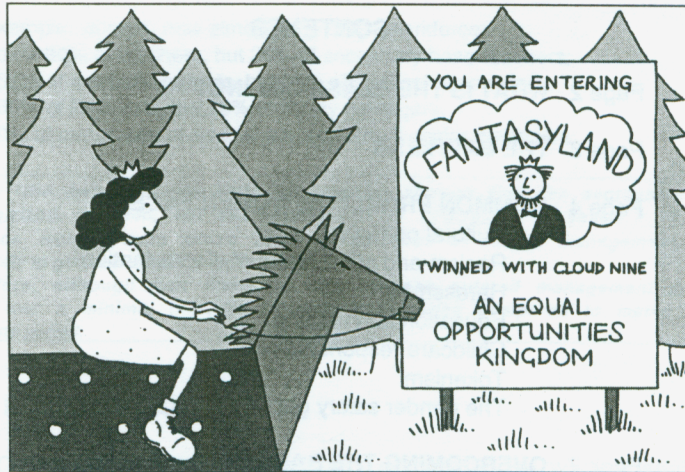# THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING

A FILM BY

LEEDS ANIMATION WORKSHOP
A Women's Collective

THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING

Notes to accompany the film by

LEEDS ANIMATION WORKSHOP
(a women's collective)
45 Bayswater Row Leeds LS8 5LF Tel: 0113 248
4997

CONTENTS

WHAT IS THE GLASS CEILING?

The glass ceiling is the invisible barrier, found in most areas of work, which stands between women staff and the fulfilment of their potential.

All over the world, in all kinds of jobs, women are found concentrated in junior positions, rarely rising above middle management level, and in careers which wield no economic or political power. The more status, wealth and influence a position carries, the smaller will be the proportion of women occupying that position.

For example, women, now almost 50% of the workforce:
are over 80% of teachers, but 20% of secondary head teachers;
are 62% of medical students, but 16% of medical consultants;
are 80% of librarians, but 20% of library managers;
are 9% of management as a whole, and 2% of senior managers.

In *the USA between 1970 and 1990, studies showed that sex segregation by* <u>*occupation*</u> *declined, but sex segregation by* <u>*industry*</u> *increased - i.e. for instance women were* more *likely to get jobs in middle management, but* less *likely to get jobs in heavy engineering. Therefore, although four times as many women entered management posts, there was a minimal increase in women's salaries compared to men's over the same period.*

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The Glass Ceiling affects all of us - not just those women seeking top jobs for themselves.

Decisions taken by politicians, civil servants, the judiciary, and
public appointees, for example, have consequences for all members of society, and in all areas of life. It is in the public interest, and essential to democracy, that women should be equally represented on the bodies making these decisions.

Also, women's unequal access to power serves as a tacit acceptance of sexism, reinforcing discrimination and the victimisation of women throughout society.

On the other hand, equality of opportunity is vital to employing organisations, whose success depends on the quality of their workforce; flexibility in **the face of change; and the ability to** appeal to a diverse public.

THE BARRIERS

In THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING, Princess Ella
encounters a series of barriers to success in her career:

Gender stereotyping and low expectations

"What a pretty little girl! My wish for her is that she should
learn to type."

Poor career guidance and education/training decisions

"Oh no! I've been seriously misinformed about career
opportunities."

Unfair selection for promotion

"I've worked harder and better than anyone in this department.
Why have Tom, Dick and Harry been promoted, and not me?"

Sexual harassment

"Don't you want your promotion?" he snarled.

Lack of domestic support

When John the Dragonslayer stops in the evening, a team
of

women services him: mother, wife, sister, secretary,
neighbour... Ella is left to look after herself - and the horse.

Discrimination

John is made Chief Dragonslayer, despite having achieved
less than Ella.

Caring responsibilities

"And Ella shall be Assistant Dragonslayer, with special
responsibility for baby dragons, emotionally disturbed teenage
dragons, and elderly dependent dragons."

Ineffective equal opportunities policy

"You've got BIAS written all over you."

Lack of peer support

"You must pass over the Lonely Mountains..."

Prejudice of male colleagues

"He will seize you if he can, and cast you into the Typing
Pool."

The unhelpful woman in authority

"The Ice Queen long ago had climbed to the top of her
mountain, and the struggle, hard work and isolation had
frozen her heart."

The Velvet Ghetto

"She was forbidden to climb the high peaks, or approach
the Emperor's Palace...'The jobs I have don't go
anywhere.'"

The Men's Club

"There's a woman in here" - "How can we stop them?" -
"Exclude them" - "Ignore them" - "Patronize them"...

**Unfair selection procedures, and prejudiced
interviewers**

"First question: are you a man?"

**Unnecessary job requirements - such as age, mobility,
late nights**

"Are you exactly 35 years old? Are you free of domestic
ties?
Can you give total commitment, work all hours?"

The Glass Ceiling

"When a suitable castle becomes available, I'll let you
know."

COMMON PROBLEMS WOMEN FACE

Cultural prejudice

Many senior jobs are still designed around the assumption that the holder has a full-time spouse to shoulder domestic responsibilities; and women's prospects are still being affected by attitudes like these:

"Women have jobs, men have careers."

"Taking career breaks in order to have children indicates lack of commitment."

"Leaders must compete, control, command, criticise; they are authoritative, decisive, detached;

women, however, collaborate, create, question, **encourage;** they are naturally complaisant, passive, subservient;

therefore women make bad leaders".

Racism and other forms of discrimination

"For the white woman in her twenties and thirties, working life is certainly looking up. For her sisters from the ethnic minorities, life is still tough, although companies with the best policies on gender are the most likely ones to be implementing positive policies on ethnic minorities."

- BEST COMPANIES FOR WOMEN, by Scarlett MccGwire

A study showed that promotion to officer level amongst workers entering major corporations in the US was achieved by:

1 out of every 21 white men

1 out of every 42 men of colour

1 out of every 136 white women

No women of colour could be found at officer level within a major corporation in the US during the two-year period of the study.

Many women face additional barriers, due to, for example: class; disability; lesbianism; being fat; being older; or not being conventionally "attractive" to look at.

Harassment

An Industrial Society survey (1992) showed that over 50% of working women had experienced physical or verbal sexual harassment, compared with only 15% of men. Remarks, innuendo, and displays of pin-ups also constitute harassment, as does any inappropriate attention to sex in the workplace which makes women feel vulnerable and unconfident.

Education and training

"Women make early career choices which can disqualify them from senior management positions.

"They are often concentrated in support sectors, such as market research, from where it is difficult to move to a mainstream career; or in support functions, such as personnel or administration, which are not perceived as providing the 'business' experience necessary for a senior role. "Their career may be decided by education choices made at an early age. Women are less likely to take science subjects at GCSE/A-level (boys outnumber girls 4 to 1 in entries to A-level physics) and to take business-related degrees."
- *THE KEYTO THE MEN'S CLUB, by Trudy Coe*

Once women enter the workplace, they are 50% less likely than their male colleagues to be given job-related training by their employers.

Childcare responsibilities

"As long as women continue to bear the major share of domestic responsibilities, the demand for a full-time commitment to a career for the whole of their working lives will continue to bar their way.

"Post-motherhood: up to 30% of women's lifetime earnings can be lost, largely through a return to work part-time; almost half of all women returning to part-time employment go back to jobs below the level for which they are qualified; women taking a complete break from work for childcare fail to conform to expected (male) career patterns, and rarely find that the time they have spent at home is valued by prospective employers."
- *WOMEN AT THE TOP, The Report of the Hansard Commission*

Women returning to work after having children are discouraged from applying for many jobs by:
• unnecessary age bars and mobility requirements;
• pressure to work long, inflexible hours, necessitating difficult childcare arrangements and lack of family contact.
However:
"the barriers to women's promotion are complex and cannot be attributed just to... the demands of having children. Women without children do not abound in senior management."
- *BEST COMPANIES FOR WOMEN*

Tokenism

Women comprising 15% or less of any group at work experience problems of segregation; isolation; harassment; face unequal promotion prospects; and are perceived as representatives of their gender rather than individuals in their own right: their failures are seen as reflecting on all women.

'Critical mass', the point at which the appointment of more women to the group is accepted as normal, seems to be achieved ,at around 35%.

Tokenism affects members of disadvantaged minorities in a similar way: but it does not, for example, apply when one or two white, able-bodied men are outnumbered in a workplace full of women.

The Gender Salary Gap

Women are increasingly gaining professional and other work-related qualifications, and entering fields hitherto closed to them.

However:
• women's average earnings continue to hover at around three-quarters of men's;
• managerial women are concentrated among jobs requiring a high level of expertise rather than those carrying influence and authority.
• the highest-paying fields are more resistant to sex desegregation;
• as women enter a field of work, the status and the pay both fall;
• women in senior jobs often have more responsibilities, but lower grading, than men, according to a UMIST survey.

The effects on the gender salary gap of main college subject, academic achievement, and related experience were researched amongst a group of professional women and men (Fuller and Schoenberger, Social Science Quarterly, 1991). The fact that women did better than men in all three areas reduced the gap in their starting salaries - but the gap was still there; and it widened overtime.

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

Here are some of the ways Princess Ella manages to overcome the barriers she meets in THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING.

Luck

Ella is young, fit, white, and a fairytale princess, with no domestic ties. All this helps.

Mentors

Ella has her three fairy godmothers to provide guidance and support. The equivalent outside fairyland is to find a sympathetic older woman who has travelled the same path before you and can smooth your way. The scarcity of senior women available to act as mentors has been a handicap to female high-flyers, but some have received encouragement and advice from male mentors.

Ambition

"... and then she tried the Chief Executive's chair, and it was very comfortable, and she liked that best of all."

Planning

"It's time for me to make a serious career move. I want to run one of the castles in this empire!"

Hard work

In her first job, Ella builds up her expertise by working harder and better than anyone else in the department. Finding her employers unappreciative she eventually leaves, but at least she has a portfolio of achievements which will stand her in good stead.

Determination

Ella bravely undertakes the journey to the Palace of Power, not withstanding that the way is long, and hard, and dangerous.

Calling in the union

"Promotion? - Not on your terms!" Ella knows her rights and how to defend them. The union provides an important source of information, legal advice and support as well as an opportunity for networking and solidarity.

Equal opportunities policies

As Ella discovers, these do not solve the problem of discrimination, though they are a step in the right direction.

Sexism awareness training

May be necessary both for staff and employers, to help them to recognise and overcome their own gender conditioning.

Networking

There are various formal professional networks for women on a national and even international level. In large organisations there may be internal networks for women employees. Many women organise their own informal networks to exchange experiences and information, give mutual support, build confidence, formulate strategy, have a laugh...

Flexible working practices

The Emperor learns to adapt:"You can draw on a wider pool of talent, have shorter hours, and make work more flexible - at all levels."

CHANGING EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE

Equal opportunity audits and monitoring

Establish where women and men are located in the organisation, and in what positions. What proportion of job applicants are women? Is training offered equally? Is part-time work or job-sharing available at all levels?

Keep track of women's and men's rates of career progress and levels of pay and performance. Note any problems with staff retention. Produce regular updates of progress towards equality.

Targeting

Setting targets for promotion is not a quota system, but a way of seeing if equal opportunity policies are working: if targets are not being met, there are still blocks in the system which need sorting out.

Equal opportunity training

"A company which has not examined its prejudices still acts on them"

- BEST COMPANIES FOR WOMEN.

Good recruitment practice

Project a positive image in promotional and recruitment literature; avoid stereotypes, ensure there are good female role models; send out positive signals in the wording and imagery of advertisements; review job descriptions and selection criteria, removing unnecessary barriers;

set up interview panels which are not male-dominated, and give equal opportunities training to panel members.

"Family-friendly policies" should be targeted at men as much as women. They should apply to non-biological as well as to biological parents, and to anyone caring for dependent relatives. Such policies may include:

Maternity support, with time to attend antenatal facilities, and improvements on the statutory minimum for maternity leave and pay;

Paternity leave;

Parental leave;

Childcare support: advice about facilities; vouchers; creches; holiday playschemes; and so on;

Re-entry training programmes for women or men returning to work after having children;

Flexible hours: the possibility of working part-time, job-sharing, term-time working;

Career breaks, paid or unpaid, to take sabbaticals or to fulfil caring responsibilities.

Staff development and support

Review the culture of your organisation and make everyone responsible for eliminating prejudice; make sure training opportunities - whether assertiveness training or technical courses - are open to everyone; introduce career development counselling.

GOOD FOR ALL OF US

"The best companies for women are also, of course, the best companies for men." - Scarlett MccGwire.

Here are some of the good reasons why organisations should rethink the role of women in their workforce:

Wastage of resources

If women are under-represented at most levels, the talents they would have brought to the organisation remain unexploited.

The workforce is changing

Women now make up half the working population and will account for 90% of labour force growth by the turn of the century, as the proportion of young people entering the job market in Europe continues to decline.

Evolving management styles

The old command and control culture is changing, we are told, to one of involvement and participation.

This matches the skills of many women workers, who have been found more flexible and adaptable, better at team working, managing change, networking and group support.

Part-time workers and job-sharers save employers money

There are reduced labour costs; increased productivity; maximum use of plant and equipment; additional cover in peak periods; better continuity, and reduced impact of absence. Staff bring more energy to the job; there is a wider employment pool to draw on, and a greater range of skills available; the organisation can retain the skills and experience of those unable to work full-time.

Promoting women brings financial benefits

• An organisation can *save money* on staff turnover, recruitment, selection and induction.

• It can *improve its efficiency* - by good employment practices, which improve staff loyalty, motivation, performance, and retention, while reducing absenteeism; - and by drawing on a larger pool of talent.

• It gains a *market advantage* by being able to empathise with and attract women customers, clients and shareholders; and its progressive outlook will also attract younger male customers.

• It *strengthens itself* by drawing on a greater variety of management styles, becoming more flexible, dynamic, robust, and adaptable to change.

• It gains a *strategic advantage* by maximising the potential of its workforce in the longer term.

Discrimination loses money

It is costly to lose trained staff and replace them:

"For every woman at section manager level who leaves because her wish for development is frustrated, we estimate it costs us £5,000 to find and train a new recruit to the same standard. For store managers and their deputies the figure is nearer £10,000. No business can afford that level of waste." - David Sainsbury, chair of the supermarket chain.

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EVERYWOMAN monthly magazine (from newsagents or by subscription from FREEPOST, LONDON N1 8BR) also produces:
THE EVERYWOMAN DIRECTORY, an invaluable handbook of women's businesses, advice agencies, networks, organisations, campaigns, etc.

STUDIES ON WOMEN: ABSTRACTS - Useful reference work which details and summarises the research papers published year by year. Local reference libraries or college libraries may have it.