

INTRODUCTION

One of the things a writer is for is to say the unsayable, speak the unspeakable and ask difficult questions.

Salman Rushdie 1947– Indian-born British novelist: *Independent on Sunday* 10 September 1995

A warm welcome to *The Glass Ceiling Delusion*. Let me start by both posing a question and suggesting an answer. What's the difference between the ambitious men and the ambitious women who are disappointed with their career progression? While the men will accept responsibility for their situations, hopefully with good grace, the women can enjoy the luxury of blaming the 'glass ceiling' for their situations *and they will be encouraged to do so*.

We shall see that many women's prime motivation in seeking senior positions is the pursuit of neither job satisfaction nor happiness, but the feminist gender equality agenda; so we should not be too surprised that there is often little correlation between the degree of individual women's ambitions for senior positions, and their fitness for them. The inevitable result? A lot of angry women who appear to think businesses exist to give women positions they deem themselves qualified to fill. The women might as justifiably deem themselves qualified for the New York Giants American football squad. As a fan of the Giants for the past 35 years, I have to say I *really* wouldn't welcome that development.

Across most of the developed world women have enjoyed equality of opportunity with men for many years. This hasn't resulted in equality of gender outcomes so women (or militant feminists, at least) are reverting to their default setting: a demand for special treatment, this time to achieve gender

balance in the boardroom. With their customary ingenuity they offer many assertions in support of special treatment. One of their most cherished assertions is that ambitious women seeking senior positions are thwarted by discrimination: the ‘glass ceiling’.

The glass ceiling is a delusion, as we shall see. This book examines 30 assertions put forward by feminists in support of more gender balance in senior positions. I seek to demonstrate that all 30 are variously fantasies, lies, delusions or myths.

If there is to be gender balance in the boardroom on the grounds of merit, this could only result from there being equal numbers of men and women able and willing to take on such roles. The number of men with the experience and personal characteristics *able* to take them on greatly outnumbers the number of women with them, and this looks set to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. This may be of academic interest only; regardless of their fitness for senior roles many women are disinclined to take on the roles when offered them, as we shall see. And that too doesn’t look set to change any time soon.

We live in an era in which militant feminists – a band I define as those campaigning for gender equality in the boardroom, among other causes – exert an ever-increasing influence in the public and corporate worlds, despite their numbers being miniscule. We shall see that the intellectual roots of feminism are the same as those of Marxism, and it should be a matter of serious concern to all of us that militant feminists exert *any* influence in the public and corporate worlds.

Feminists have been successful in persuading women that their gender’s ‘under-representation’ at senior levels in organisations can be explained by the ‘glass ceiling’. In 33 years

in the business world, most of them spent in senior positions in major corporations, I never encountered gender discrimination against women. I came across examples of discrimination *in women's favour* but such discrimination is, we must assume, not a problem needing to be addressed.

Does anything drive the feminists' demands for gender equality in the boardroom, beyond their political ideology? Let me say the unsayable. It's perfectly clear that these women – who typically have little or no understanding of what makes businesses succeed – are also driven by a chronic childishness; they want to have what men have, even if far fewer women than men are prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to have any prospect of being appointed to the boardrooms of major corporations.

My motivation to write a book about gender balance in senior positions in general, and in the boardroom in particular, arose from a growing realisation that the case for this radical change in corporate governance was flimsy at best, and absurd at worst. The campaign for gender balance in the boardroom is a blatant assault on meritocracy in business, and therefore an assault on a free society.

It suits the militant feminists' bid for boardroom gender equality to assert either that there are no significant differences in the natures of men and women, or that any differences are the results of social conditioning in the family and elsewhere. This is the 'Blank Slate' theory of human nature and as we shall see, it has been thoroughly discredited. Most men and women are born with gender-typical brains. The book has a good deal to say on the differences between men's and women's natures and how they affect their prospects in the workplace.

It has been my experience in the workplace and outside it that gender-typical men and women are markedly different, have different interests and thought patterns, and given the same life choices, make different decisions. Women tend to be superior in certain areas of life, while men tend to be superior in others. Women's claims to be superior in certain areas, but inferior in none, are simply not credible. It happens that more men than women have the attributes required for senior positions in business, so it is only to be expected that more men than women will be successful in their bids for these positions.

Militant feminists have done all in their power to bully women out of their traditional roles as homemakers and into paid employment. I couldn't care less whether women choose to be homemakers or to undertake paid work. But why would anyone try to deny a woman the opportunity to find happiness in the role of homemaker, if she wished to choose that option? The world surely has a greater need for well-cared-for families than for more women on corporate boards.

If we are prepared to look at the worlds of the two genders as they really are, we cannot fail to see that women are more likely than men to pay a great deal of attention to their personal relationships: family, friends, and work colleagues. Men tend to be more interested than women in how systems work, and how they might be improved – political systems, mechanical systems, business models, the list is endless. We shall see convincing arguments that these gender-typical differences are 'hard-wired' in most men's and women's brains.

My experience of working as an executive with major corporations in the United Kingdom for 33 years (1978-2010) led me to an inescapable conclusion which was as obvious to me in the later years as it had been in the earlier years:

The number of female executives able and willing to take on senior roles in general, and executive director roles in major businesses in particular, is far lower than the number of male executives able and willing to do so.

We move from business to politics. We should not have been surprised to see militant feminist politicians – notably Harriet Harman – controlling the ‘gender agenda’ of the previous execrable Labour administration (1997-2010). Perhaps more surprising is that our current Prime Minister David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative party and the leader of a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, is actively pursuing the same agenda. But evidence existed even before he assumed office that not only does he have a female-pattern brain, but that he’s a feminist too; not so much ‘heir to Blair’ as he once termed himself, more ‘heir to Harman’.

I worked as a business consultant for the Conservative party over 2006-8 and resigned my membership of the party in October 2009 when Cameron announced his proposal to introduce all-women prospective parliamentary candidate shortlists; the leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband, is also a supporter of all-women shortlists. Both Cameron and Miliband read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford University (graduating in 1988 and 1990 respectively). Their attitudes towards women in the world of work are strikingly similar to Harriet Harman’s.

Within eight weeks of coming into office in May 2010 the coalition government signed a Commencement Order bringing into force over 90% of Harriet Harman’s brainchild, the Equality Bill 2010. Perhaps the most invidious provision in the Act was the introduction of the concept of ‘positive action’ through which public sector organisations will ‘voluntarily’

meet the new 'Equality Duty'. We can expect feminists in the public sector (and especially those in Human Resources departments) to be enthusiastic volunteers, exercising positive discrimination *for* women and *against* men, although both forms of discrimination are illegal under British and EU law. I wrote to The Rt Hon Theresa May MP (appendix 12) to ask whether she personally supported the concept of positive action, and the lead to her response is provided at the end of the appendix.

Despite their influence militant feminists are, ironically, highly unrepresentative of women. We shall see that the intellectual sustenance for militant feminism lies within academia and doesn't invite robust debate – or any debate, for that matter. This 'feminist hothouse' fosters convictions about some quite extraordinary ideas, held by few people outside the world of feminist academia. My personal favourite (p.88) is that fatness should be celebrated. You couldn't make it up, could you?

Men have long been manipulated by women at the individual and familial levels, and tend not to notice it: perhaps it suits them not to notice it. Militant feminists have extended manipulation of men to the business and political levels, and men don't seem to have noticed that either. Faced with any challenge militant feminists will stridently demand either equality or special treatment for women: whichever one delivers what they deem to be their entitlements.

Fortunately a crucial and perennial problem lies at the heart of the militant feminist mission: the overwhelming majority of women aren't militant feminists. Militant feminists may be likened to a band of generals commanding only a handful of troops. Ignoring the hectoring of their militant feminist sisters, women continue to seek lines of work which are emotionally fulfilling even if they're poorly paid, rather than the higher-paid

lines of work men typically seek; and they're less likely than men to seek higher incomes through taking on more responsibilities. Women generally want less work in their work/life balances, not more.

The doors to senior positions in general, and to the boardroom in particular, are open for talented women. But those women need to accept they're more likely to make it through the doors if they're not shackled to a band of less talented women. They have nothing to lose but their chains.

Until the next time.

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CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD OF WORK: FEMINIST FANTASIES, LIES, DELUSIONS AND MYTHS

He who does not bellow the truth when he knows the truth makes himself the accomplice of liars and forgers.

Charles Péguy 1873–1914 French poet and essayist: *Basic Verities*

Assertions widely accepted by women including militant feminists – militant feminists are selective about the equality they want – the ‘top 30’ feminist fantasies, lies, delusions and myths – top executives’ statements on gender issues in the workplace are generally public relations exercises – a female director hears ‘blah, blah, blah’ – talented women find gender balance initiatives condescending

I start by outlining a number of assertions about the genders and the world of work which are widely accepted by women, in particular by the small band of women I term ‘militant feminists’. Sometimes the assertions are made explicitly by feminist writers and others, at other times they are implied in the stances feminists take. For the purpose of this book I shall define militant feminists as those feminists (usually but not exclusively women) who campaign not for equality of opportunity for men and women in the workplace, but for equality of *outcome*.

Militant feminists are highly selective about the fields in which they seek equality of outcome with men. They aren’t interested in equality of outcome in unpleasant and poorly-paid lines of work, nor in lines of work which pose a danger to life and limb (virtually all fatalities in the workplace involve men). The equality of outcome of which militant feminists dream,

and for which they campaign and scheme, lies in the boardrooms of major companies. In the United Kingdom they usually mean companies in the 'FTSE100' or the 'FTSE250': the top 100 or 250 companies by market capitalisation, whose shares are readily available to buy and sell.

The assertions made about the genders in the workplace which I contend are variously fantasies, lies, delusions or myths – take your pick – include my 'top 30' outlined below, most of which will be explored over the course of this book. We shall see that feminists draw upon different and sometimes inconsistent assertions to suit differing circumstances and challenges. Some of the assertions might not appear obviously relevant to the 'gender balance in the workplace' question, but their relevance will become clear.

1. Women's progress into the senior reaches of organisations is hindered by overt and/or covert discrimination against them exercised by men (and sometimes women) already holding senior positions – the 'glass ceiling'
2. Unlike men, women are gender-blind when it comes to recruiting and promoting staff. They make selection decisions based solely on individual candidates' merit
3. Talented women with the experience, ambition and qualities required to reach senior positions and the boardroom share a common cause with less talented women, and the career prospects of the former will not be impaired if they campaign for gender balance initiatives with the latter
4. The key psychological differences between men and women result from differences in their social conditioning (nurture) rather than in their biology (nature)

5. The degree of overlap between men's and women's natures, patterns of thinking and behaviour is high enough to make statements about gender-typical natures, patterns of thinking and behaviour unhelpful
6. Women are as likely as men to be ambitious and focused on career progression
7. Gender-typical choices of professions made by men and women (e.g. engineering for men, nursing for women) result from social conditioning
8. A higher proportion of women in senior positions can be expected to enhance organisations' profitability
9. Equal numbers of men and women are able and willing to take on senior positions including board directorships
10. Men and women are equally interested in the world of work; women are not more likely than men to seek a satisfying 'work/life balance'
11. Men are not more likely than women to possess qualities which make them suitable for senior positions
12. Women *are* more likely than men to possess qualities which make them suitable for senior positions
13. Women are unlikely to be either more emotional or less rational than men
14. Women are likely to be more emotionally intelligent than men, and emotional intelligence helps foster a productive working environment
15. Militant feminists are representative of women in general, and are therefore qualified to speak on behalf of women
16. The rate of women's progression into senior positions is being enhanced by the activities of militant feminists

17. Feminist politicians have a democratic mandate to pursue feminist goals through legislation, and to introduce women-only shortlists for prospective political office
18. Where women's responsibilities and interests outside the workplace lead to their commitment to the organisation being reduced – quantitatively or qualitatively – this shouldn't impact negatively on their promotion prospects. In particular, taking time out of the workplace (possibly a number of years) to care for children shouldn't impact negatively
19. Equality of gender outcomes in the workplace is a desirable objective regardless of the proportion of candidates for senior positions who are women
20. Women would be more likely to seek high office if there were more role models to inspire them
21. Equality initiatives and special treatment for women are both valid approaches for increasing the proportion of senior positions filled by women
22. Women are happier in the world of work than they would be (or were) in their more traditional roles as wives, mothers and homemakers
23. Women represent a sufficiently homogeneous and disadvantaged group as to justify positive discrimination on their behalf
24. Businesses have social responsibilities which extend beyond the making of profits for their shareholders and this includes the promotion of gender-balanced outcomes at senior levels
25. If businesses do not pursue gender-balanced outcomes of their own volition, they should be forced to do so through legislation

26. Men and women have no preference for reporting to a male boss rather than to a female boss
27. Men and women are equally resilient and able to weather the stresses and strains of senior positions
28. Men and women are equally likely to be innovative and risk-taking, and are therefore equally likely to behave in an entrepreneurial manner
29. Men network and ‘bond’ through shared activities such as playing golf; these activities play a subtle yet significant role in influencing men’s decisions about corporate appointments
30. Attractive women don’t exploit their attractiveness to give themselves an unfair advantage over men and less attractive female colleagues in the promotion stakes

It doesn’t matter in the slightest whether *I* think assertions such as these are variously fantasies, lies, delusions or myths. What *does* matter is that the people running major organisations – the women as well as the men, it must be said – insofar as they consider such matters at all, tend to be of a like mind as myself, even if their public pronouncements on gender-related matters might lead you to believe otherwise. Those pronouncements should be seen for what they are: public relations exercises.

One female director told me that when she hears people put forward arguments for the advancement of women in the workplace she nods encouragingly, but all she hears is, ‘blah, blah, blah’. She also maintained that the women with the qualities and the drive required to make it on the grounds of merit to the boardroom – and succeed there – find initiatives to advance women condescending. It’s only the less talented women who support gender balance initiatives.