at a German university which is 9,2 % (Winnacker 2006:6). He got in trouble when he demanded a quote for female professors. He is convinced that an increase of the women percentage in science is only possible by the pressure of a specific quote (Ibid.).

### **2.1.3. Economy**

But is this quantitative superiority of men only limited to politics and science? In the year 2005 44% of labour force was female and only 8% of these women were executive managers (Accenture 2005:5). Even though the Institut für Arbeits- und Berufsforschung der Bundesagentur für Arbeit (IAB) shows statistics which make certain distinctions between small to huge companies, first to second managerial level and different branches, the results are unambiguous: men outweigh women in leading positions in the economy (cf. Brader 2006:2f). According to the IAB statistics the percentage of women on the first managerial level differs between 26% in small companies (1 to 9 employees) and 4% in huge companies (500 and more employees) (Ibid.). There is only one category, in which men and women share the same quote of 7%. This category was analysed by Mikrozensus 2000 and quoted by Spiegel online. It includes young men and women under the age of 30 on managerial level (cf. Spiegel online 2001:1).

### **2.1.4. Wages**

Not only does the quote of women in leading positions differ, but also the salary of men and women in these positions does. Women's income as a percentage of men's income, being a managerial employee in the German economy, is only 90 % (Accenture 2006:5). Compared with the general relative salary of women in 2001, which was 75,86 % of men' salary, the payment of women in leading positions is closer to that of men than in other (lower) positions (Hinz 2005:18). As Thomas Hinz and Hermann Gartner in the IAB study refer to the USA, where discussion about salary differences of women and men in the same position is combined with legal consequences concerning the discrimination law, Germany seems less active concerning that matter (Hinz 2005:31).

The data underlines the quantitative superiority of men in leading positions in Germany. These facts lead to questions: Do German female leaders perceive a difference, feel discriminated or actually are discriminated.

## **2.2. Accenture study: The Anatomy of Glass Ceiling**

Firstly, the assignment will explain in short the study-acquiring company, secondly comment on the study set-up itself and finally sum up the results limited to Germany.

### **2.2.1. Accenture consultancy**

The company sees itself as a "global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company" (Accenture 2006:19). It wants to realize innovations in their clients' corporations to improve the performance of them. Accenture therefore offers a wide expertise in branch know-how, international teams and competence in performance. It employs over 126,000 men and women in 48 countries and earned through good management in the fiscal year before last 15.55 Billion US-Dollar (Accenture 2006:19). Accenture did the study because they realized the emergence of women in leading positions and wanted to examine "the world wide perception of the

unofficial barrier to upper management” (Adkins 2006:3). Examining specific factors for specific countries, Accenture wants to assist their clients with a specific know-how to improve their performance.

### 2.2.2. Methodology

The study “The Anatomy of the Glass Ceiling: Barriers to Women’s Professional Advancement” is one part of the international Accenture-activities on the occasion of the world women day. Therefore Accenture interviewed 1200 experienced business executives from small and huge companies with a minimum turnover of 250 Million US-Dollar. 48% of the participants were female. All surveyed were chosen in equal shares from eight different countries: Australia, Austria, Canada, Philippines, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland and the USA.

The assignment will concentrate on three main parts of the survey: Firstly, the characteristics of successful leaders. Secondly, the perceived existence of an invisible barrier for women and its specific barriers. Lastly, the specific weight of the three dimensions, which they call individual, society and company, and its factors of Glass Ceiling in Germany. Each of these dimensions includes five factors and was lastly ranked through including the survey results. The Glass Ceiling dimensions were ranked from 0 (=no existing Glass Ceiling) to 6 (=maximal thickness of glass ceiling). The goal of the study was to determine an Accenture global Glass Ceiling Index for each of the examined countries, which would lay focus upon individual factors, society or company. The index should describe and compare the relative thickness of the ceiling in several countries. The assignment will explain and refer to these results in Germany.

### 2.2.3. Results

The study found about 20 common characteristics, beliefs and identity patterns which are shared by successful male and female leaders all over the world. These are for example: middle-class backgrounds, professional competence and emotional commitment to and from the company. Concerning similarities the study sums up: “The right mixture of ‘roots and wings’ – to use Goethe’s famous phrase – seems to be prerequisite for success across the globe” (Accenture 2006:8). Even though there are a bunch of similarities, the difficulties between gender and country concerning dimensions and factors differ tremendously.

The study found out that 30 % of the female managers and 43 % male leaders believe in equal chances for both sexes to achieve a leading position (Accenture 2006:5). Another indicator – in international comparison- is that 20 % of the survey participants perceive gender as a hindrance (Ibid.).

As the assignment mentioned the Glass Ceiling dimensions were ranked from 0 (=no existing Glass Ceiling) to 6 (=maximal thickness of glass ceiling). For Germany the study examined the following results:

Individual: 3, 4

Company: 3, 4

Society: 4, 8

The dimension 'individual' was ranked 3.4. According to career planning men seem to be much more self-confident regarding that factor. Concerning professional competence two aspects shall play a key role: On the one hand women do believe less in a high necessity of formal education to reach a leading position. On the other hand young women seem to study topics, which do not promise a successful persistence and successful career. Women assess that ambition and the ability to assert oneself are prerequisites to success. Male executives in contrast do not assert this factor as such important. Female managers are also convinced that they have to work harder to achieve a rising career.

Mobility does not seem to be an important factor for neither men nor women. The study sums up, that difference in family status do not play a major role or create a mobility problem among neither men nor women (Accenture 2006:12).

The second dimension 'company' was also ranked 3.4. Compared with all the other countries, German executives stress the importance and value of good integration in internal networks to reach leading positions. But women seem to be locked out from many men networks. An explanation approach will follow in the third chapter. Also other factors are perceived by some female executives. They criticise their companies because of a less fluid hierarchy and not transparent promotion processes.

In contrast to the third dimension which is ranked 4.8 women are more satisfied with promotion and training programs of their companies than with these of the German country. They do not believe in equal career opportunities and are absolutely convinced that the important decisions are still made by men.

As a conclusion to the thickness of the glass ceiling in Germany it is to emphasize that the biggest barriers are made by the society. In comparison to the other seven examined countries, Germany is on the second last rank competing only Austria. That offers two approaches: Firstly, the society in Germany establishes a Glass Ceiling for women. Secondly, the state should concentrate on processes to improve women's advancement possibility and abolish this barrier to ladle out the potential of one half of its society and labour force to compete more successful in the future with the other countries. Politics lay the groundwork for female equality (Accenture 2006:16).

The study additionally found out, that a lack of the right kind of support within companies, for example mentoring-programs, is a key factor to explain the small share on women in leading positions (Accenture 2006:14). The position of successful women is due to their own abilities, as over 80% stress ambition and assertiveness as the two key success factors (Ibid.).



## **2.3. Dr. Sonja Bischoff: Men and women in leading positions in the German economy**

Professor Dr. Sonja Bischoff teaches business management at the Hamburg University for economics and politics. Since the 1980's she has done research work and has published four studies for Deutsche Gesellschaft für Personalführung e.V. The studies focus on the subject 'men and women in leading positions in the German economy'. The assignment will concentrate on Bischoffs actual results concerning factors of hindrances.

For her studies Bischoff has only questioned men and women in leading positions from all levels of management in Germany. She has established that 44 % of the surveyed female leaders perceive hindrances on their career advancement (Bischoff 2005:76).

The major hindrance (39 %) of these is a lack of qualification (Bischoff 2005:76). Concerning top management leaders, 72 % men and 68 % of women have finished a complete study (Bischoff 2005: 60). But this includes less insufficient education. It is lacking but needed self-confidence and assertiveness. She also takes up ambition as a characteristic which seems to be assessed as the key factor for promotion by women. Men on the other hand do not mention these characteristics (Bischoff 1999:148).

The second realized factor with 25 % general approval should be prejudices against women (Bischoff 2005:77). Here Bischoff stresses that all answers were given referring to experience and not as association or general ideas. This hindrance results in missing acceptance of women in management just because of their "Frausein" and also in exclusion of women from networks by men (Bischoff 2005:76).

The second factor leads to problems with colleges and superiors. It shows the third hindrance and is perceived by 18 % of women (Bischoff 2005:76). Envy from female colleagues, mobbing, intrigues and missing support from their superior are the main content (Bischoff 2005:77). Some of these factors also belong to the category 'prejudices against women' and are due to missing acceptance and exclusion as blockades by male colleagues (Bischoff 2005:77). Going into detail it should be considered that 26 % of women in leading positions have felt discriminated referring to their gender (Bischoff 2005:77). The amount of prejudices depends on three variables: size and branch of a company and area of responsibility (Bischoff 2005:77ff).

14 % women mention that a hindrance in advancement is caused by the arrangement of career and family (Bischoff 2005:76). This low result implies a relative manageable view of child care and pregnancy.

Ranked on the 5<sup>th</sup> place with 11 %, women experience hindrances directly from the company. These results are due to merging, restructuring and competition about jobs. The least ranked hindrances concern prejudices according to age, social background and missing relations. They will be ignored in the assignment.

To put in a nutshell Bischoff established two main hindrances, which women in leading positions perceive concerning career advancement: missing qualification and prejudices against women. It seems that neither training nor apprenticeships are sufficient qualifications for leading positions in the top management. While this

factor lies under the influence of the individual women, the other factor lies beyond; it lies under the influence of the specific company and the society. Accordingly, Bischoff stresses the importance of the management of a company (Bischoff 199:151). Gender unbiased superiors and chief executives might be able to reduce the amount of hindrances in companies as they supposed to have the function as a model.

### **3. Glass Ceiling viewed from social constructivist side**

In the following, the assignment will discuss a set of difficulties and hindrances concerning the Glass Ceiling phenomenon on the basis of empirical studies and will put these in a theoretical content. That is why the assignment will describe the social constructivist action schemes, which are suitable for theoretical description. Accordingly, as Lueger describes, there is a need of action schemes, which make scientifically work possible according to empirical data and “die eigenen Selbstverständlichkeiten und Vorurteile [zerrüttelt]” (Lueger 2000:9). Firstly, it is to explain how to open the research subject ‘gender and organisation’, to grasp it in every characteristic and to consider, which procedures besides those ones mentioned in chapter two are needed. As suitable in sense of gender building, social constructivism could be called.

#### **3.1. Micro-sociological and action-theoretical background**

With micro-sociological and action-theoretical background one can proceed from the assumption, that gender is produced socio-symbolically and that “eine erkenntniskritische sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung vor der Aufgabe steht, die Logik von Prozessen der Vergeschlechtlichung zu rekonstruieren” (Gottschall 1998:64). By that symbols which establish gender are to be understood as reconstruction of collective interpretation patterns of society (Abels 1997:133). Accordingly, they are a reproduction of the social construction of a society, which permanently constructs its new images, in sense of symbols, on its own (compare Berger/Luckmann). In that way this construction has effects on construction of society structures (Ibid.).

That the prevailing images are not only explained by biological differences is also stressed by Gayle Rubin: “but they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than eighter is to anything else – for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. The idea that men and women are different from one another must come from somewhere other than nature” (Rubin 1975:179). What Rubin calls “somewhere other than nature”, describes Hartman Tyrell as an in collective consciousness established and as in everyday life as category learned thinking that men and women are an „oppositionelles, wechselseitig exklusiv aufeinander verweisendes Kategorienpaar“ (Rubin 1986:465).

Expounded the social constructivist basis of the general differentiation of men and women in society, in the following the assignment will discuss, according to the two studies and the empirical social research from the second chapter, how it was possible to receive such perceptions of gender roles of the surveyed managers.

As the study of Bischoff described, there are three main hindrances to the career promotion of women to identify:

1. Qualification

2. Prejudices

3. Structural factors

The qualification of women as a hindrance is just on the first sight not working with social construction. Proceeding in this matter from the assumption of a socially constructed picture of women, this construction is not temporary limited, but must be seen as a continuous, even in motion being process. Also the Accenture study emphasizes that the professional competence is a characteristic of leaders. But whereas men realize this, women believe less in the high necessity of education to reach leading positions. The Accenture study adds also ambition and assertiveness as important characteristics to the qualification factor. The effects of social construction on the picture of women on the education possibilities will not further be discussed in this assignment, because it perceives itself just on the secondary form of Glass Ceiling and should be the research item of a general research on the role of the woman.

Also the third perceived hindrance within a company is an indirect consequence of social construction on the position of women. It shows not the actual barrier itself, but because of omnipotent and always present presence of social construction, it is important to decision holders and arrangement makers.

Looking at these two factors the real dilemma of the role of the woman is obvious: Because of the role allotment, which is thought categorical and a part of the social construction of a society and not only of a single individual, the allotment will happen regularly and will have effects on the frame giving elements of an occupation within a company.

Consequently, the social construction of gender roles seems to have clearly more background. It is only on a few parts directly touchable, partly also legal or from organization theoretical view out from usable. This direct perception describes Bischoff in the second ranked factor, prejudices. These are within the theory of the social constructed society as well to interpret as an important guide within social life, which helps for orientation. But they can also, like it can be presumed in this matter, lead to disparage of single components of the society. A special form of prejudices is 'statistical discrimination', which Margit Osterloh stresses in one of her studies (see Osterloh 1995). It means that human resource managers hesitate to take women on staff because they are convinced they would not bring the same yield because of a coming marriage and pregnancy (Osterloh 1995:2ff). Lastly, the arrangement of family and occupation are mentioned by both studies. Even if they are ranked differently, they seem to be a small but existing hindrance in career advancement.

### 3.2. Procedure with this problem viewed by organisation

As described Glass Ceiling is a problem of social constructs, which nevertheless can have veritable effects on an organisation, which at first acts in sense of the economy without looking at sexuality, but not until addition of human and social factors produce such a phenomenon.

The Accenture study stresses the importance of networks for career advancement and the exclusion of women from these networks. The reason for this exclusion could be distinction processes: The nearer the following group in the status hierarchy is, the harder are the delimitation processes from status claims of the threatened group (see Hofbauer 2004:56). Bourdieu states: "Nicht zufällig trachtet jede Gruppe ihre ureigensten Werte in dem wieder zu erkennen, was – im Sausurrechen Sinne – ihren ‚Wert‘ ausmacht, d.h. in der letzten Differenz, die häufig genug auch die letzte Eroberung ist, in der sie spezifisch definierenden strukturellen und genetischen Abweichung" (Bourdieu: 1988:383).

Basic research concerning the connection of organization and gender gives the study "Men and Women of the Corporation" by Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Kanter defines the organization according to that as „ein geschlechtsneutrales Gebilde, dessen inneren Machtverschiebungen wichtig, aber dennoch unabhängig vom Geschlecht ausgetragen werden“. According to that she examines the structural prerequisites for such power fights, which, as Kanter says, bundle up in one specific resource: a "Masculine ethic" as resource for power achieving and power preserving makes it more difficult for women to advance in their career (see Lange 1998:48ff). So the (German) society establishes Glass Ceiling. The upcoming question concerning organisation as a „geschlechtsneutrales Gebilde“ is therefore, to come to an action advise to companies, which interest have companies in treatment of gender specific problems?

Susanne Klöß, member of the executive of Accenture states: "Um eine Firmenkultur zu schaffen, die Innovation, Wachstum und Wohlstand hervorbringt, braucht man Menschen mit unterschiedlichen Fähigkeiten. Organisationen müssen daher sicherstellen, dass sie alle Führungs- und Arbeitsstile gleichwertig einsetzen" (Klöß 2006:2) There are clear approaches, which the assignment will describe in its motive layer and its conversion:

### 3.2.1. Managing Diversity

Changing context circumstances permanently force organizations to improve and to specialize its changing- and developing ability (see Proust/Büchel 1994:7ff). A „shift of paradigm“ in the personal leadership leads to a different sight, at which the human being does not assimilate to the organization, but the organization has to assimilate to its members. "Es zielt darauf, Bedingungen zu schaffen, unter denen alle Beschäftigten ihre Leistungsfähigkeit und ihre Leistungsbereitschaft uneingeschränkt entwickeln und entfalten können – unabhängig vom Geschlecht, von der ethnischen Zugehörigkeit und von einer Vielzahl anderer Merkmale (z. B. Alter, Familienstand, soziale Herkunft oder sexuelle Orientierung)" (Andrea Emmerich/Gertraude Krell 1997:331). Accordingly, this approach is to see as one, which motive layer is the improvement of efficiency.

### 3.2.2. Gender Mainstreaming

Gender Mainstreaming is defined as „die systematische Einbeziehung der jeweiligen Situation, der Prioritäten und Bedürfnisse von Frauen und Männern in alle Politikfelder, wobei mit Blick auf die Förderung der

Gleichstellung sämtliche allgemeine politischen Konzepte und Maßnahmen an diesem Ziel ausgerichtet werden und bereits in der Planungsphase wie auch in der Durchführung, Begleitung und Bewertung der betreffenden Maßnahmen deren Auswirkungen auf Männer und Frauen berücksichtigt werden« (Europäische Kommission 1997). Accordingly, the programme emphasise two new perspectives on gender equality: the establishment of a gender perspective in all areas, functions, decisions and processes of the organization and the reevaluation of the 'pure' equality policy concerning a gender to a 'real' gender policy for both sexes.

### 3.2.3. Equality

So equality of chances can be differed, according on which goals they are focused, if it is result- or process orientated or if unequal treatment is necessary. The guarantee of inequality concerning chances is connected with support of self-working processes within organizations, which leads to a growing participation of women on all levels. Within the equality approach the organization acts as a balanced element of structural barriers caused by the employee's philosophy of life. The orientation takes place at a value judgement of the equal rights that the difficulty of gender levels out. In the statement this happens through laws, quote rules and company intern guide lines. It is true that this approach happens out of one value orientation, but works not with attitude change on the part of the employees and can so only interfere in the consequences of Glass Ceiling but not the reasons.

## 4. Conclusion

The assignment demonstrated several indicators and reasons for the Glass Ceiling in Germany. It also has shown that there is a specific origin of the Glass Ceiling phenomenon. This origin lays in social constructivism. Human beings construct this social barrier of women's advancement inevitable and mainly unconscious. Here is to stress that prejudices not only have an unfair side. Referring to prejudices people can make decisions easier than without. Otherwise they always had to consider every factor which eventually has an influence on the matter to make a decision. Accordingly, besides other factors prejudices construct society and society constructs the social phenomenon of Glass Ceiling.

The data of the empirical studies of Bischoff and the Accenture consultancy and also the empirical social research have proven the perceived consequences of this construction, the Glass Ceiling and give support to this theory. Bischoff investigated explicit prejudices as a main factor whereas the Accenture study mentions implicit prejudices which consist of women exclusion from male networks, missing support of women from supervisors and not transparent fluid hierarchies, which makes women career advancement difficult. A significant indicator for the male dominated leading positions and patriarchy coined economy is the salary significant salary gab of men and women in leading positions.

According to the empirical data, companies mainly only use one half, which is the male half, of the whole potential of (their) human resources. As a consequence they avoid using potential advantages of competition. If companies will use this potential in the future, they could reach their goals more effective.

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