



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

ISSN 2385-2755
DiSSE Working papers
[online]

WORKING PAPERS SERIES
DIPARTIMENTO DI
SCIENZE SOCIALI ED ECONOMICHE

**Insights about the barriers
to achieve gender equality
in the decision-making roles
and power positions.**

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N. 06/2023

SAPIENZA - UNIVERSITY OF ROME

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CF80209930587 – P.IVA 02133771002

Insights about the barriers to achieve gender equality in the decision-making roles and power positions.

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June 15, 2023

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Abstract

Despite significant advancements in recent years, numerous barriers hinder the full participation and representation of women in higher influential domains. To effectively address the disparities and foster more inclusive and equitable societies, this article presents a literature review, examining the barriers that impede gender equality in decision-making roles and power positions. By shedding light on the complex dynamics and systemic challenges, it aims to contribute to the design of effective strategies for dismantling gender disparities. To investigate why women struggle to fully advance along the corporate ladder, this study explores the contributing factors to gender inequality in the labor market at three levels: micro, meso, and macro level. Additionally, the article leverages the Varieties of Capitalism framework proposed by Hall and Soskice (2001) to gain insights at a macro level into how gender inequalities in the workplace are shaped and to understand the positioning of Italy within the international context while emphasizing the importance of empirical research to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Understanding the real-world experiences of individuals and organizations working towards gender equality is essential for developing effective strategies to overcome these obstacles and promote equitable representation.

JEL codes: D63, J16, J70,

Keywords: Gender inequality, leadership, women empowerment,

1. Introduction

The quest for gender equality in decision-making and positions of power has been a longstanding objective in societies worldwide, therefore, an interest point for various scholars. Despite notable progress in recent years, numerous barriers persist, impeding the full participation and representation of women in these influential domains. Understanding these barriers and their underlying mechanisms is crucial for designing effective strategies to dismantle gender disparities and create more inclusive and equitable societies. This article provides a literature review exploring the barriers that hinder gender equality in decision-making roles and positions of power, shedding light on the complex dynamics and systemic challenges that perpetuate gender imbalances.

The fact that all the researchers agree on, is that the number of women reduces as the organizational level rises. According to EIGE power indicators in the EU, women comprised only 30% of positions of power in different political, economic, and social pillars in 2021 (EIGE, 2021).

So why women cannot fully advance to their potential along the corporate ladder? We have investigated the issues contributing to gender inequality in labor market at three levels, individual or micro, organizational or meso, and institutional or macro. We take advantage of the Varieties of Capitalism framework of Hall and Soskice (2001), in order to better understand how the gender inequalities in workplace are

shaped and how Italy fits in the international context which give insights in a macro level, regarding how women elevate to higher positions in organization. Two major categories of capitalism are discussed, liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). Our case of study, Italy, has acquired features from liberal as well as coordinated models (Della Sala, 2004), and we will investigate how this affected the position of women in the labor market.

By examining theoretical frameworks, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and inform policy interventions aimed at promoting gender parity and women's empowerment in leadership roles.

Italy presents an interesting and important case study of gender equality in top leadership positions due to its historical gender disparities, recent progress in political representation, unique cultural and societal context, implementation of policies, and potential for comparative analysis. Analyzing these factors can contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with achieving gender equality in leadership roles, not only in Italy but also in other countries facing similar issues.

If we consider the issue of gender balance in decision-making roles as not just an instrumental value, but a terminal one, then it is vitally important to discuss the obstacles (such as organizational, social, and structural) on the way to achieving it. Without a better understanding of the conditions and processes that influence the experiences of women in diverse decision-making groups, these groups may fail to live up to their potential (Elsass & Graves, 1997).

2. Theoretical framework

Gender bias is more than a discussion regarding human rights. It causes loss of human capital as it deprives half of the population to reach their full potential. Global advantages arise from gender equality in all domains including social, political, and economic (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In order to study the barriers to gender equality, it is crucial to define what is meant by gender equality.

2.1 What does gender equality mean?

According to the World Bank, gender equality is achieved when women and men, girls and boys have equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to their communities, countries, and the world (World Bank, 2023). In a World Bank report gender equality is defined in terms of “equality under the law, equality of opportunity (including equality of rewards for work and equality in access to human capital and other productive resources that enable opportunity), and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to the development process)” (King E. & Mason A., 2001). OECD describes gender equality as foundation of a thriving economy which brings sustainable inclusive growth. Gender equality is a key to assure men and women can contribute at their full potential at home, at work, as well as, in the public life, to enhance not only societies, but also economies at larger scale (OECD, 2017). The European Union (EU) defines gender equality as the principle that women and men should have the same rights and opportunities, and should not be

discriminated against on the basis of their gender to thrive and lead our society equally regardless of their gender. The EU has established various policies and legislation aimed at promoting gender equality in areas such as employment, education, and social protection. According to the EU, gender equality means ensuring equal access to employment, training, and career development opportunities for women and men, as well as equal pay for equal work. It also means promoting work-life balance and supporting the reconciliation of work and family life for both women and men. Furthermore, gender equality includes addressing and preventing gender-based violence and harassment, promoting women's health and well-being, and ensuring equal access to education and training for both genders. The EU also aims to promote women's participation in decision-making processes and leadership positions in various sectors. Overall, the EU's definition of gender equality encompasses a wide range of policies and measures aimed at ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for women and men in all areas of life (European Commission, 2023).

Definitions of gender equality highlight the importance of reducing gender gaps in various domains, such as education, healthcare, employment, and political participation, recognising gender equality as a fundamental human right and a key principle of development. Overall, these definitions provide a comprehensive view of gender equality as a multidimensional concept that encompasses various aspects of social, economic, and political life.

The fifth goal of The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is "Gender Equality" (Salazar & Moline, 2023) and in the European Union context, it is more focused on decreasing violence against women, developing equality in education as well as employment and ultimately in leadership (Eurostat, 2021). One of the targets of this goal, is that women fully and equally get the chance to acquire decision-making roles, however according to the latest report in 2022, there is still a dearth of women in decision making roles. Decision-making roles can be found at various levels and positions within an organization or government, and typically involve the responsibility of making important choices that have a significant impact on the organization or community. Decision-making is the same as managing (Simon, 1945) and decisions are related to asserting power. So, the individuals in charge of making the decisions with significant influence, are important to the prosperity of organizations and communities (Fulop, L. et al., 1999).

2.2 how well are we doing in gender equality so far?

Female leaders have taken decisive and effective action during the Covid-19 outbreak to implement and manage response and recovery operations, giving priority to actions that address the most vulnerable communities. Despite this widely acknowledged achievement, the slow progression of women in positions of power is disappointing. In the early days of January 2022, it was determined that there were 26.2% more women in the lower house of national parliaments around the world than there were in 2015. In local governments, women make up just over one third of the population. If things continue as they are, we should wait about 40 more years before both genders are equally drawn in national legislatures (UN Women, 2022). The Covid-19 outbreak disproportionately negatively affected employed women, the progress made since 2015 with regards to empowering women faced a setback as inequalities and gender discrimination increased, affecting the most vulnerable

groups of women in poverty. The pandemic also shifted the use of resources away from policies aimed to empower women (OECD, 2020). Due to a rise in unpaid domestic care labour, individuals deducted their working hour schedules or left their work completely. Before Covid-19 in 2019, women comprised 39.4% of the labour force. Roughly 45% of worldwide individuals who lost their jobs were women in 2020. From 2015 to 2019, the number of female managers grew very subtly yet globally, however, this number did not rise from 2019 to 2020, which was alarming considering the fact that since 2013 every year consecutively there have been some improvements (United Nations, 2022).

Italy is ranked sixth among 19 European countries by the Gender Diversity Index (EWOB, 2021). Regarding the SDG number 5, Italy outperforms the EU in terms of shrinking the unfair gender pay gap, the proportion of women in the Senate and Parliament, and top corporate positions. These outcomes are seen to be mostly attributable to the 2011 quota Law number 120, which was passed in an effort to improve corporate governance in Italian corporations (Dello Strologo et al., 2021). The reform established gender quotas, mandating that the directors' firms elected must include at least one-third of members of the underrepresented gender. The number of women serving on boards has significantly increased since the law's passage. It has been observed that the female presence increased by 17% in the first term and by 11% in the second (Bruno et.al, 2018).

According to Linciano et al. (2019), the percentage of women on boards of directors reached new levels in 2019, hitting 36% for administrative posts and 39% for control positions. The other SDG number 5 indicators, on the other hand, show conflicting information. Inactivity due to caregiving responsibilities, for which data indicate that 50% of the Italian population between the ages of 26 and 64 will be inactive in 2030, and employment of recent graduates, for which data indicate that, at the end of the Agenda, only 39.32% of young people between the ages of 20 and 34 with higher education will be able to obtain job. The findings indicate that there is still a considerable gap to achieve gender equality and implementing the Nordic model that puts the chase of gender equality at the heart of the policies seems viable (Júlíusdóttir et. al, 2018). In the light of the potential for beneficial 'cascading' implications on the other SDGs, several academics have cited SDG5 as being the most crucial (Hepp et. al, 2019). Hence, Italy is considered to be the country that should effectively commit itself to gender equality.

These gender disparities, especially for promotion to decision making positions, call for investigating what problems are contributing to this. While many cases of inequality exist, overall, women have made slow but genuine progress in management roles. As more women have entered management positions, the wage gap between genders has decreased, and the gender gap in authority has not widened. These results contradict the idea that corporations are merely pretending to support opportunities for women by giving them managerial titles without corresponding pay or authority (Jacobs, 1992).

2.3 What are the factors hindering gender equality?

Researchers have investigated the issues contributing to gender inequality in the labor market at three levels, individual or micro, organizational or meso, and institutional or macro. The micro level includes the experiences that each woman has, such as their challenges and the effect of structural or cultural barriers on their

career path (Bozzon et al., 2019). Regarding personal factors that can shape one's experiences, women often bring different management styles and approaches to the table than men. For example, women may be more collaborative and focused on building relationships, while men may be more hierarchical and focused on competition (Wajcman, 2013). Most people regardless of their gender are inclined to associate the characteristics of a 'good manager' to male traits (Powell & Butterfield, 1979). Same concept portraits in the works of Schein as 'think manager, think male' expression (Schein, 1973). There are abundant studies that support this view. In a study in Iceland, interviewees chosen from female top executive positions believed that in order to overcome these obstacles they should be more like men with masculine traits. However, having feminine traits, they believed they are not suited for top-level positions (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2018). Some researchers take into account the biological elements for the root of these differences. For instance, Spelke (2005) argued for a genetic root in different performance of men and women in science which shapes from birth.

Gender is not simply an individual characteristic or a product of biology, but rather a social structure that is deeply embedded in society. Gender is created, reinforced, and reproduced through social institutions such as family, education, the economy, and the media. It is important to understand gender as a social structure in order to create more equitable and just societies (Risman, 2018). Similarly, Valian argues that the gender gap is not solely due to individual choices or lack of qualifications among women, but rather the result of systemic biases that disadvantage women at various levels. She discusses the ways in which gender stereotypes and discrimination can impact the evaluation, promotion, and pay of women, and how this can create a self-perpetuating cycle of inequality (Valian, 1999).

women in management positions often face discrimination and bias, particularly when it comes to promotion and career advancement. Women may be overlooked for leadership roles, despite having the necessary qualifications and experience. Despite efforts to eliminate discrimination, gender bias continues to play a role in hiring and promotion decisions. Women are often evaluated more harshly than men and are less likely to be offered leadership positions (Wajcman, 2013). Discrimination is also a determining factor in Occupational segregation, which concentrates women in certain occupations and industries that tend to pay less and have lower status (Jacobs, 1995) (Crompton, 1997).

women often struggle to balance their work and personal lives, particularly when it comes to caring for children and other family members. This can make it difficult for women to advance in their careers, as they may not have the same level of flexibility or support as their male colleagues (Wajcman, 2013). Moreover, women who have children often face negative consequences in the workplace, including lower pay, reduced opportunities for advancement, and negative stereotypes which is also known as the motherhood penalty. Fathers, on the other hand, often experience a "fatherhood bonus" in terms of increased pay and status (Jacobs, 1995). Some researchers studied the effect of unconscious bias as an obstacle to women's progression (Evans & Maley, 2020). Anicha et. al (2020) argues that we should address men's critical consciousness to shape policies to obtain gender equity because men are unintentionally biased in their advocacy for women and they shape the majority of leadership roles, thus policymakers in diversity and equity actions. An earlier study however argued that besides dealing with the biases around women,

they should be guided to gain awareness of their own biases in order to develop their career path to leadership (Madsen, & Andrade, 2018). Merely all the decisions regarding a woman throughout her career are biased. Men are more favored over women in organizations. They argue that mostly gender biases are a result of unconscious stereotypes, and some individuals rely on the belief that stereotypically women quit their job to take care of family. However, many might have sexist attitude and choose not to hire, promote or work with women (Chang & Milkman, 2020). Hideg and Shen (2019) believe the damaging role of benevolent sexism that decreases the presentation of females in leadership positions.

It is safe to say that the gender gap is not solely due to discrimination or women's preferences, but rather the result of historical and economic forces that have shaped women's roles in the workforce (Goldin, 1990) which could be analyzed in broader levels. By recognizing the ways in which gender operates as a social structure, we can work towards dismantling gender-based inequalities and creating more inclusive communities (Risman, 2018).

The meso level refers to intermediate levels of analysis that fall between the micro and macro levels. At the meso level, the focus is on organizations, communities, or other social groups that operate within larger societal structures. meso-level factors might include the norms, values, and practices of specific organization, as well as the relationships and interactions between groups and larger institutional structures (Bozzon et al., 2019).

The social role theory defines how people are expected to obtain a certain social position, that according to historical divisions of labor, men are considered breadwinners and women homemakers (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Households in which both genders are working and participating financially are becoming more and more prevalent. Nevertheless, despite this modernization women continue to face a variety of employment-related challenges that are still due to out-dated views on the role of women in society. These obstacles include stereotyping, unequal salaries, limited job opportunities, present HR practices and policies and negative attitudes which consequently impacts women progress in the corporate ladder (Wolf & Fligstein, 1979). Women at lower-level managerial roles still encounter various difficulties brought by existing cultural and societal standards that affect the performance of work-related responsibilities, such as disparities between how women and men are perceived and expected in culture and society. Personal responsibilities such as being a wife and mother cannot be put on hold during working hours and women undergo more pressure to accomplish their duties without the necessary organizational support. unsupportive norms impact women's professional lives and career advancement (Heilman, 2001).

Women in management positions often rely on support networks of other women, both inside and outside of their organisations. These networks can provide a valuable source of advice, mentorship, and support in navigating the challenges of corporate life (Wajcman, 2013). Access of female managers to effective personal networks which are dominated by men in a form of an "old boy's ghetto" can have a positive impact on their career progression (Linehan, 2001). Jauhar's (2018) results were similar and they used the terms such as organizational culture, networking, and practices. Kilian et.al (2005) added that besides networks, it is more difficult for women to find mentoring and sponsorship opportunities. In addition, real or perceived family responsibilities, stereotyping, and discrimination, limit the females'

career path. In a study of US female leaders in hospitality, work-life balance, organizational commitment, and lack of female role models, as well as lack of mentors are shown to be problematic (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018).

At the macro level, broader societal and institutional structures that shape the research environment should be considered, including policies and practices that perpetuate gender bias and other forms of inequality. This includes issues such as the gender pay gap, lack of diversity in leadership positions, and limited access to funding and resources for women and marginalized groups (Bozzon et al., 2019).

Women face gendered trade-offs when it comes to balancing work and family responsibilities, and that these trade-offs are shaped by a complex interplay of economic, cultural, and policy factors. While all countries face gendered trade-offs, the specific challenges and opportunities vary based on factors such as economic development, cultural norms, and policy choices (Pettit & Hook, 2009). Mothers in countries with more generous work-family policies experience smaller earnings penalties than mothers in countries with weaker policies. However, work-family policies may have trade-offs, such as increased taxes or decreased economic growth, and that policymakers must weigh these trade-offs when designing policies (Budig et al., 2016).

Varieties of Capitalism framework of Hall and Soskice (2001) sheds a light on how the gender inequalities are shaped in a macro level, regarding how women elevate to higher positions. This concept focuses on organization on topics such as technology shift, skill supply, collaboration of workforces, financing strategies and more. Two major categories of capitalism were distinguished: liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs).

Within liberal market economies the framework includes a type of training and educational system that focuses on general skills and capabilities and corporate governance in LMEs focuses on short-term profits. LMEs prefer a one-sided management system and are more hierarchical. Also, bargaining of employment related matters is less union dependent and more at company level. Economies with the Anglo-Saxon model, as well as Ireland and Israel are considered LMEs (Estévez-Abe, 2009).

In contrast, coordinated market economies depend on non-market means of interaction, the educational system is more specific skill based, corporate governance targets long-term capital, relations in organizations are more collaborative and labor matters are discussed on a more macro level. Some examples are Northern Europe, Germany, Japan, etc...

As a matter of fact, beside these two types, there are other variations in which our case study Italy, is more like a 'dysfunctional' state capitalism (Della Sala, 2004), however, not as much direct presence of state in industry-level and financing, also employment matters are less conflicting about salaries, or fits under the 'Mediterranean capitalism' (along with countries such as, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey) which has characteristics of both models (Meardi, 2012). It follows the market in employee relations but non-market in terms of provision of capital because of the intervention of the state.

However, Estévez-Abe's finding has opened up a very interesting line of argument regarding particular career patterns. She concluded that CME firms that spend extensively in company-specific talents will be concerned about hiring women who

may quit their jobs to raise children or pursue their spouses' careers if their husbands relocate or are relocated by their firms.

Some might argue that specific policies, such as extended parental leaves, have a greater impact on gender equality than generous welfare states in general and traditional belief that certain types of welfare states lead to better economic outcomes for women. When it comes to reducing pay inequities, policymakers should focus on policies that keep women connected to the workforce. These policies include moderate-length leaves, publicly funded childcare, lower taxes on second earner income, and support for father involvement after childbirth (Budig et al., 2016).

What is notably interesting about its empirical implications is that the more the importance of the job, the greater the penalty of losing an employee with company specific talents, and the larger the male domination. In this regard, the difference among management roles in CMEs and LMEs is drastic. It is more probable for female leaders to be seen in management roles in LMEs.

Studies demonstrate that women might experience less promotion barriers in higher skilled occupations than in the overall labor market. Additionally, they might face fewer challenges within the most competitive companies and specialized fields than in the entire profession. Although availability of more opportunities is not the reason, rather, it is mainly because the population they represent is highly qualified and focused on their careers (Gaiaschi, 2021).

Women led businesses are becoming more strategic in the Italian economy. Covid-19 era highlights the unique circumstances of female owned businesses, who are severely impacted by the negative economic consequences of pandemic. As compared to their male counterparts, female business owners experienced more challenges in regard to financial stability, supply procurement, difficulties related to the decline in employment, more limits in access to credit, and technological issues. The perceived entrepreneurial success is heavily influenced by the conflict among career and family domains. Work-family conflict influences all four characteristics of perceived entrepreneur success, proving to be a critical factor in women entrepreneur's reported success in the pandemic. Risk management related challenges and lack of uncertainty in managing one's own business, particularly during the pandemic, can cause a detrimental impact on perceived entrepreneurial access in relation to personal financial benefits and satisfaction. Time constraints, on the other hand, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the working relationships; most likely due to the increased involvement they bring (De Simone et al., 2021).

Gender-based discrimination is prevalent in academia and research, leading to underrepresentation of women in senior positions, lower salaries, and greater job insecurity (Bozzon et al., 2019). The Italian higher education system workforce has recently been more female dominated, however, access of women in academia to tenure track has been reduced and the employment gap has been constant in the past two decades (Gaiaschi & Musumeci, 2020). In a 2018 study on the path to promotion in Italian universities, authors found that men have around 24% more chance to get promoted considering similar scientific achievements (Marini, & Meschitti, 2018).

To help increase gender equality in the workplace, for instance, one of the tools that is being used by different countries to help represent women is gender quota.

Norway gender quota laws were adopted by several countries in Europe, including Italy in 2011. Women board quota required by the law resulted in slight rise in female representation among high earners or at the top executive levels in the short term. There was a modest growth in the proportion of female managers and those at the top of the company-specific salary, with a greater increase in the number of businesses that have a female CEO in accordance with the law (Maida & Weber, 2022).

Interestingly, not all countries with binding quotas for board members are high in the ranking. In fact, this is only the case for Norway and France. Italy and Belgium follow, with a slightly better than average (Italy) or average (Belgium) score, while Germany is below the average GDI. This is likely due to the fact that companies adapt to the set quota, with quotas more or less high (from 30% to 40%) or binding from country to country (EWOB, 2021).

A significant institutional-level decentralization of state authority has begun in Italy over the past few decades. Currently, regional governments are responsible for a number of public policies that are important to the goal of gender parity (for instance, policies on the labour market and social policies). In the meantime, the central state is capable of implementing regionally specific intervention programs that are intended to address the economic and social inequalities, thanks to the obvious evidence of gender inequality in the region (di Bella et al., 2021).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present literature review has explored various insights into the barriers that hinder the achievement of gender equality in decision-making roles and power positions. The findings reveal that despite significant advancements in women's rights and gender equality initiatives, numerous challenges persist in breaking the glass ceiling and ensuring equal representation in positions of power.

From a European perspective, the integration of gender must be sought in all areas of policy-making and at all levels of decision-making. This requires designing appropriate policies that simultaneously address the complexity of the economic system and gender objectives. Italy is advancing towards gender equality at a significantly faster rate than other EU countries (EIGE, 2020). This progress has been achieved through the introduction of legislative quotas at the local, European, and national levels. Despite the improvements and appealing statistics lies an issue in areas which are mostly influenced by the country's moral beliefs, sociocultural practices, and tradition, and unaffected by quotas. Italy has experienced an exponential growth in the proportion of women managing elected office and board members (Rigolini & Huse, 2017) and the government's efforts in order to achieve a more inclusive body of organization have been found satisfactory at some levels, mostly in non-executive roles (De Vita & Magliocco, 2018). However, this growth has not been reflected in any considerable advancement regarding equal opportunity (Belluati & Sampugnaro, 2020).

Some might argue this is due to fundamental characteristics of Italian political power. If we eliminate quotas, fields with a considerable number of females are politically unimportant, plus decision making areas that are mainly male dominated.

Women are still marginalized in politics, with men still possessing a significant amount of power in the center (Farina & Carbone 2016).

While introducing a policy, we should consider some degree of resistance. Resistance to initiatives that improve gender equality is a regular characteristic of social life, whether in the workplace or in other organizations. Flood and colleagues (2021) examined the common nature, dynamics, and settings of resistance to gender equality policies. Resistance to progressive social change is an unavoidable, albeit unpleasant, response. Backlash and resistance to gender equality commonly take the following forms: problem ignorance, responsibility rejection, inaction, appeasing, co-option, and repressing. Individual or collective, official or informal, resistance exists. Members of the advantaged group (men) are more likely to oppose gender equality initiatives than members of the disadvantaged group (women). Resistance is an expected expression of organized privilege's defense, but it is also affected by common ideologies on "sex roles" and "post-feminism," the strategies used to advance gender equality and the situations in which they occur. There is always resistance to the movement toward gender equality, both individual and societal, both official and informal. Backlash and resistance are anticipated manifestations of the defense of ingrained and unfair gender practices and identifying them enhances attempts to eliminate systemic gender inequalities (Flood et al., 2021).

While this literature review has provided valuable insights into the barriers to achieving gender equality in decision-making roles and power positions, it is essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice by exploring the empirical dimension. Incorporating empirical research, which examines these barriers in real-world contexts, is needed to shed light on the experiences of individuals and organizations working towards gender equality.

Through the empirical dimension, we can explore case studies, surveys, and qualitative interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women in decision-making roles and power positions. This approach will allow us to identify specific contexts, industries, or regions where gender disparities persist and examine the factors contributing to such disparities. By analyzing real-world data and experiences, we can propose evidence-based strategies and interventions that can effectively address these barriers and promote gender equality.

By bridging the gap between theory and practice, we can move beyond identifying barriers and towards proposing effective solutions that can dismantle existing power imbalances. Achieving gender equality in decision-making roles and power positions is not only a matter of justice and fairness but also a necessary step towards building more prosperous and equitable societies boosting the economy (Duflo, 2013; Elson, 1998; Elomäki, 2015) and will elevate efficiency in business as well as political domains (Profeta, P., 2017). Despite the gender-based entry obstacles, women on corporate boards contribute more to corporate financial and non-financial performance (Nguyen, et. al., 2020). Hoobler (Hoobler, et. al., 2018) studied the business case for women leaders and found a positive relationship between women in leadership and firms' overall financial performance. However, the author questions the methods of defining the female leadership business case and whether they can show the overall value added by women to leadership. Confirming the business case for increased gender parity at the top (Bahadori, et. al., 2021), as a firm's financial performance will be positively affected, in a study authors found that environmental, social and governance factors will boost which demonstrates the

value that women on top bring to the corporation is beyond financial measures (Di Miceli & Donaggio, 2018).

In summary, removing barriers to gender equality in top positions brings about a wide range of benefits. By collectively working towards overcoming these obstacles, we can create a society that values and promotes equal opportunities for all, irrespective of gender. Let us strive together to break down these barriers and build a future where all individuals have an equal opportunity to succeed, ultimately reaping the rewards of a more equitable and prosperous world.

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