

From Glass Ceiling to Glass Cliff: Women in Senior Executive Service

Meghna Sabharwal

University of Texas

ABSTRACT

The dominant paradigm that frames the challenges women face in attaining upward mobility has been the glass ceiling metaphor (Bowling, Cynthia, Kelleher, Christine, Jones, Jennifer, and Deil Wright. 2006. Cracked ceilings, firmer floors, and weakening walls: Trends and patterns in gender representation among executives leading American state agencies, 1970–2000. *Public Administration Review* 66 (6): 823–36; Bullard, Angela, and Deil Wright. 1993. Circumventing the glass ceiling: Women executives in American state governments. *Public Administration Review* 53 (3): 189–202; Naff, Katherine C. 1994. Through the glass ceiling: Prospects for the advancement of women in the federal civil service. *Public Administration Review* 54 (6): 507–14; Riccucci, Norma M. 2009. The pursuit of social equity in the federal government: A road less traveled? *Public Administration Review* 69 (3): 373–82; Sneed, Bethany G. 2007. Glass walls in state bureaucracies: Examining the difference departmental function can make. *Public Administration Review* 67 (5): 880–91). However, over the last decades women have made steady progress and are moving to positions of leadership. Women in leadership positions continue to face an uphill battle; they often are placed in precarious positions setting them up for failure and pushing them over the edge—a phenomenon recently termed as “glass cliff” (Ryan, Michelle K., and S. Alexander Haslam. 2005. The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of Management* 16, 81–90. Ryan, Michelle K., and S. Alexander Haslam. 2007. The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions. *Academy of Management Review* 32 (2): 549–72). Using data from the 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, this research examines the challenges women face in Senior Executive Service (SES) in various US federal government agencies (distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and constituent policy). The study is based on three widely discussed theories in the field of social psychology—think-manager-think-male, social role theory, and role incongruity theory. The study findings indicate that SES women in distributive and constituent policy agencies are most likely to face glass cliffs. The odds of women falling off the cliff are less when women have influence over policymaking decisions, perceive empowerment, and experience organizational equities.

Address correspondence to the author at meghna.sabharwal@utdallas.edu

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INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that women have made strides in the public sector, but they continue to face challenges while climbing the management ladder (Bowling et al. 2006; Bullard and Wright 1993; Hsieh and Winslow 2006; Newman 1993, 1994, 1996; Riccucci 2009). Several metaphors have been used to document these challenges: glass ceiling, glass walls, glass escalators, and sticky floors.¹ Recent studies have begun to question these metaphors. Dolan (2004) reported the gains of women in the top ranks of the Senior Executive Service (SES) seem “genuine, not illusory.” Over time government agencies also have seen a steady rise of women not only in the overall workforce but in upper-management positions as well (Bowling et al., 2006; Dreher 2003). In 2010, women comprised 30% of the SES, which more than doubled from 12.3% in 1992. It is projected that by 2030, an 11% point increase will be seen in the number of women in SES positions (41%) (Kohli, Gans, and Hairston 2011).

Though women in the workforce are shattering the glass ceiling to reach senior management positions (in the public sector), there is limited research on what happens to these women once they reach positions of leadership. Do women continue to face challenges despite breaking through the glass ceiling? Women managers tend to be evaluated less favorably, receive less support from their peers, are excluded from important networks, and receive greater scrutiny and criticism even when performing exactly the same leadership roles as men (Eagly and Carli 2007; Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky 1992; Jacobson, Palus, and Bowling 2010; Kloot 2004; Ryan and Haslam 2005). Women in leadership positions face an uphill battle with these challenges which may set them up for failure, thus pushing them over the edge—a phenomenon termed as “glass cliff.”

Glass cliff is a recent metaphor put forward by Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007) that explains the challenges women face in leadership positions. The current study extends the findings of Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007) beyond the private sector to the public sector to test the phenomenon of glass cliffs among women in SES, arguably the most senior ranking positions in the US federal government. This study thus investigates the phenomenon among four different types of federal agencies (distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and constituent policy) subject to gender segregation (Newman 1994; Stivers 1993). The risk of falling off the cliff is further explained by factors such as: *influence in policymaking, empowerment, organizational equity/justice, and satisfaction with work-life balance* (Dolan 2004; Kelly and Newman 2001; Naff 1994, 2001; Newman and Mathews 1999; Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez 2011; Saltzstein, Ting, and Saltzstein 2001; Stivers 2000; Yang and Lee 2009). The study findings indicate that SES women in distributive and constituent policy agencies are most likely to face glass cliffs. The odds of women falling off the cliff are less when women have influence over policymaking decisions, perceive empowerment, and experience organizational equities.

¹ Glass ceiling refers to the barriers women are confronted with in their attempt to rise to leadership positions. Glass walls are barriers that hold women in certain types of agencies that are traditionally viewed as “feminine” in nature. Glass escalators refer to occupational segregation experienced by gender wherein men in female dominated positions are promoted to leadership positions at a much faster rate than women. Sticky floors hold women down to low level jobs and prevent them from seeking high management positions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The dominant metaphor that frames the challenges women face in attaining upward mobility has been the glass ceiling. The term was first used by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) in a *Wall Street Journal* report and later adopted in academic settings by Morrison, White and Velsor (1987) in their book titled: *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the top of America's Largest Corporations?* They defined glass ceiling as “a transparent barrier that kept women from rising above a certain level in corporations” (p. 13). The term has since been adopted in studies across various disciplines including public administration (Bullard and Wright 1993; Cornwell and Kellough 1994; Crum and Naff 1997; Kellough 1989; Lewis and Emmert 1986; Lewis and Nice 1994; Mani 1997; Naff 1994; Naff and Thomas 1994; Newman 1994; Pfeffer and Davis-Blake 1987; Reid, Kerr, and Miller 2003; Wilson 2002). Several factors that impede the advancement of women in senior positions have been noted in the literature. Of prominence are: human capital barriers (lack of education, finances, resources, and experience); gender based stereotypes; differences in communication styles; exclusion from informal networks; limited management support for work/life programs; lack of mentors and role-models; occupational sex segregation; and attitudinal and organizational biases (Dolan 2004; Lewis 1997, 1998; Mani 1997, Riccucci 2009).

The theoretical explanation of why fewer women are in leadership positions is provided by social psychologists. Leadership is considered a quality mostly associated with males, most of the traits cited in the literature for an effective leader have been male traits (risk taking, decisiveness, directive, assertive, ambitious) (Croson and Gneezy 2009; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). Theories like “think-manager-think-male” (Agars 2004; Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman, Block, Martell, and Simon 1989; Koenig et al., 2011; Schein 1975, 2001), social role theory (Eagly 1987; Eagly et al., 2000), and the role incongruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002; Koenig et al., 2011) further explicate the role of men in leadership positions. The think-manager-think-male framework dominates the leadership literature. The concept was originally put forward by Schein (1975) and has been tested and replicated in several settings, including internationally (Eagly 2005; Schein 2001; Schein and Mueller 1992). Schein's experiments involved both male and female managers. Ratings on each of the 92 items ranged from 1 (not characteristic) to 5 (characteristic). Results indicated that both male and female managers see the manager's job as masculine and a better fit for males. Out of the 92 descriptors, 60 were found to be characteristic of both men in general and managers. The descriptors match the attributes demonstrated by men in leadership roles (emotionally stable, aggressive, possessing leadership abilities, self-reliant, competitive, self-confident, objective, ambitious, well informed, and forceful). However, in consecutive experiments, male managers continued to hold the masculine stereotype of leaders, whereas female managers no longer held such stereotypes and viewed both males and females to possess traits that would make them successful managers (Brenner, Tomkiewicz and Schein 1989). The authors argued that the responses of female managers differed from the studies carried out in the 1970s, which they attributed to a changed view of leadership roles among women rather than a change in male perspective.

Another theory that builds on the think-manager-think-male framework is the social role theory that examines differing leadership styles of men and women; men

being more agentic and women demonstrating communal behaviors. Some of the agentic attributes demonstrated by men are: aggressiveness, assertiveness, acting like a leader, self-reliant, self-confident, forceful in negotiations, independent, dominant, and ambitious (Eagly and Karau 2002). Communal behaviors attributed to women are: gentle, kind, affectionate, empathetic, nurturing, sensitive and helpful (Eagly and Karau 2002). Though these differences form the basis of social role theory, Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that the role congruity model builds on it and explains the prejudices held against women in their social and leadership roles. The authors of this model argue that women are considered disadvantaged in their leadership roles and assessed less favorably when in such positions. The incongruity arises when there is a conflict between the social roles that women hold in society and the requirements of being in leadership roles. Role incongruity along with communal and agentic meanings ascribed to leadership roles of women and men (and the perpetuating masculine stereotype) gave way to the more recent *glass cliff theory* that aims to explain the challenges women face in leadership positions.

Glass Cliff

The term “glass cliff” was first used in the business literature by Ryan and Haslam (2005, p. 83) and refers to the phenomenon whereby “women may be preferentially placed in leadership roles that are associated with an increased risk of negative consequences. As a result, to the extent that they are achieving leadership roles, these may be more precarious than those occupied by men.” Glass cliffs seem to arise as a result of combination of social psychological and social constructs. The former arising as a form of overt sexism (injustice and inequity issues) whereas the latter a more subtle dimension reflective of a desire to appoint women to high risk positions—setting them up for failure (Ryan and Haslam 2005, 2007). In other words, women confronted with glass cliffs are more likely to leave the organization.

The phenomenon of glass cliff continues to be debated (Adams, Gupta, and Leeth 2009). The metaphor, however, rests on the belief that the playing field for women leaders is far from leveled—as indicated by several studies in the public sector (Bowling et al., 2006; Kerr, Miller, and Reid 2002; Lewis and Nice 1994; Miller, Kerr, and Reid 1999; Reid, Miller, and Kerr 2004). The cliff phenomenon in certain ways is another sort of glass ceiling that women face when they ascend to the highest structural levels in an organization. However, once they crack the ceiling and are in senior positions, they are unable to exert authority the same way as men. Women in these positions seem less likely to be involved in decisions of greater policy traction, feel less empowered, and report facing inequities at work. In the federal government this is evidenced by women being overrepresented in redistributive agencies (Guy and Newman 2004; Kelly and Newman 2001; Kerr, Miller and Reid 2002; Naff 2001; Riccucci 2009; Sidel and Loscocco 2005; Sneed 2007). *Redistributive agencies* are those that “affect society on a larger scale” than any other agency (Lowi 1985, 93). These agencies include: Department of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Social Security Administration, and Veterans’ Administration. It is well known that redistributive agencies are most closely tied to entitlement

expenditures in the federal budget, which is by and large automatic spending (Parkins 2008). There is very little discretionary spending available in these policy areas; this fits well with the role incongruity theory wherein women are perceived as less capable of making decisions.

Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007) conducted a series of experiments using graduate business students, law students, and high school students. All of these experiments revealed that participants chose women as being responsible for failures and less successful when responsible for executing key decisions. Through all these experiments the authors concluded that women are more likely to fail when placed in precarious positions. This article asserts that women placed in positions that are male dominated receive less support from their peers (mainly males), creating interpersonal conflict and stress—eventually setting them up to confront a glass cliff. Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007) argue that despite breaking through the glass ceiling, women are confronted with subtle form of discrimination in which they are afforded limited leadership opportunities, have less authority in decision-making, and are left to face challenges such as lack of support and work-life imbalances. Other factors causing the risk of falling off the cliff go beyond those explained by the psychological and sociological theories of leadership (Ryan and Haslam 2005, 2007). The authors attributed glass cliff to several factors that include: male dominance in organizations (gendered institutions), overt sexism or discrimination in the workplace (organizational inequities), deliberately placing women in senior positions with less support and opportunities for growth (lack of empowerment), in-group favoritism in the form of “jobs for boys,” which leaves those outside the group to take up less favorable positions, and hiring women to leadership positions, just to appear promoting gender equality, without providing the required support (lack of involvement in decision-making). Based on this theory and other evidence outlined above, the current study expects glass cliffs to be impacted by several factors, which are expanded in the next section.

FACTORS IMPACTING GLASS CLIFF

Gendered institutions

A major source of discrimination in any organization is the strongly possessed values, beliefs and perceptions about the social role and behaviors of men and women. Gender inequalities result in women flocking into certain occupations, getting low paying jobs, and working in jobs with fewer opportunities for advancement. Although this situation can be explained by social role theory, a change is observed in the social roles and norms in the past decades; women are starting to enter jobs previously reserved for men.

With changing roles of women in society and their steady entry into the labor force, the stereotypes of male masculinity have decreased (Duehr and Bono 2006; Powell et al., 2002; Schein 2001), but far from being completely unfounded (Guy and Newman 2004; Kelly and Newman 2001; Newman 1994; Stivers 1993). Further, women are perceived to support issues that concern women; the gendered perspective helped pass the Family Medical and Leave Act (FMLA) in 1993. Personal experiences and testimonials from women senators prompted Congress to pass the law (Tamerius

2010). It is widely believed that women have a better understanding of issues that relate to women, children, and caretaking, which is why females are hired in large numbers in agencies such as: Department of Education, Department of Veteran Affairs, and Department of Housing and Development, which are classified as redistributive agencies.² The risk averse behavior of women attract them to jobs that fit their appropriate social roles based on the cues they receive from the workforce, that is, presence of greater percentages of women in certain professions (Croson and Gneezy 2009).

Kelly and Newman (2001) examined data across three state agencies in Florida, Arizona and Alabama, utilizing Lowi's classification of distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and constituent policy agencies. On examining the employment patterns, the authors found women held higher percentages of mid- and upper-level positions than men in redistributive agencies, about an equal percentage of mid- and upper-level positions in regulatory agencies, and a lower proportion of these positions in distributive agencies. The authors concluded that "Given the gendered nature³ of state bureaucracies across policy type, it is highly likely that more active representation of women will occur in redistributive than in either distributive or regulatory agencies" (Kelly and Newman 2001, p. 20).

The presence of higher numbers of women in redistributive agencies versus other types of agencies gives rise to gender typing or gendered institutions (Guy and Newman 2004; Kelly and Newman 2001; Kerr, Miller and Reid 2002; Naff 2001; Riccucci 2009; Saidel and Loscocco 2005; Sneed 2007). Greater numbers of women in

2 Lowi's (1985) classified agencies in four categories: Distributive, Regulatory, Redistributive and Constituent.

- a) *Distributive agencies*: Agencies that "are responsible for policies that work directly on or through individuals, the relationship is one of patron and client rather than controller and controlled" (Lowi 1985, 87). Agencies include: Agriculture (Research Service, Economic Research Service, Farmer Cooperative Service, Forest Service, Soil Conservation); Commerce; Health, Education and Welfare (National Institutes of Health); Interior, Labor, Independent agencies (Smithsonian), NASA, National Endowment for the Arts, National Science Foundation, Small Business Administration, Energy, and Transportation.
- b) *Regulatory agencies*: Agencies that "are responsible for implementing the classic control policies of government, formulating or implementing rules imposing obligations on individuals, and providing punishment for nonconformance." (Lowi 1985, 85). Agencies include: Agriculture (Marketing Service, commodity Exchange), Health, Education and Welfare (Food and Drug Administration), Justice, Transportation (ATF and FAA), Treasury, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Environmental Protection Agency; National Labor Relations Board, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and Securities and Exchange Commission.
- c) *Redistributive agencies*: those whose "rules or the rules for which they are responsible affect society on a larger scale than any others" (Lowi 1985, 93). Agencies include: Agriculture (Farm Credit Administration, Farmers Home Administration), Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor (Bureau of Employment Security), Social Security Administration, and Veterans' Administration.
- d) *Constituent agencies*: "The missions of these agencies come closest to maintenance of sovereignty... There is minimal responsibility for making or implementing rules that pertain directly to citizen conduct or status" (Lowi 1985, 94). Agencies include: Agriculture (Administration, Budget and Finance, General Counsel, Statistical Reporting), General Services Administration, Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Management and Budget, Office of Personnel Management, DHS, Commerce (Bureau of the Census); State Department, Interior, and Defense.

3 "The term 'gendered institutions' means that gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life" (Kenney, 1996, p. 446).

redistributive agencies is in large part attributed to the nature of the job that requires “soft skills” and emotional labor (Guy and Newman 2004; Meier, Mastracci and Wilson 2006; Ryan and Haslam 2007; Stivers 1993). Such an environment is attractive to women and helps build a pipeline for senior management (Meier, Mastracci and Wilson 2006). Women in distributive and regulatory agencies experience the greatest amount of discrimination in hiring, pay and upward mobility largely due to departmental mission, institutionalized policies and culture that promotes male dominance in senior ranking positions (Kelly and Newman 2001; Newman 1994; Kerr, Miller and Reid 2002; Reid, Miller and Kerr 2004; Sneed 2007). Thus based on past studies and theories that explain the deficit of women in leadership positions, this study expects:

Hypothesis 1: Senior women in redistributive agencies are least likely to experience glass cliffs when compared with women in other agencies.

Influence over Policies

Influence over decision making is an underexplored cause for glass cliffs. Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007) take note of the fact that despite cracking through the glass ceiling, women continue to have limited leadership opportunities and less authority in decision-making. Expanding this idea to the public sector, the current study argues that influence over policymaking is grounded in the representative bureaucracy theory. The main tenet of the theory is: bureaucracies that reflect the demographics (passive representation) eventually impact the choices, values, and interests of citizens (active representation) thus impacting policymaking (Brudney, Hebert and Wright 2000; Dolan 2000; Kelly and Newman 2001; Meier and Bohte 2001; Sneed 2007; Sowa and Selden 2003; Thielemann and Stewart 1996). The gendered nature of bureaucracies places women in agencies that are afforded the least discretion in policymaking (Kelly and Newman 2001; Naff 2001; Stivers 2000). Men far more than women exert authority over decision making and the capacity to impact the career growth of subordinates (Smith 2002).

In contrast to previous studies, Dolan (2004) found that women and men in SES positions exert equal influence in policymaking decisions, in fact the study found women in distributive agencies such as, Agriculture, Energy, Transportation reported greater influence than their male colleagues on factors such as recommending changes, interpreting and applying laws, initiating policy ideas, drafting laws and regulations, keeping abreast of issues and new developments, gathering information, and setting priorities for the organization. Dolan (2004) argues that the rise of women in SES positions is “genuine and not illusionary.” Although Dolan’s study is notable, it stands in direct contrast to previous studies that conclude that women primarily employed in male dominant agencies such as Transportation, Commerce, and Defense might find themselves in token positions lacking influence over shaping policies (Newman 1994; Kelly and Newman 2001; Miller, Kerr, and Reid 1999). It can be further argued that perceived lack of involvement in policymaking negatively impacts retention rates (Findler, Wind, and Barak 2007; Wilson 1994). This study thus hypothesizes that:

- Hypothesis 2: SES Women in redistributive agencies are likely to exert greater influence over policymaking than women in other agencies
- Hypothesis 3: SES Women exerting greater influence in policy making are less likely to experience glass cliffs than those who exert less influence at work.

Empowerment

Successful organizations are those in which women executives are valued for the skills they bring to the organizations and wherein their full potential is realized (Ryan and Haslam 2007; Wirth 2001). Empowerment is usually seen as a goal of attaining equality among group members rather than gaining power and control (Lincoln et al. 2002). There are two approaches to empowerment debated in the literature a) rational and b) psychological. The former relegates power from the superiors to their subordinates (Burke and Day 1986; House, Umberson, and Landis 1988) whereas the latter focuses on enhancing feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura 1986; Conger and Kanungo 1988; Deci and Ryan 1985; McClelland 1975). Empirical evidence suggests a significant relationship between empowerment and job performance (Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2011; Lee, Cayer, and Lan 2006; Pereira and Osburn 2007), job satisfaction (Cotton et al. 1988; Kim 2002; Lee, Cayer, and Lan 2006; Miller and Monge 1986; Park and Rainey 2007; Wright and Kim 2004), and turnover (Pitts, Marvel and Fernandez 2011; Yang and Lee 2009). The current study refers to empowerment as the feeling employees get of personal belonging, recognition for meaningful contribution, and encouragement to innovate. The concept of empowerment from a feminist perspective suggests that women are less likely to be empowered and included in important decision-making processes (Kerr, Miller and Reid 2002; Newman 1994; Lincoln et al. 2002). Women in senior positions who breach the glass ceiling often experience resistance and doubt from male colleagues who do not like to take orders from women (Connell 2006; Eagly and Carli 2007). The “think-manager-think-male” framework can help explain the challenges women face in managerial positions. Women managers are further confronted with role incongruity, wherein they are evaluated less favorably and are perceived to lack managerial skills. A female manager adopting agentic attributes (masculine leadership traits) is criticized for not being feminine enough and shunned for her aggressive and bossy management style (Jackson 2001). Given these challenges, women are faced with an organizational identity crisis that prevents them from feeling like they belong and contribute to their fullest. Thus it can be hypothesized that:

- Hypothesis 4: Empowered SES women are less likely to experience glass cliffs than those who are less empowered at work.

Organizational Equity/Justice

Inequities that arise in the workplace either as overt sexism and discrimination in the workplace or through subtle ways can result in glass cliffs (Ryan and Haslam 2007).

Organizational justice or equity is the perception about the fairness in treatment that employees receive from their employers and is a concept that originates from research in social psychology (Greenberg 1990). Three main forms of organizational justice have been shown to impact turnover intentions a) Distributive (fairness of outcome) b) Procedural (fairness of process) and c) Interactional (fairness by employee's supervisor). For the purposes of this research, organizational justice and equity refer to fairness in terms of workload, compensation, performance-based rewards, and inclusion in senior leadership positions in the federal workforce. Inequitable treatment gives rise to negative emotions that can create additional stressors at one's job (Folger 1993; Fox, Spector and Miles 2001; Skarlicki and Folger 1997) resulting in job dissatisfaction and turnover (Alexander and Ruderman 1987; Geurts, Schaufeli, and Rutte 1999; Moorman 1991).

The literature on organizational equity and gender is mixed. Inequities are experienced differently by both genders, when asked about their glass cliff experiences; female participants described pernicious processes such as lack of opportunities, sexism or unfair in-group favoritism, whereas men questioned the validity of the research and downplayed the existence of glass cliffs. Other forms of injustice reported among women in the workforce are pay inequities and disproportionate rates of promotion (Alkadry and Tower 2006, 2011; Guy and Newman 2004; Kelly et al. 1991; Stroh, Brett and Reilly 1992). However, as women are rising above the fray and achieving integration in male-dominated occupations in the federal civil service, studies have reported narrowing wage gaps (Blau and Kahn 2000; Lewis 1996, 1998). Despite positive findings, women continue to be promoted at lower rates than men (Naff 1994; Riccucci 2009) and reservations remain about the performance and abilities of women who reach positions of leadership (Connell 2006). Based on the above discussion this study hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis 5: SES women reporting equitable treatment at work are less likely to experience glass cliffs than those who experience inequities at work.

Work/Life Imbalance

"By nature it is an all-consuming job and it does take a toll on the family" (Associated Press 2011). These were the words of Michele Flournoy the most senior female official in the history of Pentagon when she announced she was stepping down as the chief policy adviser to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. After spending three years in one of the most demanding jobs, Flournoy at the age of 51 felt compelled to leave as she was unable to strike a balance with work/life issues. Women opt out of senior management positions as they need to look after their children or elderly family members (Eagly and Carli 2007; Hewlett and Luce 2005). When confronted with a choice of choosing family or career, women often choose the former. Thus, work-life imbalances lead to glass cliffs (Ryan et al. 2007).

Women continue to face challenges balancing work and family life, which has led to rise in studies that advocate for family-friendly policies in public sector organizations (Durst 1999; Ezra and Deckman 1996; Facer and Wadsworth 2008; Newman and Mathews 1999; Kim and Wiggins 2011; Lockwood 2003; Saltzstein, Ting, and

Saltzstein 2001). Studies report increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions in organizations that offer family-friendly policies such as: telecommuting, flex-time, compressed work weeks, alternative work schedules, and child care (Bond and Galinsky 2006; Ezra and Deckman 1996; Glass and Estes 1997; Hornung, Rousseau, and Glaser 2008; Hughes and Bozionelos 2007; Kim and Wiggins 2011; Lockwood 2003; Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2007; Saltzstein, Ting, and Saltzstein 2001; Secret and Swanberg 2008).

A recent study by Kim and Wiggins (2011) reported different satisfaction patterns by agency type. Employees in Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security (both constituent agencies) express lower satisfaction with family-friendly policies like telecommuting, alternative work schedules, child care, and work-life programs compared with other types of agencies. The difference in satisfaction with family-friendly policies is not a measure of agency type alone, but a result of differences in implementation, employee demands, and education about the policies (Kim and Wiggins 2011). This study thus hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis 6: SES women reporting higher satisfaction with work/life balance are less likely to experience glass cliffs than those who experience work/life imbalances at work.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data for this study are taken from the 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (formerly known as Federal Human Capital Survey). The survey was first administered in 2002 and repeated biennially since. The survey is distributed to more than 75 large, small, and independent agency employees comprising more than 94% of the executive branch. The response rate was 49.3% with over 250,000 respondents. The survey was administered by the Office of Personnel Management. The data are filtered to include full-time, permanent SES employees (employees beyond GS-15 grades). Analyses are conducted using weighted data⁴ to match the population distribution. The N for the study is 177,586.

All the analyses are conducted on SES personnel. The SES includes most managerial, supervisory, and policy positions classified above General Schedule (GS) grade 15 and are comprised of men and women in key positions just below the presidential appointees. The SES was created with the passage of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 with the premise that men and women will be given equal opportunities to lead

4 Weighted data are used since the “survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample were drawn; the resulting data are called weighted data. The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey weighted results represent all Federal employees covered by the survey. The weighting process involves computing and assigning a weight to each survey respondent. The weight indicates the number of employees in the survey population the respondent represents. Information about demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, supervisory status, age, and agency size, are used to develop the weights. The weight does not change a respondent’s answer; rather, it gives appropriate relative importance to the answer.” (<http://www.fedview.opm.gov/2010/FAQS/>). The weighted $N = 177,586$ and the un-weighted data $N = 21,816$. The difference in N is due to the weights that are calculated based on the population estimates. The use of weighted data does not alter the response of the participants, rather produces an accurate representation of the survey population.

the transformation of government. They are responsible for overseeing the functions of the 75 or more federal government agencies (Dolan 2004; Huddleston and Boyer 1996).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable used for this study is a surrogate for glass cliff—intention to leave the workplace within a year. Glass cliffs are viewed as the failure of women in senior ranking positions, and failure to perform often results in increased turnover (Ryan and Haslam 2006, 2007). In past studies, intention to leave is used as a substitute variable for turnover (Bertelli 2007; Kim 2005; Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez 2011). The limitation of using this variable is that it is hard to assert with certainty whether these employees will actually leave, but it is the best available measure validated by past researchers for predicting turnover (Dalton, Johnson, and Daily 1999; Steel and Ovalle 1984; Tett and Meyer 1993). The dependent variable is dichotomous, with 1 representing those who decide to leave the agency or the federal government⁵ and 0 representing those who decide to stay. The survey question used is: “Are you considering leaving your organization within the next year?” Respondents indicating plans to retire within a year are excluded since it is a natural part of the career trajectory and not a response to challenges faced in the workplace.

Independent Variables

To examine whether women in senior executive positions are more likely to fall off the glass cliff, the study uses four key variables shown to impact turnover and Lowi’s classification of agencies along with demographic characteristics such as age, experience in the federal government and the organization, satisfaction with pay, and overall job satisfaction. The first variable, *Influence over Policies*, is important in turnover studies (Allen, Shore, and Griffith 2003). Several studies report lower influence among women in bureaucracies that witness gender-based occupational segregation (Kelly and Newman 2001; Naff 2001; Stivers 2000). Based on Dolan’s (2004) study on SES employees, the variable used to measure involvement in policymaking is “Satisfaction with involvement in decisions that affect your work.”

The second variable, *Empowerment* is noted by several authors to impact turnover intention (Ingersoll 2001; Kim 2005; Moynihan and Landuyt 2008; Yang and Lee 2009). Inevitably, reduced organizational identification results in increased glass cliffs (Ryan and Haslam 2006). Key measures of empowerment used in past studies are: providing employees with access to job-related knowledge and skills and granting employees discretion to change work processes (Bowen and Lawler 1992; Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2011; Yang and Lee 2009). The survey items thus selected have been used in past studies of public sector to measure empowerment. The index is composed of: a) “I am given a real opportunity to improve my

⁵ The following responses were coded as 1 (intent to leave): a) “Yes, to take another job within the Federal Government” b) “Yes, to take another job outside the Federal Government” and c) “Yes, other.” Nonrespondents were excluded from the study.

skills in my organization” (Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2011) b) “I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things” (Lee and Whitford 2008) c) “Supervisors/team leaders in my work unit support employee development” (Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2011), and d) “Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes” (Caillier 2012; Fernandez and Moldogaziev 2011; Lee and Whitford 2008; Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez 2011) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.86).

The third variable, *Organizational Justice/Equity*, is often measured in the literature as a) Procedural Justice (injustice related to procedures) b) Distributive Justice (injustice related to outcomes), and c) Interactional Justice (quality of interpersonal relationships or treatment received at work). Perceived injustice of any kind can result in lower job satisfaction and turnover (Choi 2011; Crozpanzano and Baron 1991; Lawler and Jenkins 1992; Rubin 2009). Consistent with past studies (Aryee, Budhwar, and Chen 2002; Cho and Sai 2012), the index is a measure of the following items a) “my workload is reasonable,” b) “I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal,” c) “my performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance,” d) “promotions in my work unit are based on merit,” e) “pay raises depend on how well employees perform their jobs,” f) “in my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way,” g) “satisfaction with recognition received for doing a good job,” and h) “managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88).

The fourth variable, *Work/Life Balance Issues* is a measure of seven items commonly used in the literature (Caillier 2012; Park and Joaquin 2012): a) “satisfaction with telework,” b) “satisfaction with alternative work schedules,” c) “satisfaction with health and wellness programs,” d) “satisfaction with employee assistance programs,” e) “satisfaction with child care programs,” f) “satisfaction with elder care programs,” and g) “senior leaders demonstrate support for work/life programs” (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.85). All of the indices are on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Model Estimation and Results

Since the dependent variable is a binary response, which lacks a continuous normal distribution as seen in an ordinary least squares regression, a logistic regression is utilized with agency-specific effects. Goodness of fit also is reported. Before the logistic model results are presented, descriptive statistics by gender and agency type along with correlations are reported.

More than 75 large/independent/small agencies are categorized into four categories (distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and constituent policy) as classified by Lowi (1985) and Dolan (2004). Results in table 1 indicate that close to 40% of the agencies in the sample belong to distributive, followed by redistributive agencies (20.3%), regulatory (20.2%), and constituent policy (19.6%). Minorities are classified as respondents belonging to all racial groups with the exception of white, and constitute 30.2% of the sample; these percentages further mimic the US demographics

Table 1
Demographics by Gender

	Overall (N = 177,586)	Female (N = 79,012)	Male (N = 97,912)
% Minority	30.2 (52,401)	37.0 (28,765)	24.6 (23,477)
% Age			
Under 29	7.4 (12,965)	4.1 (3,188)	9.9 (9,674)
30–39	18.9 (33,191)	20.2 (15,675)	18.0 (17,463)
40–49	27.4 (47,959)	26.1 (20,269)	28.3 (27,519)
50–59	33.2 (58,218)	35.7 (27,723)	31.2 (30,353)
60 and over	13.1 (22,988)	13.8 (10,723)	12.6 (12,231)
% Agency code			
Distributive agencies	39.9 (70,893)	31.2 (24,667)	47 (45,982)
Redistributive agencies	20.3 (36,047)	39.3 (31,075)	5.0 (4,899)
Regulatory agencies	20.2 (35,916)	13.5 (10,649)	25.5 (24,990)
Constituent policy agencies	19.6 (34,730)	16.0 (12,622)	22.5 (22,041)
Years in the Federal Government			
10 years or less	50.5 (88,408)	49.6 (38,819)	51.2 (49,309)
Years in the organization			
10 years or less	58.4 (102,966)	58.5 (46,006)	58.3 (56,579)
Expressing intention to leave	20.9 (34,887)	19.1 (14,347)	22.4 (20,448)

(34% minority). Overall, one-third (33.2%) of the sample are between ages 50–59 followed by 27.4% between ages 40–49, 18.9% aged 30–39, 13.1% aged 60 and over, and 7.4% under 30. Close to half of the employees had 10 years or less experience in the federal government and about three-fifths (58.4%) with similar number of years experience in the organization. Similar percentages are reported by gender, barring a few variations. The largest difference in frequencies is seen in type of agency distribution—with women about eight times more likely to be employed in redistributive agencies as compared with male colleagues (39.3% versus 5.0%).

Redistributive agencies have the greatest percentage of SES women as compared with the other three agency types. Distributive agencies have more men in senior positions than female SES employees (47.0% versus 31.2%). Regulatory agencies have twice the number of men than women in SES positions (25.5% versus 13.5%). Overall, the largest percentages of SES men are employed in distributive agencies. The results are not surprising and confirm the gendered nature of bureaucracy (Guy and Newman 2004; Kelly and Newman 2001; Kerr, Miller, and Reid 2002; Naff 2001; Riccucci 2009; Saidel and Loscocco 2005; Sneed 2007).

Close to one-fifth (20.9%) of the SES employees indicate that they plan on leaving within a year. Within agencies, constituent policy agencies have the highest percentage of employees expressing intent to leave (27.2%) followed by regulatory agencies (18.1%), distributive agencies (12.6%), and redistributive agencies (11.8%). Female SES employees in redistributive agencies such as Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Housing and Urban Development, which typically have a female-friendly work environment (Dolan 2000) are least likely to experience intent to leave (12%) when compared with other types of agencies.

Table 2
Percent Agreement and Mean Differences for Factors that Influence Glass-Cliffs by Gender and Agency Type

	Percent Agreement (Mean)		Percent Agreement (Mean)		Percent Agreement (Mean)		Percent Agreement (Mean)	
	Distributive Agency		Redistributive Agency		Regulatory Agency		Constituent Policy Agency	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Influence over policies								
Satisfaction with involvement in decisions that affect your work (63)	48.8 (3.27***)	50.4 (3.31)	52.3 (3.38***)	77.5 (3.76)	54.6 (3.41***)	51.4 (3.29)	57.9 (3.50***)	61.1 (3.57)
Empowerment								
I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization (1)	60.8 (3.49***)	62.5 (3.56)	72.5 (3.79***)	68.5 (3.73)	68.0 (3.73***)	66.2 (3.61)	72.4 (3.79)	72.6 (3.81)
I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things (3)	56.7 (3.43***)	55.8 (3.39)	63.2 (3.49***)	63.6 (3.63)	59.9 (3.52***)	48.1 (3.21)	66.6 (3.72*)	65.6 (3.69)
Supervisors/team leaders in my work unit support employee development (47)	62.4 (3.57***)	64.6 (3.64)	65.4 (3.45***)	64.4 (3.66)	68.9 (3.78***)	64.1 (3.59)	70.9 (3.83)	71.6 (3.83)
Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work (30)	40.6 (3.06***)	44.4 (3.10)	36.7 (2.86***)	76.2 (3.71)	46.8 (3.20***)	43.4 (3.12)	49.1 (3.27***)	53.0 (3.39)
Organizational justice/Equity								
My workload is reasonable (10)	55.8 (3.27***)	56.5 (3.33)	54.9 (3.30***)	56.1 (3.41)	56.3 (3.26***)	63.7 (3.51)	60.0 (3.35***)	60.1 (3.42)
I can disclose a suspected violation of any law, rule or regulation without fear of reprisal (17)	53.2 (3.31***)	58.3 (3.44)	68.1 (3.70***)	61.6 (3.88)	65.6 (3.67***)	59.3 (3.49)	64.5 (3.62***)	69.1 (3.78)
My performance appraisal is a fair reflection of my performance (15)	57.0 (3.37***)	55.6 (3.32)	72.3 (3.63***)	81.3 (3.97)	66.1 (3.66***)	58.6 (3.44)	63.0 (3.55)	64.3 (3.57)
Promotions in my work unit are based on merit (22)	29.4 (2.74***)	34.3 (2.77)	32.0 (2.91***)	59.8 (3.19)	42.1 (3.09***)	32.3 (2.76)	38.1 (3.07***)	45.0 (3.19)
Pay raises depend on how well employees perform their jobs (33)	31.4 (2.72***)	29.8 (2.66)	25.6 (2.52***)	48.4 (2.94)	31.7 (2.76***)	20.6 (2.36)	33.1 (2.85**)	34.2 (2.90)

Continued

Differences across Indexes by Agencies and Gender

To examine if there are differences in response to items on four key factors that impact glass cliffs, difference of mean tests are conducted by gender and agency type, the results of which are presented in [table 2](#). The results suggest that women in distributive, redistributive, and constituent policy agencies express significantly lower agreement with their male colleagues on the influence they have in policymaking. Despite being present in much higher numbers in redistributive agencies, women have much less influence over policies that impact their work than men (close to 25 percentage point difference). The results do not support Hypothesis 2 which states that women in redistributive agencies are likely to exert greater influence over policymaking than their male colleagues. Regulatory agencies are the only ones in which women express significantly higher influence in decisions that impact their work than their male colleagues. The differences are significant at $p < .01$.

Overall, women in regulatory agencies report higher means on the empowerment index than their male peers. The results are reversed for women in other agencies (distributive, redistributive, and constituent). When asked if “employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work,” women across all agencies except regulatory agencies report lower agreement than men. The difference is largest in redistributive agencies where only 37% of women agree or strongly agree that they feel empowered at work compared with 76% of men in SES positions. On analyzing the overall differences in means in organizational justice/equity index by gender and type of agency, the results indicate that similar to the influence over policies and empowerment index, women in regulatory agencies have higher agreement on seven out of the eight variables that measure justice/equity. The only question, “my workload is reasonable” in regulatory agencies was one that women expressed lower agreement when compared with men (56.3% versus 63.7%). The differences are significant at 99.99% of confidence interval. In redistributive agencies, the opposite was true; women expressed lower agreement on seven out of the eight variables that measured organizational justice/equity index. Women in general in redistributive agencies report greater inequities than men. The largest differences in percentages by gender were reported on the following items: “promotions in my work unit are based on merit,” “pay raises depend on how well employees perform their jobs” “in my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way,” and “satisfaction with recognition received for doing a good job.” On all these variables, women in redistributive agencies are at least 20% points less likely to agree than their male colleagues.

Overall, women in redistributive agencies are less satisfied on all work/life balance factors, except satisfaction with elder care programs. Despite being employed in greater numbers than men, SES women in redistributive agencies report lower satisfaction with influence over policies, equitable treatment, empowerment, and work-life balance as compared with their male colleagues. Since lower satisfaction on these measures is positively correlated with intention to leave, the study examined whether women in redistributive agencies are more likely to face glass cliffs than other agencies; logistic regression was conducted to explore this issue of glass cliffs (turnover intention) by agency type controlling for the four key variables and various demographic factors. As seen in [table 3](#), intention to leave was negatively correlated with age, gender (female), years in the federal government, years in the organization, overall job satisfaction,

Table 3
Correlations—Intentions to Leave by Demographic and Index Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Intentions to leave	1											
2. Female	-.04**	1										
3. Minorities	.01*	.13**	1									
4. Age	-.09**	.07**	-.08**	1								
5. Years in the Federal Government	-.08**	.01*	-.07**	.54**	1							
6. Years in the organization	-.11**	-.03**	-.09**	.49**	.84**	1						
7. Overall job satisfaction	-.38**	.04**	-.01	.05**	-.01**	-.02**	1					
8. Satisfaction with pay	-.24**	.01**	-.11**	.15**	.13**	.12**	.46**	1				
9. Influence over policy	-.28**	.01*	.01**	.06**	.02**	.01**	.67**	.37**	1			
10. Empowerment index	-.32**	.01**	-.05**	.07**	.05**	.03**	.72**	.41**	.72**	1		
11. Organizational justice/equity index	-.29**	-.03**	.01	.04**	.03**	.02**	.69**	.50**	.68**	.80**	1	
12. Work/life balance index	-.12**	.03**	.02**	.11**	.07**	.06**	.29**	.20**	.28**	.32**	.35**	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 4
Modeling the Impact of Factors That Influence Intent to Leave (Glass Cliffs)

	B (Log Odds)	Exp(B) Odds Ratio
Influence over policies	-.116***	.891
Empowerment Index	-.017***	.984
Organizational justice/equity index	-.024***	.977
Work/life index	.008***	1.008
Agency type (redistributive reference group)		
Distributive agency	-1.071***	.343
Regulatory agency	.640***	1.897
Constituent policy agency	.489***	1.631
Female	-.206*	.813
Interaction gender × Agency type (redistributive reference group)		
Female × Distributive agency	1.281***	3.599
Female × Regulatory agency	-.209*	.812
Female × Constituent policy agency	.183**	1.201
Female × Influence over policies index	-.155***	1.168
Female × Empowerment index	-.046***	.955
Female × Organizational justice/equity Index	-.026***	1.027
Female × Work/life index	.006*	1.006
Age	-.042***	.959
Years in the Federal Government	.053***	1.055
Years in the organization	-.258***	.773
Job Satisfaction	-.719***	.487
Satisfaction with Pay	-.080***	.923
Minorities	.112***	.894
Female × Minorities	-.183***	.833
Constant	3.308***	27.324
N	174,79	
-2 Log Likelihood	117410.68	
χ^2	871.965***	
Pseudo R-square	0.293	

Note: The dependent variable is intention to leave. The survey question is: Are you considering leaving your organization within the next year?

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

satisfaction with pay, and all the four key factors that impact glass cliffs (influence over policy, empowerment, organizational justice/equity, and work/life balance).

Glass Cliff (Intention to leave)

Logistic regression was employed to analyze whether women in SES positions overall, and in certain agencies, are more likely to face glass cliffs than SES men. The results are presented in table 4. Overall, employees who are likely to experience greater involvement in policies, feel empowered, and experience organizational justice are less likely to express their intent to leave or face the risk of falling off the cliff. The odds of leaving are 10.9% less for employees involved in policies that impact their work, 1.6% less for those who feel empowered and 2.3% less for those who experience

equity in the workplace. Interestingly, the odds of leaving are more among employees expressing greater satisfaction with work/life balance. Women in senior SES positions are less likely to express their intent to leave than their male colleagues. The odds of women staying in SES positions are 18.7% points higher than their male colleagues. SES employees in distributive agencies are 66% less likely to express their intent to leave when compared with SES employees in redistributive agencies (reference group). Although this is true for the overall data, the results do not hold up when interactions by gender and agency type are introduced in the model.

Overall, SES women in distributive agencies are 3.6 times more likely to face a glass cliff compared with redistributive agencies (reference group). Women in constituent policy agencies are 20.1% points or 1.2 times more likely to face glass cliffs when compared with redistributive agencies. Overall, women in regulatory agencies are least likely to face glass cliffs, thus failing to confirm Hypothesis 1, which states that women in redistributive agencies are least likely to face glass cliffs. The odds for women in regulatory agencies are 18.8% less than women in redistributive agencies to face glass cliffs. In other words, women employed in distributive agencies (which are typically male dominated) face the greatest risk of glass cliffs when compared with other agencies.

The odds of women leaving with greater influence over policies is 16.3% less, 4.5% less for women who are empowered, and 2.7% less for SES women who experience equity at work. In other words, women who express greater satisfaction with involvement in policymaking, experience empowerment at work, and face organizational justice/equity are less likely to experience glass cliffs. The results thus confirm Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5, which state that a) SES women exerting greater influence in policymaking are less likely to experience glass cliffs, b) Empowered SES women are less likely to experience glass cliffs, and c) SES women reporting equitable treatment at work are less likely to experience glass cliffs than those who experience inequities at work. The results however, do not find support for hypothesis 6 that SES women reporting higher satisfaction with work/life balance are less likely to experience glass cliffs. Since close to half of the SES women are over the age of 50, it is possible that several do not necessarily utilize day care/child care programs. Alternatively, more recent research is pointing to the fact that telework increases the risk of social isolation, increased workloads, and lack of knowledge sharing (Bailey and Kurland 2002; Golden, Veiga and Dino 2008; Horan and Wells 2005). A recent study by Lee and Hong (2011) found that family friendly policies such as paid leave for family care, telework, and alternative work schedules do not have any significant effect on turnover. Only child care subsidies impacted turnover rates. Future research should look into the relationship between work/life programs and retention across agencies.

Other control variables in the model suggest that as age increases the likelihood to leave decreases by 4.1%. However, as the years spent in the federal government increase the likelihood of expressing intent to leave also increases. The relationship is reversed for number of years one spends within the agency. In line, with previous research, this study finds that satisfied employees are 51.3% less likely to leave than those dissatisfied with their jobs (Bright 2008; Crewson 1997; Johnsrud and Heck 1994; Naff and Crum 1999; Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez 2011). Further, employees

expressing satisfaction with pay are 7.7% points less likely to leave than employees who express greater dissatisfaction with salary. Minorities in general are 10.6% more likely to face glass cliffs, whereas female minorities in particular are 16.7% less likely to express their intent to leave. The model explains close to 30% of the variance, with a Pseudo R-Square of 29.3%. Hosmer and Lemeshow test for goodness of fit was conducted. The likelihood ratio (X^2) indicates that the model as a whole is statistically significant, thus, illustrating that it is extremely unlikely that these results are due to chance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study uses the glass-cliff metaphor to examine women who shatter the glass ceiling and express intentions to leave after reaching senior leadership positions. The results of this study show that despite women being present in large numbers in redistributive agencies they report lower satisfaction on several factors that impact glass cliffs. Though women in redistributive agencies are less likely to be involved in organizational decision-making, report lower empowerment, face inequities at work, and express lower satisfaction with work-life balance than their male peers, they are less likely to experience glass cliffs when compared with distributive and constituent agencies. The relationship is significant after controlling for factors such as age, years in the organization, years in the federal government, and job satisfaction. The finding is important given that past research has indicated that dissatisfaction with intrinsic (e.g. involvement with policymaking, lack of empowerment, and inequity at work) and extrinsic factors (e.g. work/life balance) leads to turnover (Alexander and Ruderman 1987; Geurts, Schaufeli and Rutte 1999; Moorman 1991; Wilson 1994).

Although dissatisfied on various factors in their day-to-day work, women in redistributive agencies have fewer prejudices held against them since they have formed a critical mass at the senior level, which might prevent them from falling off the cliff. With large numbers of women than men in SES positions in redistributive agencies, some of the typical incongruity that exists in leadership roles and female gender roles might be resolved (Eagly and Carli 2003; Eagly and Karau 2002). Women in redistributive agencies do not have to demonstrate agentic (masculine leadership) traits since communal behaviors (gentle, kind, affectionate, empathetic, nurturing, sensitive and helpful) are greatly sought in these agencies. Further, women in redistributive agencies might perceive greater opportunities for growth in spite of lower satisfaction than their male colleagues. Only 12% of SES women in redistributive agencies express their intent to leave when compared with 29% in distributive agencies despite lower satisfaction on almost all factors impacting glass cliffs, especially empowerment, pay raises, promotions, recognition at work, and alternative work schedules. Though the government provides alternative work arrangements and promotes work/life balance, recent research suggests that those who take advantage of such policies (mostly women) are confronted with unfavorable treatment when it comes to pay raises and promotion (Tower and Alkadry 2008; Sabattini and Crosby 2008). This might also explain why executives who express greater satisfaction on work/life measures express greater intent to leave.

The risk of facing glass cliffs is highest for women in distributive agencies followed by constituent policy agency. SES women in regulatory agencies are least likely to face glass cliffs followed by women in redistributive agencies. Men dominate distributive and constituent agencies, but on the other hand they are also twice as likely to be in regulatory agencies. So why are women in male-dominated regulatory agencies thriving and are least likely to encounter glass cliffs? One possible explanation is that this pattern has less to do with occupational segregation/gender typing when compared with the structure of individual agency. Although past theories suggest that in organizations where think-manager-think-male and role incongruities by gender are well and alive, the perpetuating masculine stereotype of a leader negatively impacts the ascendancy of women in leadership positions. Although this is true for SES women in distributive and constituent agencies, the results are different for SES women in regulatory agencies. Regulatory agencies typically have flat hierarchies and hire from the outside when compared with distributive agencies. Regulatory agencies tend to “favor lateral entry, that is, the recruitment of personnel from the outside directly into upper-management ranks...These agencies would have a large proportion of high-ranking managers, making the hierarchy flatter and more truncated than in Weber’s model of an ideal bureaucratic structure” (Newman 1994, p. 278). It is possible that the structure of lateral entry favors hiring of a diverse set of employees who are less subject to the power struggles and organizational socialization that perpetuates the masculine stereotypes typically faced by women in agencies that promote from within (distributive and constituent policy).

Women in distributive agencies are most likely to face glass cliffs. It is likely that communal behaviors typically demonstrated by female leaders (gentle, kind, affectionate, empathetic, nurturing, sensitive and helpful) might not sit well in an agencies dominated by males where being aggressive assertive, self-reliant, self-confident, forceful in negotiations, independent, dominant, and ambitious (agentic attributes) are often praised as qualities of a good leader causing role incongruity in leadership positions. SES women in distributive agencies are unable to exert authority the same way as men. Women in these positions seem less likely to be involved in decisions of greater policy traction, feel less empowered, and report facing inequities at work—all possible explanations for glass cliffs. Women in these positions are placed in precarious positions dominated by men where the likelihood to fail (fall off the cliff) is much higher than women in other agencies. The lack of support that women receive is also explained by shadow structures, which suggest that women’s networks are less resourceful than men’s network even when they are in similar positions (Kanter 1977; McGuire 2002); women also report feeling more excluded than men (Findler et al. 2007). An important character of glass cliff positions is that they are inherently stressful, and often lead to reduced commitment and increased turnover (Ryan and Haslam 2005, 2007; Ryan et al. 2007), which is true for women in male-dominated distributive agencies who experience inequities in pay raises and promotions when compared with their male colleagues. Involving SES women in decisions that impact their job and their organizations, empowering them with opportunities to advance the agency’s goals and priorities, and providing a fair and just environment at work are important factors that can prevent them from falling off the cliff. More support and wide acceptance of work/life balance programs must be promoted in all agencies to lower the

untoward consequences for employees (often times women) who make use of such programs.

This study is not without its limitations. The data are from a single source, future studies should consider using different data sets to test the theory of glass cliffs. Given that these data are secondary, it is limited in the nature of questions asked; very few questions measure employees' involvement in policymaking. Researchers can consider designing questionnaires focused on testing the various factors that impact glass cliffs. This is a new area of research and hence consensus around a theory of glass cliffs is yet to be reached—however, this study builds on the existing concept and expands it to the public sector. The study contributes to the literature by taking the discussion of glass ceiling a step further by examining glass cliffs in public sector agencies. Although the concept of glass cliff is relatively new, our understanding of the dynamics that underlie the relationship between women in leadership positions and organizational turnover have long existed. Diversity goals are not about the number of women that reach senior positions but about the quality of the work environment that can lead to inclusion and success of women in leadership roles.

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