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# Glass Ceiling: A Concussion to Women Everywhere

## An Introduction to Sexism

Barbara Berg perfectly introduces topics such as the glass ceiling, the gender pay gap, and overall sexism in America in her novel *Sexism in America: Alive, Well, and Ruining Our Future*, with, "I couldn't stop thinking about it. Not for days, even weeks after. Why were these women, with so much going for them, slipping into roles rather than deciding upon them? Were these women a skewed sample? Or were they representative of a general population? I didn't know. And if it hadn't been for a paper I had to write, I might not have found out," (Berg, XIII).

The American glass ceiling will not be shattered until feminism and its ever-changing definition are no longer considered to be "dirty", sexism and gender inequality in the workplace is eradicated, and a female president is elected. The definition of feminism varies based on one's demographic make-up, the situation, and their familiarity with the topic. In order to comprehend factors of limitation within the realm of the glass ceiling, the interpretation of feminism must be explored. "Feminism is about opening your eyes to ugliness in the world, and believing, and standing by, survivors of hate and violence and disrespect," (Hoffer).

To expand on sexism in the workplace, "just as the overall labor market remains sharply segregated by sex, women executives are concentrated into certain types of jobs - mostly staff and support jobs - that offer little opportunity for getting to the top," ("The Glass Ceiling: How Women Are Blocked from Getting to the Top."). Even when women do come into positions of power, their accomplishments, strengths, and weaknesses are subject to scrutiny by others in the light of masculine counterparts.

The next crack that must be overcome in order to shatter the glass ceiling is that of the wage gap. "Women face a pay gap in nearly every occupation. From elementary and middle school teachers to computer programmers, women are paid less than men in female-dominated, gender-balanced, and male-dominated occupations," (Hill).

The last aspect of feminism that must be taken into account in order to finally abolish the glass ceiling would be the election of a female president, as this would be a major step in "correcting the imbalance," ("Why We Need a Female President").

## Defining Feminism: A Crucial Step in Understanding the Glass Ceiling

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The “f-word” is unique in its plethora of interpretations, including that “feminism is a multi-disciplinary approach to sex and gender equality understood through social theories and political activism,” (“What is Feminism?”). A malleable concept, feminism shapeshifts to adopt any aspect of unfairness present in a culture in order to promote change. “Anytime stereotyping, objectification, infringements of human rights, or gender- or sexuality-based oppression occurs, it’s a feminist issue,” (“What is Feminism?”). Hoffer broadens the controversial topic beyond simply culture the needs change to adopt the recognition of injustices present in society. “Feminism is about paying attention to quantitative information, like statistics showing that Black people are more likely to be stopped by police, that women are at high risk of being raped or battered by men they know, and that gay and lesbian youth are at increased risk of committing suicide.” In addition, Hoffer continued with the statement that, “feminism is about recognizing that where people are disproportionately impacted by indignity, and poverty, and violence, and harm, and disrespect.” Versatile in its role in society, especially in the context of political activism, “Feminist theory now aims to interrogate gender inequalities and to effect change in areas where gender and sexuality politics create power imbalances,” (“What is Feminism?”).

## **Feminism in Modern American Culture**

As of late, feminism as a general concept has been labeled as a dirty word, and has become unpopular with young women and men everywhere, despite weak voices of their baby boomer mothers during an earlier feminist era in the United States’ history. In a fit of passion during her TED talk, Isabel Allende stated that for most western young women, being called a feminist is an insult. She then continued on and bargained for girls to call it [feminism] whatever they want, “Aphrodite, B.S., bimbo,” just as long as they understand that there are issues affecting girls and women, which are therefore affecting boys and men, and therefore entire societies, that must be addressed. “Feminism is not dead, but has only evolved” (Allende).

While delivering her speech, Allende rattled off statistics to support her rallying point; she noted that women make up two-thirds of the world labor force, yet only own one percent of global “assets”, and are more often than not, paid less than men for performing the same tasks. She also stated that “educating women and assisting them in becoming financially independent benefits the society”. In addition to issues concerning women affecting an entire population, a woman’s independence and success can prove the opposite by benefitting her surroundings. “If a woman is empowered so are her children and family, then the village, then the entire country.” As a closing statement, Allende ended with the idea that “the time is right to make fundamental changes in our civilization,” (Allende).

Allende’s point of view is crucial, as she was raised in the third-world country of Chile where she experienced female oppression at second hand by witnessing her mother struggle to

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establish a dominance in her own life; however, the Chilean author's insight proves that although seemingly unaware, or perhaps simply turning a blind eye to it, American women are indeed "second-class citizens" in what is supposedly the greatest country on earth, (Berg, XIII).

## **Sexism in the Workplace, Anything but Sexy**

According to Morrison and her colleagues, the glass ceiling "is not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person's inability to handle a higher-level job. Rather, the glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women," ("The Glass Ceiling: How Women Are Blocked from Getting to the Top.") In addition to being presented with misogynistic obstacles to stifle them from achieving their full potential in the workplace, Berg states that, "I feel that women get penalized just for having a working womb," (XIII).

A common title for the obstacles and oppression that women encounter in the work environment is known as the glass ceiling. The exact definition of glass ceiling, according to Merriam-Webster is "an unfair system or set of attitudes that prevents some people (such as women or people of a certain race) from getting the most powerful jobs." Rather than just an invisible fault in the workplace that affects a handful of perhaps unskilled women who may not be performing at the highest percentile in their field, the glass ceiling "is not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person's inability to handle a higher-level job. Rather, the glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women," ("The Glass Ceiling: How Women Are Blocked from Getting to the Top."). Not only are women competing against productivity standards set by supervisors, but also on physical appearance expectations in comparison to their younger counterparts. "Facing the dual blades of age and sex discrimination, older women may not get the same opportunities because men doing the hiring often look for younger, more attractive women; they don't get into training programs and have little chance of upward mobility as they approach retirement," (Berg 200). Discrimination in the hiring process not only affects the women immediately, but also down the road, as they will be less likely than their more attractive co-workers to receive raises or promotions, therefore impacting the entirety of their career and eventually retirement (Berg 201). This data simply proves that women of all ages continue to be impacted by the overhang of a crystal limitation.

The glass ceiling and its accompanying challenges and inequities in the American labor are not outdated, nor are they unsupported by ancient statistics. Published in spring of 2015, Wolfers' article in The New York Times was introduced with a startling statistic, "Fewer large companies are run by women than by men named John, sure indicator that the glass ceiling remains firmly in place in corporate America." For every one woman in an executive position in an American corporation, there are four men named "John, Robert, William, or James" (Wolfers). In addition to never having elected a female president, the United States "has had six named James, five

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named John and four named William,” (Wolfers).

The evidence is irrefutable, the glass ceiling has concussed any and all upward bound women in male-dominated fields; the inequality is tangible, as The New York Times gathered enough data to craft a chart “measuring” the glass ceiling in the form of an index. This impermeable boundary will forever remain unchanged until a female president is elected in America.

## **A Female President: Approaching Uncharted, but Necessary Territory**

With forty-four elected male presidents since George Washington took office in April of 1789, the United States has never voted in a female candidate; however, Hillary Clinton ran in 2008 and intends to run in 2016, as she launched her campaign in April (“George Washington Biography.”). Although originally stated in 1994, in regards to her plans for a future presidential campaign, Clinton said, “I know you think I’m nuts, but I find this exciting,” (Rogak). In addition to refusing to back down from a challenge, as campaigning in what always has been, and has the potential to be an all-male race, Clinton has disregarded her gender in focus of tackling right-wing Republicans. “For fifteen years I have stood against the right-wing machine, and I’ve come out stronger. So if you want a winner who knows how to take them on, I’m your girl,” (Rogak). In order to set a new precedent as president, Clinton must overcome sexism and prejudice in the media, American culture, and of course, politics. “This openly sexist and vile rhetoric persists everywhere across our media culture. It’s not going to change overnight. These beliefs are ingrained in our society, and it will take decades more of progress (if we’re lucky) to fully remove them, (“Why We Need a Female President.”). Clinton must overcome the apprehensive and sometimes demeaning opinions of both men and women, as even organizations that appear to support women can undermine the authority of a potential female president. Published by the Women’s Media Center, a list of “10 ‘Must Haves’ for the Woman Who Would Be President” includes a sexist list of qualities that a glass-shattering candidate must have from “an attractive appearance” and “the right look” to “heterosexual orientation” and “restraint when it comes to playing the gender card”, the article overall pokes fun at the possibility of a non-male leader of the free world, as one would have to scour the Internet for a publication that demands that a Y-chromosome possessing candidate be good-looking and supported by a spouse (Bartelli).

The most important aspect of Hillary Clinton’s campaign is approval, admiration, and inspiration that it will invoke among women and girls of the postfeminist era. Berg wrote that, “In her concession speech [in 2008] she talked about the eighteen million cracks in the glass ceiling. Most likely another woman at another time will smash it entirely, without having to prove over and over again that she’s tough enough, man enough, to do it,” (324).

## **And So Ends a Feminist Rant**

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From the beginning of recorded history, women and girls have been mistreated, underrepresented, and silenced; that is, until the launch of the feminist movement, perhaps beginning at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, women have been both nonviolently and yet aggressively demanding respect and recognition in a male-dominated world. In modern day America, the women-oppressing glass ceiling is still in place, and its associative bad vibes toward women's rights has tainted feminism to be known as a negative word; however, until feminism and its supporters enlighten others to its positive definition, and a female president is elected, the glass ceiling, and therefore patriarchy will never be smashed in America and will continue to reign with an oppressive fist.

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