

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING  
STIRLING MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

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**Window Dressing?  
Women, Careers and  
Retail Management**

SUBMITTED FOR FULFILMENT OF THE DEGREE OF PHD

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12.11.10

## **ABSTRACT**

Via the submission of six published papers, this thesis draws together the body of work by Broadbridge on retail management and women's careers. It reveals the factors that continue to be problematic for women's careers and why in 2010 they continue to be under-represented in the retail management hierarchy. A contextual background to the selected papers is provided in three chapters which summarise some wider issues for the non specialist reader: an introduction to career development models, the gendered processes in management and a contemporary overview of retail employment in the UK. Of the six papers presented, each adopts a different theoretical perspective and so cumulatively a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for women's continued under-representation in retail management positions is gained. The overall findings from the papers indicated that the main reasons for women's and men's differential experience in the retail management hierarchy can be located in issues of male control. Retail management is male dominated, male identified and male centred. This can present itself in a variety of different ways, and through overt or covert means of behaviour and underlying organisational cultures. Key theoretical contributions to the thesis are located in three sets of theory: the sexual division of labour and the organisation of retail work; the gendered retail career, and work-life balance and multiple role demands. Empirical and methodological contributions come from the corpus of data and the use and refinement of a mixed methods approach to understanding the subject area.

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### **SELECTED PAPERS**

Paper 1: Broadbridge, A. (2008a) 'Barriers to Ascension to Senior Management Positions in Retailing', *Services Industries Journal*, 28(9-10): 1225-45.

Paper 2: Broadbridge, A. (2008b) 'Senior Careers in Retailing: An Exploration of Male and Female Executives' Career Facilitators and Barriers', *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(1): 11-35.

Paper 3: Broadbridge, A. (2009) 'Sacrificing Personal or Professional Life? A Gender Perspective on the Accounts of Retail Managers' *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 19(3): 289- 311.

Paper 4: Broadbridge, A. (2010a) 'Women at the Top in British Retailing: Plus Ca Change?' *The Service Industries Journal*, 30(9): 1-25.

Paper 5: Broadbridge, A. (2010b) 'Choice or constraint? Tensions in female retail executives career narratives' *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(3): 244-60.

Paper 6: Broadbridge, A. (2010c) 'Social capital, gender and careers: evidence from retail senior managers', *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 29(8): 815-34.

Figure 1.1 : Board Composition of Tesco

## Board of Directors



David Reid — 63, Non-executive Chairman

David Reid became Non-executive Chairman on 2 April 2004. Prior to his appointment he was Deputy Chairman of Tesco PLC and has served on the Tesco Board since 1985. David is a Non-executive Director of Reed Elsevier Group PLC and Chairman of both Kwik-Fit Group and Whizz-Kidz.

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Rodney Chase CBE — 66, Deputy Chairman and Senior Non-executive Director

Sir Terry Leahy — 53, Chief Executive

Richard Brasher — 48, Commercial and Marketing Director

Philip Clarke — 49, International and IT Director

Andrew Higginson — 52, Chief Executive of Retailing Services and Group Strategy Director

Tim Mason — 52, President and Chief Executive Officer, Fresh & Easy

Laurie McIlwee — 47, Group Finance Director

Lucy Neville-Rolfe, CMG — 57, Corporate & Legal Affairs Director

David Potts — 52, Retail and Logistics Director

Charles Allen CBE — 53, Non-executive Director

Patrick Cescau — 61, Non-executive Director

Karen Cook — 56, Non-executive Director

Dr Harald Einsmann — 76, Non-executive Director

Ken Hanna — 56, Non-executive Director

Ken Hydon — 65, Non-executive Director

Jacqueline Tammenoms Bakker — 56, Non-executive Director

Jonathan Lloyd — 43, Company Secretary

### Key

- = Member of the Nominations Committee
- ◆ = Member of the Audit Committee
- = Member of the Remuneration Committee

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Figure 1.2 : Retail Week conference advertisement

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# CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

‘I think retailing historically has been at the senior level fairly macho and again you know at the early stages of my [FTSE 100 company] life it was incredibly sexist. I mean I had a stand up argument with a male director who said “you will never be a female general manager with children” you know, and we’re not talking about a long time ago. You know it kind of is pretty frightening and I think you either choose to accept those rules or you choose to challenge them depending on the type of individual you are you’ (Hazel, aged 40, operating board director)

‘Food retailing traditionally is a very, very male orientated business and you know [the perception is that] women can’t run stores, can’t cope with the pressure’ (Fiona, aged 45, operating board director)

‘It is quite extreme. And the type of things that go on here in terms jokes; it’s a very, very laddish culture. They all love their football; they all love their bras and their bottoms and things like that. It’s quite a difficult; it’s a bit of a seedy environment for younger women coming into. I think they must look at it and think all these old men being a bit grubby. I think that is why it’s quite a strain here’ (Wendy, aged 40, retail logistics director)

These comments were made by women retail senior managers, i.e. those who have successfully broken through the glass ceiling. One might suppose, given various legislative changes pertaining to sex discrimination and equality issues since the 1970s, that they reflect the state of retailing in the 1970s; they do not – all are from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Moreover, Figures 1.1 and 1.2 have been included as powerful images that portray the state of UK retailing in 2010. Tesco is one of four UK retail companies that have the highest number of women (three) on their board. The Retail Week Conference is the biggest and most prestigious event for the industry in the UK and Europe and attended by many hundreds of retailers. The images are strong reminders to the power base of UK retailing, and all these illustrations demonstrate the continuing power of gender relations in retail organisations.

This thesis pulls together the author’s research on women retail managers’ career issues. By using as its focus six published papers, it contributes to knowledge in the area in the UK.

Explanations for the under-representation of women in managerial positions (and in particular senior ones) in the UK retail workforce is the main focus of the thesis. This chapter provides an overview of the thesis structure. The next sections help to set the scene by providing a brief overview of women's and men's participation in the UK management workforce generally and their positions as managers within the UK retail sector in particular. Much historical and prominent research on management has overlooked or underplayed the position of gender in management (women in particular) and a contextual explanation of this follows. The thesis aims and objectives are then briefly located in the context of the author's broader body of research. Finally a brief overview of how the rest of the thesis is structured is outlined.

## **1.2 Women's and men's participation in the workforce and in management positions**

It is 35 years since the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and 40 years since the Equal Pay Act (1970), during which time we have witnessed various changes in women's and men's employment in the UK. The increase of women in the UK workforce during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is well documented and women now constitute almost half (46.7%) of the UK workforce (Office for National Statistics, 2010a). They also occupy around a third (36%) of all managerial positions (Office for National Statistics, 2010b), a three-fold increase since 1988 (Davidson, 1991), and a substantial increase from just two per cent in 1974 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006). Reasons for this increase have been attributed to decreasing fertility rates (Hakim, 2003a), greater social acceptance for women with children to work (Institute of Management, 2001) and women's own investment in their human capital via higher education (Institute of Management, 2001; Hughes, 2010). The increase of an

information and service based economy which impacts women's employment in management positions as well as organisational policies to promote equal opportunities are additional contributory factors (Powell, 2000).

However, while there has been undoubtedly an increase of women represented in managerial positions generally, they remain under-represented at senior management levels throughout the majority of sectors of the economy (Linehan, 2002; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004a; 2005; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006; Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, 2006; Office for National Statistics, 2010b). Men continue to outnumber women in leading policy making positions of organisations; women's advancement to board positions is slow paced and they remain in the minority on the vast majority of company boards (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004a; Ahmansson and Ohlund, 2008; Martin *et al.*, 2008; Shilton *et al.*, 2010; Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2010). For example, women constitute just 12.5% of directorships in the top FTSE 100 companies (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2010). This has led to arguments that the 'glass ceiling' (Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; O'Leary and Ickovics, 1992) remains for women in managerial positions; it merely has been raised (Simpson, 1997; Simpson and Altman, 2000) and in some cases been moved to the penthouse level (Mavin, 2009a).

### **1.3 Retail management**

The retail sector comprises roughly one in ten of all jobs (Office for National Statistics, 2010c), making it the largest private sector employer in the UK. This in itself makes it a worthy choice for examination. Moreover, women comprise two thirds of all employees in retailing (Office for National Statistics, 2009a). Research has shown that social structures

are important to managerial career advancement, and that women are more likely to gain initial management jobs and advance to senior positions when the managerial hierarchy is less proportionately male and subordinates are women rather than men (Tharenou, 1997; Cohen *et al.*, 1998; Dreher, 2003). Indeed, previous work (Davidson, 1991; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Hammond and Holton, 1994; Schein, 2001; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003) has suggested that as a sector, retailing is more likely to employ women managers than other occupational sectors. The evidence is unclear however. Research has also shown that horizontal and vertical segregation exists and persists within the retail management hierarchy. While there is some parity between the numerical distribution of the sexes at lower levels of the retail management hierarchy, women are disproportionately under-represented in the senior management and director levels of retailing (e.g. Dawson *et al.*, 1987a; Broadbridge, 1987; 1996a; 1998; 1999a; 2008a Tomlinson *et al.*, 1997; Thomas, 2001; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004b; Maxwell and Ogden, 2006; Skillsmart Retail, 2010a). Nevertheless, Singh and Vinnicombe's research indicated that retailing was increasing its numbers of women board level positions, arguing that the retail sector 'is an area where women really have started to break through the glass ceiling' (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003:351) and where 'women are making inroads into the boardroom, in increasing numbers' (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004b:13). This is supported by further evidence that shows that it is a sector with proportionately a higher number of women directors than other sectors (Holton, 2000; Sealy *et al.*, 2008; Broadbridge, 2010a). However, Broadbridge (2010a) found women directors accounted for around just 11% of the director level positions in all FTSE retail companies in 2008 (10.8% of the executive directors and 11.2% of non executive directors), which still places them in minority status (Kanter, 1977; Levinson and Levinson, 1996). This raises the question whether women merely represent 'window dressing' status in the top positions in UK retail companies. The role of gender in the career development of retail

managers is a relatively underdeveloped area, a large majority of the research being undertaken by the author (e.g. Broadbridge, 1996a; 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 2004; 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2010d). Broadly, these works have traced the enablers and inhibitors in the career development process of women and men retail managers. At times, specific areas have been selected for particular attention, such as the role of mentoring, issues connected with stress and balancing work with non-work issues. The research findings indicate the complexity and interdependency of the issues involved in researching the careers of retail managers.

The retailing sector in the UK contains a number of organisational forms including independent, co-operative and multiple (or corporate) retailers. Skillsmart Retail (2010b) states that 90% of the 295,000 UK retail businesses employ fewer than ten people. However, 66% of retail employees work for the largest 75 retail companies. Many women set up their own businesses and become entrepreneurs, often as a response to the alien male cultures they find themselves in many firms and industries (e.g. Marshall, 1995a; Green and Cohen, 1995; Moore and Buttner, 1997; Vinnicombe and Bank, 2003; Terjesen, 2005). The research in this thesis however is confined to multiple and corporate retail companies. These were selected as they are ones with more professional approaches to staff training and development, and so can offer genuine career opportunities to their workforces. Furthermore, in such a dynamic sector, organisational and technological changes within the retail industry have altered the nature of multiple retail management jobs, which in turn create new opportunities and barriers to career development.

#### 1.4 Historical positioning of research in women in management

Women have had cursory treatment by authors on organisations and organisation theory (Acker, 1992). Historically women have been ignored when discussing management, and so it is possible to criticise such research for overlooking some essential differences between women and men, or for adopting a male bias. Much seminal management research was conducted by men and solely on male samples (cf. Taylor, 1911; Carlson, 1951; Guest 1956; Hughes, 1958; Dalton, 1959; Veroff *et al.*, 1960; Blauner, 1964; Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1969; Mintzberg, 1973; Benyon, 1973; Becker *et al.*, 1977; Cox and Cooper, 1988). No mention is thought necessary in most of these works to explain why they should only refer to men. Yet these classical studies have influenced and guided much subsequent management research. Thus, the management practices surrounding them are in danger of being perpetuated (without generating an adequate critical analysis) through other research studies, as well as within business organisations themselves.

In other research studies the mention of gender has been ambiguous (cf. Herzberg *et al.*, 1959; Likert, 1967; Stewart, 1967), leading the reader to assume that the research was conducted entirely on men, or not even to question the issue of gender and the absence of women. Other research has included women and men participants yet failed to undertake any, else an inadequate, analysis by gender in the reporting of their findings - even if it were only to state that no gender similarities or differences were found (cf. Maslow, 1954; McGregor, 1960; Hofstede, 1980; Stewart, 1990). As Oakley (1974: 19) argued 'women are conspicuous for their absence as data in the sociology of industry and work', and 'samples tend uniformly to be male, or mostly male: this fact is hidden through the use of titles which purport to be describing work in general and the worker irrespective of gender'. More

recently, Bendl (2008: S51) argued that ‘the dominant texts in organizational discourse may appear to be or are presented as gender-neutral, while the underlying texts (re)produce latent gender distinctions’. She continued that organisational theory has either neglected women else, where women were part of the research, little attention has been given to the fact that women and men were treated differently by researchers or that women and men faced different working and living conditions. All these contribute to producing a gender bias in the research.

More disturbing findings are revealed by research that appears to consciously exclude women from the investigation. For example, McClelland *et al.*'s (1953) work on motivation (deemed to be an important contribution to psychological theory – at least with reference to the theory of motivation) drew on participants being shown a series of four pictures where they had to describe what was going on in them (thematic apperception tests). In total eight pictures were used for the experiments; all of them depicted pictures of men or boys; no women were present. The experiments were conducted under different conditions and with different samples of students. Of the six achieved samples, four consisted of a population of men only while the other two samples came from a population of both women and men. Nevertheless, only the men's results were used for analysis purposes. The authors' state: ‘The tests were administered to a large summer session class at a large university which included both men and women, but only the men's records were used.’ (1953:101). The same procedure happened when selecting the other mixed sample. No reason was provided for why the women in both these samples were excluded from the analysis (or any subsequent analysis of the data). So while some key research studies have omitted women in their samples, other researchers have actively ignored women and their views.

Some might argue that it is reasonable for various historical samples to be confined to men on the basis that management research historically simply reflected or helped to reinforce the gender biases of the period. Research was conducted mainly on masculine jobs, hence a reason why women and a gender analysis were excluded from seminal management research. However there still exists an inherent bias in this process which is not brought out in any discussion trying to justify the initial choice of occupations for study. Ignoring or overlooking gender aspects serve to perpetuate the notion of male norms and values as standard organisational norms. So organisations and organisational theory are not gender-neutral (Acker, 1990; Gherardi, 1995; Aaltio and Mills, 2002; Martin and Collinson, 2002; Calás and Smircich, 2006; Bendl, 2008); management involves many homosocial practices which work to ostracise and undermine women, suppress subordinate masculinities and perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. Women are evaluated as less competent and less effective when compared to men and masculine attributes continue to be a more comfortable fit with management careers (Wood, 2009).

## **1.5 Thesis aims and objectives**

Various contemporary texts (which are still used for teaching purposes) continue to largely overlook issues of gender when referring to careers (e.g. Arnold, 1997; Baruch 2004a; Greenhaus *et al.*, 2010) but the foregoing section validates a need to examine women's and men's careers independently or separately rather than amalgamating them as one category. The approach adopted by the body of research conducted by Broadbridge (which is the focus of this thesis) has been to redress previous imbalances by researching both women and men in their retail careers and their ensuing issues. The rationale for researching both women and men retail managers was so that a more complete picture can be gained of the factors

involved in career management within the retail sector, and to enable a commentary of any apparent similarities and differences by gender.

The thesis contextualises the development of the overall work of the author in the area of employment issues in retailing and gender. Tracing this 'journey' helps to understand the rationale for the selected published works presented for the thesis. Figures 1.3 and 1.4 provide a diagrammatical representation of this body of work. In Figure 1.3 the different research projects are outlined. In Figure 1.4 the retail employment and gender publications by the author are portrayed. They reveal the personal development of the work from its inception of examining sales assistants' perceptions of their jobs through to the most recent research conducted on the career progression and career management issues of retail directors and senior executives. The route has been varied yet is logical and interconnected. Issues concerning retail career expectations, management and progression have been conducted with undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as volunteers and managers of charity retailing. Full time managers in junior, middle and senior positions of multiple retail companies have been examined in detail by various research projects and form the basis of the samples for the articles presented for this thesis. A variety of research methods have been used to collect these data and, through a process of triangulation, both a positivist and a social constructionist analysis have been applied to the data. In line with Olsen (2004), the culmination of this work has resulted in a deeper and wider understanding of the careers of retail managers in the UK. Appendix 1 provides a supporting overview of these works, while a few are referred to in Chapter four (Sections 4.5 and 4.6).

The purpose of this thesis, however, is to concentrate specifically on women in retail managerial positions because of their historical absence as research subjects (Section 1.4) but

also they have hitherto been under researched within the retail context. Some comparisons between women's and men's careers are reported where it is felt necessary so as to achieve a better understanding of the issues involved in retail career management. Yet the principal focus is an in-depth exploration of women managers rather than a comparative study of women versus men. The overall aim of the thesis is to provide a better understanding of women in retail management and their careers.

The objectives of the thesis are to:

- introduce the broad range of work by Broadbridge on employment issues in retailing which enables the published articles presented for the thesis to be contextualised within the complete work of Broadbridge (Figures 1.3., 1.4. and Appendix 1);
- critically appraise the relevant literature, in particular, career development models and gendered processes in management (Chapters two and three);
- provide an overview of retail employment in the UK generally and women's relative place in the retail managerial hierarchy specifically (Chapter four);
- identify, through the presentation of specific published works, the contribution they make to the subject area and the personal development of the author (Chapter five).

The next chapter provides an overview of some career theories as these have not been addressed in any detail in the published papers. It therefore provides a context within which to understand the career development of retail managers. Chapter three introduces the women and management literature for the non-gender specialist and shows the range of issues which can be used to understand the relative positions of women and men in management. Chapter four outlines retail employment issues in UK retailing. Where

possible, it provides an historical account of gender issues in retail employment. It then provides an overview of the current position of retail employment for the non-retail specialist, before outlining some of the previous work undertaken by the author in the area of women's representation in retail management. Chapter five outlines some methodological considerations not detailed in the selected papers so as to provide a more detailed understanding of the research projects. It provides a brief introduction to the six papers submitted for this thesis, and outlines the personal development of the author, the overall contribution of the thesis and future research plans.

**Figure 1.3 : Research projects by Broadbridge**



**Key to Projects**

- Retail Career Issues
- Student and Generation Y's Perception of Retailing as a Career
- Stress Retailing
- Charity Retailing
- Student Term Time Employment and Adjustment to University Life
- Case Study Projects



## CHAPTER 2 : CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORY

### 2.1 Introduction

Greenhaus *et al.* (2010:13) define career development as ‘an ongoing process by which individuals progress through a series of stages, each of which is characterized by a relatively unique set of issues, themes and tasks’. Gender is implicit in this definition yet it can be crucial for understanding various concerns during each stage. To understand the context of women’s position in management today, the aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of how career theories have evolved and their association with gender issues. It is not the intention to examine any theory in depth, but to provide a backdrop for understanding the context of women’s position in management today. It traces the limitations of early career theories that largely ignore the issue of gender to some of the emerging theoretical models of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where gender differences are brought out and made explicit.

The study of careers in organisational contexts has been short of systematic approaches (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000) and is not claimed to be the property of any one theoretical or disciplinary view (Arthur *et al.*, 1989; Montross and Shinkman, 1992). Some confine its definition to the work arena: a career is the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person (Arnold, 1997), and it has traditionally been largely based on the notion of movement (Marshall, 1989) and advancement (Kanter, 1989). Others recognise that a person’s career is influenced by one’s personal characteristics and environment (Arthur and Lawrence, 1984; Betz *et al.*, 1989; Super, 1992; Powell and Mainiero, 1992; O’Neill and Bilimoria, 2005; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Baruch (2004b) and Greenhaus *et al.* (2010) recognise how careers have changed over time in response to changing economic circumstances, the main shift being from careers that offer secure

employment for all, to careers that provide opportunities for development. The changing structure of organisations in response to economic and technological developments, together with the subsequent changes in the psychological contract account for these modifications in career structure. Greenhaus *et al.* (2010) claim that traditional perspectives of careers rested on advancement and stability. More contemporary positions include the protean career and the boundaryless career. However, the more traditional developmental or stage based models of careers are still upheld by Greenhaus *et al.* (2010) as useful for understanding career development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **2.2 Early career models**

Early career models characterised careers as going through various phases (age or non age related) from entry level into the labour market, through to establishment, progress, mid career, late career and retirement. Among the most well known include Miller and Form (1947); Super (1957); Hall and Nougaim, (1968), Levinson *et al.* (1978); Schein (1978) and Greenhaus (1987). The classic model, which was upheld as the norm, was generally based on studies of white, middle class men (Ginzberg *et al.*, 1951; Super, 1953; 1957; Schein 1971; 1978; Hall, 1976; Levinson *et al.*, 1978) who followed a traditional, consistent, continuous and linear career model within one or two organisations.

Because men had significantly larger work participation rates (about double those of women) and dominated the labour market at these times so it may have appeared logical that any research undertaken and conclusions drawn would be more relevant to the male population of the workforce than the female. Consequently, early career development theorists such as Super and Ginzberg gave primacy to women's homemaker role (Diamond, 1987). The

absence of adequate gender analysis of careers meant that any differing circumstances of women's employment to men's were not highlighted. In general women were either omitted from the research sample process (a similar proposition to the classical management studies described in Chapter one) else an analysis by gender was not subsequently undertaken or deemed necessary. This was despite recognition that occupations were sex segregated (Miller and Form, 1980), and became *more* segregated over time. Nonetheless a couple of these original authors did revise their original research to consider women. For example, Super (1980; 1984) revised his original model to represent women's and men's careers, proposing four paths for men (stable, conventional, unstable, multiple trial) and seven for women (the additional three being stable homemaking, double track and interrupted). Similarly, although Levinson *et al.*'s (1978) original research was conducted with men, a later research study was carried out with women (Levinson and Levinson, 1996). Criticisms might be levied at their sample however for being fairly unrepresentative of women and their employment. Their sample comprised 45 women (15 homemakers; 15 corporate careers in finance; 15 academic careers) confined to the age categories 35 to 45.

So women have been ignored, marginalized and neglected by many early career models, making it difficult to fully comprehend their relative position to men in the labour market. In general, early developmental and stage theories can be criticised for ignoring the distinct position of women and their participation in the labour market; the majority of career stage models were age related and based on a male pattern of uninterrupted work and thus did not account for any breaks in employment. Furthermore, traditional career theories tended to follow a narrower definition of career. Thus, they were confined to the realm of the work arena and ignored issues outside of a person's working life. Adopting a gender lens, these theories assume that all workers follow such a pattern of working and so they overlook that

many women (and some men) lead different lifestyles and have followed different patterns to their careers. Women's traditional responsibilities for the home mean that many have been unable to adopt a continuous, linear pattern to their careers. Many women will have broken patterns of employment, and instead move in and out of the workplace according to the accommodation of family duties and so their employment pattern very often is not continuous or linear. Traditional models then, ignored how outside responsibilities (e.g. family) might obstruct the ability to work long hours and demonstrate the commitment expected and rewarded by such models. Hence it can be argued these developmental and stage models are inadequate to understand the careers of everyone. As Wajcman (1998:105) observed:

‘... the classic career is predicated on the sexual contract, which supports the male life-cycle. Mothers are not seen as appropriate employees for senior management levels whereas the family man is the ideal’.

Because classical models fail to take gender aspects into consideration the resulting discourse can come across as being gender neutral. This is a major criticism of the interpretation of such traditional career models: gender is difficult to see when only masculine is present, and so it may be more appropriate to argue that such theories are gender blind. Baruch (2004a) acknowledges that organisational structures, cultures and processes are essential inputs for career systems although he overlooks that these structures, cultures and processes are often deeply embedded in male norms and values. Organisational structures are not gender neutral (Acker, 1990) and consequently it can be more difficult for women to construct their careers on an equivalent basis with men. Male models of work are deeply embedded in most organisational cultures (Lewis, 2001) and work is often constructed to suit men's life patterns in a society of divided stereotyped roles (Marshall, 1989). Overall, then, it is easy to see how early career models were gender blind, and led to the adoption of a male based approach to careers being regarded as the norm.

In response to the inadequacy of classic male career models to account for women, so in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, academic attention began to recognise the importance of gender for understanding careers (Astin, 1984; Larwood and Gutek, 1987; Gallos, 1989; Marshall, 1989; Sekaran and Hall, 1989; Montross, 1992; Powell and Mainiero, 1992) but as Mavin (2001:186) commented these are not ‘mainstreamed’ in management literature, organisation strategy and policy or in career management practice. Nevertheless, these researchers highlighted, and contributed to an important debate in the area of gender and careers. Traditional career theory was criticised for being rooted in male values (Dalton, 1989; Marshall, 1989) and it has been highlighted that most occupational environments were more conducive to men’s success than women’s (Tharenou *et al.*, 1994). Women’s career paths have always been more complex and ambiguous than men’s (Stroth and Reilly, 1999), and so these authors highlighted that gender is critical in the understanding of careers (Sekaran and Hall, 1989; Montross, 1992; Still and Timms, 1998; Mavin, 2001). While women construct their conceptions of themselves, their lives and the world around them differently from men (Gilligan, 1982; Gallos, 1989) this does not mean they have less career motivation. As Astin (1984: 118) argued:

‘basic work motivation is the same for men and women, but that they make different choices because of their early socialization experiences and structural opportunities are different’.

Her model placed emphasis on the structure of opportunity and how social forces shape and reshape occupational decisions. Gallos (1989) also recognised that women have different career perspectives, choices, priorities and patterns which are influenced by cultural expectations, employment opportunities, and family concerns. Hirsh and Jackson (1989) argued that careers needed to accommodate the reality of women’s lives so that they could make a meaningful investment in both occupational and family roles. Women are sole child

bearers and still more likely to be the major contributor to the home domain even in dual career/ income households (Crompton and Lyonnette, 2008; Budworth *et al.*, 2008). Thus the value placed on continuity of employment and commitment and inflexible working hours will exclude some women from some managerial jobs. Using male-based standards of career and career success, it is easy to assess women who choose a career that combines achievement and nurturance as failing professionally (Gallos, 1989). Although neoclassic approaches made some attempt at recognising that women's and men's lives are different, they too offer inadequate explanation as they either uphold women's family life above their work life (e.g. Psanthas, 1968; Zytowski, 1969), or else relegate family life to a subordinate position (e.g. Astin, 1984).

### **2.3 Career models of the 1990s**

The traditional uninterrupted career path (Schein, 1971) that assumed that a person joined a company at the beginning of their working lives and stayed with that company over the course of their career came under further challenge at the beginning of the 1990s, not by the gender argument, but more pragmatically by the changing economic and social climate. On 19 October 1987 stock market prices fell dramatically. Known as 'Black Monday' this resulted in a sharp recession, and by the 1990s the economic climate in UK companies had changed. Many companies re-structured as a retrenchment strategy. Numerous retail companies streamlined their operations at this time, and several layers of management were eradicated resulting in leaner, less hierarchical and more customer focused organisations. For example, at Tesco, store operational management levels were cut from six to three, with a staff-management ratio of 3:1 under the old system moving to 6:1 with restructuring (Broadbridge, 1994).

Many contemporary scholars view the changes in structure and restructuring of organisations, together with economic turbulence, as the factors which have forced significant shifts in the paradigm of careers and how they are managed. As a result, other views of career paths emerged including downward, lateral, diagonal or spiral careers (Walker, 1992; Brousseau *et al.*, 1996), or what Baruch (2004a) terms multidirectional career systems. The result was that women and men began to frame their careers more broadly and less traditionally than in the past (Gunz, 1989; Arthur *et al.*, 1999; Greenhaus *et al.*, 2000). The idea emerged that careers could take a variety of patterns not just the linear route emphasised by the classic models. Two of the emergent career models that have received considerable academic attention are the boundaryless and protean career, and they have influenced theory and research over the last 15 years. An overview of these is considered below along with another approach, ‘River of Time’, which specifically considers the characteristics of women’s lives and careers.

### **2.3.1 *Boundaryless and protean careers***

A boundaryless career refers to individuals who move across various employers and thus are not “bounded” by one firm. It is expected in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that a person will move from one company to another, adopting a boundaryless career (Arthur 1994; Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Osterman, 1996) and will even have second and third careers or similar careers across companies within the same industrial sector. Greenhaus *et al.* (2010) note that people just beginning their careers today can expect to have seven to 12 different employers, a marked contrast to the one or two employers that delineated careers a few decades ago. Boundaryless careers are learning related rather than the traditional age related careers (Sullivan, 1999) and so more applicable to a wider range of employees, both women and men. The skills (human

capital) learnt by an individual in each firm are portable by the individual, and so can be transferable across to other firms.

The 1990s also saw the growth of the protean career (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). This involves independence and self directed career behaviour (Hall, 1976) where employees take responsibly for their own career development and management (Brousseau *et al.*, 1996). Briscoe and Hall (2006a) note that the boundaryless and protean careers are interrelated yet independent constructs. The main distinction is that boundaryless careers examine careers from the organisation's perspective while protean careers are driven by the individual rather than the organisation, and emphasise their adaptability and self direction (Sullivan, 1999; Baruch, 2004a). So the psychological contract has moved from the organisation to the individual (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). Workers used to exchange loyalty for job security under the old contract but with the new one they exchange performance for continual learning and marketability (Sullivan, 1999). Moreover, the protean career addresses whole life concerns and is not based *solely* on advancement (Hall and Mirvis, 1996). Being engaged in work that makes a contribution to society and achieving work-life balance are two values that drive protean careers (Sargent and Domberger, 2007). As Cabrera (2009:187) argued, because 'a protean career is conceptualized as an individualized, self-directed career guided by personal values and subjective measures of success' where individuals can reshape their careers in response to changing life circumstances, it is more useful for understanding women's careers.

Nevertheless, there are some problems concerning the protean model and gender issues.

First, a protean career relates closely to an individual's accumulation of human capital within the working environment. Women historically have accumulated less human capital than men, the result of which might be a constraint in their choices and opportunities. Although

women's accumulation of human capital via education is better than men's today (Hughes, 2010), evidence still suggests that their accumulation of human capital via work assignments and developmental opportunities is lower than men's (Catalyst, 2010). Secondly, and relatedly, the process of a protean career also fails to acknowledge the relative power of the management structures against the individual person to decide on who in the organisation gets the experiences and opportunities necessary to develop one's career. Thirdly, the theory appears to ignore the importance of the accumulation of social capital in managers' career developmental opportunities, else makes it implicit. Furthermore, another criticism made by Briscoe and Hall (2006b) is that although the boundaryless and protean careers were devised to apply to many people, they are only relevant to elite professionals who have the power to be mobile or change their careers at will, and so this argument by association may be more applicable to men than to women. The protean career regards the person (as opposed to the organisation) as managing. Without challenging the underlying structure and culture of organisations and the composition and combination of the work and home domain, patriarchal power relations risk being perpetuated within organisations. Men's position will continue to be privileged, enabling them to 'manage' their careers more efficiently and effectively than women (see Chapter three).

### **2.3.2 *River of time***

Powell and Mainiero (1992) came up with a new approach to conceptualising women's career development, which they called 'The River of Time'. Their analysis recognised that women face more constraints in the workplace because of organisational factors (such as gender stereotyping in hiring and promotion decisions and in performance evaluations) as well as having to adapt to their husband's career. Furthermore, they criticised prior theories

for only partially addressing the multiple and conflicting personal, organisational, and societal factors that can influence women's development. They argued that women's career and life development involves a complex set of choices and constraints, and that women's lives are distinguished from men's by issues of balance, connectedness and interdependence. Their model does *not* depict women as occupying particular life stages at specific points in time, and so is a progression from the stage theories proposed earlier. Rather, their model recognised that women's lives often involve tradeoffs and temporary sacrifices. The essence of their approach was to argue that women, at different times of their lives, will place different emphasis on their careers or their relationships outside of work else attempt to balance both.

Their paper outlined some of the personal, organisational and societal factors that affect women's choices, some of which serve to accentuate or restrain their careers. They argued that personal factors (including career interruptions, dual career demands and parenting demands) have an effect on women's success in both their careers and their relationships with others. Organisations have not adopted practices to help women balance both areas and so women deemphasise career and interrupt it. Men they argue may *choose* to accommodate competing priorities between work, family and career decisions whereas women primarily handle family responsibilities which *necessitate* some kind of accommodation in their career and may lead them to make different career choices from men. However, like Astin (1984) and Gallos (1989), Powell and Mainiero (1992) were careful to point out that women do not have less work or career motivation than men, but a different perspective concerning what a career means; they adopt a more holistic view to their lives than men. Powell and Mainiero (1992) argued that organisational factors including how people were recruited and developed in the workplace and how organisations are structured so as to meet individual concerns can

have a strong impact on the career success of women. Moreover, they hold accountable societal factors (e.g. legal requirements, government programmes and social mores) as being behind the influence of many organisational and personal factors on women's development.

Powell and Mainiero (1992) concluded that the 'River of Time' approach to women's careers focused on success in career *and* in relationships with others. Like multiple role theories, the relationship between the two can be positive (positive spill over from one domain to the other); negative (success in one domain means less success in the other) or positive in some conditions and negative under others. The contribution of Powell and Mainiero's (1992) model over earlier approaches is its recognition of the complexity of the multiple influences on women's lives, and women's need to manage their careers alongside their relationship outside of work. Furthermore, they highlighted that from an organisational perspective, that subjective measures of success are as important as objective measures in career development. Another important tenet of their paper was their claim that not all men fit the traditional career development models either; many men want a better work-life balance than these models assume. So they recognised that not all men are exclusively career driven without concern for the impact on their families and relationships with others outside of work, and that it should be acceptable for men to take family concerns into account when accepting broader based work responsibilities.

#### **2.4 Emerging career models in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

While both Super and Levinson claimed that their work was also applicable to women Powell and Mainiero (1992) critically appraised developmental models for ignoring the distinctive features of women's lives. There then emerged the work of Sullivan (1999) who also

emphasised the unique experiences of women (including issues of workplace discrimination, greater family demands, pay and promotion inequities and sexual harassment). Sullivan (1999) claimed that future approaches to women's careers should consider the interactions of the timing of parenthood, family responsibilities, the career stage of a woman's partner, organisational support (e.g. flexible work schedules, formal mentoring programmes) and workplace discrimination. This resulted in further development of career models that consider the individuality of women's and men's lives. The 21<sup>st</sup> century then has seen the emergence of the Kaleidoscope career model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005); and O'Neill and Bilimoria's (2005) career development phase model. These both acknowledge that women's careers may develop different patterns to men's. Family responsibilities are embraced by these models and they are helpful in understanding women's under-representation at higher managerial levels.

#### **2.4.1 *Kaleidoscope careers***

The kaleidoscope career is so named because Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) proposed that careers are made up of three elements; authenticity, balance and challenge and they argued that the emphasis of these change over the course of an individual's life, thus creating changing patterns that resemble a kaleidoscope. They argued that women and men assume different patterns to their careers (men follow an alpha pattern, while women a beta pattern). In alignment with the traditional career model patterns, they claimed that men tend to follow a linear or sequential aspect to their career which involves the element of challenge first, followed by concerns about the self and then a later focus on balance and others. They found men tended to keep their work and non-work lives separate (which was enabled by the assistance of female partners), something Collinson and Hearn (2000) argued was critical for

career success. Men also examined career decisions from the perspective of goal orientation and independent action (acting first for the benefit of career). Only once they have made progress in their careers do men value relationships more. So in relation to Powell and Mainiero's (1992) argument above that not all men are exclusively career driven, some men are seemingly constrained by the traditional roles and norms society places on them.

Consequently, men are likely to claim they have made personal sacrifices for career successes but over time (once their career is established) balancing becomes more important for men.

Women, Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) argued, examined the opportunities and barriers in their careers and rejected a linear career pattern in favour of one that suited their lives, needs and objectives. Thus, women's career decisions are made from a lens of relationalism, that is, they take account the impact on the various other people in their lives when considering their careers. As such, women move facets of their lives around in order to best suit the needs of their life circumstances and their own wants and needs, even if those choices defy typical definitions of career success:

‘...women are more interested in creating a career *their* way, through lateral but challenging assignments, opportunities that fit their lives, entrepreneurial activities, or flexible scheduling, rather than focusing on advancement for the sake of advancement’ (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005:113). (authors' emphasis)

Thus, they argue, women have to adapt their careers because of traditional family roles and so make their career suit their lives rather than overtake it. The issues of authenticity, balance and challenge predominate at different points in women's life span according to Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), and so they experience a more complicated pattern to their careers than men which involves employment breaks and career transitions for family reasons and to achieve a satisfying balance between work and family.

Mainiero and Sullivan's (2005) work and their development of the kaleidoscope career model is useful to understand the differences between women's and men's careers *within* the framework of the traditional sexual division of labour in society. However, the assertions made by the kaleidoscope model are all made in the context of women's and men's traditional roles in society. The model helps understand the relative importance women and men attach to various issues at different times of their lives. Yet it does not appear to fundamentally challenge these sex role stereotypes. Thus, the contention that women reject linear careers, and the issue over what constitutes real 'choice' when it comes to defining women's and men's decisions regarding their career opportunities remains (see Paper 5).

Cabrera (2009) found that balance was a key driver for women changing their careers. Women's 'pursuit of a protean career was driven in large part by their desire to better integrate their work and non-work lives' (Cabrera, 2009:194). She found, in accordance with Mainiero and Sullivan's beta pattern of the kaleidoscope career model, 22 of the 25 women she interviewed had changed careers in order to better integrate their work and non work lives; their life circumstances had led them to step out of the workforce temporarily. Cabrera's findings support the kaleidoscope career model in that mid career women often adjust their career ambitions to obtain more flexible schedules (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007), and she argues that life situations, especially children, often mean women downsize their ambitions as they head through their thirties. Cabrera states that inflexible working schedules, long hours and travel demands (all of which are common in retailing) make it impossible for many women to balance work and family responsibilities, so they are *forced* to follow a protean orientation in order to create careers that allow them to manage these competing demands.

Cabrera (2009:198) concludes:

‘many professional women are rejecting traditional organizational careers in favor of protean careers. They are opting for self-directed careers that let them achieve subjective career success by allowing them to satisfy both work and non-work responsibilities as well as fulfil their needs for authenticity’.

Nevertheless, the essence of her findings shows how it is women who have to adapt to their changing circumstances, rather than any effort on behalf of organisations to better accommodate women’s changing circumstances.

#### **2.4.2 *Career development phase model***

O’ Neill and Bilimoria (2005) developed a model of how women’s careers develop over time. Noting that women’s careers can progress differently from men’s, they proposed three factors that justify a particular focus on women’s careers: their family responsibilities, their positioning in the higher levels of organisations and the centrality of relationships to women’s growth and development. They distinguish between ordered and emergent career patterns, the former being more proactive than the latter, which are more likely to involve serendipitous and unforeseen events and/or be interrupted for non-career events. They also described the locus of the career (the focal point from which career orientation, motivation and success emanate) explaining that an internal locus is when an individual takes personal responsibility for their career success and an external locus is where they perceive their success to be owing to chance or luck (i.e. external interventions). From their findings they proposed three age related phases of a woman’s career:

- Phase one: idealistic achievement (age 24-35)
- Phase two: pragmatic endurance (age 36-45)
- Phase three: re-inventive (age 46-60)

In phase one women's career paths are ordered and they generally have an internal locus and positive experiences. They are achievement oriented; self motivated to succeed, seek personal happiness and fulfilment, and want opportunities to make a difference. They see their career as opportunities to realise their dreams. They believe they can overcome any negative organisational environments but are concerned that organisations are not supportive of dual career families. In phase two their careers can be ordered, emergent or a combination of both, and they tend to have an external locus. Their careers can be impacted by others (either professionally and/or personally) and they are aware of negative organisations and managers. O'Neill and Bilimoria suggest that these women are most likely to be disenfranchised and dissatisfied with their workplaces, may question the centrality of their careers in their lives and may turn attention to other areas of their lives. They are more likely to be managing multiple responsibilities, and they argue that this is an age when women 'have to make firm choices' about parenthood and career commitment (O'Neill and Bilimoria 2005: 183). They argue that success is defined by these women as happiness and personal fulfilment but that their careers are not means to achieve that end. In the third phase, women again have an external locus yet hold a more positive perspective. They focus on contributing to their organisations, families and wider communities, wanting to make a difference to others. They have experienced their personal lives being subsumed by their professional lives, and for many there is a renewed focus on work and career concerns. They regard careers as learning opportunities, and see others (personal and professional) as having an input into the direction of their careers. They define success as recognition, respect and being able to live integrated lives.

O'Neill and Bilimoria explain how over the course of a woman's life their career focus moves from an internal to external locus. Their explanation for this resides in the fact that

younger women might believe that an internal focus is the way to get ahead based on classic models of career success and norms which reward individual achievement, competition and hierarchical advancement. Over time, as they realise the difficulty of conforming to such models, women might decide to explore other avenues to career success. They argue it might be because that over time as women age and become more experienced they have more of an idea of how advancement might be due to internal and external loci. They also conclude that the trend across career phases reflects a focus on self, on others and then a balance between the two. Overall, then, their model is useful for understanding the realities of women's lives. They go on to outline some implications for women and organisations arguing that organisations must be supportive of women's careers and relationships so as to retain talented women. While their suggestions are valid, they tend to be presented as too idealistic in that the authors ignore that men may be reluctant to facilitate these changes on the premise that it is not in men's own interests. Nor do they pay adequate attention to the barriers women suffer in organisations because of male forms of control. While they point out that the middle phase is where women need to make the most choices in their personal lives and careers, they do not question this from an inability of successfully combining careers and family, and the fact that these choices may in fact be constraints on women owing to the intransigent organisational cultures.

## **2.5 Survival of the traditional career model**

Following Carbera's (2009) quote above (page 29), a career belongs to an individual but in much employment the career will be planned and managed for the individual by the organisation (Baruch, 2004b), and this is how gender discrimination and traditional career theories can be upheld. Baruch (2004b) argued that climbing the hierarchy was no longer the

sole criterion to success; inner satisfaction, life balance, autonomy and freedom are also now important *alongside* the traditional measures of income, rank and status. This is an important observation. Undoubtedly new career models have emerged over time to reflect changing economic conditions, and others have more explicitly recognised the different career paths that individuals take in order to fit with their whole life concerns. However, it might be argued that the tenets of career success that are based on male definitions of success such as organisational structures of pay, status and reward systems persist (Sturges, 1999). While boundaryless careers measure success by psychologically meaningful work (Sullivan, 1999), many people move boundaries (i.e. companies) for promotional purposes, thereby promulgating linear progress. Still traditional (male) views of success exist because of the nature of the rewards that go with it. Therefore the importance of the traditional hierarchical linear career remains (Baruch, 2004b). So although fewer management levels means that fewer people have the chance of a linear career, organisational systems that reward this kind of career model remain, which in turn results in increasing the competitive nature for these jobs. This is disconcerting news for women who want to pursue a linear career (see Chapter three). The premise behind the traditional career models, despite being gender biased and archaic, is still strongly advocated today. For example, despite new careers emerging there is still evidence to suggest that promotion is still common in organisational life (Holbeche, 2003) and sought after (King, 2003; Broadbridge, 1998, 2010b) even by those Generation Y individuals entering the workforce (King, 2003; Broadbridge *et al.*, 2005). The linear career is still epitomised by many people as the most successful in a majority of organisations today. Organisations today remain supported by structures, cultures and remuneration packages that coincide with a linear pattern of progression.

## 2.6 Summary

Baruch (2004b) argued that the two major career issues for the individual are career choice and career development. These are both pertinent in the gender context as both career choice and career development has been constrained by the expectations of the traditional roles adopted by women and men in the public and private arenas. Women's primary role within the family and men's primary role within the economic work environment has placed constraints over what is judged as appropriate for them to do. Careers are complex and women's careers are additionally complex owing to their traditional responsibilities for the home. Traditional career theories and beliefs concerning career success were built around the notion of white men following a particular career path and so rooted in white male values. It has therefore been difficult to understand the careers of women and other minority groups in these contexts as they are compared against a male based norm which make others appear deviant and lacking, and so they are undervalued. Historically, women and men have not been on a level playing field when it comes to career choice and career development, as the career game being played has followed men's rules. Thus, women face different constraints than men in exercising their decision over their careers (Devine, 1994; Ginn *et al.*, 1996; Healy, 1999; McRae, 2003; Dooreward *et al.*, 2004) and it can be argued that women are not able to make the same choices over their careers that many men are able to.

However, the notion of careers has changed over time and academic recognition is now given to the role of gender in careers, as well as career systems being realigned to fit the changing economic climate. The traditional linear career has become just one of the different ways that people can think about their careers. Nevertheless, it is certainly not dead, and as long as organisational systems and reward structures continue to incentivise the linear career, so it

will continue to be 'held up' as the most 'successful' and sought after. These notions are also disseminated by academic textbooks. In investing in one's career, Baruch (2004a) outlined various individual career developmental strategies that had been identified by Greenhaus *et al.*, (2000), a common core student text. These can be criticised as biased towards male values and norms and consequently their analysis can be criticised for being gender blind. For example, success is defined in male terms, demonstrations of commitment and loyalty relate to long working hours, and the acquisition of new skills appears to ignore the possibility of career breaks or interruptions from employment. Greenhaus *et al.* (2000) do, however, stress the importance of more informal strategies such as creating contacts and strategies of visibility and exposure, the support of others, image building and organisational politics. However, because their framework ignores gender, the assumption is that everyone has equal access to these individual informal strategies, an assertion that many would disagree with (e.g. Singh *et al.*, 2007).

In the next chapter an overview of gendered management structures is presented. This shows how women and men do not have equal opportunities in many organisations and the complexity of comparing women and men in organisational life is developed.

## CHAPTER 3 : GENDERED PROCESSES IN MANAGEMENT

### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter one showed that organisational theory has traditionally neglected gender issues with many studies being based on male samples, thus rendering the traditional underpinnings of the management field as having a male bias. Wajcman (1998) noted that male cultures are so ingrained in organisations that they are seen as ungendered. What is represented as gender neutral in reality represents a male perspective (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). Broadbridge and Hearn (2008) also noted that in many organisations management has been, and continues to be, represented as gender neutral. However, this is a fallacy as gender pervades the roots and branches of organisations. Hidden assumptions about gender are embedded in our cultural discourses, social institutions and individual psyches. These serve to perpetuate patriarchal social systems, male power and the oppression of women. These assumptions shape not only perceptions of social reality but also the more material things (like unequal pay and the glass ceiling) that constitute social reality itself (Broadbridge and Fielden, 2010). So management is gendered in many specific ways and despite women having entered the workforce in more equal numbers as men in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they are not granted similar rights and privileges. For example, much research has shown that men managers are more likely than women managers to be better paid, to be in more secure employment, to be on higher grades, have more formal power, have access to more role models, to be less stressed, and to have not experienced prejudice and sexual discrimination (*cf.* Fielden and Cooper, 2002; Chênevert and Tremblay, 2002; Calás and Smircich, 2006; Gatrell and Cooper, 2007; Alvesson and Billing, 2009; Office for National Statistics, 2009b; Catalyst, 2010; Sealy and Singh, 2010).

Feminist researchers have long studied gendered labour markets and the gendered divisions of labour (horizontal and vertical) in management, the origins of which can be traced to the roles that women and men (particularly in the middle classes) were traditionally expected to perform in the pre-industrial revolution era: men in paid employment and women largely in the home attending to domestic and caring duties. Occupational and sectoral segregation has remained almost unchanged in most European countries over the last few years (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). A combination of individual, organisational and societal factors have been proposed to help understand the relative position of women and men in managerial roles. Fagenson (1990) proposed a gender-organisation-system approach to understanding women's limited progress in management and argued that this could be a result of their gender, the organisational context and the wider social and institutional system in which they function. The growth of gender and organisation studies, Simpson and Lewis (2007) argued, has given a voice to women's experiences and made visible the gendered nature of organisational practice. This chapter traces some approaches to understanding women's and men's relative positions in the managerial hierarchy. It begins by charting some of the problems that have been encountered by women managers over the last three decades. It then considers how these problems have arisen and outlines the patriarchal nature of organisations and how management is organised around male values and cultural norms, before outlining some practices that continue to be problematic for women. Thus, the chapter sets a broad context for understanding contemporary issues and provides an introductory framework for understanding the variety of areas that are expounded upon in the published works.

### **3.2 Problems women face in organisations**

There have been myriad aspects of personal and organisational behaviour that have especially created problems for women managers. Table 3.1 outlines some of these aspects found by a host of researchers over the years. Some factors relate to women themselves, but the majority relate to the way organisations are structured. Hence, many of the factors are associated with organisational cultures and structures that discriminate against women in various ways. Several factors relate to the lack of management support for women or the lack of opportunities available to them. Furthermore, informal processes operate within organisations to exclude women. Thus the way that organisations are structured help to perpetuate an argument by some that blames women themselves for their positions in the organisation. These all contribute to the well-known existence of a glass ceiling which prevents women utilising their full talents and abilities (Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Rosen *et al.*, 1989; Hansard Society Commission, 1990; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Brockbank and Airey, 1994a; Flanders, 1994).

A major contributor to the ongoing position of women today can be traced to the power of patriarchal social systems. Powell and Graves (2003:13) noted ‘Throughout the recorded history of Western civilizations, a patriarchal social system, in which the male has authority over the female, has prevailed, or at least has been the norm’. Johnson (2005) described a patriarchal society as male dominated, male identified and male centered. Like Kanter (1977), he argued that male dominance creates power differences between women and men and promotes the notion that men are superior to women; positions of authority are generally reserved for men while women are treated as an exception to the rule and compared against a

**Table 3.1: Problems encountered by women managers**

Lack of appropriate role models	Absence of mentors
Double standards for assessing performance	Lack of feedback on performance
Outdated attitudes to women's roles / organisational attitudes towards women	Lack of support from superiors / male colleagues
Pay inequities	Lack of challenging, high profile assignments
Lack of flexi-time and child care facilities	Lack of training opportunities/ provision
Overt or covert discrimination in the workplace	Exclusion from the informal networks within the company
Organisational climate and policies pipeline debate	Not long enough in pipeline
Being in token and minority status	Power of informal processes
Attitudes of senior managers	Male dominance in the hierarchy
Economic recession	Managers/others acting as gatekeepers
Leadership being construed in masculine terms	Structural constraints
Women less likely to be in authority relationships	Isolation
Inflexibility	Long hours
Women themselves (lack of confidence; self criticism; lack of political awareness; home-work responsibilities; choice)	Lack of networking and existence of a men's club network
Male definitions of success, merit, competence	Lack of visibility
Gender stereotyping	Inhospitable organisational culture
Culture as a barrier	Greater family demands; dual career-family conflicts
Gender stereotyping in hiring and promotion decisions	Sexual harassment
Limited opportunities for visibility	Hitting the glass ceiling

**Sources:** Orth and Jacobs, 1971; Wood, 1975; Hennig and Jardim, 1976; Harlan and Weiss, 1981; Marshall, 1984; Alban-Metcalf, 1984; Thomas, 1984; Mumford, 1985; Davidson, 1985; Sutton and Moore, 1985; Truman, 1986; Hammond, 1986; Gulati and Ledwith, 1987; Long, 1987; Davidson and Cooper, 1987; Nicholson and West, 1988; Noe, 1988; Forbes *et al.*, 1988; Hammond, 1988a; Rosen *et al.*, 1989; Scase and Goffee, 1989; Rosen *et al.*, 1989; Metcalfe and Leighton, 1989; Arnold and Davidson, 1990; Powell, 1990; Hansard Society Commission, 1990; Hammond and Holton, 1991; Colwill and Vinnicombe, 1991; Powell and Mainiero; Coe, 1992; Wentling, 1992; Fischer and Gleijm, 1992; Dalton and Kesner, 1993; Halford and Savage, 1995; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; 1994; Maddox and Parkin, 1994; Flanders, 1994; Ragins *et al.*, 1998; Sullivan, 1999; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002; 2003; Wellington *et al.*, 2003; Agars, 2004; Wood 2009; Catalyst, 2010; Vanderbroeck, 2010; Kumra, 2010; Sealy and Singh, 2010.

man in the same position. By 'male-identified' he meant that 'core cultural ideas about what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are associated with how we think about men and masculinity' (Johnson, 2005: 6) and men's lives are taken as the standard for defining what is normal. By 'male-centered' he meant 'the focus of attention is primarily on men and what they do' (Johnson, 2005: 10) and this was shown in Chapter one when considering traditional management studies. Johnson (2005:5) additionally argued that patriarchy was 'also organized around an obsession with control', and that 'men maintain their privilege by controlling women and anyone else who might threaten it' (Johnson, 2005: 10). These patriarchal social systems are played out in a variety of ways as is illustrated below and in the published papers.

### ***3.2.1 Social construction of management***

Various authors have shown how the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'management' have been socially constructed, and from here stems many issues facing women managers. For example, Kerfoot and Knights (1993: 663) argued that masculinity is a social construct that has been produced within history and culture. Wajcman (1996) further argued that management has been socially constructed by men and that male and female characteristics are understood in relation to each other rather than as independent categories. Alvesson and Billing (2009) also noted that the concepts of feminine/masculine are constructed as oppositional, dichotomous and hierarchal. As a result, rather than be evaluated separately, the male manager represents the standard against which women are measured (Wajcman, 1998) and masculinity is elevated above femininity (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993). So management is generally associated with masculine discourses and practices such as authoritarian, competitive, disciplinary, instrumentality and control (Kerfoot and Knights,

1993; 1998). Acker (1992: 253) commented that ‘... organizations are lean, mean, aggressive, goal-oriented, efficient, and competitive, but rarely empathetic, supportive, kind and caring’.

Kanter (1977: 22) aligned the qualities needed for effective management with masculine traits (a tough minded approach to problems, analytical abilities to abstract and plan, a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interest of task accomplishment, and a cognitive superiority in problem solving and decision making).

Spence and Helmreich (1978) outlined a masculine orientation as including characteristics such as goal directedness, self-confidence, analytical, decisiveness, independence, high achievement motivation, competitiveness and assertiveness. Female traits were outlined as being warm, caring, emotional and understanding. Fondas (1997) found that most researchers attribute females with some of the following qualities:

‘empathy, helpfulness, caring, and nurturance; interpersonal sensitivity, attentiveness and acceptance of others, responsiveness to their needs and motivations; and orientation towards the collective interest and towards integrative goals such as group cohesiveness and stability; a preference for open, egalitarian, and cooperative relationships rather than hierarchical ones and an interest in actualizing values and relationships of great importance to the community’ (Fondas, 1997: 260).

Rosener (1990) distinguished between transformational and transactional leadership and argued that women tend to adopt transformational leadership styles, which embraces participation, power sharing and information exchange; power is drawn from their interpersonal skills and charisma. Men tend to adopt more transactional styles, based on autonomy, independence and instrumentality where power is drawn from formal status and authority in the organisation. These distinctions clearly demonstrate the dichotomous nature of the terms and how men’s behaviour is more akin to the way businesses operate.

Transactional and agentic behaviours continue to underpin competitive organisational behaviour. This led Priola (2007) to argue that the identity work that women managers undertake may be conflictual, contradictory and produce strain on one's performance.

Schein (1973; 1975) stated that management and leadership have traditionally been constructed in male terms leading to the legendary claim 'think manager, think male' which has been found to exist across cultural boundaries (Schein *et al.*, 1989; Schein and Mueller, 1992; Schein and Davidson, 1993; Schein *et al.*, 1996). Management, and especially what is often understood as effective management, is assumed to be consistent with characteristics traditionally valued in men (Kanter, 1977; Marshall, 1991; Alimo-Metcalf, 1993; Heilman, 2001; Schein, 2001; Powell *et al.*, 2002; Mavin, 2009b). Organisations uphold male characteristics and values as the cultural norms (Marshall, 1987; 1991; Fischer and Gleijm, 1992; Davidson and Cooper, 1994) which in turn shape gender relations at work. The way managers are evaluated, then, follows masculine norms, the masculinist concern with personal power and the ability to control others and self (Collinson and Hearn, 2000; Jackson, 2001). Comparatively then, women's behaviour and careers have been viewed in negative terms as inadequate, deficient, incompetent, devalued and different (Heilman and Okimoto, 2007) and attitudes are less positive towards female leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Unsurprisingly, many women managers in organisational life have felt marginalised; their confidence has been undermined and their careers restricted. Snyder (1989) also argued that those treated in negative ways became less competent. Similarly, Marshall (1995) found that women who were undervalued or placed under intolerable pressure by their organisations found their own sense of competence undermined to the point that they left.

Even research this century shows that management, and what is considered to be a 'good' manager, is still perceived as being characterised in masculine terms (Heilman, 2001; Schein, 2001; Powell *et al.*, 2002). Others too (Heilman, 2001; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Mavin, 2009b), argued that upper level management positions are characterised in agentic masculine terms and that stereotypical male qualities are thought necessary to being a successful executive. Eagly and Carli (2007) also noted how women are evaluated less favourably as leaders and that much of this prejudice is not explicit and overt but often implicit and covert. Heilman (2001) concluded that there is a perceived lack of fit between the requirements of traditionally male jobs and the stereotypic attributes ascribed to women.

### **3.2.2 *A need to manage like a man?***

O'Leary and Ickovics (1992) argued there were two main stereotypes of women managers: those who behave too much like women (i.e. too sensitive, emotional, family oriented) or women who behave too much like men (i.e. too competitive, deceitful, aggressive). They point out, as do Warning and Buchanan (2009), that a female manager may be disadvantaged by role stereotyping and that whatever the style adopted, women are criticised for being too soft or too hard. According to Vinnicombe and Singh (2002), as men occupy the top of many organisations and women are found lower down in supportive roles, masculine and feminine characteristics are believed to be associated with occupational positions and organisational level rather than their sex. Hence, they argue, when looking for senior level jobs, people possessing masculine characteristics are sought. As women aspire to more senior positions, they therefore have to consider how their own behaviours and perceptions fit with those associated with successful careers in their organisation (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002). Wajcman (1998) argued that to achieve positions of power,

women must accommodate themselves to the organisation not the other way round. To succeed, Wajcman argued, women had to deny aspects of themselves and ‘manage like a man’. Some women will undoubtedly do this, although others will see this as too much of a sacrifice of their gender identity. So, Liff and Wajcman (1996) argued that there is a real danger that Equal Opportunity policies based on equal treatment require women to deny, or attempt to minimise differences between themselves and men. Such a procedural approach to equality focuses on changing behaviour but leaves attitudes and beliefs relatively untouched (Liff, 1999).

Eagly *et al.* (1992) noted that women were evaluated as less effective even if they behaved in exactly the same manner as men. Similarly, Heilman (2001:657) argued that ‘being competent does not ensure that a woman will advance to the same organizational level as an equivalently performing man’. This idea was more recently developed by Kumra (2010) who showed that merit is socially constructed by men and so determined in a context of prevailing power relations. The construction of merit, she argued, includes those who behave *appropriately*, give total commitment to the organisation and deploy key impression management strategies such as visibility, overt ambition and self-promotion, all of which are more attuned with men’s rather than women’s behaviour. Merit, therefore, is constructed using male terms and standards. These arguments might give rise to further speculation that in order to get ahead women need to manage more like men.

The idea that women should manage like a man is not unproblematic then for a variety of reasons, not least because it assumes unquestioningly that male characteristics are those needed to effectively manage organisations. It therefore perpetuates, rather than challenges, a management style that is characterised in male terms and as a result, organisational cultures

at the top are unlikely to ever change. Secondly, women who do take on these male characteristics are subject to negative criticism and double standards for behaving 'like a man'. Heilman (2001:667) argued that although

'women may move with ease through an organisation's lower ranks and appear poised to pierce the glass ceiling to the upper strata of the organization, their success may be hindered by the disapproval their behaviour evokes because it violates prescriptive norms' [of how women should be].

By adopting male characteristics, women are not behaving "appropriately" and so are not regarded as conforming socially. Social conformity is an important part of being a manager (Kanter, 1977). Individuals form expectations for the social roles of others based on the stereotypical and appropriate behaviours expected of women and men (Powell *et al.*, 2008; Mavin *et al.*, 2010). Women leaders perceived as 'masculine' can therefore attract negative reactions (Mavin, 2010, quoted in Mavin *et al.*, 2010) although men behaving more femininely do not appear to attract the same amount of criticism and so double standards are applied to what is regarded as women's and men's "appropriate behaviour". Behaviours that are acceptable for men can be misinterpreted when applied to women (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2010). Mavin (2009a: 85) argued:

'Men gain from dominant, aggressive, independent leadership traits but are also rewarded for demonstrating communal leadership behaviours ... Men are given recognition for social and emotional skills, whereas women are simply behaving like women (Kelan, 2007).'

Mavin (2009a: 85) also stated: 'Agentic women leaders are then insufficiently feminine to satisfy the gender role stereotyping and can often be rejected'. As Maddox (1999) argued, senior women who challenge the gendered structure of their organisations were regarded as nuisances by the dominant males who acted to marginalise their voices. Collinson and Hearn

(2001), as did Maddox and Parkin (1993), also suggested that corporate women face less hostility if they adopted conventional women's roles. Therefore, it is easier (and safer) for senior women to choose to 'blend in' rather than 'stand out' from the dominant male voice. Eagly and Carli (2007) claimed that women risk not getting a job or promotion when they are too direct and are better liked and more influential when they moderate their style: 'A dominant manner places women at risk of being disliked and can undermine their ability to wield influence' (Eagly and Carli, 2007:103). However, men can communicate in either a warm or dominant manner with little consequence. So difficulties arise in treating women the same as men in strong masculine cultures. Behaviours valued in men can be regarded as weak or deficient in women (Oakley, 2000; Mavin, 2009b), while many women in senior positions are highly scrutinised in a way that does not apply to men (Wajcman, 1998; Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Eagly and Carli, 2007). This can make for sensational news headlines such as 'Men make better bosses, according to employees' and 'Men are the best bosses: women at the top are just too moody (and it's women themselves who say so)' (Brown, 2010; Hull, 2010). Their underlying message is to legitimise and reinforce men's positions at the senior levels and the top of the hierarchy and ensure societal attitudes conform to the dominant male model of working. This endorses the idea that men are treated more favourably in management (Posner and Powell, 1985) and that women have to work much harder to prove themselves (Brockbank and Traves, 1995; Jackson, 2001; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Broadbridge, 2007). Wajcman (1998) concluded that the construction of women as different from men was one of the mechanisms whereby the unequal distribution of power and resources in the favour of men was maintained.

### 3.2.3 *Homogeneity of women and men*

An added misconception is the assumption that all women and all men are homogeneous and should act like their role stereotypes. Not all women in senior positions will fight the cause for other women to make it in a man's world (Mavin, 2006a; 2006b; 2008). The queen bee syndrome relates to the phenomenon that women who have been individually successful in male-dominated environments are likely to oppose the women's movement (Staines *et al.*, 1973). The strategies that individual women employ to achieve career success are likely to cause them to discriminate against other women (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004). Gibson and Cordova (1999) argue that such women would be more likely to perpetuate the organisational culture in which they have succeeded.

The misconception of treating women as a homogeneous group facing the same problems in the workplace continues to be played out in the Boardroom. A sole woman director can be regarded (and expected) as representing the views and voice of all women (Erkut *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, Liff and Wajcman (1996) argue that the extent to which women and men are regarded as the same or different from each other suppresses any differences *between* men and *between* women and ignores similarities amongst women and men that would be highlighted by categorising them differently.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that various homosocial practices and organisational norms help to perpetuate a hegemonic masculinity, reproducing a pecking order among men by suppressing subordinate masculinities too (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). Like Powell and Mainiero (1992), Wajcman (1998) noted not all men endorse the dominant male model;

some are alienated from the macho culture of corporate power and most men do not succeed in becoming senior managers. She asserted that modern men may accept equal opportunity policies and women in the workplace, and could learn from women and adopt softer management styles.

### **3.2.4 *Women as tokens and minorities***

Kanter (1977; 1997) argued that a critical mass (30%) was necessary for an under-represented sex to have equal opportunities to members of the dominant group. She further asserted that when there were less than 15% of women, they were regarded as tokens and various processes marginalised and excluded the minority of token women rendering them both isolated and visible. She talked about asymmetric power relations where the majority dominated and marginalised the minority and organisational structures emerged to preserve this situation. Women's average representation in business stood at 14% in 2007 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007) and just 12.5% of the FTSE 100 directors are currently held by women (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, as well as being tokens, gender imbalance and associated visibility heightens career barriers, limits career progress and helps to create a hostile working environment for minority women (Simpson, 1997, 2000).

Simpson's (1997) work also found gender mix was highly significant in determining the nature of women's experience within their organisation and noted that in this respect little had changed since Kanter's (1977) study. She found that token women were highly visible and experienced an entirely male-dominated culture from which they were excluded and marginalised. She argued that barriers were intensified in these groups and more token women encountered a men's club in their organisation, while men's behaviour was more

macho when only a few women were present thus asserting their authority and control. For the token women in particular, structures and processes relating to the gender mix of their organisation seemed to be operating at the *informal level* to undermine their formal status. Simpson (1997) noted that women, no matter how senior, could be excluded and isolated from informal channels of communication. She argued that managers continue to make decisions on the basis of stereotypes, value people in their own image and hold strongly sex-typed views of job requirements and high performance. If change is not large enough to create a critical mass (Kanter, 1977), negative intergroup dynamics such as increased resource competition and tokenism can persist (Kosek *et al.*, 2003).

### **3.3 Formal attempts to redress gender inequality in organisations**

Various legislation and campaigns regarding gender issues have been proposed to overcome the problems women face in organisations. However, the extent to which such progress has been achieved is debatable. Forty years after the passing of the Equal Pay Act the full-time median gender pay gap stood at 12.2%, while women's full time hourly pay was 16.4% less than men's full-time hourly pay; in the private sector the gender pay gap was 20.8% (Office for National Statistics, 2010d). Moreover, the general trend of women continuing to earn less than men is forecast to continue until 2067, almost 100 years since the passing of the Equal Pay Act (Smyth, 2010). In addition, thirty five years after the Sex Discrimination Act, women continue to be discriminated against at all levels of organisations (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010), and Turner (2010) comments how it could take 60 years before women and men are equally represented at board level.

Schein and Davidson (1993) recommended legislative and organisational policies to break down barriers faced by women managers. These included positive action programmes; equal opportunity audits; flexible working arrangements; fair selection and promotion procedures; career planning; better work life balance; maternity and paternity provisions; changes in corporate cultures and attitudes. Indeed, many organisations now include gender-sensitive policies and practices, gender equality plans, equal opportunities policies, family-friendly policies, gender training, and harassment, bullying and violence policies, the implication being that women now compete on equal terms with men. Individual organisations' commitment to gender diversity is usually found at their website in a diversity and inclusion section and they will sometimes use these as promotional tools in their attempts to demonstrate gender neutrality.

Arising from a Hansard Society Commission (1990) report that identified that women were an untapped resource in management, the Opportunity 2000 (renamed Opportunity Now) initiative was launched in October 1991. Its goals, which were based on an economic argument (and were aligned with some of Schein and Davidson's recommendations above) were to increase the representation of women in key areas (including target setting); build equal opportunity objectives into management appraisal processes; conduct attitude surveys among staff; increase maternity retention rates; provide senior and line training programmes and provide regular commentary of their progress in annual reports (Hammond and Holton, 1991; Hammond, 1992; Schein and Davidson, 1993). Employers were to publicly make a statement of their ambitions and goals for improving women's representation at all levels in the workplace. Companies where women were major clients (e.g. retailers) backed the scheme from a customer/market business orientation (Hammond, 1992; King, 1994). Opportunity Now (part of Business in the Community) as it became is a membership

organisation for employers who are committed to creating an inclusive workplace for women. From the foundation that it makes good business sense, it works with its membership of employers to offer tailored, practical and pragmatic advice on workplace issues regarding the employment of women.

Of the criticisms levied at the Opportunity 2000/Now Campaign was the requirement for companies to become paid members, and then they were encouraged to set their own goals (which could be quantitative targets or merely statements of general intent); to publish these goals and to monitor and report on progress regularly. Another criticism might be the emphasis placed on business benefits rather than social or moral ones. Members were not monitored against any required standard of achievement, which meant that they could observe the spirit of the campaign, add positive sounding statements to their annual reports, without complying very much. Simpson (1997) also criticised the Opportunity 2000 initiative for being based on a liberal feminist idea that if opportunities are made available and if women try hard enough inequalities in the work place can be largely eliminated. She observed that this approach placed responsibility for women's position in the labour market on themselves and their own deficiencies. This liberal approach was also criticised by Broadbridge (1987) who noted that retailing denied there was discrimination between the sexes, arguing that both sexes could compete on an equal basis.

In reality the statements made by some member companies of Opportunity 2000/Now could be interpreted as bland. In the retail domain, Kingfisher's principal goal (set in 1991) was to 'increase the number of women at middle to senior management levels' which is vague. More specific goals were set within the group however. For example, Superdrug's goals were 'increasing the percentage of women in management from 14% to 20% within 5 years, with

50% more women at senior management levels'. Given the number of women at senior management levels was not disclosed, this target is fairly meaningless and why when retailing is predominantly comprised of women employees should they aspire to a only a fifth of all managers being women? Iceland Frozen Foods pledged to increase the proportion of female store managers from under 10% to 15% by the end of 1992 (Employment Gazette, 1992). Moreover, at August 2010 from a total membership of around 350 employers just six retail companies (B&Q, Tesco, Carphone Warehouse, Marks and Spencer, Mid Counties Co-op and J. Sainsbury) are members of Opportunity Now (with Carphone Warehouse and J. Sainsbury being amongst the 28 corporate champions listed). This is fewer than the 13 retail companies who were original members of the Opportunity 2000 campaign and accounted for a quarter of the British retail workforce (Times Books, 1995). Does this imply that retail organisations are less committed about creating an inclusive place for women managers, or do many such companies believe they now provide such inclusive cultures?

We can undeniably attribute the increased representation of women as UK managers to the success of some formal equal opportunity and diversity policies that have been introduced into organisations. However, many of the management positions women have gained are at the lower levels. Senior positions remain predominantly male preserves. Although more women are now entering high level professional and managerial jobs, men are still twice as likely to be in such positions and three times as likely to be senior managers (Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, 2006). Hence, Simpson's (1997) argument that the glass ceiling remains; it has merely been raised. A recent report showed that 100% of the UK companies asked 'Does your company have specified targets, quotas, or other affirmative policies to increase the percentage of women in senior management or executive positions?' said 'yes' (Zahidi and Ibarra, 2010). Yet, the trend was that the more senior the positions, the

lower the percentage of women were found; women employees tended to be concentrated in entry or middle level positions of organisations. The survey results for the UK showed that for the responding companies women comprised 39.5% of all employees, yet none were found as CEOs (Zahidi and Ibarra, 2010).

Formal organisational policies and Equal Opportunities legislation do not fundamentally challenge the gendered nature of organisations or men's power within them. They ignore (or are unable to challenge) underlying structural or informal policies and attitudinal factors linked to the culture of the organisation (Simpson, 1997; Sealy and Singh, 2010). As Wajcman (1998) stated, men still define what constitutes organisational success is and monopolise it. Priola and Brannen (2009:380) further noted that it is not so simple as increasing the number of women in management or a matter of time, but that 'a change in cultural values and practices within organizations, as well as within society, is needed for women and men to achieve equality'.

Patriarchal systems have not disappeared. Instead, Wajcman (1998) argued there now existed 'contemporary patriarchy' which was all about the subordination of women *within the framework of equality*. In relation to this, Kottke and Agars (2005) observed that negative attitudes towards women are now more subtle and covert than they once were and so have become less distinct, although they remain powerful. The adoption of many equality and diversity policies can be criticised for being reactive rather than proactive, i.e. they often appear to be in response to legal requirements such as alignment with EU directives rather than a search for genuine gender justice in itself. They are 'tick the box' exercises rather than searches for gender equality. The result is much less overt sex discrimination which arguably is an even more insidious position to be in as it blames women's under-representation in

senior positions as owing to their own choices and preferences (Simpson, 1997; Hakim, 2000) rather than their continued discrimination. Contemporary patriarchy means discrimination has been driven underground.

### **3.4 Economic and social changes**

Because of patriarchal systems and men's power in organisations, changes in the economy can severally threaten the progress of gender equality initiatives. Reorganisation and restructuring of work in the 1990s had profound implications for the nature of managerial work (Worrall and Cooper, 1998; Collinson and Hearn, 2000). This resulted in fewer top management jobs yet there were more women in the workforce. These fewer job opportunities for men threatened existing organisational culture and further threatened men's self-esteem and masculine identity (Kottke and Agars, 2005). Reskin (1988) explained that as women gained access to managerial jobs and opportunities previously held by men, men devised new rules to keep women from gaining power, thus organisations can change the rules of what one must do to reach the top in order to make it more difficult for women to succeed. Cockburn (1991) also noted men's heightened resistance to women's advancement because of the threat they felt to their power and 'sex right', while Kottke and Agars (2005) argued these perceived threats could lead to rigidity of responses and to limited opportunities for the inclusion of women on projects and in both formal and informal networks. Simpson and Lewis (2007) referred to research that has shown that men resent women's entry into organisations, and as a result have become territorial and more macho in their behaviour. The restructuring of work manifested itself in work extensification and intensification, and underpinned practices that help to reinforce, rather than challenge, traditional male standards of working (e.g. long hours, single minded commitment, uninterrupted career patterns).

With regard to the aspect that patriarchy is about control (Johnson, 2005), Collinson and Hearn (2000) argued that managers are increasingly assessed according to their ability to control their lives (and in particular the divide between their work and home lives). As a result, men have distanced themselves from their children and family responsibilities and made sacrifices in their personal lives (Powell, 2000). Such distancing strategies are interpreted positively as evidence of commitment to the company and of individual ability to control 'private life' (Collinson and Hearn, 2000). Many women are either unable or unwilling to 'control' their lives in such ways and so because they are evaluated against men, they are viewed negatively by organisations. As such they will continue to be regarded as less committed and less able to control their private life than their male counterparts. This reinforces Powell's (2000) argument that top management jobs do not encourage a 'balancing' of home and work lives, and therefore, will attract individuals who adhere to the traditional male model of career success thus perpetuating views of what is considered to be a good manager. Some women managers may have attempted to compartmentalise their work and home lives, contracting out childcare and household duties, else have postponed or foregone having a family (Broadbridge, 2007). Yet, ingrained stereotypes mean organisations still categorise women differently from men and regard them as less able to control their lives. These behaviours by men help to perpetuate the notion of 'contemporary patriarchy' and can place women managers in a more precarious and vulnerable position during times of economic recession. Davidson and Burke (2000) noted that because they are mostly in mid-level management, women were more dispensable than men in times of downsizing and restructuring. Baruch (2004a) also warned that in tough business environments qualities such as caring, team working and creating relationships are not necessarily advantageous, and that a trend towards lean and mean business management may contrast with the qualities women bring to the workplace.

Economic recession has hit the economy again and moreover the UK is currently in danger of entering further recession. Recent press reports have also shown the dearth of graduate jobs available. It is currently estimated that the ratio of graduates to jobs is 69:1 (AGR, 2010) and so concerns grow for both the underemployment and unemployment of graduates. The majority of employers (78%) will not now consider anyone with less than a 2.i. degree (Garner, 2010) and this enables them to be more selective in their recruitment drives and succession plans. Therefore the so-called 'war for talent' (Braid, 2007; Maxwell and MacLean, 2008), is arguably less relevant in times of economic crisis/ downturn. Zahidi and Ibarra (2010) reported that more than 30% of their UK responding companies believed that the economic recession would be more harmful for women's rather than men's jobs. Furthermore, issues of work-life balance are in danger of being put on the back burner (Burke, 2010) as no doubt will be issues of diversity. Thus, hopes of women entering more senior management positions might be severely curtailed. Rather than embracing diversity, the structure of the economy risks reinforcing the gender divide within companies, and protecting the powerful positions at the top as men's. In such economic climates there will be enough people willing and able to perpetuate long-established cultural norms and so contemporary patriarchy is in danger of continuing.

### **3.5 Continuing practices**

Men's resistance to women in management, Reskin (1988) argued, came in the form of exclusion, subtle barriers and open harassment. As Bendl and Schmidt (2010) observe, discrimination continues and is intentional. The report by Zahidi and Ibarra (2010) found that the barriers considered to be most problematic for women to rise to positions of senior leadership were lack of flexible work solutions; lack of adequate 're-entry' opportunities (for

those who had taken breaks in their employment); lack of role models and masculine/patriarchal corporate cultures. Various organisational processes effectively perpetuate management (especially at senior levels) as a male preserve and serve to impair women's progress and ambitions. Upholding the notion of contemporary patriarchy, these processes and practices are less blatant than they were in the 1970s, and are more subtle and covert, but equally as powerful.

Many of these practices are engrained in organisational values and cultures that continue, however subtly, to marginalize and exclude women. Over 30 years ago Kanter (1977) identified how the corporate treatment of women was related to the organisational culture, where the majority dominate and marginalise the minority and where structures emerged to preserve this status quo. The extent that an individual fits with the cultural values and belief systems of the organisation will help to determine the extent of support and development they receive which in turn shapes their career prospects. With organisations and their belief systems being imbued by male values and standards so this places men in a more advantageous position to receive these opportunities and support. Management has traditionally involved homosocial practices with men's preference for men and men's company, and the use of masculine models, stereotypes and symbols in management (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). These are also associated with competitiveness and emotional detachment and so serve to ostracise and undermine women. Women continue to feel silenced, ridiculed, seduced, inferior and infantilised by dominant men (Ford and Harding, 2010).

### 3.5.1 Attitudes of senior management

Kanter (1977) said that organisations wish to minimise uncertainty and one way to do this was to close top management positions to people who are regarded as different. The perceptions and attitudes of senior male management are therefore likely to be influential in determining women's success (Liff *et al.*, 1997). They are effectively gate keepers and have a crucial affect on the behaviour of women in business and in the labour market. The views and opinions of CEOs formulate the culture of the organisation from which the values and belief systems stem. Senior positions remain a largely male preserve yet it is at this level of corporate cultures that changes and attitudes are critical for women to make any real achievements. Ragins *et al.* (1998) found disparity in the perceptions of CEOs and high ranking women concerning barriers women face. In particular, CEOs were far more likely to attribute women's lack of advancement to their lack of general or line management experience, and not being in the pipeline long enough. The women themselves, however, were far more likely than the CEOs to attribute their barriers to male stereotyping and male preconceptions, exclusion from informal networks and inhospitable company cultures. A BITC/Catalyst Report (2000) also showed that CEOs and senior women's explanations for the lack of women in senior management positions diverged; CEOs were apparently less aware of the barriers facing women managers, instead using the pipeline debate (Forbes *et al.*, 1988) as an argument for the reason why women are under-represented in senior management positions. This adopts the view that women have not been in the system for long enough, and in time, any differences will disappear. Table 1, Paper 2 shows these differences in attitudes. With the exception of general management or line experience which both groups agreed were the main barriers for women, Wellington *et al.* (2003) also found

that executive women and CEOs (who were mostly men) perceived the barriers to women's advancement differently:

‘A clear majority of the female executives surveyed cite numerous barriers: exclusion from informal networks, stereotyping, lack of mentoring, shortage of role models, commitment to personal or family responsibilities, lack of accountability on the part of senior leadership, and limited opportunities for visibility. CEOs also acknowledge these obstacles but in many cases seem less convinced of their significance’.  
(Wellington *et al.*, 2003:19)

Moreover, the CEOs were more likely than the women executives to consider that women's barriers are owing to ‘ineffective leadership styles’, ‘lack of skills to reach senior levels’ and ‘not in management ranks long enough’ thus confirming their stereotypical beliefs and blaming women for their own shortcomings, while demonstrating how they are continuing to evaluate women against a male standard. Of some concern is that those at the very top of organisations continue to use the pipeline debate. As an approach it can be open to criticism. For example, the latest available FTSE female executives report (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2010) stated that there were currently 2,551 women in senior executive positions, i.e. those who represent this pipeline (which was a 11.8 % increase from the previous year's figure of 2,281). This shows that women are in the system, yet they are not gaining these very senior positions. Instead, they remain in the minority at very senior levels. Vinnicombe *et al.*'s (2010) report therefore demonstrates that the pipeline debate is inadequate as an explanation for women's under-representation at senior levels of organisations.

### **3.5.2 Power of informal processes**

Liff and Cameron (1997) reported that men behave in exclusionary ways and this included their tendency to share information predominantly with other men, recruit in their own image,

ostracise and undermine women, and generally act to perpetuate ways of working and forms of interaction with which they felt comfortable. Much of this behaviour operates at an informal level of the organisation. This is an effective way that the dominant members of organisations (i.e. men) can circumvent the effects of the introduction of formal policies, by protecting the influence of informal processes and networking. Informal networks are not easily entered by women. Self categorisation theory claims that similar people are more likely to become friends (Pelled *et al.*, 1999). The development of informal network relationships at managerial levels may also be 'more natural' if via same sex - therefore men naturally have a better ability to form these relationships at managerial levels than women do because of the male dominated hierarchy (Broadbridge, 2004). Nielsen and Huse (2010) explain that in social identification and social categorisation theories, individuals define their own identities through social comparison with others. With social categorisation theory individuals divide group members into in-groups (those who are similar) and out-group members (those who are dissimilar). In turn, they will positively evaluate and like in-group members and negatively evaluate and dislike out-group members. This demonstrates the similarity-attraction paradigm as proposed by Byrne and Neuman (1992) that people tend to make the most positive evaluations of and decisions about people whom they see as similar to themselves. With men dominating the board rooms so such 'homosocial reproduction' (as first posited by Kanter, 1977) can be, and is (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004a) perpetuated.

Various research has illustrated the importance of networking and visibility in organisations (Kanter, 1977; Brass, 1985; Coe, 1992; Rutherford, 2001; Linehan, 2001) and how women are less likely than men to be included in these informal networks. As a consequence they are denied contacts, opportunities and excluded from the information networks provide. As information equates to power, and politics and networking systems are bound up with power

(which is held predominantly by men), so women's exclusion from these networks can result in them being disadvantaged in the workplace and being unable to compete on a level playing field. Benschop (2009) noted that networks that work to the advantage of men do not benefit women in the same way. The old boy network is still problematic for women particularly at senior management levels (Mooney and Ryan, 2009). The power of networking, being visible to senior and board level personnel, and adopting impression management techniques helps in being offered challenging work and high profile assignments (Morrison *et al.*, 1987) thus enabling the acquisition of human capital that is important for career development. This, McQuarrie (1994) argues is a subtle form of discrimination in the career pathing of women and men; another is the exclusion of women from important decision making meetings (Jackson, 2001). Women can also form their own networks (although because there are fewer women managers this might be more difficult to do). Often these female networks are to counterbalance the exclusion they have from the powerful male dominated networks. Women only networks have been identified as less powerful and often have different agendas to the traditional male networks. For example, they often will not have the access to the internal politics and information system of the organisation.

### **3.5.3 *Double standards***

Powell and Graves (2003:198) stated that 'Corporations tend to be run by workaholic male top executives, most of whom are married to women who are not employed full time'. These men concentrate on business needs to the exclusion of non work life, and importantly they set the standard by which those lower in the management hierarchy are judged. Top management jobs attract individuals who demonstrate an ability to keep the work and home domains separate (cf. Collinson and Hearn, 2000). This presents a particular dilemma for

women who retain responsibility for the household domain. Double standards are applied to women and men with families in organisations. Many women are regarded negatively because of their inabilities (or difficulties) to compartmentalise the two domains; while men are often treated positively as they have a supportive infrastructure at home (much research continues to show that men in senior management are more likely to have a partner who is not in full-time employment, while for similar women, they are normally found in dual full-time career households). As a consequence of the need for separation of the two domains many women in senior management positions postpone or forego having children in order to progress their careers. The choice of having both is generally not easily available. As Burke (2001:352) concluded 'having a family continues to be a career liability for many women'. To succeed in top management jobs, therefore, it appears women have better chances if, like men, they ensure that their home and work domains are clearly separated. For many women who, unlike many men, do not have a partner at home on a part-time or full time basis, this means them having to make unreasonable decisions and sacrifices about their home and work lives.

#### **3.5.4 Working hours**

The way work is organised at senior management levels is insidious, as it supports a notion that combining work and family life is largely impossible. As a result, owing to the way family units are often structured, this is more likely to negatively affect women as it is men. Kanter (1989) provided three explanations for why people work long hours. Some are workaholics, driven to work all the time because of inner compulsions beyond their own control. In other situations (particularly in high paid occupations) Kanter (1989) noted that the organisation exploits the worker, consuming ever more of their time and traps them into a

dependency on the rewards of status and power. A third explanation revolved around ‘facework’ where people control others’ impressions by creating the appearance of spending long hours working in order to make a good impression. This is now effectively perpetuated by technological developments that can create both a reality and an illusion of people being constantly working and/or available to respond to work demands. Simpson’s (1998) analysis of long working hours drew on these two latter explanations from Kanter (1989). She observed that restructuring led to increased workloads and working hours, and the incidence of presenteeism (or facetime) had increased as individuals attempted to demonstrate their visible commitment to the organisation in order to counteract their fear of redundancy and uncertainty over promotion prospects. She also commented that presenteeism was gendered and associated with a competitive masculine culture. Eagly and Carli (2007) noted that the long hours expected in organisations conflicts with domestic responsibilities for women. Therefore, long hours can be regarded as a form of male resistance to women as managers and places heavy sacrifices on women as they attempt to meet the conflicting demands of work and home. Burke (2010) commented that the most recent economic downturn has turned attention towards organisational survival and away from organisations supporting work-life balance initiatives and different modes of working which clearly affects those with outside responsibilities and helps to reinforce male based cultural values.

An Equality and Human Rights Commission study (2009) reported that many British fathers do not take up paternity leave and flexible working opportunities because they fear it will damage their careers. They believed it would signify that they were uncommitted to their jobs, or negatively affect their chances of promotion. Thus, current thinking concurs with Collinson and Hearn’s (2000) observation that men are constantly evaluated and assessed and need to distance themselves from their families in order to be seen in control and committed.

Currently (2010) paternity leave is paid the same as statutory maternity pay at £123.06 per week, which does not encourage or enable many men to take this leave even if they wanted to. This sends a particular message reinforcing the expected norms that women and men should play in 21<sup>st</sup> century society and the behaviour of career minded people. Flexible working hours have been regarded by organisations as synonymous with people not putting their career first. It is also played out by some senior women who emulate these norms by taking minimal maternity leave (see Paper 5).

### **3.5.5 *Women themselves***

Various research has shown that through their own “shortcomings”, women have not grasped the opportunities to progress their careers. Issues such as self confidence, ‘political’ unawareness, self criticism and reluctance to put themselves forward have been used as explanations for why women do not reach senior positions in companies (Eagly and Carli, 2007). These arguments can be located in the ways that organisations are structured which make it more difficult for women to compete given that they are compared against organisational cultures that uphold male standards and norms. With structures being often unsupportive to women, it is little wonder they are reluctant to push themselves forward. As Powell and Graves (2003: 195) observed: ‘When women believe they are disadvantaged by the glass ceiling, they may be less likely to express an interest in open top management jobs than equally qualified men’. This, they argued, contributes to the self fulfilling prophecy of there being few women in top management positions.

Another argument that abounds is that women themselves make their own choices not to progress their careers, preferring to opt for a more balanced lifestyle. As Marshall (1991)

argued, some women managers will reject promotion, in preference for leading a more balanced life. This is a reasoned argument if applied to everyone but it is flawed on the basis that it applies differently to women and men. The terms 'preference' and 'choice' can be unpicked and the recognition that women may be constrained in their choice making needs to be accounted for (see Paper 5).

### **3.6 Summary**

Vinnicombe *et al.* (2000) noted that women's careers are influenced by various factors that do not affect men's career to the same extent. Patriarchy has underpinned the persistence of masculine advantage and privilege. Ford and Harding (2010) maintain that there still exists an imbalance of power relations between women and men. Throughout this chapter it has been stated how organisational processes are reinforced by gendered practices and belief systems that enable men's continued dominance in organisations. As Broadbridge and Hearn (2008) noted, not only are organisations and management valued above work in the private (household) sphere but there continues the gendered relations of women's and men's participation in the domestic sphere. Within organisations and management, men's work is valued over women's and there are gendered divisions of authority (formal and informal) as well as the spatial distribution of power between the centre and the margins. Various gendered processes in organisations (either explicit or subtle) exist ranging from the way people interact and communicate with each other, both formally and informally, to their taken-for-granted assumptions, values and ideas. There also exist gendered processes in sexuality and violence and via gendered organisational symbols, images and forms of consciousness (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). Workplace gender power relations continue within and across hierarchical levels in processes and practices such as recruitment, selection,

appraisal and promotion; while men influence organisational rules, procedures, formal job definitions and functional roles. Some of these are maintained via informal organisational procedures which are embedded in deep rooted stereotypes, and effectively weaken the impact of formal policies that have been introduced to overcome sex discrimination.

It is not individual-level explanations that restrict women's access to senior positions, but organisational-level barriers that women face. Advancement in organisations depends not only on competence assessments but also on social acceptance and approval. This has its roots in patriarchal male identification and demonstrates the power of the way management has been socially constructed by men which is further perpetuated by the informal structure of organisations. Structural and systematic discrimination continues via organisational policies and practices. Men can guard certain positions by perpetuating techniques that favour men over women. Gender differentiation continues through practices such as women receiving less support for career making and important networks being out of women's reach at crucial career junctures (Personen *et al.*, 2009).

Current evidence would suggest that organisational cultures have not sufficiently changed since Kanter (1977), Acker (1992), Collinson and Hearn (1996) and Simpson's (1997) work. While formal policies have been introduced into organisations and may be associated with some positive benefits for the (relative) position of women and men in organisational life, gender difference in management remains. Structures that preserve the status quo are entrenched in traditional organisational culture and are hard to break because men continue to dominate the management hierarchy. Women's experience in senior management remains largely tokenist in character and it is accompanied by disadvantage (including, high scrutiny, exclusion and marginalisation). There remains a need to confront deep rooted stereotypes

which shape women's and men's roles in society. The way work is organised and structured is characterised around male norms and values (Hearn and Parkin, 1988; Harlow *et al.*, 1995) and male hegemony (Rindfleish and Sheridan, 2003). Male models of success (Powell and Mainiero, 1992), competence (Wajcman, 1996), merit (Kumra, 2010) and commitment are seen as the norm (Vinnicombe and Harris, 2000). These stereotypes serve to make 'natural' and perpetuate the close identification between men and management (Wajcman, 1996), and continue a persistence of such macho management practices to the present day (Mauthner and Edwards, 2010; Ford and Harding, 2010). To reinforce Lewis's (2010:353) conclusion '[g]endered experiences and gendered workplaces (and families) remain stubbornly difficult to change'.

The next chapter concentrates on examining the position of retail employment generally and women's position in retail management specifically. In so doing, it introduces some of the earlier work of Broadbridge before going on to consider in Chapter five the six presented papers for this thesis.

## **CHAPTER 4 : EMPLOYMENT IN RETAILING**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapters indicated that men's dominance in organisations has a long history and can be traced back to pre-capitalist times where the traditional division of labour placed men in work and women in the home. In this chapter as complete a picture as possible of the historical positioning of employment in the UK retail sector is provided. This provides a setting to help understand some of the current practices ongoing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is followed by a brief overview of the major developments within UK retailing generally for readers who are less familiar with its structure. The composition and characteristics of contemporary employment in UK retailing generally and retail management in particular are then mapped out. This acts as a contextual background to understanding current issues of retail management and the focus of the published works. A short introduction to the positioning of Generation Y in the market place follows as they form the next generation of retail managers. At the end of the chapter previous research by the author that has informed her current work is outlined as an introduction to the selected papers for the thesis.

### **4.2 Historical overview of UK retail employment**

#### ***4.2.1 Retail employment in the Victorian era***

Winstanley (1983) traced the historical development of retailing and Bradley (1989) showed how it has been firmly established in patterns of gender segregation. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, women might have owned shops (which Bowlby (1988) and Hall (1982) noted might have comprised a room within a house) or market stalls in their own right but they were more

likely to have aided their husbands as part of a family business. Shop keeping was considered a trade or craft and with it an apprenticeship system operated where boys were taken on to learn various aspects of the business (especially in grocery). Holcombe (1973) noted that parents were unwilling or unable to pay for girls to go through the long and expensive training required to enter the retail trade.

The restructuring of the retailing industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in response to the introduction of capitalism saw the arrival of larger shops and chain stores (Jeffreys, 1954; Hall, 1982) and brought a complex pattern of changes in the way women were employed. Bradley (1989) noted these new shops created female employment with young girls being engaged because of their sex and femininity; their glamour and appearance complemented the association of shopping and consumerism with its allure, luxury and charm. Capitalism also brought fragmentation; routinisation and specialism of the shop assistants' work (Bradley, 1989). Pre-packaging of goods superseded traditional skill requirements and made way for the growth of female employment which Benson (1978) noted was mostly unskilled. Women were preferred not only because they were regarded as being more conscientious and in tune with customer needs than men (Whitaker, 1973), but importantly they could also be paid much lower wages (Holcombe, 1973). Caplow (1954) also attributed the growth of women sales assistants to the fact that the vast majority of shoppers were women (even today women influence a high proportion of customers' purchasing decisions [Skillsmart Retailer, 2010a]). As such, the proportion of women shop assistants grew from 19% in 1861 to 31% by 1911 (Bradley, 1989). Women did not replace men however but entered in certain capacities which were very different from the skilled apprenticeship jobs. Where long and expensive training was necessary, few women were found. As Holcombe (1973:107) stated:

‘Women shop assistants were concentrated in those trades where no great degree of training was necessary, where the wage bill was highly important to the shopkeeper, where the work was considered light and suitable for them, and where the customers were chiefly women’.

Retailing was also seen as a preferable job to the alternatives for the young women themselves at the time; a certain respectability was regarded with retail work (Holcombe, 1973). The reader is not to be confused that the lives of shop assistants were glamorous themselves. In fact, they were tightly controlled and were subjected to poor working conditions. Furthermore, many lived on the premises in poor and often squalid conditions (Bondfield, 1899; Whitaker, 1973; Holcombe, 1973).

#### ***4.2.2 Twentieth century retail employment and the growth of sex segregation***

The First World War saw women, out of necessity, undertaking men’s jobs in retailing (Bradley, 1989) and some remained in these jobs after the war (Sharpe, 1976). Freathy (1993) also noted women’s participation in retailing increased after World War One. Williams (1994) reported that after World War One in Sainsbury most women were either paid off or given jobs in the new grocery departments, noting that few women kept their wartime seniority. However, she did note two women managers who had been demoted to saleswoman after the war were later appointed as managers of other stores (interestingly, Ognjenovic (1979) noted that Sainsbury had no female managers at the end of the 1970s). Men could not prevent the employment of women because they were a cheap source of labour for capitalism. However, because of their organising capacity (acquired via the apprenticeship system in the pre-industrial era), men did have the power to restrict women to a few occupations. The retail union at the time, National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, reported that there was a ‘fairly clear line of demarcation

between men's and women's work' (Bradley, 1989:181). Most supervisors were men and men prevailed in jobs where skill and knowledge were required. So men had the power and authority to define what skills and knowledge were socially acceptable. As Alexander (1976) further argued, few women's skills had any scarcity value or socially recognised status.

Men continued to work in areas which could be defined as having a craft element (Smith, 1982). For example, the way that grocery retailing was constructed still required a seven year apprenticeship which helped to keep it as a male preserve. McCulloch Thew (1985) illustrated the dominance of male power in her account of how she became the first woman assistant in her local co-operative store in the 1930s. She described how men fiercely resented her presence, regarding it as a threat to their skill and status. They argued that grocery was a skilled job and therefore a man's job and could not be done by women; as a consequence they made her job as unpleasant as they could. Over time this changed and Bradley (1989) noted how women were found in the new supermarket jobs which had been subjected to the deskilling process and could be described as assembly line type jobs - such as shelf fillers, cashiers and store clerks. Similarly, White Berheide (1998: 247) argued 'Self-service has deskilled sales work by reducing salespeople to stock handlers and cashiers who need relatively little product knowledge and few selling skills'.

Reskin (1988) criticised occupational integration as an illusion, and rather argued men and women's jobs were highly segregated. She also recognised that changes in work content (usually involving a form of de-skilling) enabled the influx of women and this had certainly been the case of the retail sector. Scott and Tully (1975) added that women were segregated into jobs that were almost exclusively performed by women. This saw how capitalism and male power upheld horizontal and vertical sex segregation in retailing, a feature that still

persists today. As Levinson and Levinson (1996) argued, when women comprise 70% of a given occupation, it is defined as 'women's work'; when they comprise 20% or less, the occupation is regarded as men's work and women have yet to prove themselves in those occupations. Caplow (1954: 240) also noted: 'In sum, it may be said that the main channels of vertical mobility in organized employment are not open to women.'

Past history has shown that even when examining the same occupation, sex segregation occurs and men are often regarded as more prestigious. In retailing, women were drawn into certain sectors and departments, often according to the predominance of the sex of the customer and the nature of the product being sold. Caplow (1954: 232) observed:

'It is probable that there are more women than men directly engaged in retail sales, and that their number is increasing faster. The prevailing pattern is that salesmen serve male customers, and saleswomen serve female customers. Where the customers are mixed in gender, the sales force follows the majority. An exception is made for very heavy or very valuable commodities, which are commonly sold by men. A whole set of folkways is developed on the basis of these principles. Thus, in a normally organized department store, there will be men in the sports-goods department, women to sell curtains and dishware, men to sell hardware, women to sell books, but men to sell wedding silver and furniture.'

Similar patterns were found by Broadbridge (1991) who also established that differential payment systems often operated for women and men in mixed departments, with men being rewarded by higher salaries. Game and Pringle (1983) suggested that the definition of women's and men's departments in retailing illustrated the way work is organised around gender and how gender itself is constructed at work. Broadbridge (1987:85) argued that 'in the main the division of labour within the retailing world is pronounced in respect to gender'. She further argued that the sexual division of labour by the nature of the departments was important in considering retail work because it helped to maintain the barriers between women and men over issues of pay (including commission) and job status. She attributed the

segregation of retailing by gender to dual labour market theory where the majority of women move horizontally within the industry, while the majority of men move vertically. There has been little documentation of sex segregation within the retail sectors in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century although some work was conducted in the 1980s (Broadbridge, 1987; Sparks, 1983a; Dawson *et al.*, 1987a) and 1990s (Broadbridge, 1996; Freathy and Sparks, 1995a). The next section traces the path of those few women who have moved vertically in the retail industry.

#### **4.2.3 *Women and management in retailing***

Three decades ago, Gillespie's (1977/78) study on women in department stores concluded that women did not achieve parity with men in managerial level positions. The reasoning for this was firmly related to women themselves (their aspirations were less, they were less dedicated to their jobs because of their family responsibilities, and they did not seek education comparable with that which men did). Ognjenovic (1979) also argued that there was no place for women in the long term career structure of retailing, arguing that for most women their career ladder stopped at supervisory level. However, in contrast to Gillespie (1977/78) her reasons were attributed to retail management following a traditional career model of uninterrupted work patterns and she further claimed that until the traditional division of labour between women and men altered, the chances of women reaching senior management positions were 'slim'. Nevertheless she noted, as did Game and Pringle (1983) and Broadbridge (1987), that women were beginning to move into junior management posts. In the late 1980s, traces of the old pattern of segregation persisted, with men holding the top positions in the retail hierarchy, and dominating certain departments (Distributive Trades EDC, 1985; Bradley, 1989; Broadbridge, 1987; 1991). Those women who did reach

managerial positions were usually found represented in business support functions (NEDO, 1990; Traves and Brockbank, 1995) such as personnel, marketing and buying; women had historically failed to achieve representation in the commercial and operations side of management (Ognjenovic, 1979; Broadbridge and Dawson, 1987; WH Smith, 1994). Broadbridge and Dawson (1987) referred to Scottish Census figures for 1981 and showed that 39.5% of men in retail distribution were employed in managerial positions. This compared with just 12.7% of the women working in retailing. The Distributive Trades EDC (1985), as did Bowlby (1988), also argued that retail management, particularly at the higher levels, was largely dominated by men. Official statistics are scarce but the Census of Population data for 1981 showed that women comprised 10.6% of managers in wholesale and retail distribution. Like Ognjenovic (1979), the Distributive Trades EDC (1985) explained the apparent lack of career opportunities for women in retailing owing to the employment structure and married women's family commitments. We shall see later that these two issues remain problematic today (Paper 1). Williams *et al.* (1983:114) concluded that 'it will take years to know whether women have become a prominent force in retailing at the managerial level'. Their advice to increase the representation of women at managerial levels in retailing was to communicate opportunities, provide specialised training and network.

Broadbridge (1987:152) criticised the fact that 'Retailing operates on a form of bureaucratic control, which denies there was any discrimination between the sexes. It asserts that women can make it on the same terms as men, that all will be rationally and fairly evaluated according to the same criteria'. This is based on a liberal feminist perspective of providing equal opportunities and ignores any specific problems faced by women workers by treating them as the same as men, a proposition still being debated today (Paper 2). Broadbridge and Dawson (1987) observed that the attitude to women of head office managers in retail

companies was sexist as well as short-sighted. Some retailers did not consider women to be responsible enough to manage a large retail outlet; they may become branch managers of small outlets but less frequently achieve managerial positions in head office, a finding confirmed in a later study by Broadbridge (1996a). Collins (1990) commented that Sainsbury, which were pursuing positive policies to promote female employees, had only five women store managers out of 291 (i.e. 1.7%); W H Smith had 26 women branch managers from a total of 461, (5.6%) while Tesco which were also making efforts to bring in managers, had only 60 women at senior level from a total of 75,000 employees. Like Gillespie's (1977/78) previous research, a WH Smith representative argued opportunities were there for women to progress but women did not want to take them as shop management meant long and demanding hours and some people do not want that commitment (Collins, 1990). Dawson *et al.* (1987a: 2) reviewed the 20 largest UK retail companies and found only three (1.5%) of the 204 board members were women. This led them to comment that there was 'little evidence of real commitment to the concept of female, and hence consumer, representation on main boards of retail companies'.

Broadbridge (1987) showed that in a major UK department store, horizontal and vertical segregation existed. Women comprised 64% of sales assistants but 39% of senior sales assistants. They comprised 56% of first line supervisors; 69% of second line supervisors; 49% of department managers; 45% of all buyers; 36% of section managers; and 27% of divisional managers. So the higher the position in the hierarchy, the lower proportion of women was found, culminating in director level positions where no women existed. She noted that having completed management training, promotion to first and second line supervisor and assistant buyer was fairly automatic. Thereafter, advancement was extremely difficult and many employees could remain as second line supervisors for many years with

little opportunity for further advancement. It was noteworthy that it was at this position that women dominated; thereafter men dominated the higher positions. It would seem that second line supervisor level represented the glass ceiling for many women. Broadbridge (1987) observed that many women left the company at that stage as they realised that they had no future opportunities.

Broadbridge (1987) noted that the company carefully selected a certain calibre of staff for their management training scheme. Trainees were expected to demonstrate their loyalty to the firm in every respect and devote much of their own time to the company. Competition was so fierce for management positions that many staff would not retaliate for fear of reprisal and damaging their career prospects. Moreover informal practices were abound and remained underground. For example, management provided certain bonuses and privileges to some staff on the understanding that they kept this secret from others. The extent to which this occurred could not be fully determined but various instances were recounted during interviews, and it certainly showed how informal practices within organisations were used to divide and rule the workforce, benefiting some employees at the expense of others. Given that women have been regarded as less assertive and confident than men, one might expect that this behaviour particularly disadvantaged women, and the tales recounted very much supported this view. Broadbridge's (1987) findings for the gender distribution of the retail hierarchy for this major department store reflected those of Williams *et al.* (1983) in the late 1970s that women had increased their managerial positions in retailing but that they had not achieved parity with men in those positions.

Relatively little else is known about the gender composition of retail management around this time. During the 1980s and 1990s Sparks (1981, 1982, 1983a; 1983b; 1984, 1987, 1991,

1992a) undertook research into retail employment in superstores, but the main focus of his research was on shop floor staff. Moreover, much of his research provided aggregated data rather than any specific gender analysis (apart from to delineate those in full-time and part-time positions). However, he noted the importance of women workers to retailing particularly in part-time non managerial positions (women comprised 71.4% of the superstore workforce). Little comment was made by him on the gender composition of the managerial workforce although some of the statistics provided indicated that women were far less likely than men to be in managerial positions [at around 13%] or as management trainees [21%] (Sparks, 1982; 1983a; 1983b; 1991). In an article by Dawson *et al.* (1987a) men were shown to comprise 84% of the managerial workforce and the authors commented that management trainees were also likely to be men, while women obtained promotion only as far as supervisory levels, although as a whole women comprised 72% of the total superstore workforce. Freathy (1993: 68) in examining superstore labour markets commented that ‘Women workers are disproportionately represented in the secondary sector’, and ‘store managers and their deputies are more likely to be male and to be employed full-time’ (Freathy, 1993: 71). He noted just two (12%) of the 17 superstores had a woman manager and only four stores (24%) had a woman deputy store manager. Just four stores were large enough to warrant a personnel department, and here (in line with traditional gender segregated functions) six of the seven officers were women. Nevertheless, supervisor positions in all of the food stores were women while they comprised 72% of the non-food superstore supervisors. Freathy and Sparks (1994a) also commented that a random sample of 481 food superstores showed 97.5% of store managers were men. This gender bias was also noticed at the deputy and assistant store manager levels. Although the majority of research at this time had been with shop floor workers, Freathy and Sparks (1995a) paid more attention to managers and their views on Sunday trading. In so doing, they reported that men (who

were likely to be married and under the age of 30) comprised 82% and 83% of grocery and DIY store managers respectively. This previous work conducted on superstore employees in the 1980s and 1990s suggested that supervisor positions represent the glass ceiling for most women superstore employees. In the next sections we explore a more contemporary view of UK retail employment.

### **4.3 Contemporary view of UK retail employment**

Marchington (1996) criticised retail texts both in UK and US as making only passing reference to employment and HRM issues, else devoting just a chapter to them. A review of the specialist retail journals (*Journal of Retailing*, *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, *Journal of Retail and Consumer Studies*) over the last few decades has shown that compared to other topic areas, retail employment issues were one of the least considered aspects of retail research. Attention grew during the 1980s and 1990s (particularly within the Institute for Retail Studies at the University of Stirling) although, as stated above, much of this work was concerned with the position of shop floor workers rather than management. The focus of attention on UK retail employment during this century has shifted somewhat, with more emphasis being placed on management issues than previously although the volume of papers on retail employment has not changed significantly. Appendix 2 illustrates the work undertaken on retail employment issues in the UK over the last three decades and broadly categorises it by topic area and employment type. Various themes are found in the published papers. For example, they may have concentrated on particular sectors of retailing such as superstore employment or charity shop employment issues. Career issues and training and development have been the focus of a variety of authors. Employee perceptions

and satisfaction have also been captured. Business related issues such as culture change, customer care, flexibility, pay issues, performance issues, technology, and diversity issues have received growing attention in 2000s. Before concentrating on the characteristics of UK retailing this century, a very brief comment on the structure of UK retailing is provided to set a context with which to understand the developments in retail employment.

#### ***4.3.1 Contemporary trends in retailing***

Retailing has undergone further structural change since 1945 and the retail sector now has some of the most innovative and successful companies throughout the world. The changes which have been in response to the macro and micro environment (Burt and Sparks, 2003) have created employment opportunities in the number, nature and skill level of jobs in this labour intensive industry (although over time some labour has been substituted by technology). The multiplicity and complexity of the forces that have transformed retail employment today can be attributed to changes in technology (e.g. EPoS, eftpos, electronic shopping), to the environment (e.g. changing customer demands and needs, legislative changes, social and economic changes, the changing nature of the city), the market (e.g. internationalisation, concentration, fierce competition) and the organisation (e.g. operating scale, management restructuring and downsizing, sub-contracting, location, centralisation of decision making, polarisation of workforce). All such developments within retailing and the wider economy impact on the composition and use of employment in retailing. For example, Freathy and Sparks (1994a) explained that managers in the food sector had seen a number of changes to their methods of working because of technological advances. In particular, they noted how control and decision making had been moved to head office, although the individual store manager was still responsible for meeting targets. Categorising retail

changes into business organisation changes and operational changes, they outlined the various employment implications that ensued, for example, in the number and type of workers (see Freathy and Sparks, 1995a, Table 1 for further details).

More recently, a special issue of the *International Review of Retail Distribution and Consumer Research* to commemorate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary highlighted some of the major changes that have occurred during this time period, including the increased globalisation of retailing. Dawson and Sparks (2010) concluded that globally retailing and consumer shopping patterns show both commonalities and divergence, although certain trends fluctuate according to country. Some retail markets have undergone rapid transformation over the last 20 years; such is the case of China (Uncles, 2010). Others, such as Latin America, are in transition (D'Andrea, 2010). More mature markets have seen specific developments. For example, a major trend in the US over this time period has been the dominance of value retailers (Serpken and Tigert, 2010). Growing internationalisation, the evolution of the retailer as a brand, the emergence of new product and service markets and the competitive dimension of time in different kinds of retail operations have been marked trends within Europe (Burt, 2010). Guy (2010) noted the extent and clustering of out-of-centre UK retail developments with the more leisure focused retailing remaining in the city centre, a trend that is indicative of many UK cities. A major similarity across retailing globally is the pace and change with which retailing develops. So we see that retailing is at the forefront of many technological and other innovative advancements in the market place and these have accompanying ongoing possibilities for the structure and use of employment in the UK (managerial and non managerial).

### **4.3.2 Official UK retail employment statistics**

Over the years figures on employment in retailing have been gathered by various Government bodies but because of differing methods of data collection, the statistics presented by different sources vary (although the trends are similar). Most data are based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) of economic activities, which is the classification system used to provide an industrial breakdown for UK official statistics. First introduced into the UK in 1948, this classification was revised in 1968, 1980, 1992, 2003 and 2007. The 1992 and 2003 Standard Industrial Classifications both saw some major changes in the way retailing and wholesaling data were collected and presented. Therefore, they are neither strictly comparable to each other nor the previous classifications. Retail statistics are also published by the Census data (e.g. self employment, hours worked, age), but because of when they are collected (every ten years) and published, they can only be treated as approximations of the current picture (particularly at 2010). Moreover, detailed statistics relating to the gender composition of the retail labour market by occupational grouping are scant and may be published on an ad hoc basis only. For example, Table 4.1 was not available in the latest (2009) Annual Business Inquiry. Thus, providing comparative data over time is not always possible. Despite the limitations in gathering and comparing official statistical data on retail employment, however, it is possible to comment on the basic labour trends in the industry and provide a partial understanding of the gender composition of the retail labour market, which helps contextualise an understanding of the six published papers.

### **4.3.3 *Characteristics of retail employment***

In December 2009 there were 2.920 million people employed in retailing (Office for National Statistics, 2010e), making it the largest private sector employer in the UK (World of Work, 2010). This represents ten per cent of the total number of people employed in all industries and services in the United Kingdom. This figure excludes, however, those people in self-employment, unpaid family workers, and those people who for whatever reason are not included within the official retail statistics. These will include those areas of work that are now subcontracted out by many retail companies, such as cleaning, catering and security jobs as well as some professional services such as accounting and HR. It also includes those workers who are employed by concessions and so not included on the official payroll of the retail company. So it is apparent that employment in retailing is large and economically crucial to the UK as it is in other countries. Broadbridge (2010a) [Paper 4, Table 1] lists the number of people employed by the FTSE retail companies, although note that some of these figures include the number of employees across their worldwide operations (rather than just UK figures). Nevertheless, figures gathered from individual company websites and annual reports demonstrate that some multiple retail companies are responsible for employing a large number of employees within the UK. The grocery sector employs the largest numbers: Tesco reports employing 287,669 in the UK, while Sainsbury and Asda each employ around 150,000. Variety stores also account for many employees: Marks and Spencer employs 71,000; the John Lewis Partnership, 70,000 and Argos, 51,000. Many other multiple companies (including Arcadia, Kingfisher, B&Q, DSG, Debenhams, New Look, Superdrug and Lloyds pharmacy) employ between 15,000 and 50,000 people in their UK operations.

Some characteristics of retail employment were described by Broadbridge (2003a).

Noticeably, many of the trends have not changed significantly since Backman's (1957) research where he concluded that the retail trade employed a significant proportion of women and youths, while it was characterised by a large amount of seasonal and part-time employment and low unionisation. The trends in retailing today can be characterised by:

- a rise in absolute employment figures (since the mid 1990s) although an overall decrease in full-time equivalent figures. The current available figures show a small decline in overall numbers over the last couple of years, most probably because of the recession.
- an overall reduction in self-employment in retailing since the 1950s.
- big companies being big employers.
- a rapid rise in women working in retailing between the mid 1950s and 1982 (Sparks, 1982). Since 1982 women employees have outnumbered men in a ratio of 2:1.
- an aging workforce although it is still a comparatively youthful industry at managerial levels.
- a higher proportion of ethnic minorities (11%) being employed in retail than the economy as a whole (8%) (Skillsmap Retail, 2010b). Given that the total official figures exclude independent shopkeepers, retailing is probably an even more important source of employment for ethnic minorities than official statistics suggest.
- part-time working being important in retail and accounting for 57.8% (Office for National Statistics, 2010e). Part-time working is also synonymous with the employment of women workers; two thirds of women employed in retailing work part-time (68.1%) compared with 41.3% of men (Office for National Statistics, 2010e). Nevertheless, the growth of men working part-time has been substantial since

such statistics were first gathered in 1985, and accounts for many students in this kind of employment. It is in non managerial positions where opportunities for part-time working are mostly found.

- a high labour turnover industry, particularly at non management levels. Official figures are not available owing to individual retail companies' sensitivity in disclosing publicly such figures.
- low unionisation brought about by characteristics that mimic the retail trade (Cully and Woodland, 1998) such as part-time work, short-term contractual work, a high proportion of women workers and students, together with the fragmentation of branches.
- a low paid industry although in practice there is a wide range of pay levels which vary according to the type of store, location and type of job performed. Many sales assistants earn the minimum wage which at October 2010 was £5.93 per hour for those aged 22 and over (Low Pay Commission, 2010). At board level, salaries can be in excess of seven figure sums. For example, Sir Terry Leahy, CEO of Tesco earned in excess of £5.2 million in salary and bonuses in 2009 (Wray, 2010). Furthermore, New Earnings Survey data consistently showed that women sales assistants earned less than men and received less commission and overtime payments than men.
- a negative perception of retailing as a career although figures were slightly more encouraging in 2007 (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007) than 2003 (Broadbridge, 2003b; 2003c). However, many students continue to associate a future career in retailing with their student employment experience and do not fully appreciate the career opportunities the industry holds at managerial levels.

**Table 4.1: Percentage of women and men in various retail sectors**

	All men	All women	Total	% male	% female
<b>Total Retail trade (excluding motor vehicles)</b>	<b>1,065</b>	<b>1,697.6</b>	<b>2,763</b>	<b>38.55</b>	<b>61.45</b>
Retail: pharmaceutical goods etc	28.8	80.3	109.1	26.40	73.60
Retail sale of textiles	4.2	11.1	15.4	27.27	72.08
Dispensing chemists	19.8	49.3	69.2	28.61	71.24
Other retail: non-specialised stores	67.1	159.0	226.1	29.68	70.32
Retail sale: second-hand goods in stores	7.5	16.8	24.3	30.86	69.14
Retail sale of books/newspapers etc	23.4	44.6	67.9	34.46	65.68
Retail: food, etc in specialised stores	56.0	97.3	153.3	36.53	63.47
Other: new goods in specialised stores	428.9	724.2	1,153	37.19	62.80
Other retail sale of food/beverages etc	7.8	12.8	20.6	37.86	62.14
Retail sale of furniture etc	44.9	67.3	112.2	40.02	59.98
Retail sale of fruit and vegetables	5.5	7.9	13.3	41.35	59.40
Retail sale in non-specialised stores	496.4	725.3	1,222	40.63	59.37
Retail sale of tobacco products	4.1	5.9	10.0	41.00	59.00
Retail sale of fish/crustaceans/molluscs	1.2	1.7	2.9	41.38	58.62
Retail sale of meat and meat products	11.7	16.3	27.9	41.94	58.42
Retail sale via stalls and markets	2.0	2.8	4.8	41.67	58.33
Retail sale of alcoholic/other beverages	12.5	17.1	29.6	42.23	57.77
Retail: non-specialised food stores etc	429.2	566.3	995.5	43.11	56.89
Other retail sale: specialised stores	162.7	206.0	368.7	44.13	55.87
Repair	5.3	6.3	11.6	45.69	54.31
Retail sale via mail order houses	23.2	27.0	50.2	46.22	53.78
Retail sale not in stores	37.4	43.3	80.7	46.34	53.66
Retail sale of medical/orthopaedic goods	2.7	3.0	5.6	48.21	53.57
Other non-store retail sale	12.2	13.5	25.7	47.47	52.53
Repair of electrical household goods	2.4	2.5	4.9	48.98	51.02
Repair of personal and household goods	10.0	10.3	20.3	49.26	50.74
Repair of watches, clocks and jewellery	0.5	0.5	1.0	50.00	50.00
Retail sale of hardware/paints/glass	51.4	46.9	98.3	52.29	47.71
Retail sale: electrical household goods	39.5	25.6	65.1	60.68	39.32
Repair of boots/shoes etc	1.9	1.0	2.9	65.52	34.48

As was the case historically, women continue to be crowded into specific sectors and occupation types within the industry. Several authors have located arguments for women's and men's participation in retailing in labour market segmentation (Broadbridge, 1987; Robinson, 1993; Freathy, 1993). Current statistical evidence suggests that sex segregation still abounds, and Table 4.1 provides the latest available official statistics on the distribution

of women and men in various retail sectors. This shows that women particularly dominate the retailing of cosmetics and toiletries, clothing, footwear, pharmaceutical and chemists, non specialised stores and second hand goods retailing while men predominate the electrical, hardware, medical/orthopedic, retail repair and non store retailing sectors.

Moreover, much research has indicated that women, despite their numerical dominance in the retail industry, are disproportionately over-represented within the lowest grades of retailing (e.g. Mackie and Pattullo; 1977; Ognjenovic, 1979; Lockwood and Knowles, 1984; Craig and Wilkinson, 1985; Clutterbuck and Devine, 1987; Dawson *et al.*, 1987a; Powell, 1988; Jackson and Hirsh, 1991; Sparks, 1991; Freathy, 1993; Broadbridge, 1995, 1996a). They comprise the majority of front line service workers and, to date, they have been under-represented in managerial positions, particularly senior positions.

#### **4.4 Gender and retail management employment**

The role of gender in the career development and associated activities of retail managers is a relatively underdeveloped area outside the author's own interests. Some research occurred during the mid 1990s and 2000s (see Appendix 2), including the work of two main groups of authors: Brockbank, Airey, Tomlinson and Traves, and Maxwell and Ogden (e.g. Brockbank and Airey, 1994a; 1994b; Brockbank and Traves, 1995; Traves *et al.*, 1997; Tomlinson *et al.*, 1997; Maxwell and Ogden, 2006; Ogden and Maxwell, 2006; Maxwell *et al.*, 2007) but little more has been conducted in this area in the UK. Several studies have examined gender in a variety of UK industries, retailing being one of them, but these tend not to report detailed results by individual industrial sector (e.g. Alban-Metcalf, 1984; NEDO, 1990; Cockburn, 1991; Hammond and Holton, 1991; Coe, 1992; Priola and Brannen, 2009).

Section 4.3.2 noted that official retail employment statistics in general are not easy to obtain, and this is particularly the case when trying to ascertain the gender composition at different managerial levels (thus the reliance on ad hoc statistics gathered from previous research studies such as Broadbridge, 1987; 1996a; Freathy and Sparks, 1994a; 1995a) although these two latter papers merely included a sentence on the gender distribution at management level. The exception is the composition of FTSE listed retail companies where companies are obliged to report the composition of their boards (see Paper 4 for more detail on these statistics). However, the composition of women and men at junior, middle and senior levels of the retail managerial hierarchy is less transparent, and the limited official statistics available provide a composite figure for all levels of managerial jobs by gender. Obtaining such figures from individual retail companies remains problematic, which might lead to a pessimistic assumption that the gender composition in retail management is not improving to any great extent. The remainder of this chapter draws more heavily on primary research conducted by the author. Appendix 1 provided an overview of the broad area of work by Broadbridge. In the remaining sections, some of the works that provide supplementary information to accompany the published works presented for the thesis are expanded upon.

#### ***4.4.1 Official management employment statistics***

Table 4.2 shows the latest available official statistics on the gender composition of managerial level positions in the various sectors of the UK economy. From Table 4.2 we see that women comprise 49.3% of the total workforce and 36.3% of all managers and senior officials in the UK in 2010 (excluding the self-employed). The corresponding percentage for women managers in the over-arching category 'distribution, storage and retail' is 31.0%. Breaking this category down further, the sample size of women is too small for reliable

estimates to be made for their positions as ‘transport and distribution managers’ and ‘storage and warehouse operators’, while they comprise 39.6% of ‘retail and wholesale managers’. So it is only the latter category where women in retailing match the national average for women in management. Although previous research (Davidson, 1991; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Schein and Davidson, 1993; Hammond and Holton, 1994; Schein, 2001; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003) suggested that retailing is an occupation that is more likely to employ women managers, it is evident that retailing today is very close to the average of all women managers and senior officials in the UK. The 1981 Census data stated women comprised 10.6% of all ‘managers in wholesale and retail distribution’. Although these two datasets are not strictly comparable, they do suggest that some gains have been made by women in retail managerial positions over the time period. For example, according to Kanter’s (1977) classifications, they have moved from token positions in ‘skewed groups’ to positions in ‘tilted groups’ where differences are less exaggerated. More detailed retail managerial statistics by gender are not generally available, thus making a more complete understanding difficult to decipher. However, some ‘unofficial’ retail statistics at company level have been obtained by the author and these are outlined below.

#### ***4.4.2 Company level retail management statistics***

A report examining the Opportunity 2000 issue within the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) found that women comprised 30% of managers (17% of middle managers: 6% of senior managers). However, no women were on the trading committee, nor were they employed as general managers (i.e. senior management positions). With regard to where women managers were employed, 53% were in marketing; 43% in buying; 25% in operations; 26% in non-food; 20% in IT; 19% in supply chain; 4% retail development.

Moreover, at this time they were paid less than men, comprising 79% of the lowest salary bands and 6% of the highest (CWS, 1998). The report concluded that CWS's representation of managerial women compared unfavourably against Sainsbury and Tesco where there were more women in middle and senior management positions. All these findings confirmed previous research that showed horizontal and vertical sex segregation to exist in retailing, along with gender pay differentials.

**Table 4.2: Gender composition of managerial positions in the UK**

Quarter 2 (Apr - Jun) 2010	Total in employment	Women in employment	% Women
Standard Occupational Classification (SOC 2000):	Total	Total	%
Total employees (thousands)	24,700	12,183	49.3%
Managers and Senior Officials	3,749	1,361	36.3%
<b>Managers in Distribution, Storage &amp; Retail</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>31.0%</b>
Transport and distribution managers	72	*	*
Storage and warehouse managers	68	*	*
<b>    Retail and wholesale managers</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>39.6%</b>
Corporate Managers & Senior Officials	130	43	33.1%
Production Managers	558	72	12.9%
Functional Managers	1,251	424	33.9%
Quality and Customer Care Managers	128	63	49.2%
Financial Institution & Office Managers	365	214	58.6%
Protective Service Officers	71	*	*
Health and Social Services Managers	212	163	76.9%
Managers in Farming Horticulture, Forestry etc	23	*	*
Managers in Hospitality and Leisure	243	117	48.1%
Managers in Other Service Industries	310	108	34.8%

\* Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2010b (based on Labour Force Survey)

Broadbridge (1996a) was given access to figures for a large UK FTSE listed retailer (for reasons of anonymity referred to here as *High Street Stores*). She noted that at the time the company was a member of the Opportunity 2000 campaign (the government initiative whereby companies committed themselves to increasing the quality and quantity of women's participation in the workforce by the year 2000). Her analysis of the figures showed that gender segregation existed across the various job categories. The branch level statistics for the entire company showed that women comprised three quarters of the workforce, confirming the general trend that retailing is an industry closely associated with the employment of women. Further analysis, however, showed that women predominated in non-managerial branch level posts. For example, 85% of sales assistant staff were women (many of whom worked part time).

On first inspection, the number of women and men employed in managerial branch positions were proportionately equal, which looks favourable when companies present figures collectively (as with official statistics). However closer inspection showed that women outnumbered men at junior managerial positions (deputy department manager and department manager) by two to one. The middle and senior managerial posts were found to be dominated by men: the higher the position in the occupational hierarchy, the lower the percentage of women was found to be represented in these posts. Women occupied only 11% of branch manager positions and 4% of area management positions. Similar trends were found for head office positions where men were numerically dominant at managerial level (75%). Moreover, all the directors were men and only one senior management post (in personnel) was held by a woman.

Comparative figures were gathered for *High Street Stores* for the year 2000. Some similar trends as before were apparent. Of the total branch level staff, women comprised 73.8% of the workforce. They continued to dominate the non-managerial positions and represented 82% of all sales assistants. Three quarters of supervisors (74.9%) were women. However, at branch manager level, some change from the mid 1990s position was observed. Almost a quarter (24%) of women now occupied these positions, which might have been explained by the company's membership of the Opportunity 2000 campaign. However, in line with Broadbridge and Dawson's (1987) and Broadbridge's (1996a) findings, further analysis showed that these women were over-represented as managers in the smallest stores (stores were then divided into six categories). Their representation in larger stores (which could be used as a springboard to other, more senior level positions) progressively decreased to a level whereby less than 5% of the managers of the three largest store categories were women.

Some statistics were gathered for one trading element of *High Street Stores* in 2010 so that the relative position of women and men could be examined. The statistics are not strictly comparable as figures were obtained for only one part of the business which comprises 18 stores with an annual turnover of £175 million. Table 4.3 shows these statistics. Women comprised 11% of the branch positions, managing the 5<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> best performing stores. Women accounted for 44% of the assistant manager positions; 31% of the supervisory positions; and 50% of the sales staff. While an assessment over time needs to be treated with some caution owing to the figures not being strictly comparable, Table 4.3 presents a dismal and disappointing picture of the gender distribution at various levels of *High Street Stores* in 2010, especially when it is considered that this company was a founding member of the Opportunity 2000 campaign, and so might be expected to be at the forefront of change. It suggests that women have not become a 'prominent force' in retailing at the managerial level

**Table 4.3 : Percentage of women in High Street Stores 2010 (ranked by £ turnover)**

<b>High Street Stores</b>	<b>Store Managers % women</b>	<b>Assistant Managers % women</b>	<b>Supervisors % women</b>	<b>Sales Assistants % women</b>	<b>Total store numbers % women</b>
Store 1	0	100	33	47	46
Store 2	0	100	50	54	54
Store 3	0	100	20	56	55
Store 4	0	0	20	45	43
Store 5	100	100	40	52	53
Store 6	0	0	20	44	42
Store 7	0	0	50	47	46
Store 8	0	0	20	42	40
Store 9	0	0	25	46	44
Store 10	0	0	0	52	48
Store 11	0	100	0	56	50
Store 12	0	0	100	63	55
Store 13	0	100	100	57	60
Store 14	0	0	100	57	50
Store 15	0	0	0	80	50
Store 16	100	100	100	57	70
Store 17	0	100	0	67	56
Store 18	0	0	0	50	29
Average % women in occupational category	11	44	31	50	48

Source: Company Data, 2010

(Williams *et.al.*, 1983); rather their numerical presence has slipped back to that in 1996, and they apparently face the glass ceiling once at assistant manager level.

Gender statistics at individual company level remain difficult to obtain. Requests for statistics (and promising confidentiality) were made to Tesco and the Co-op in 2010, both of which are affiliated with Opportunity Now. In both instances the request was declined on the

grounds that these data remained confidential to the company. However, Tesco's website does state under the heading 'Inclusion' that of Tesco employees in the UK, 56% are female, and women comprise 17% of store managers. They also state that they are continually developing more women to enter management roles (Tesco, 2010). Of other websites visited, few mention specific targets although Kingfisher (2010) report that across the group women accounted for 41% of total employees and 29% of managers in 2009/10.

Sainsbury (which is one of two champion retail companies of Opportunity Now), stated in its 2009 annual report that it aimed to have (only) 20% of women store managers by 2011, despite declaring that over 50% of its total workforce were women. Several direct approaches by the author were made to the company (again assuring anonymity) to obtain some general statistics on the gender composition of their managerial workforce but these were not made available. However, a search of individual store websites which publish the name of each individual store manager, found that in August 2010 around 10% of Sainsbury's 537 supermarket managers were women. Of these supermarkets, women accounted for 4.5% of managers of the largest branches (i.e. those with sales areas of over 50,000 sq. ft.). This calculation of 10% excludes Sainsbury's 335 local convenience stores which are much smaller in size (and so might employ proportionately more women managers), and any names that indicate any ambiguity over gender (e.g. Sam, Chris, Leigh/Lee).

Anecdotal evidence from retail managers themselves implies that the kind of gender proportions in managerial positions found for Sainsbury's and *High Street Stores* in 2010 are replicated in other large UK retail companies. The very fact that they are not freely available suggests slow progress and little change by individual retail companies. Another difficulty is

that when statistics are available, they are usually reported as an aggregated management figure (e.g. Tesco and Kingfisher above). This can camouflage that it is men who occupy the highest positions at each management level and so are better paid and positioned to make linear progress. Individual companies can make bold statements about diversity issues and the future gender balance in management but they do not, or will not, disclose their current positions which remains discouraging.

At board level, where FTSE companies are required to state their composition, women comprise 11.0% of executive and non-executive directors of all FTSE listed retail companies (Broadbridge, 2010a, Paper 4). This represents some improvement on Dawson *et al*'s (1987a) figure of 1.5%, but little improvement over Thomas's (2001) findings of 10% (although more encouraging, the proportion of women executive directors has risen from 3.8% in 1997 [Thomas, 2001] to 10.8% in 2010 [Broadbridge, 2010a]). From the 2010 Female FTSE (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2010) seven retail companies were in the top FTSE 100 companies. Of the 16 companies with female executive directors, three were retailers (Next, Burberry and Marks and Spencer). Of the retail companies from the FTSE 250, only one company (Debenhams) had at least 20% women directors against five with no women directors (Mothercare, Halfords, Sports Direct International, JD Sports, Kesa). Women's representation at the most senior levels of retailing was visually depicted in Figure 1.1.

Visual communications can be interpreted in different ways. For example, Figure 1.1 shows one of two things. Either the dominance of men on Tesco's main board is the main thing to catch the viewer's eye. Else, the women stand out in the picture because of their difference. Kanter (1980) described the Tale of Os among the Xs. Women (and other minority groups) stand out for their 'O'ness and this can be interpreted in positive or negative ways. However, as Eagly *et al.*, (1995), Ryan and Haslam (2005) and Kanter (1980) herself noted, women in

such positions are very much under close scrutiny and open to negative criticism, blame and humiliation. Figure 1.1 was deliberately chosen as Tesco's board is normalised with regard to gender (Erkut *et al.*, 2008). It represents one of only four FTSE 350 retail companies in 2010 to have a maximum of three women on their board (the other companies being Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury and Burberry). For all other retail companies, the visibility of women directors is even less. The limited voice of women in the highest positions of retail companies was reinforced by an advertisement for the 20<sup>th</sup> Retail Week Annual Conference to be held in 2011 (Figure 1.2). It depicts photographs of the 18 CEOs who comprise their Advisory Board and who will steer the content for the conference. It is a powerful image and, together with the combination of official and company level statistics, confirms that power and control of UK large retail companies firmly remain a male preserve. In relation to Williams *et al.*'s (1983) earlier comment (p 73) that it will take years to know whether women have become a prominent force in retailing at the managerial level, it can be argued that women are more prominent at the junior and middle levels of retail management than they were in the 1980s. However, this is not the case at the more senior levels and the picture for senior women executives remains bleak (Broadbridge, 2010a, Paper 4). Following Simpson (1998), it is reasonable to argue from the evidence available that the glass ceiling has been raised to more senior levels in the retail industry than was the case in the early to mid 1980s.

#### **4.4.3 *Dominant characteristics of retail management***

Chapter three noted the relative importance attached by organisations to agentic over communal types of behaviour. With regard to retailing, companies require people in key positions who can deliver key measurable 'hard' objectives and key performance indicators

(i.e. key performance indicators (KPIs) such as sales targets etc). Thus agentic behaviour and transactional styles of leadership have traditionally been sought for management positions, and the dominant management style has been characterised by task orientation, competition, separation, self assertion and control. Those characteristics associated with male managers such as competitive, aggressive, dominant and achievement oriented behaviour were believed to be ideally suited to this role (Broadbridge, 1998). During the 1990s restructuring processes, which saw productivity gains met by management reorganisation and technological developments, companies began to require more of their key people and emphasis was placed on the 'softer' skills of delivering high morale, customer care and employee care as a means of achieving competitive advantage. This people centered approach emphasising communication skills draws on communal behaviours and transformational leadership styles, and is associated with stereotypical feminine qualities (Bem, 1974; Rosener, 1990; Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Contemporary descriptions of managers continue to include the stereotypical masculine qualities but also “allow” for some stereotypical feminine qualities such as being helpful and understanding, and qualities considered being more gender neutral like displaying intelligence and dedication (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Women have been considered to bring special qualities and behaviours to retail management positions, including a different management style and balance, strong interpersonal skills, people qualities and a more caring, understanding and empathetic approach; a more intuitive and sensitive perspective to management; a better understanding of female staff needs and consumer issues (Brockbank and Airey, 1994b; Brockbank and Traves, 1995; Broadbridge, 1998; 2007; Foust-Cummins, 2008; British Retail Consortium, 2010). Note how women are said to bring special qualities to the retail management role. This surely reinforces the proposition that the traditional retail

management role is characterised around masculine qualities and behaviours and so conforms to an ideal of ‘think manager, think male’ (Schein and Davidson, 1993). For example, Domino Consultancy (2001) reported that the management style within the Co-operative Group was generally autocratic and controlling and incorporated a blame culture. Broadbridge (1998) was skeptical whether acknowledgement of stereotypical feminine qualities would result in more women being appointed to senior management positions, as men had the power and were able to resist any such plans on the grounds that they constituted a threat to their own career prospects and identities; they would argue that appointing women to senior positions was regarded as a risk in uncertain climates. Indeed, successful executives are considered to continue to possess and exhibit high amounts of traditional masculine qualities and agentic behaviour over any other kind of traits (Schein *et.al.*, 1996; Powell *et.al.*, 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2007).

#### **4.4.4 Generation Y managers**

It is worth mentioning the next generation of managers that are entering the labour force and comment on their characteristics and economic situation. In relation to the economic and social climate, the traditional linear career path has been accompanied by more multidirectional career paths (Chapter two). King (2003) described the ‘new’ career as consisting of more lateral moves and employer changes. The latest demographic group to enter the labour force is Generation Y, and these employees have unique values and belief systems (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007). This generation has been found to particularly value their work-life balance (Morton, 2002; Kerslake, 2005; Eisner 2005; Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007). Broadbridge *et al.* (2009) also found support from Generation Y students expecting a linear career path with good pay in retailing, whilst at the same time wanting a good work-life

balance, thus reflecting the notion that Generation Y 'want it all' (Martin, 2005).

Consideration needs to be given to whether these aspirations are indicative of Generation Y specifically or do they simply reflect a general naivety of young people about to embark on their career? With the negative perceptions that retailing has received relative to other sectors (Broadbridge, 2003b; 2003c), the influx of Generation Y employees into the labour market with their distinct views on work life balance issues might have been of increasing concern for retail companies to entice, recruit and retain the best retail managers in the future and this was alluded to in some of the published papers presented in this thesis. However, the recent economic downturn has dissipated this threat, especially with the prospect of the UK entering even further recession.

Retail companies in particular are predicted to have fewer graduate vacancies than in previous years (Channel 4 news, 2010). Amongst the sectors facing the biggest drop in vacancies are fast-moving consumer goods, i.e. supermarket and consumer electronic goods (which are down 45.4%), and retail which is down 31.4% (Garner, 2010). Competition for retail management jobs will thus remain as fierce as ever. There has also been speculation that retailers may start to take tentative steps back into the mergers and acquisition arena (Wright, 2010). This inevitably would lead to fewer jobs, particularly at senior levels, and place even more pressure on those in (and aspiring to) senior management positions. Rather than be concerned with diversity issues, such pressures are likely to ensure that the power of those at the top are protected. While senior women were significantly more likely to recognise the barriers that management restructuring has on their entry to senior levels (Broadbridge, 2008a) the impact that recession has on diversity issues needs to be monitored.

## **4.5 Previous work on careers by Broadbridge**

As explained in Appendix 1, during the 1990s the author undertook a questionnaire survey to investigate various aspects of retail managers' careers to date, their future aspirations and perceived facilitators and barriers. This resulted in a series of publications between 1998 and 2002. The findings of that research informed the basis of future research undertaken, and these future research projects are reported in the published works presented for this thesis. A synopsis of some of the key findings from the original research undertaken in the 1990s is reported in this section (rather than in Appendix 1) as it provides a backdrop to understanding the subsequent research projects.

### ***4.5.1 Key findings from the 1990s questionnaire***

The background literature of Broadbridge (1998) provided a brief overview of the occupational structure and gender composition in the retail industry, and outlined some of the developments taking place in the retail industry. Theoretically, it provided an overview of reasons for women's relative disadvantage to men in managerial positions. This acknowledged that many women's and men's lives and work cycles are different and this was also highlighted in various career models in Chapter two (Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; O'Neill and Bilimoria, 2005). It also revealed that organisations themselves might practice overt or covert forms of discrimination which create a glass ceiling for women. These reasons were grounded in a gender and organisational analysis which uphold male characteristics and values as the cultural norm. This in turn shapes gender relations at work, and an outline of the preceding literature that had concentrated on identifying aspects of organisational behaviour which creates problems for

managers (especially women) was presented. Against this background the analysis of the data revealed the interdependency and complexity of issues involved in the career development of retail managers. Some problems were experienced by both men and women which confirmed the validity of researching both men and women. Nevertheless, the overall findings suggested that women faced more barriers in their career development than the men. The article concluded that the reasons for a gender imbalance in retail management posts were grounded in gender and organisational analysis which upheld male values as the accepted cultural norms.

Both the women and men respondents were in agreement regarding their opinions of the most influential factors to have helped in their career progression to date. In order of importance these were stated as their attitude to work, their experience, their personal skills, and their past and present performance (Broadbridge, 1999a) and broadly relate to their personalities and acquisition of human capital. The work by Broadbridge (1998) demonstrated that many of the problems faced by women in general in the 1980s remained in various guises in retail management in the 1990s. In particular the main problems that were encountered by women retail managers (and mentioned more regularly than by the male managers) included lack of challenging assignments and lack of feedback on performance, exclusion from informal networks, absence of mentors, lack of female role models, hitting the glass ceiling, dual career-family conflicts and lack of support from male bosses. Moreover, Broadbridge (1998) found various significant differences between the women's and men's responses. Women managers were significantly less likely to state they had been given challenging work assignments, and significantly more likely to state they lacked role models, were excluded from informal networks and experienced conflicts from their dual roles in the work and family.

In response to various statements about experiences and expectations of work, men were significantly more likely than women to want to be considered for promotion and believed their organisation was committed to policies of equal career development, while at the same time believing men make better managers than women! They were also significantly more likely to perceive that they have been given the same opportunities to grow and develop, and the same level of career counseling as women. The women managers were significantly more likely to believe that men were treated more favourably by management and advanced more quickly in their organisations. They felt they had to work much harder to prove themselves to top management, and thought there was a distinct disadvantage in being a woman and desiring a career in retailing. It is not surprising, therefore, that compared to men, they lacked confidence in applying for promotion. Women's careers were also more likely than men's to be affected by their traditional position in the family. Women were significantly more likely than the men to say that their partner's work and having children had restricted their career, that they would relocate to accommodate their partner's career and that they were primarily responsible for child care and housework responsibilities. The significant differences between the women's and men's responses illustrated how retail organisations were discriminating towards women, often in a way men were unaware of. In accordance with BITC/Catalyst (2000) findings, they show how men think differently and this is one way that cultural issues can be maintained and perpetuated.

When Broadbridge (1998) asked retail managers the reasons they considered women were under-represented in senior management positions in the industry, both women and men respondents suggested reasons that were broadly similar to some reasons found generally across industries in the 1970s and 1980s. These could be divided into two categories. The first category related to women's primary responsibilities for the household division of

labour. Included here was the lack of child-care facilities, together with the long anti-social hours of retailing and lack of flexitime provided. The second category related to organisational attitudes and included outdated attitudes to women's roles, the lack of female role models, and company culture and a reluctance to change. These responses supported the outdated attitudes and cultural difficulties actually experienced by some women managers and were symptomatic of how organisations have traditionally been defined by gendered custom and practice. Broadbridge (1998:71) concluded that '[t]here is no doubt that female retail managers encounter more barriers in their career progression than male managers because of male-dominated cultural norms'. For women who sought a career in retail management, the opportunities were apparently both fewer and qualitatively different from those available to men.

#### **4.5.2 *Long hours culture***

One of the most striking and continuing visible barriers to women managers in particular is the long hours culture in retailing. Working long hours has become an unwritten but seemingly necessary way of proving managers' commitment to the company and for getting ahead. In the retail management context, many managers (both men and women) talked (and even boasted) about the long and anti-social hours they work (e.g. Broadbridge, 1999c; 2002a); it is not uncommon for them to report working a 12 hour day, added to which was the travel time to and from work. They work these hours in the belief that this was integral to career progression and reaped the benefits. Men, in particular, legitimised this by stating that they enjoyed working such long hours. There was, however, a certain amount of acceptance associated with working long hours, and a belief that a career in retailing was synonymous with long, and sometimes, unsociable hours. For many retail companies, working long hours

are embedded in the cultural norms and sanctioned by top management and many retail companies expect their managers to sign a waiver to the EU 48 hour working time directive. Non compliance denotes a lack of commitment or indifference to the company and their career. So long hours was regarded as integral to career progression: 'you need to be prepared to put in the hours for a career - if you work 9am to 5pm, you will be in the same job for ever more' (Broadbridge, 2002a: 180). Several anecdotes were relayed to the author about senior managers expecting open displays of commitment particularly from branch managers, and expecting them to come in on a day off to meet with senior staff or to be 'on call' 24 hours a day etc. This was common practice across numerous multiple retail companies and formed part of the displays of transactional management styles and bullying behaviour common in retail management. Following Wajcman's (1998) observations, we might argue that retail managers are expected to accommodate themselves to the organisation not the other way round.

Structural, operational and technological developments in retailing have enabled consumers to shop more conveniently and flexibly. Opportunities exist to shop 24 hours, whether personally or electronically. Some retailers have the flexibility to specify delivery dates (sometimes within a customer specified two hour period). Retailers can also tightly control their labour scheduling at shop floor levels so as to match customer demand, thereby maximising productivity and profitability levels. It is economically prudent to introduce some flexibility into senior management positions. Tackling the issue of long working hours is not just a moral issue; it has economic benefits and offers a credible business case. Stress has been associated with managers working long hours in retailing (The Grocer, 1997; Brownhill and Thompson, 1997; Broadbridge, 1998; 2002a). One outcome of working long hours is the negative spillover effect it has from work to private life (Broadbridge, 1999c;

Paper 3). The impact of stress on the economic health of the organisation and the mental and physical health of the individual has been well documented (e.g. Cooper, 1994; Nelson and Burke, 2000). It can lead to lower productivity, higher absenteeism and labour turnover and ill health (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994a). However, prior research has also demonstrated the benefits for people having a more balanced lifestyle (e.g. Burke and Greenglass, 1987; Powell, 1999; Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000). These can enhance individuals' satisfaction as well as job performance (Burke, 2010).

The issue of flexibility at senior levels is interesting given that it is regarded as a cost saving at lower levels of the hierarchy, especially at non management positions. But senior positions have traditionally been fiercely contended as being unable to be performed on a flexible basis (no financial savings are to be made on salaried posts). Even retail directors are currently divided over whether more flexibility at senior levels is possible. Yet senior managers themselves revealed that various aspects of their jobs could be performed more flexibly (Paper 1, Table 4), and the explosion of technologies means this is even more a reality than in the past. With 24/7 trading, it makes economic sense to have flexible arrangements.

Whether organisations do shift their focus onto more flexible working arrangements at senior management levels is questionable however. It appears that retail organisations in general are not genuinely supportive of flexible working practices at senior levels. A retailing culture that continues to have expectations of work intensification and long hours will perpetuate a hierarchy that conforms to such norms and values. Therefore we would expect to see very little change at the top.

Broadbridge (2002a) described the competitiveness of retail management and how this manifested itself in certain behaviours that complied with male cultural norms, long hours

being just one of them. This is additionally acted out by out by performances of ‘facetime’ and ‘presenteeism’ (Kanter, 1989; Simpson, 1998), and Broadbridge (2002a) revealed various managers actively demonstrating this kind of behaviour. This behaviour also draws on the importance of impression management and ‘facework’ (Kanter, 1989 quoting Goffman; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000; Singh *et al.*, 2002; Kumra, 2010; Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2010) as well as the accumulation of social capital (Paper 6) in today’s competitive retail environment. Very often internal progression depends on a recommendation from a line manager, hence the necessity for managers to get noticed and become recognised. The employment of impression management techniques is arguably especially important in an environment where organisations have become leaner and so the opportunities for promotion both internally and externally are more difficult. The pressure to create a good impression and to perform well (to meet targets) was immense, and resulted in long hours worked, and empire building which ‘creates frustration and ends up making it a very stressful job’ (Broadbridge, 2002a: 180). Retail managers were seen as highly dispensable and managers specifically talked about their fear of replacement: ‘retailing is a rat race - there is always someone watching you for your job’ (Broadbridge, 2002a: 180) and ‘if you don’t work as hard as possible or as long as your boss, you’re out’ (Broadbridge, 2002a: 180) and ‘if your boss doesn’t think you’re performing you’ll be sacked’ (Broadbridge, 2002a: 179).

## 4.6 The current research by Broadbridge

### 4.6.1 *Cohort of managers*

The research on which the selected published papers are based comprises a variety of research projects. The quantitative element of the current research built on the 1990s questionnaire outlined above. As an introduction to the published papers this section sketches some findings from the quantitative research project for the entire sample of retail managers which are not reported in the published papers. Broadbridge (2007) provided an overview of some of the main findings for the whole cohort of retail managers from the questionnaire survey. Some issues were found to be experienced similarly and others differently by the women and men. This concept of similarity and difference is developed in Paper 2 for senior managers. When talking about factors that have facilitated their careers, women and men retail managers attributed these first and foremost to their own efforts and attitudes towards work, their personality traits and motivation rather than to any organisational factors. These findings were broadly similar to the previous research (Broadbridge, 1998, 1999a). Women and men attributed the same six factors among their top facilitators (attitude to work; interpersonal skills; determination; concern for results; breadth of experience; past and present performance). These are what Eagly and Carli (2007) describe as more gender neutral qualities.

Problems in their careers to date were associated with factors outside of their control. The main problem mentioned by the *cohort* of women and men managers (ie. the combination of junior, middle and senior levels) was ‘limited promotion opportunities’ (Broadbridge, 2007). In relation to Heider’s (1958) Attribution Theory this is perhaps understandable as people are

less likely to attribute their problems to factors within their own control or their own shortcomings. Nevertheless, this issue poses a very real problem for the sector as it is characterised by an apex hierarchical structure, and organisational re-structuring in recent years has witnessed a delayering of management positions. This has resulted in fewer management positions and levels to rise through to reach the top of the management hierarchy, thus creating a bottleneck effect for those aspiring to senior management positions. Of the other organisational problems encountered by managers some of the main ones were organisational politics and absence of mentors, lack of feedback on performance, lack of career guidance, personality clashes and prejudice of colleagues (Broadbridge, 2007). Moreover, while the cohort of men and women encountered some similar problems, they also reported some significant differences. Women were significantly more likely to report problems of lack of training provision, lack of support from male colleagues, lack of role models, organisational attitudes towards women, the existence of a men's club network and sexual discrimination. Disappointingly, various problems reported by the women managers in the previous questionnaire (Broadbridge, 1998) still existed for many women managers over a decade later (Broadbridge, 2007), and included both visible and invisible barriers.

When asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with various statements that have been made about work, many respondents (women = 58%; men = 60%) believed that informal processes of selection still existed in their organisations, that promotion is in the hands of one's line manager (women = 41%; men = 44%) and that the old boy network is still prevalent in most retail organisations (women = 47%; men = 37%). In addition, women were significantly more likely to report that informal social networks assist men's managerial advancement; colleagues of the opposite sex regard them as a threat; men are treated more favourably by management and men are assigned better jobs than women. They also

considered that they had to work significantly harder to prove themselves than men; were under a greater pressure at work than men; that men do not like to be supervised by women and that we still live and work in a man's world. The women were also significantly more likely than the men to state that they lacked self confidence generally, and more specifically in applying for promotion which, given the obstacles they face, is perhaps no surprise (for further details see Broadbridge, 2007, Table VI). All these differences indicate that informal practices in organisation can have a powerful effect on perceived career development and that gender issues continue to play a part in organisational structuring and processes of development.

#### **4.6.2 Senior managers**

The findings from the body of work confirmed that the influence of other people at work can be either a helping or hindering factor in people's careers. The sponsorship and support of the senior team can make a crucial difference to women to break the glass ceiling into senior roles, and senior women were significantly more likely than junior and middle women managers to attribute their own success to the support of others, visibility and networking issues. They were also more aware of the problems of company cultures and organisational policies than women in lower level managerial positions. These findings also draw speculation over whether senior women differ in their political awareness levels, their approach to their careers and management styles than women in lower management positions. Notably, however, many women lacked the support of male bosses and access to other forms of informal practices *once* they reached senior levels. Here, the power of informal practices was particularly strong and seemed to work especially to the advantage of men within senior levels. Interpersonal factors and organisational cultural differences were

significantly more likely to be problematic to women than they were to men at these senior levels. Intransigent working practices, the notion of 'facetime', the influence of informal and homophilous practices, comparing employees to male based norms and standards, lack of support from male colleagues and bosses all contribute to outdated company cultures and attitudes that continue to hold women back. The continued relative power of informal policies over formal policies at senior levels was highlighted. As a consequence many retail organisations lack a supportive and inclusive infrastructure that enables women to reach senior management positions in similar proportions to men. Four issues revealed significant differences between the women and men senior managers which were not raised for the cohort as a whole. These were 'social pressures'; 'inflexible working practices'; 'lack of support from male bosses'; and 'exclusion from informal networks'. They indicate that these may be particularly problematic to women in relation to men *once* they have reached senior levels and all relate to the power of male control. Moreover, while inflexible working patterns are a major reason for women's under-representation at senior management levels, there was evidence of men in senior positions working more flexibly on an *informal* basis.

The findings confirmed that senior men tended to follow a traditional route to their careers and this was facilitated by the way retail management is characterised around male norms and values. Senior men had largely followed traditional linear career patterns. Their home support infrastructure enabled them to demonstrate the necessary masculine behaviours of commitment, uninterrupted careers and long, unsociable hours. They followed the pattern expected of men explained in the kaleidoscope career model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). The women managers were more complex and followed one of three main routes to their career. In general, they were more aware of the relational aspects of their work and non work lives (although contrary to the kaleidoscope career model, the majority of women sought

linear careers). At one end of the spectrum, a few women adopted the traditional roles expected of them, had a family, taken maternity leave and returned, but often to a different role or level in the organisation. They conformed to their social stereotype to a certain extent, but “paid” for their career by taking a break in their employment and prioritising home, even if for a short time. At the other end of the spectrum were the women who conformed as much as possible to hegemonic male characteristics. In addition to adopting a range of male behaviours this also meant them having uninterrupted careers. As a result they either took maternity leave which was more akin to annual leave, else forfeited or delayed having a family (in the fear that it would damage their career). As a role model for other women, this approach demonstrates and perpetuates adherence to patriarchal social structures which can be discouraging and leaves cultural norms unchallenged. Other women attempted to juggle as best they could the competing demands of work and home life. As a result they encountered feelings of exhaustion, overload, and sometimes regret and guilt, while at times still being perceived as less committed to their careers. The message to other women is it can be done if you are prepared to be superwoman. Any demonstrations of commitment shown by the women were not reciprocated by the retail companies themselves. Companies are reluctant to offer more flexible working schedules at senior levels, will not always guarantee the return to the same job after maternity leave, and can be insensitive to women’s family responsibilities. If women do adopt more stringent hours in order to combine their two domains they are often made to feel guilty about this from peers and superiors. The message conveyed is that they are not totally committed and so their career will be stalled.

## 4.7 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of retail employment in the UK and outlined the historical perspective. It outlined some of the author's previous research (1998; 2007) as this provides a particular context for the published papers presented in the thesis. The gendered positioning of retailing can be traced to the pre-industrial revolution, where although some women had stalls or shops in their own rights, they were less likely to be proprietors than men (Caplow, 1954). Apprenticeship systems favoured men who learnt a skilled craft and so commanded the powerful positions. The advent of capitalism, the growth of new types of retailing and the decline of the crafts tradition resulted in shop assistants' jobs being reorganised and deskilled which meant they could be paid less wages. Women were regarded as ideally suited to these now unskilled assistants' jobs. However, through the process of male power, men were able to protect certain jobs as their own. They remained in the better paid jobs requiring socially acceptable skills and knowledge, while women were confined to certain sectors and departments, especially where there was a female customer base.

When we consider retailing today many of the ongoing practices can be traced to this historical position and the gendered processes of management (Chapter three). For example, the dominance of male power and male resistance (located in the traditional crafts sector), how management has been socially constructed and how cultures and practices based on male norms and values are continued; comparing women on the same terms to men; the

perpetuation of pay differentials between women and men; horizontal and vertical segregation and the maintenance of informal systems in the organisation. The papers presented in this thesis reflect various practices that still remain in 21<sup>st</sup> Century retailing. The final chapter outlines the six papers presented for the thesis and demonstrates how they make a strong empirical contribution to our understanding of the positions of women in retail management.

## **CHAPTER 5 : SYNOPSIS OF SELECTED PAPERS AND CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The overall aim of this thesis has been to critically investigate issues connected with the careers of women retail managers in the UK. The previous three chapters provided an overview of the main career theories, gendered processes in management and retail employment in order to provide a contextual background for understanding the published papers presented in the thesis and the contribution they make to overall knowledge in the field. In this final chapter an overview of the research paradigm and its associated ontological and epistemological concerns is provided together with the personal development of the author. This is followed by a short summary of each of the submitted papers for the thesis (full papers are bound with the thesis). A section outlining the contribution of the thesis to the academic field follows. Finally some concluding remarks and a section on personal future research directions is provided.

Kleinman (2007:1) contended: '[O]ur views of the world are always shaped by our identities, group memberships, and values.' Research does not exist in a vacuum, and it is possible to see threads over time in most researchers' interests (Burke, 2010). The initial choice to research the retail sector was a natural one. The beginning of this research 'journey' drew on initial insights from five years personal experience of working in the sector as a sales consultant. Appendix 1 provided a complete overview of the research connected with retail employment issues undertaken by the author. This has taken various forms and developed in methodological and conceptual thinking over time. There have been departures in the

author's research over this time, as is the natural process of research, yet these have been logical and interrelated and have enabled the research to move into different directions, as summarised in Figures 1.3 and 1.4. The core central themes throughout the period have concentrated on retail careers, gender, and specific human resource management issues. This thesis consolidates the work that focuses on women and retail management. The six papers selected for this thesis represent some of the recent publications by the author and illustrate the continuation of the research strand into the under-representation of women in retail management. They directly follow previous research by the author (e.g. Broadbridge, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; 1999c). A synopsis of the six published papers is contained in Section 5.5.

## **5.2 Research paradigm**

### **5.2.1 Research perspective**

Each of the papers presented for this thesis contains its own methodology section. Therefore this section deviates from a traditional thesis and contains just an overview of issues pertaining to the methodology that are not necessarily reported in the individual papers.

Moulettes (2009: 51) argued that a study can:

‘either take its point of departure in a positivistic ontology and seek to construct law bounded categories by the use of quantitative methods, or it can take its point of departure in social constructionist ontology and seek to discover patterns of meaning within the studied phenomenon by the use of qualitative methods’.

There is debate over the positioning of research, with qualitative and quantitative research often presented at opposite ends of a research continuum. Rudestam and Newton (2007:37) in discussing the distinctions of quantitative and qualitative research stated:

‘quantitative research seeks to define a narrow set of variables operationally and isolate them for observation and study. This contrasts with qualitative research, which is more holistic and aims for a psychologically rich, in-depth understanding of a person, program, or situation by exploring a phenomenon in its entirety.’

They go on:

‘quantitative research seeks objectivity, by standardizing the procedures and measures as much as possible and by distancing the researcher from the participants. The qualitative researcher values the subjectivity of the participants and sees their unique characteristics not as “error” to be removed or minimized but as valued aspects of the research situation’ (Rudestam and Newton, 2007:37).

All research methods have their strengths and limitations. Adopting a mixed methods approach can compensate to some extent for the drawbacks of using one approach over another. A mixed method approach to research, which combines elements of quantitative and qualitative research techniques within a single study or a series of studies, has become increasingly accepted in the field of management (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). They argue that ‘Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone’ (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007:5). Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) further argue that a mixed approach suits culturally sensitive, and applied research, and can be more complex and sophisticated than simple combinations of traditional qualitative and quantitative research methods. Kent (2007) explains that mixtures can take place at several different levels and that not only can there be a mixing of research methods, but also of research paradigms (i.e. positivist and interpretivist).

The methodologies utilised by the author in researching women in retail managerial careers have helped to address some criticisms made by others in the field of retail employment. For example, with the exception of Freathy (1993), Marchington (1996) criticised other retail specialists for placing an over reliance on questionnaires which, he argued, could produce

superficial and misleading results. Similarly, Alvesson and Billing (2009:161-2) in talking about research on women, managerial jobs and leadership claimed:

‘The great majority of the research is either positivistic or popularly oriented texts written for practitioners and mainly with references to anecdotal material. There is a shortage of careful qualitative studies in the field.’

Thus, the approach adopted by the author to use a mixture of techniques and triangulate the data has helped to overcome the criticisms made by such scholars, and enabled the career development of retail managers to be located within both the retail and gender organisational literature.

### **5.2.2 Research design**

Creswell (2009) outlined sequential studies as procedures in which the researcher seeks to elaborate on or expand on the findings of one method with another in two distinct phases. He also talked about equivalent status designs, where both quantitative and qualitative techniques are used with more or less equal emphasis in order to understand the phenomenon being studied. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:84) explain multi-level triangulation designs where ‘different types of data are collected to represent different levels of analysis within a system, with the intent of forming an overall interpretation of the system’. The mixing of the data occurs via connecting the data, so that the datasets build on each other.

In the search for understanding retail managers’ careers, the course of the author’s work has involved the collection of data from multiple and different sources as a means of corroborating evidence and illuminating a theme or theory (Rudestam and Newton, 2007).

This kind of methodological pluralism has been described as facilitating the access to

different aspects of the same social phenomenon (Olsen, 2004). This mixed methods approach combines the rigour and precision of quantitative data with the depth of understanding of qualitative methods and data. (Rudestam and Newton, 2007). The particular approach adopted in this thesis is that of sequential, equivalent status, mixed designs. The stages of the research were linear, i.e. qualitative research followed by quantitative followed by desk research followed by qualitative research, and equal weight was given to each primary research method. The analysis of the research was more iterative. It enabled a cyclical moving backwards and forwards between the different stages. Analysis of the qualitative data took the approach of theming the data (Boyatzis, 1998) and relating them back to the objectives of the research. The analysis can also be described as triangulated, in that the different approaches to the research can be used to provide an overall understanding of the careers of retail managers.

The research undertaken for the papers put forward in this thesis was cross-sectional (rather than a longitudinal approach) involving three discrete, sequential multiple research studies and a secondary data analysis, all of which have been informed by previous personal research (outlined in Sections 4.5, 4.6 and Appendix 1):

- Stage 1: qualitative in-depth biographical interviews with 22 UK retail managers at various management levels which explored their career histories and the factors they had perceived as facilitating and/or hindering their careers to date. Interviews consisted of two parts: discussion of a personal career map (produced by respondents prior to interview), followed by various specific questions regarding their careers (Papers 3 & 6).

- Stage 2: quantitative research with 286 retail managers at various stages of their career examining career history, attitudes to work and satisfaction levels, perceived enablers and barriers, future career aspirations, demographic details (Papers 1 & 2).
- Stage 3: Secondary data analysis using the Board Ex database of women and men in board level positions in FTSE listed retail companies (Paper 4).
- Stage 4: Qualitative in-depth interviews with 25 retail senior operational and main board directors, to explore and understand more fully how they have achieved these high level positions in retail companies, and how they position their careers within their whole life concerns (Paper 5).

Given that each paper has its own methodological section, Table 5.1. provides a brief overview of the research design and sample selection utilised in the published works. Each of the published papers reports the results of one main study. The results of Stage 1 of the research were used alongside the results of previous literature and research by Broadbridge (1998) to inform Stage 2 of the research. Stage 3 drew on secondary data to contextualise and analyse the current situation of women retail directors in UK FTSE companies. Stage 4 built on Stages 1 and 2 and explored the issues of retail careers with those who have effectively broken through the glass ceiling. It also enabled some further examination of certain topics identified in the first two stages. For example, new questions emerged from the learning phase from Stages 1 and 2 which were able to be explored further in stage 4 (e.g. whole life issues).

**Table 5.1: Overview of sample details for papers presented in the thesis**

	<b>Method</b>	<b>Achieved sample</b>	<b>Type of sampling</b>
Paper 1 (2008a)	Quantitative	n =286 135 women; 150 men retail managers at various management levels (1 missing re gender details)	Non probability - purposive and quota
Paper 2 (2008b)	Quantitative	n = 124 50 women; 74 men retail senior managers	Non probability - purposive and quota
Paper 3 (2009)	Qualitative	n = 22 9 women; 13 men retail managers (middle and senior)	Non probability - convenience
Paper 4 (2010a)	Secondary	BoardEx database – all FTSE listed retail companies	Census of FTSE listed retail companies
Paper 5 (2010b)	Qualitative	n=13 13 women directors	Non probability - convenience and referral
Paper 6 (2010c)	Qualitative	n = 17 6 women; 11 men retail senior managers	Non probability - convenience

**Stage 1 - Qualitative research** (Papers 3 and 6)

The approach to the qualitative research can be described as phenomenological. Kent (2007: 569) defines phenomenology as a ‘method of research in which primacy is given to understanding the subjective experience of the participant in the research’. Rudestam and Newton (2007:106) argue that a ‘phenomenological study usually involves identifying and locating participants who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon that is being explored’. Thus they argue that the researcher uses ‘criterion’ sampling, that is, they select the participants who closely match the criteria of the study. For her research on why senior women leave management jobs, Marshall (1994:189) used MBA graduates on the basis that they ‘offer populations of women and men with equal qualifications, who are expected to be both able and career-committed.’ For similar reasons, the research participants for Stage 1 of

the research used a database of full-time retail managers who were also students or graduates of an MBA in retailing by distance learning programme run at the Institute for Retail Studies at Stirling University.

As described in Paper 3, a biographical approach to the interviews was adopted for the research. A biographical approach rests on the belief that each individual has a unique personal construct system which cannot be identified through traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods. Analysis then identifies any important patterns or themes in this laddering technique. By telling their story, respondents also provide an interpretation that is historically and culturally grounded (Fisher, 1987). The researcher intertwines the narrative of a person's life with the societal forces that influence pertinent thought processes (Phillips Carson and Carson, 1998). In the context of this research project, adopting a biographical approach enabled social and other environmental factors to be linked to career development, something that many other approaches do not offer. Wren (1991:97) stated in his review of a collection of autobiographical essays the importance of societal and environmental factors in building a picture of the whole individual:

‘... their family background, the circumstances of growing up and how that influenced their life choices, their education, academic affiliation, work and/or consulting experiences, mentors or colleagues who influenced them, and publications and career development. These behind the scenes glimpses of how the laureates shaped their view of the world are insightful and enlightening’.

It was considered that by comparing the narratives and behaviour of women and men in their career progression using a biographical perspective, a clearer understanding of the career development processes, and possibly the glass ceiling phenomenon, might be reached. A biographical approach, often adopted by historiographers, relies on impressionistic analysis where conclusions are drawn based on narratives that capture mood, feeling, underlying thought processes, and motivations (Phillips Carson and Carson, 1998). This is important as

individuals' career development can be researched and the various formal and informal processes of career development (societal/ environmental/ cultural forces) can be placed into context and used to illustrate how career development is perceived by the individual.

The research process began by asking respondents to complete a 'career map' prior to the interview and send it in advance to the researcher before the interview commenced. How they did this was up to themselves. No formal structure was imposed by the researcher although it was suggested to them that they might like to think about the highs, lows and plateaus of their careers within that journey. The completed career maps were subsequently used as a basis for respondents' to describe their career history and the researcher to guide the interview. The interviews began with some general ice breaker type conversation together with an explanation of the research project and discussion of anonymity and confidentiality issues. This was to establish a rapport with the respondents before moving on to explore their career maps and histories. Because a humanistic approach was undertaken, flexibility to explore additional areas was regarded as important. Thus if the conversation went off on a tangent, this was permitted so long as it did not go too far beyond the research objectives. This enabled the researcher to obtain as rich a picture as possible of the respondents' lives and interpretations of their careers. On occasions, further questions served as probes to encourage the interviewee to dig deeper and reflect on the meaning of the experience, e.g. 'What aspect of the experience stands out for you?' (Rudestam and Newton, 2007).

A conversational style was adopted for the interviews which, at times, involved some humour. The interviews were conducted according to each respondent's preference. Some were conducted at their place of work, others at a neutral location for the convenience of the respondent. A few were conducted by telephone because of the difficulty of geographic location for the respondent and researcher. They lasted between one hour and three hours,

the average being 90 minutes. All 22 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Consideration was given to the fact that the use of a voice recorder may inhibit some respondents (Coolican, 1999), but the advantages of its use was deemed to outweigh any potential limitations in the research process. It was recognised that post-hoc rationalisation in biographical interviews needs to be taken into account i.e. that respondents may recall and report events differently from the actual event (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2000). The author kept a diary to record impressions, reactions and other significant events that occurred during the interview. This was done immediately after the interview had been conducted and when the author was alone. As other researchers might agree, various conversations carried on after the tape recorder was turned off, and sometimes these proved to be significant to the research objectives and therefore crucial to be captured in some way. The diary also enabled some observational data to be recorded (including any unease or particular enthusiasm and, for the face to face interviews, visual observations and reactions).

## **Stage 2 - Quantitative research (Papers 1 and 2)**

The quantitative research consisted of a postal questionnaire using mostly structured (including a variety of measurement scales), semi structured questions and a limited number of open ended questions. Behavioural, attitudinal and classification data were gathered (Hague, 1993). The questionnaire drew on findings of the qualitative research (Stage 1) as well as topics raised from a previous literature review. The questionnaire contained 47 questions and covered various aspects involved with career management. It replicated various areas addressed by the questionnaire used in previous research (Broadbridge, 1998; 1999a) so as to gauge whether there had been any changes over the intervening years. Thus, 37 questions were asked in this questionnaire that had also been asked in the previous one.

These included general background details on their employment history, current positions and classification data regarding the respondents' demographics and family status. Other replicated data gathered was on satisfaction with current positions, whether they had set themselves a life plan, questions about their mentoring relationships, the factors that had assisted their careers, and any problems encountered. Various statements about work were included and respondents asked to state to what extent they agreed or disagreed with them. The ultimate position the respondents aimed for in their careers was asked along with strategies to get there and potential barriers that might hold them back. Finally, the reasons they believed for women's under-representation in the senior management echelons was sought.

Where the questionnaire was different and had developed from the previous quantitative study was the addition of some of the descriptors used to refer to facilitators and problems in their careers to date. In both cases these descriptors had been expanded from 15 to 43 and 16 to 45 respectively. Moreover the series of statements that people had made about work was expanded from 37 in the first questionnaire to 62 in the second. Other additional questions that were added to the second questionnaire to reflect some of the findings from the qualitative research were questions about networks, how the respondents anticipated their careers would develop and the possible effects of women's under-representation at senior management levels on the present and future company performance. Five Likert scale questions were included to gather an extensive data set.

Postal questionnaires are notorious for having poor response rates, one reason being that there is no personal contact with the respondents to encourage cooperation, another being the amount of junk mail distributed in recent times. Yet they are extremely cost effective (Kent,

2007) and this was a major consideration for the research design. As Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008: 219) observed ‘for many researchers, a 20 per cent response rate would be regarded as good’. In an attempt to increase the response rate, a detailed covering letter was included together with a business replied paid envelope. The population for the study consisted of the same database used as in Stage 1. Purposive sampling was used to select retail managers at different stages of their careers. In an attempt to capture the views of as representative a sample of retail managers as possible, so participants from the initial database selection were asked to distribute another six questionnaires in their companies, one each to women and men at junior, middle and senior management levels respectively (thus totalling six). Through this personal contact it was hoped that the subsequent respondents would agree to participate. It was also anticipated that the interest factor, i.e. answering questions about oneself and one’s career might overcome some issues with non-response.

Moreover, the questionnaire was piloted with a group of retail managers known to the researcher prior to finalising the questionnaire. These respondents shared similar characteristics to the main sample in terms of background characteristics, familiarity and interest level with the topic area. The pilot testing enabled the researcher to check that the instructions, sequence, layout and structure, question content, wording, language, difficulty, and overall design of the questionnaire was appropriate to the needs of the research. In accordance with best practice, the pilot test was conducted on a face to face basis (Malhotra and Peterson, 2006). This enabled any problems or issues with the survey to be fully understood and addressed by the researcher. A total of 938 questionnaires were distributed and 286 useable ones returned, resulting in a response rate of 30.5%. In light of Easterby-Smith *et al.*’s (2008) earlier comments, this was therefore considered to be a good response rate. Papers 1 and 2 contain further details of the methodology and sample collection.

### **Stage 3 - Secondary data collection (Paper 4)**

Secondary research is information that already exists in the form of publications or other electronic media which is collected by the researcher (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008). Paper 4 used secondary research, BoardEx data, to analyse the positioning of women directors in FTSE listed retail companies. This listing also acted as a sampling frame to conduct the second phase of qualitative research with retail directors (Stage 4). Since 1999, researchers at the International Centre for Women Leaders at Cranfield School of Management have tracked the position of women in the top FTSE UK listed companies and provided some valuable insights (see Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2010 for the latest female FTSE report). The scope and contribution of their work is to report the overall position for UK companies rather than details for any one sector. Thus, the aim of Paper 4, using BoardEx material, was to concentrate on the composition of UK retail boardrooms. In so doing it provided some contextual material with which to understand the primary research studies.

### **Stage 4 - Qualitative research (Paper 5)**

Stage 4 consisted of further qualitative research and involved 25 in-depth interviews (13 women; 12 men) with main board retail directors, and senior executives (described by Tyson (2003) as the marzipan layer). Similar considerations were given to the sample and research method as outlined in Stage 1 above, and so are not repeated here. As described in Paper 5, the population of women retail directors (26) from the FTSE 350 database were written to requesting an interview. A matched sample (in terms of age, status and company) of men retail directors was similarly contacted. The final achieved sample consisted of eight of these directors. Other participants were contacted via referrals from some of these initial contacts

to large multiple non listed retailers, thus producing a snowball effect. Of the achieved sample, three respondents (one woman; two men) were known personally to the author. The author was conscious that these were very busy people and were giving of their limited time freely to help with the research. Therefore to be more efficient with their total time involved with the research project, a copy of their CV was considered adequate rather than requesting them to produce a separate career map detailing the highs, lows and plateaus of their careers. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face at the respondent's place of work or their choice of location. Four of the 13 interviews with women directors were conducted by telephone owing to the difficulty of finding a mutually convenient time and location for the interview. However, it was not felt that this compromised the data collection process.

While the aim of the interviews was to be response driven rather than question driven there were several broad overall themes that guided the research. The interviews began by exploring the respondents' career history and current role, some of which was provided by their CV. This formed the basis of the structure of the interview. Other themes that were explored were the key facilitators and barriers in their career; the influence of others (either work or personal) in their career; any sacrifices or choices they had made in their career or personal life; their future ambitions and personal circumstances (including details on their household composition, leisure time and activities etc). Respondents were encouraged to talk about these themes in as much or as little depth as they felt necessary. These themes were either probed if it was felt necessary at appropriate junctures in their narratives or if they had not already emerged during the course of the discussion were asked as specific questions towards the end of the interview (e.g. time spent on housework, leisure activities etc). With regard to number of respondents, it was believed that the process concluded at saturation

(Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As with the Stage 1, all 25 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and anonymity maintained.

### **5.2.3 *Gaining cooperation of respondents***

The general topic area of careers was recognised as one which could present a certain degree of wariness from employers. The potential problems of collecting a sample of respondents for the research purposes were considered and, with this in mind, non probability sampling methods were used across the research projects. If companies had been approached formally regarding the project, this could have led to either gate keeping issues, that is, only certain kinds of managers being selected to participate in the study or, more likely, a refusal to cooperate in the research. Past research studies with retail companies, some on topics arguably less sensitive than career development issues, have encountered problems of gaining permission to participate in the research. For example, in relation to employment research, out of 30 stores Nickson *et al.* (2004) contacted, they only gained access to seven supermarkets. Walters (2005) explained that she had approached 18 retailers for her research with checkout operators and general assistants on their orientations and attitudes to work but only two agreed to participate. She also commented that store managers (at least initially) were quite careful in their selection of prospective interviewees, thus highlighting their gate keeping behaviour. As obtaining gender statistics for various occupational levels from individual retail companies is so difficult (Section 4.4.2), so the decision was taken to accept a non probability sampling approach to the research.

Anonymity is also a common problem with retail research. In the employment context, Maxwell and Ogden (2006) conducted three retail case studies with a small, medium, and

large retailer; the large retailer requested anonymity. Whysall *et al.* (2009) obtained access to three major companies for their research, two of whom wanted anonymity. In the event, they anonymised all three in their publications. The use of verbatim quotations from the interviewees enables the reader to be brought into the reality of the situation studied. However, it also carries the risk of participants' being identified. From an ethical standpoint, Creswell (2009) recommended using pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. This was respected by the current research where both the anonymity of the participants and the retail companies were preserved. For example, one respondent had reported a personal crisis which, given its nature, could have led to their identification. Another respondent had twin children; again this was not reported in the personal data section in case their identity could be traced. All respondents at each stage of the research were assured complete confidentiality and anonymity in the research process. This proved to be a limitation for Stage 4 of the research. Because the population of women respondents was so small, this made it difficult to outline the individual details of the respondents in as much depth as would be ideally preferred. Nevertheless as many relevant details were provided as was possible, although some of these were reported cumulatively rather than individually, so as to maintain their anonymity. This minimised the risk of any potential harm that the publication of the work might have caused.

#### **5.2.4    *Sensitivity issues***

Lee and Renzetti (1993) purported that the definition of sensitive research is so broad that it can include topics that may not have been thought of as sensitive, and in fact all research might be considered sensitive in nature. They also argued that sensitive topics can present problems because research into them may involve potential 'costs' to those participating in

the research. The work on the career development of retail managers was approached with a certain degree of sensitivity for a variety of reasons (including those described in Section 5.2.3). First, following the research of Veale and Gold (1998: 17) who claimed that ‘[t]he complexity of the glass ceiling phenomenon in organisations demands a methodology that can access to its subtle manifestations’, so it was decided that a sensitive approach be adopted as the research could be regarded as emotionally charged for some respondents. McAdams *et al.*, (2001) argued that narrative inquiry assumes people construct their own meanings of their lives through the stories they tell. Indeed, reflecting on their own lives and making sense of what they had done and why they did it, did result in a few respondents saying they had never really thought about their life histories before, so this research and their thought processes was revealing something new to them. Others talked of retrospective regrets and disappointments. Several of the women retail directors talked about issues they had encountered that had involved sexual harassment from male directors. Others talked about tensions within their personal lives including the breakdown of marriages and relationships. Overall, then, the author approached the research studies and subjects with a degree of sensitivity in the knowledge that she was delving into respondents’ career and personal lives, and uncovering some topic areas that were sensitive to them.

### **5.3 Empirical and methodological contribution**

Given their differing experiences and circumstances, an argument can be proposed that researching men is not important when the focus of the research is women. While this approach can be justified and have its merits, in certain research areas it might also be open to criticism for adopting a female bias and excluding some essential comparisons between women and men. The author’s approach has been to consistently research women and men

participants on the basis that they deserve to be researched in their own right, as well as enabling some comparisons and points of differences to be made. Understanding that such comparisons can be flawed unless one takes account they are being made against traditional male organisational standards and cultural values has been acknowledged by the author. However, by researching men as well as women enables a broader understanding of the overall issues and can highlight where gender plays a significant role. For example, it enabled some of the nuances of informal practices on women's and men's career to be stressed. Moreover, the potential danger from treating women (and indeed men) as one homogeneous group, thereby ignoring that women's lives can be varied and differ significantly from one another, has also been recognised.

Methodologically, both quantitative and qualitative data have been undertaken by the author throughout her research career. Both have their strengths and limitations and an argument for triangulating methodological approaches can be proposed as it minimises research bias (Smith, 1975). This has enabled a greater methodological diversity in the exploration of the subject area. From a personal perspective, reflection on the methods utilised and contained in the thesis have highlighted a proclivity to use qualitative methods of research, and in particular, phenomenological approaches. Qualitative research involves techniques that describe, interpret and explain human experience through inductive reasoning (Patton, 1990). Thus, qualitative research enables a much deeper understanding of the respondents' than the results of a questionnaire survey. While quantitative research facilitates an overview of the issues concerned and can be useful for determining majority thoughts and opinions, it cannot always provide the reasoning behind a particular answer. This resulted in an iterative process of data analysis whereby the author revisited the initial qualitative research transcripts and reanalysed them for certain topic areas which had proved to be important or inconclusive

areas from the quantitative research. Issues emerged from the interviews that the quantitative elements of the study were not able to elaborate upon. Therefore there was benefit for employing a triangulation approach to the data analysis.

Moreover, with qualitative research being respondent driven, this provided more challenges for the author on how to conduct the research, listening carefully to what the respondent was saying and knowing when to interject yet remaining as objective and impartial as a researcher can be. This challenge resulted in the biographical method being chosen so that the respondent was 'in charge' of how s/he wanted to direct the conversation by drawing on her/his personally constructed career map. The data gathered from this approach were very rich and varied and, as indicated above, transcripts were examined several times searching for themes, commonalities and differences. The findings from the previous qualitative and quantitative research resulted in a phenomenological qualitative approach being adopted to understand how those at the pinnacle of retail companies explained how they had reached the positions they had. It was considered that a deep understanding of these participants' lived experiences was necessary to understand the progression of their careers and this could not be acquired via the results of a questionnaire survey.

The initial piece of qualitative research focused on respondents' career maps and this was used as the basis for the discussion. Thus, it assumed a narrow definition of career as being a series of jobs and contained within the working environment; the issue of personal lives and life outside the working environment was implicit. Nevertheless many respondents, in their narratives, talked about their non-work lives (and in particular their family lives) in the course of describing their career maps. This might not have been achieved had a more conventional face to face in-depth interview had been conducted. The very nature of these

biographical interviews being response driven indicated the importance that a wider definition of careers that took account of whole life concerns was necessary and as a result, the area of non-work was made explicit in the design of the subsequent quantitative and qualitative research.

In summary, the empirical and methodological contribution of this thesis rests on the rigour, depth and breadth of the mixed methods approach used in the data collection phases. The combination of methods used has helped to provide a rich understanding of the issues women retail managers face in their careers and has enabled some recommendations for the future management of the retail sector to be made. The approach emerged from the wider corpus of research and experience of data collection at all levels of the retail hierarchy throughout the author's career. Reflection on the combination of previous methods used by the author therefore helped to inform the methods employed in this thesis. These methods have arisen from significant personal experience of working in the retail sector, previous research studies conducted by the author and the teaching and training of existing and future retail managers.

#### **5.4 Personal development of the author**

The thesis represents a career map of the author's research undertaken on employment issues in retailing, and could be said to be somewhat synonymous with the career maps developed by individual retail managers in some of the research undertaken. The process has enabled the author to reflect on the overall personal development of her research and view it in a wider context of her career. In this respect it followed a similar approach to some of the respondents who, when talking about their careers, mentioned that they had never previously given their career much thought; it had just evolved. Involvement in the research process was

mentioned by some respondents as having been specifically helpful to them in contextualising the development of their careers; a similar benefit was found by the author in the production of the thesis. Retrospectively, careers and research do not just ‘evolve’. While individuals might believe this to be the case, by thinking about the issues in further detail, they often do see an interconnection and logical development in what they do.

The foundation of the author’s approach to the key themes of the research contained in this thesis lies in the statement ‘the personal is political’. Personal values, working experiences and personal gendered experiences have all informed the direction of the research areas. Research wise, the author has published around 50 journal articles, 10 book chapters, and presented 65 papers at a range of international management conferences. The culmination of research experience has enabled the refinement of a mixed methods approach to conducting research in the area of management careers. The process and findings of personal research projects has enabled the author to make substantial contributions to training the existing and future generation of researchers and retail managers. This has been via her general involvement with the Institute for Retail Studies, her teaching at undergraduate, postgraduate and post experience levels in the Management School, and her broader involvement in devising and delivering personal and professional development courses run from the training and development unit at the University. At a broader level, the author has helped to shape the scholarly field of gender in management. Personal research into the gendered career led to the author establishing, developing and chairing a Gender in Management Special Interest Group (GIM SIG), which is now affiliated with the British Academy of Management (BAM). The group has around 400 members worldwide and across 16 countries. It functions as a dedicated network for academics to keep up to date with current issues in the area of gender and management, and its objectives are to:

- improve the future position of gender issues in management through policy recommendations;
- share and encourage international, interdisciplinary and cross cultural research;
- develop an international focus for research ideas and dialogue;
- act as a forum for members to exchange ideas and information around topics related to gender and management;
- provide a supportive environment in which both new and established academics can share and develop ideas (e.g. through mentoring, study groups and peer reviewing);
- provide networking opportunities for academics researching in the area;
- act as a forum for the development of an integrated body of management knowledge.

Because of its global reach, some of the activities of the group are virtual but the author co-chairs the Gender in Management track at the BAM annual conference where members present papers, exchange and debate ideas and network. Further, a range of one day seminars and workshops are provided by the SIG. These bring together distinguished speakers in the field and explore topic areas at a deeper level. The group particularly welcomes doctoral students as part of their personal and professional development which cultivates networking activities for them. Within the group the author has taken a central role in mentoring and supporting the next generation of gender and management researchers.

## **5.5 Synopsis of the selected papers**

The following series of boxes contain a brief overview of the six selected papers for the thesis. Complete papers are bound at the end of the thesis. In brief, Papers 1 and 2 (reporting on quantitative research) confirmed the position of women in retail management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and, in particular, highlighted some of the issues that they still confront. Papers 3 and 6 related to the two broad categories of the traditional division of labour between women and men (work-life balance issues and sacrificing), and organisational practices that continue to ‘sponsor’ certain people over others (the relative importance of human and social capital on career development). Paper 4 provided statistical evidence of the current position of women in FTSE retail boardrooms. Paper 5 unpicked women directors’ narratives in order to consider whether the ‘choices’ they have made were real choices or were constrained by societal expectations and how organisations are structured.

**Paper 1: Broadbridge, A. (2008a) 'Barriers to Ascension to Senior Management Positions in Retailing', *Services Industries Journal*, 28(9-10): 1225-45.**

**Aim** - Considered issues that retail managers' (women and men) perceived to be barriers in the ascension of women to senior management positions.

**Literature base** - The sexual division of labour and the organisation of employment.

**Methodology** - Questionnaire survey with 286 retail managers at various management levels.

**Findings and conclusions** - Barriers for women were classified into five categories: work-home commitments; the way work is organised; women's invisibility at senior levels; masculine dominated organisational cultures; and women themselves. Work-home commitments are major barriers reported by women and men. Retail organisations lack a supportive infrastructure to enable women reach senior management positions. Senior jobs can be performed more flexibly than current practice. Retail management continues to follow intransigent working practices which are linked to patriarchal social systems. Patriarchal company cultures perpetuate stereotypical beliefs about women's roles. Significant gender differences imply men are less aware of the range of issues for women's under-representation at senior levels. Views of retail managers have changed little over time: company cultures that uphold patriarchal systems and reinforce women's position in the family and men's in the paid workplace are associated and contributory factors to women's under-representation at senior retail management levels.

**Implications** - A reconsideration of the way retail managerial work is organised was recommended.

**Paper 2: Broadbridge, A. (2008b) 'Senior Careers in Retailing: An Exploration of Male and Female Executives' Career Facilitators and Barriers', *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(1): 11-35.**

**Aim** - Examined perceived facilitators and barriers experienced by senior retail managers in their careers to date. i.e. those who have effectively broken through the glass ceiling.

**Literature base** - Issues of women's 'sameness' or 'difference' from men, and the notion of 'contemporary' patriarchy.

**Methodology** - Questionnaire survey with 124 senior retail managers.

**Findings and conclusions** - Women and men reported more apparent similarities than differences in the facilitators and problems encountered in their careers to date. Senior men considered 'limited promotion opportunities' to be their main hindrance; for senior women this factor ranked sixth behind other work related issues and conflicts between personal and work life. Lack of support from male colleagues and bosses, inflexible working practices, exclusion from informal networks and social pressures were significant problems for senior women. The relative influence that informal factors (e.g. interpersonal, social capital, visibility, and networking) might have on retail managers' career development was highlighted. The paper recognised the difficulty in making comparisons between women and men in management positions when the point of comparison is male based norms and values. It raised issues of whether women need to sacrifice elements of their own gender identity and 'manage like a man' in order to pursue their careers.

**Implications** – Organisations need to embrace an inclusive culture in order to tackle the issues women face.

**Paper 3: Broadbridge, A. (2009) 'Sacrificing Personal or Professional Life? A Gender Perspective on the Accounts of Retail Managers' *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 19(3): 289- 311.**

**Aim** - Explored issues connected with the interface of work and non-work lives and how this impacted on managers' careers.

**Literature base** - Work-family conflict model and multiple role demands.

**Methodology** - 22 in-depth biographical interviews with retail managers.

**Findings and conclusions** – Women and men experienced asymmetrical conflict between work and personal lives. To progress their careers required prioritising work over home lives. Work demands were more likely to have spilt over to personal life than vice versa. Managers were constrained by conventional norms and values.

Many retail companies' management structures are incompatible with enabling people to take career breaks or effectively combine careers and caring responsibilities. For many women this meant sacrificing or postponing having children, else attempting to juggle the competing demands of work and home life as best they could. Women more often suffered from role overload. Men were better able to separate and control the two domains although still reported sacrificing aspects of their personal life. Men conformed to a traditional and sequential career path while women's careers were more relational and depended on various interconnected issues and people. Some senior women appeared to conform to, rather than challenge, the expected male patterns of behaviour. At senior positions, men were better able to balance work and family life yet women still were more likely to struggle and juggle their roles.

**Implications**- Brought to the fore the importance of considering whole life concerns when investigating people's careers. Consideration of practical working patterns for managers to better manage their work-life balance was recommended.

**Paper 4: Broadbridge, A. (2010a) 'Women at the Top in British Retailing: Plus Ca Change?' *The Service Industries Journal*, 30(9): 1-25.**

**Aim** - Identified current gender composition of the UK's FTSE listed retail boards.

**Literature base** - Resource Dependency Theory, Institutional Theory, Social Identity Theory, Agency Theory.

**Methodology** - Secondary data analysis of retail companies listed in BoardEx.

**Findings and conclusions** - Women were more likely to be in retail sector boardrooms than many other business sectors. Over half of the retail companies had women on their boards, and the majority of women in the FTSE 250 companies were members of influential committees. However, just 12% of companies have more than one woman director. In just three retail companies could the composition of the retail boards be considered to be 'normalised' with regards to gender. All the retail firms were male dominated and 42% of the FTSE retail companies had no women at board level. Men executive directors and non executive directors outnumbered women by a ratio of 8:1. The power base of FTSE UK retail companies remains a male preserve. Women continue to remain in minority positions on UK retail boards, and so overall have limited voice. In accordance with Social Identity theory and Agency Theory, there is a danger that the informality of some board room appointments will perpetuate a male board room culture and keep women out, or in 'window dressing' positions.

**Implications** - The influence of Institutional Theory may be more apparent in the larger companies. Recommended to continue to monitor women in FTSE 250 companies as they are younger, better educated and served on more boards than their male counterparts. Calls for further primary research with women in board positions.

**Paper 5: Broadbridge, A. (2010b) 'Choice or constraint? Tensions in female retail executives career narratives' *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(3): 244-60.**

**Aim** - Investigated women retail directors' and senior executives' accounts of how they had reached their current positions.

**Literature base** - Preference Theory.

**Methodology** - In-depth interviews with 13 women retail directors.

**Findings and conclusions** - Women's accounts were infused with notions of choice, but these choices were often constrained and were related to traditional and stereotypical views of gender roles, and to outdated company cultures and attitudes. Women retail directors did not all fit either of the Hakim's categories of 'work centred' or 'adaptive' women. The theory was criticised for underestimating the constraints that extraneous variables play in exercising the genuine choices women can make, and for not recognising that work can be central to professional women yet family still takes priority. Preference Theory does not adequately explain or predict women's choices between market work and family work; only some support for certain of the tenets of Preference Theory could be made. Many women were burdened with unreasonable choices between their careers and family lives, something that men were less likely to face.

**Implications** - The notion of 'choice' can be loaded with contradiction and sometimes needs to be framed within the parameters of constraint. The term 'satisficing' or 'maximising' may better describe the position that women retail directors find themselves in regarding their work and non-work lives.

**Paper 6: Broadbridge, A. (2010c) 'Social capital, gender and careers: evidence from retail senior managers', *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 29(8): 815-834.**

**Aim** - Considered the perceived relevance of the accumulation of social capital in the career development of retail managers.

**Literature base** - Social Capital, Human Capital.

**Methodology** - In-depth biographical interviews with 17 senior retail managers.

**Findings and conclusions** – The accumulation of human and social capital is inextricably linked. Women and men retail managers attributed their own accumulation of human capital as being crucial for career development. Both were equally aware of the importance of the accumulation of social capital for career development purposes. Some had acquired social capital early in their careers; this had a beneficial impact on subsequent career development. However, at senior levels women and men seemingly differ in how they use social capital. Men outwardly engage in networking activities, are more strategic and instrumental about accumulating social capital and use these as career leverage; senior women were more likely to build expressive networks for social support and as a barrier against the male organisational culture. Senior women suffered an apparent deficit to men in their accumulation of social capital for career purposes. Promotional activities to higher levels of management continue to rely on informal organisational policies located in entrenched organisational practices and norms, and these tend to favour men.

**Implications** - Introduced a new dimension to understanding retail careers. Called for more inclusive working practices and more gender sensitive ways for people to access social capital.

## **5.6 Contribution of the published papers**

Each of the six papers presented in this thesis have individually made a contribution to the subject area both in content and process. At an empirical level, the papers have helped to understand the ways in which contemporary UK retail managers engage with their careers and the issues that have unfolded. At an academic level, each paper applied a different theoretical perspective to the case of retail management, an area which has received limited research attention outside of the author's own field of research. Cumulatively, the published papers highlight the strong empirical contribution the thesis makes to retail employment in the UK, and women retail managers' careers in particular. Collectively, they have enabled a deeper understanding of the subject area and highlighted those areas that are important in understanding the enablers and barriers in retail managers' careers. This has never been done to this level of detail in the UK retail context.

This thesis contributes to the fields of gender and management, and retailing. From the gender and management perspective and by using a range of theoretical approaches, it synthesises the issues involved in career development for one sector, retailing. In so doing, it has provided a comparator industry and enabled women retail managers to be contextualised within the general body of research on women in management. While the overall findings tend to confirm various previous research on women and management, specific findings add to the body of this literature. For example, a combined category of 'business experts and support specialists' was found for the women directors and this adds to the Resource Dependency literature (Paper 4). The application of a social capital perspective to understanding careers has indicated some important gender differences in the acquisition and use of social capital (Paper 6). Moreover, it was clear from various papers that the term

'choice' is loaded and in fact various women directors' 'choices' were often constraints enforced on them by societal pressures and male forms of working (especially Paper 5). This challenged the work of Hakim and demonstrated that motherhood and careers continue to be competing loyalties for women retail managers. The importance of considering whole life concerns when examining people's careers was highlighted by various papers (especially Paper 3), rather than adopting a more narrow definition of career taken by others that concentrates on the work environment alone.

It is within the existing body of knowledge on retailing that the thesis makes the most contribution. Employment issues in the UK have received relatively little attention in the general academic field of retail research (Appendix 2). Moreover, the subject area of employment is vast and covers a range of issues. Very little has been written about career issues in retailing and no previous authors have studied these issues in as much depth as this thesis delves. So from a retail perspective this thesis provides the most thorough investigation into the careers of UK retail managers that has been undertaken. Reflecting on the findings and the issues the selected papers have raised, three sets of interrelated concepts cut across the literatures in retail, gender in management and gender and organisational theory. One of the strengths of the thesis is its strongly inter-disciplinary focus. Key contributions lie in three sets of theory: the sexual division of labour and the organisation of retail work (barriers, infrastructure, patriarchal cultures); the gendered retail career (preference theory, social and human capital theory) and work-life balance and role demands (work-family conflict, multiple role demands). Although women may have comparatively less confidence than men, it is not individual-level explanations that restrict women's access to senior positions but organisational-level barriers that women face; the majority of women retail managers want to progress their careers linearly and are highly ambitious. A major

theme connected with these sets of theory and one that arises in various guises throughout the body of work is that of 'male control' and this is a major contribution the thesis makes to knowledge of careers in retailing. The application of a gender approach to understanding the career issues for retail managers reveals how the privileging of masculine forms of behaviour are upheld and how retail management itself is gendered. The fundamental concern underpinning the differences in women's and men's career progression in retailing can be linked to procedures and practices that are associated with male control. Returning to the quote at the beginning of this thesis from Hazel, an operating board director of a large multiple retail company (p.1), women have to either accept the rules or challenge them. Compliance and acceptance might be the easier option for many women who are already placed in highly visible positions and are under constant scrutiny.

Various practices that are considered 'normal' or 'standard' in retailing (and so might be deemed to be gender neutral) actually are deeply rooted in masculine norms and values. Retailing is still very much characterised by long, anti social hours, work intensification, and uninterrupted careers. Thus, continual, sequential and linear careers continue to be highly valued by retail managers and rewarded by retail companies. Behaviours that continue to be recognised, valued and rewarded in retailing include the ability to openly show commitment and separate home and family lives, the use of ingratiation and impression management techniques which require the performance of 'facetime' and 'facework'. The power of male control enables equal opportunity policies to be manipulated and subverted in several ways. These can be couched in performance, profitability and organisational efficiency terms, and this makes them far more difficult to be challenged. The way that male control is played out can be subtle as witnessed by the (supposed) inflexibility of senior management posts or the non guaranteed return to original jobs for women taking maternity leave. Economic and

performance arguments can be put forward by companies as insidious explanations for maintaining these “rules”. This makes it more difficult for women to compete alongside men in the management hierarchy. Through processes of male control, so informal practices are also perpetuated. Women continue to be excluded from the old boy’s network. Informal processes of homophily and selection continue to operate at senior levels of organisations and the acquisition of social capital can have a vital role in the career progression of male managers, while boardroom positions are often invitations from the chair.

There is little evidence that retail companies in general embrace an inclusive workforce as recommended by Opportunity Now. A major constraint is that retailing at management levels does not accommodate work and family life very well. This can be traced to the way that men control the retail environment, and affect the ‘choices’ anyone with family commitments subsequently makes. Women’s continued major responsibility for the home and family together with the social pressures placed on them was confirmed by the papers. This places added burden on their abilities to combine their career and family arrangements, forcing them to make sacrifices and put emphasis on one domain at the expense of the other, or attempt to juggle competing demands as best they can and try to achieve satisfactory or ‘good enough’ outcomes in both domains. As a result they face the consequences of role overload and appear less committed to their careers. On the contrary, for many men, the family unit supports and enables their career progress and so their home lives are complementary (rather than conflictual) to their work lives. Once at the top, men are seemingly better able to balance their career and personal lives and to work more flexibly on an informal basis.

The exercising of male control ensures that senior posts are reserved for those willing to adhere to these norms. It dictates that senior management jobs cannot be undertaken more flexibly, which is paradoxical given the advancement of technologies that increasingly make this more feasible. Long hours can be regarded as a form of male resistance to women as managers. Men's control enables them to work more flexibly at senior levels but also to maintain this as an informal arrangement. Formalising it risks enabling women to compete more effectively with men at senior levels of the hierarchy and thus threaten men's continued senior status and control of the management hierarchy.

Official and published company managerial statistics are provided as a composite figure which can also be regarded as a form of male control. This thesis demonstrated through access to specific company level management statistics that women are consistently found in the lower levels of the managerial hierarchy while men are far more likely to be positioned in such ways that they have more opportunities to advance their careers. Ultimately women's representation in retail board rooms remains tokenist and in comparison to men, they have limited voice in retail management hierarchy. This might fuel suggestion that they continue to have "window dressing" positions at the top of many retail companies. Their power is always shrouded by the power and control of men. Their invisibility at senior levels (especially at executive director level) leads to a lack of female role models and may act as a discouragement to other aspiring women.

## **5.7 Concluding remarks**

There have been some changes and small gains in the gendering of the retail management hierarchy over the last three decades, yet women certainly have not become a prominent

force in retailing at the senior management levels. Given the feminisation of the retail workforce and large female customer base, together with the transformation of the industry over this period, the proportion of women in senior management positions and beyond remains disappointing. It does not appear that the culture of many retail organisations has changed significantly to embrace women at the top. Many organisational cultural problems experienced by women retail managers over the past three decades still exist for many current women managers including senior women managers.

The introduction of formal organisational policies that comply with Gender Equality legislation and policies of good practice no doubt have helped women's progress in the retail management hierarchy, although their impact is probably more at junior and middle management levels. Various companies have introduced gender policies although to be effective requires an inclusive management approach where women and men are judged on their own merits rather than against a male norm. Otherwise, there is a danger that such policies are merely paid lip service. The power that male control and ingrained gendered assumptions have on workplaces and how invisible barriers and certain unofficial practices continue to advantage certain types of people who meet the inner criteria should not be undervalued. The body of research presented in this thesis has demonstrated the power and strong foothold that informal organisational practices can have on retail managers' careers. Broadly, they continue to facilitate men's careers while are more likely to hinder women's at senior levels. Employment of these informal techniques that are embedded in male cultural norms and values enables some men to get and stay ahead in the present competitive environment.

Although evolving leadership styles in retailing are reflective of transformational leadership qualities and those normally associated with traditional feminine qualities (teamwork, participative management styles, customer service), the underpinning culture of retailing (especially at the top) remains masculine in its character, and senior management is still considered to be a male preserve by both the men and women retail managers. There remains a need to confront and challenge deep rooted stereotypes in retail organisations. Moreover, women remain constrained by the traditional division of labour. It can be concluded that the glass ceiling has been raised for women retail managers over the period, but it has not disappeared; it remains at senior levels of the organisation. It might be argued that at the very top of retail companies, women remain in “window dressing” positions, especially when it is considered that women comprise just 11% of directors on the FTSE 350 retail boards and only four of these companies are said to be normalised with regard to gender composition.

## **5.8 Future research possibilities**

The body of work in this thesis has made a strong empirical contribution to knowledge of careers in retailing, and furthered understanding of the gender and management field. However, research is not a static process; it evolves over time and in response to existing knowledge. As with any research, the body of work in this thesis is bounded by limitations and two particular elements for further research have been identified to pursue over the medium to long term. The first is to continue research with retail directors. Having control and being the decision makers in the industry, their insights into factors associated with career development and progression, recruitment, selection and succession planning is invaluable. As with the author’s previous research, the views of both men and women are sought. Arguably, more so than ever, men’s views are important because change comes from

the top. Understanding the mindsets of male directors can be illuminating to consider what skills and behaviours are considered to be critical at senior levels of retailing and what practices might be continued or altered. Particularly important is the views of the younger male directors and chairpersons as their control and power can make an influential difference to whether the culture at the top changes to embrace a more inclusive environment, else is used to reinforce these increasingly scarce positions at the top as male preserves.

Complementing this is gaining a more thorough understanding of the careers of women retail executive directors, the strategies they adopted in their careers, what has made them successful and differentiated them from women (and men) at lower levels of the hierarchy, whether they continue to face obstacles in their careers at these positions and their views for the future. The extent to which women are prepared to conform to male standards, sacrifice elements of their own gender identity and manage like a man, else are prepared to challenge existing cultural norms would benefit from being unpicked in more detail. Do they provide appropriate role models for other women to aspire to? Do women in senior positions 'make do' or 'put up' with their positions in their work and non-work lives because of the continued obstacles placed in their way which fosters the incompatibility of the two domains? The few women directors in the FTSE 350 companies who are younger and better educated than their male counterparts are particularly important to investigate further. If they conform to traditional masculine behaviours this demonstrates that the stereotypical masculine cultures are being perpetuated and so little overall change in the positioning of women in retail management might be expected. If, however, they are prepared to challenge traditional cultural norms, this might indicate a movement towards a more inclusive culture in retail companies.

Existing research into women and retail managers has provided a snapshot of the issues involved in their career development. A second element for further research is to undertake longitudinal research to track the careers of women and men from their entry level as graduate trainees in retailing over time. This offers the opportunity to dig deeper into the relative career progression and aspirations of women and men, how these change over time in response to various organisational enhancers, barriers and influences of the external environmental (economic, technological, political and social). This approach lends itself to a triangulation of methods including the use of quantitative surveys as well as a series of in-depth interviews at particular junctures in participants' careers. Moreover, the use of continuous self completed diaries throughout the research period in order to capture events, thoughts and reflections *as* they occur would greatly facilitate the data gathering exercise and provide vital new evidence to the research field. A major challenge of undertaking this research is to gain and *retain* a suitable sample of people who are willing to be involved over a long period of time. This longitudinal research enables the capture and tracking of the aspirations of Generation Y (born between 1977 and 1994) and Z employees (born since 1991) as they enter and progress in the workforce (which also complements other aspects of the author's research strand). Their unique set of values to previous generations of employees, together with their complete familiarity with using mass technology and living in a globalised economy will enable investigation to ascertain whether traditional attitudes are to be radically challenged or whether the gendered power base of management structures is so strong as to overcome these values (particularly given the current economic climate where retrenchment strategies may threaten the male preserves). Nevertheless, a sense of dynamism is badly needed in terms of the research area and methodological approach, and this will be made possible by a longitudinal approach. It presents opportunities for collaboration with

other institutions and industries to extend the body of knowledge of managerial careers and progression.

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**Note: This section relates to references in the main body of the thesis only. References pertaining to the published works can be found at the end of the individual papers.**

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## **APPENDIX 1: CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF BROADBRIDGE'S WORK**

### **A.1 The late 1980s and early 1990s**

#### ***A.1.1 Perceptions of sales assistants' toward their jobs***

Initial interest in retail employment issues arose from five years retail work experience at Barkers of Kensington and Harrods. This resulted in a master's dissertation examining department store sales assistants' perceptions of their work, their experiences of pay and working conditions and prevalent assumptions about skill and expected behaviour. The research involved 43 qualitative face to face semi structured in-depth interviews with female sales assistants in a number of department stores located in central London. Interviews included both quantitative (e.g. demographic, factual and work related type details) and qualitative data (e.g. satisfactions, perceptions of employment, employee and customer relationships, changes they wanted to see implemented). Ten managerial female staff and ten male sales assistants were additionally interviewed as control groups. Some of the findings from this research can be found in Broadbridge (1991).

The findings of the research revealed that men and women experienced their jobs differently in various respects, while they were treated differently by customers and management. Very often the men and women were employed in sex segregated departments, and as a result men were associated with jobs that commanded a *perceived* higher degree of human capital than the women, and thus benefitted from higher rates of pay and other advantages. Even when men and women were employed in the same department, the men had the opportunity to earn approximately four times as much commission than the women. For departments dominated

by women employees most often no commission was paid. Sex segregation according to the nature of the department showed how work was organised around gender, and how gender itself was constructed at work. It maintained the barriers between men and women over issues of pay, conditions of work, and job status which, in turn, affected the employee's job perception. Proportionately, the men were more likely than the women to state that their job was rewarding. Men's greater enjoyment was likely to be related to the benefits which they receive from the formal recognition of their skills, which altered the way customers treated them and which was reflected in their superior pay levels. Although men were included as a control group in order to investigate women sales assistants' perceptions of their work, the differences between the men and women's responses led to a realisation that in order to fully appreciate women's careers and employment issues it is important for them to be understood in the context of men's careers. These findings from this research helped to shape subsequent research areas as outlined below. The main thread throughout is gender and employment.

### ***A 1.2 Pay in retailing***

Following the stark contrast in remuneration received by men and women sales assistants and managers in the department stores analysed by Broadbridge (1991), further research using the Department for Employment New Earnings Survey data was conducted to examine if earning differentials in retailing were as widespread for men and women across all sectors of the industry (Broadbridge, 1995). The research upheld this supposition finding women in retail distribution to earn just two thirds of their male counterparts. The differentials were narrower when comparing the same occupational grouping however. For example, in 1992 women sales assistants' weekly earnings and hourly earnings (which exclude commission, shift and overtime payments) were 78.3 % and 84.2% of the male sales assistants, respectively. The

findings implied that there existed a sex segregation of occupations within the retail environment and further investigation found this to be the case. Managers were reported to comprise 15% of all female retail jobs against 42.2% of all men's retail jobs. Consequently, the findings reinforced that gender was an important issue to examine in any retail employment research. A supplementary article examined possible theoretical explanations for these gender pay differentials (Broadbridge, 1997a). It concluded that economist and labour segmentation theories offer only partial explanations for retail earning differentials. It argued for an historical perspective to also be adopted. This traced women's involvement in the retail trade and demonstrated how trade unions and skill levels were constructed against women. The article additionally concluded that the interrelationship between the paid labour market and the home should not be overlooked in explaining gender differences.

### ***A.1.3 Charity retailing***

Arising from the research into department store sales assistants' perceptions of their work (Broadbridge, 1991) was interest in the nonprofit sector of retailing and how this differed to the traditional 'for profit' retailing sector. Traditionally, this sector was managed by volunteers and consisted of middle aged, middle class women. This was an under researched area and so a joint project (with Suzanne Horne) was instigated to examine the types of people who volunteer for charity retailing, their motivations for doing so, along with an investigation of their work patterns. It complemented the previous research by generating general perceptions of the working environment within the nonprofit retail sector (Broadbridge and Horne, 1994; Horne and Broadbridge, 1994). A further article addressed the relevant issue of recruitment and training of volunteers within the charity retail sector (Broadbridge and Horne, 1996).

#### ***A.1.4 Management change in retailing***

At this time the author was invited to write a case study on contemporary employment issues within the retail sector for inclusion in a retail marketing text (Broadbridge, 1994). This involved writing a real life case study of a FTSE 100 retail company (fictionalised for the purpose of publication) and a face to face interview with one of the store managers. The case addressed the issue of the management of change. At this time many retail companies were undergoing restructuring of their workforces which resulted in the delayering of various managerial levels. The effect of the communication of these changes on the workforce was investigated along with the resultant career issues and stress this placed on staff.

#### ***A.1.5 Careers of MBA retail students***

Another research project (with Dr. Keri Davies) built on the author's underlying research teaching and interests. It involved examining participants on the MBA in retailing and wholesaling programme, their reasons for undertaking an MBA, the pattern of their career changes since registering for the MBA and their future ambitions (Broadbridge and Davies, 1993). The findings from this research project revealed some similarities and differences in men and women's responses, and indicated areas of interest for further investigation. The MBA programme was considered important for broadening participants' experience and seen as an important tool for building self confidence, career development and self advancement. It had resulted in many respondents' increased responsibilities at work and change of job, and in particular highlighted the importance of accumulating human capital for women. However, men were more likely to have made linear job moves while women's job moves were more lateral job moves in nature, and resulted, unlike the men, in them believing their

careers had not progressed as rapidly as they had expected they would. Men were twice as likely as the women to say they aspired to senior management positions within retailing; in contrast, women were unsure of their future career development. These findings, together with the preceding projects fueled interest to further understand the careers of women and men retail managers in more depth.

## **A.2 The mid and late 1990s**

### ***A.2.1 Gender and careers in retailing***

As a background to progress research into managerial careers in retailing, some statistical evidence was sought. Official data do not provide adequate/sufficient details of gender and managerial levels in retailing (Chapters one and four). Being a member of the MBA course directorate, however, enabled access to company data on the gender and occupational structure of a FTSE 250 listed major retail mixed company (named here *High Street Stores*). In general these company data were (and remain to be) considered highly sensitive and were/are not available in the public domain for any multiple retail company. Access to *High Street Stores* data, therefore, allowed for a detailed analysis of the occupational structure of the company by gender. This enabled further investigation of the claim that sex segregation of occupations existed in retailing (Broadbridge, 1995). Analysis indeed revealed that men and women occupied different positions within the company structure (Broadbridge, 1996a). In non management positions women comprised 85% of sales assistant staff, 72% of weekend staff and 100% of secretarial staff. An inverse relationship between women and men according to position in the management occupational hierarchy was found. At operational levels, women outnumbered men by a ratio of two to one at the most junior

departmental management levels, but men outnumbered women by a ratio of three to one at deputy management levels; by nine to one at branch level positions and by 20 to one at area management positions. The pattern was no different at head office where men managers outnumbered women managers by a ratio of three to one. The data exposed that achieving senior management positions in retailing was apparently more difficult for women than it was for men; as Levinson and Levinson (1996) suggested women had yet to prove themselves in these positions. Explanations for this observation were proposed and located in women's own choice and/or a glass ceiling effect and organisational values. Practical organisational strategies were considered to enable women's better representation to men in future.

Although the research was based on secondary data analysis of one major retail company, it confirmed anecdotal evidence from retail managers in other multiple UK retail companies. Therefore there was nothing to suggest that this retail company was an anomaly in terms of its gender composition at different occupational levels. Further, although possible explanations were proposed for the imbalance of men and women in various managerial positions, there were no firm data to support that these statistics might be accounted for by women's own choice not to progress their careers. With this in mind, further literature research on career management and gender was conducted, and a questionnaire survey was developed so as to ascertain in more detail managers' considerations of their career management. An overview of some of these findings is in Section 4.5. Greenhaus *et al.* (2000) proposed that career management efforts must take into consideration additional demands including stress, work-life balance and diversity issues. Consideration of various elements of these aspects had been already taken in account in devising the questionnaire survey. In many respects this research project was exploratory in nature; the topics covered were deliberately broad in order to pinpoint the career management issues facing retail

managers and to help direct future research designs. The research design recognised that organisational and technological changes at that time had altered the nature of retail management jobs which in turn presented new opportunities and barriers to career management.

The questionnaire contained 68 questions and covered various aspects involved with career management. Topics included background data on job experiences, work patterns, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, training and on the job learning, mentoring, factors helping career development, problems encountered by managers, barriers encountered in career advancement, ultimate desired career position, pressure experienced at work, family and domestic issues that might impinge on career, reasons for women's under-representation in senior management positions in retailing and demographic data. Seven of the questions contained a series of Likert scale statements so as to obtain as much data as possible from the respondents. The questionnaire took about 30 minutes to complete. A database of retail managers who had registered for the MBA in Retailing Distance Learning Programme was used as the sampling frame and in total 132 completed questionnaires were used for analysis. A series of conference papers and presentations (Broadbridge, 1996b; 1996c; 1996d; 1996e; 1997b; 1997c), journal articles (Broadbridge, 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 2000a; 2002a) and a book chapter (Broadbridge, 2001) arose from this research.

The first peer reviewed publication to arise from this research examined the relative barriers to career development experienced by male and female retail managers, the problems they had encountered in their jobs and the reasons for lack of women in senior management positions (Broadbridge, 1998). An overview of this paper is provided in Section 4.5 as it forms a background for the subsequent research studies that are contained in the published

works for the thesis. A second article from this research project profiled female retail managers (Broadbridge, 1999a). The article reported on the work experience, current positions, levels of job satisfaction and ultimate goals of men and women retail managers. It also identified the skills training they had received and required, and explored the factors helping and hindering their careers. The findings revealed that both similarities and differences were reported by the men and women retail managers. Similarities were found in areas such as job satisfaction and overall ambitions [this is different from the findings of the MBA retail research (Section A.1.5) where women were unsure of their future career development]. Both men and women respondents were in agreement regarding their opinions of the most influential factors to have helped in their career progression to date. In order of importance these were stated as their attitude to work, their experience, their personal skills, and their past and present performance. Both men and women reported some similar difficulties. Nevertheless a range of differences were also reported and can be traced to a cultural climate dominated by male values and norms. Dual career family conflicts, lack of female role models and exclusion from the informal networks of the company were problems specifically encountered differently by the men and women (with women significantly more likely to report them). These areas have been subject to further investigation by the author (e.g. Broadbridge, 1999b; 2004; 2008a). The findings from this quantitative project highlighted the value of undertaking qualitative research with retail managers in order to understand in more depth some of the nuances of the issues involved in career management.

An area of the questionnaire which contained some open ended questions was that of mentors and their influences on careers. The distinction of the lack of female role models and preceding literature on what aids career development led to an article that specifically examined the issue of mentoring in retailing (Broadbridge, 1999b) although it is recognised

that the two are different. Role modeling is just one function of mentoring. Mentors provide advice and support through an interactive relationship. A role model is a person who provides an example for the individual to imitate (Gibson, 2004). Role models can be symbolic (the person doesn't need to interact with them) or they can be one of the functions of mentoring (Gibson, 2004). Previous research had identified the benefits that mentoring relationships have for the protégé, mentor and organisation. The findings from the research showed that half the sample had been mentored; and no significant differences were found between a respondent's sex, age, position in the organisation, location or job function and whether they had been mentored. The benefits of mentoring far outweighed any disadvantages experienced. Mentoring was found to serve two primary functions: career and psychosocial. Mentoring played an important role in the development of the protégé's current job career and self development.

### **A.3 The late 1990s and early 2000s**

At this time the author was invited to contribute to a seminar focusing on ageism in the workplace. This resulted in a book chapter that focused on age and career related issue of retail managers. This was a pertinent topic to the retail industry because of the demographic changes occurring in the population and the traditional reliance on a young age profile within retailing. The chapter concluded that age was not regarded as an overriding issue in retail managers' achieving their long-term career ambitions. Respondents were in general agreement over the factors which have assisted their career development to date, while no significant differences were found between the younger and older managers and the factors hindering their career development.

### *A.3.1 Stress in retailing*

Given that stress had been identified by previous research as having an effect on career management, the next article from the quantitative survey examined the incidence of stress and retail managers (Broadbridge, 2000a). Retailing and management jobs had been identified as very stressful jobs (The Sunday Times, 1997). The findings showed that men and women managers reported similar job pressures particularly in relation to 'work overload', 'time pressures and deadlines', 'staff shortages and turnover rates' and 'long working hours'. In addition, women managers were more likely than men to suffer from additional pressures caused by sex discrimination and prejudice. It argued that retail managers may be at risk from stress because of the way work is organised and day-to-day demands and the fact that women take responsibility for the home and family, thus doing the double shift (Hochschild, 2003). The article concluded that women managers were potentially liable to greater pressures of the job than men when they compete at occupational levels traditionally dominated by male values and norms.

Parallel with the analysis of the quantitative research was some further qualitative research conducted with retail managers regarding work stress (Broadbridge, 1999c). This was situated in previous literature that located the relationship between work and home life as having a spillover, compensation or independent effect. The research method consisted of eight mini group discussions with retail managers from a variety of UK multiple retail companies. The discussions explored what the retail managers believed to be the major demands and stressors placed on them through their jobs, and how their work-family relationship was affected. This showed that some roles within the organisation and the nature of the retail environment were considerable sources of stress for retail managers. The nature

of the retail environment resulted in spillover behaviour from work to personal life, with family boundaries being more permeable than work boundaries. Women's multiple roles meant that many women managers needed to manage competing domestic and employment role demands more so than the men managers. This was considered to result in them suffering more overall pressures than the men in their quest for career advancement.

A second article from the qualitative research on work stressors examined the factors causing stress to retail managers and their coping strategies (Broadbridge, 2002a). The findings corroborated previous research into executive stress but also revealed those stressors particularly relevant to the retail industry. These were the nature and pace of change within the industry, technological developments, quantitative work overload, staff shortages, the service oriented environment including customer demands, attitudes and threats of violence, as well as the general organisational structure and climate. Problem focused and palliative coping strategies were adopted by organisations and individuals to cope with these pressures. A book chapter on stress in grocery retailing was written following an in-depth interview with the occupational health expert of a FTSE 100 supermarket chain (Broadbridge, 2000b). Following the preceding quantitative and qualitative research on stress in retailing and the recognition that retailing had experienced various changes over the preceding years that had impacted on workforce jobs, a small scale piece of research was conducted with Dr. Vivien Swanson and Christine Taylor into the effects of retail changes on employees' job demands and home life (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2000). It involved conducting five group discussions with employees from one FTSE multiple variety store chain of retailing. The purpose of the article was to report the impact on work and home life of changes occurring in retailing. The group discussions explored the changes occurring in retailing that respondents' believed had impacted on their jobs; their reported satisfactions, dissatisfaction and demands of the job;

and the implications of the changes, demands, satisfactions and dissatisfactions on the respondents' personal lives. The groups described these organisational changes as resulting in increased work demands and workloads, the elimination of supervisory roles, role ambiguities and fewer career progression opportunities. As found elsewhere (Broadbridge, 2000a) the results suggested that a spillover relationship between work and home stress was useful in describing the impact of change (the spillover being more likely to occur from work to home), although some instances of compensation and independence between the two domains was apparent. The findings suggested that the issue of stress in the home/work interface was complex and that the demands in each domain may be positively or negatively related depending on the characteristics of the demands themselves or may vary according to the individual characteristics of the people studied.

### ***A.3.2 Rationalising retail employment***

During 2000 and 2001 a shadowing opportunity was sought and undertaken at one store of a FTSE 100 retail supermarket chain. This entailed spending a day a week at one of the store's branches over a period of six months. Shadowing of the managers (all men) occurred and exposure to non managerial staff formed part of the exercise. The company was keen to reduce its wage bill and so it relied on a quantitative labour scheduling system controlled by head office. At the end of the shadowing exercise, and on behalf of the senior management team, the author conducted six group discussions with general staff members to ascertain their experiences and thoughts about the company in general, and store in particular. This focus was comparable to the attention of earlier research which wanted to ascertain employees' attitudes towards their jobs (Broadbridge, 1991). The store had recently introduced a flexible labour scheduling system and reactions to this system were also sought

from the group discussions. It was found that some approaches to a quantitative labour scheduling approach resulted in decreased employee and customer satisfaction levels. Like earlier work on stress (Broadbridge, 2000a; 2002a), employees complained about the lack of staff in the store. This had a resultant negative effect on customer service levels. It also added several pressures on to the existing staff. Management (i.e. men) was additionally regarded to be unappreciative and unsupportive of the staff. Staff shortages and tight labour scheduling resulted in implications on training and development opportunities, and many staff were dissatisfied with these. Communication difficulties were also voiced by the staff. The result of the various pressures felt by staff was low morale, work strain, tiredness and increased multiple role demands. Thus the labour scheduling exercise introduced to make productivity gains, led in practice to work intensification and strain, and manifested itself in low staff morale and poorer customer service levels. The staff wage bill might have been reduced but at what cost in terms of employee productivity and customer satisfaction levels? The exercise resulted in the presentation of a journal article (Broadbridge, 2002b).

### ***A.3.3 The professionalisation of charity retailing***

In 2001 and arising from previous research on the charity retail sector (Broadbridge and Horne, 1994; 1996; Horne and Broadbridge, 1994), along with the quantitative research on careers of retail managers (Broadbridge 1998; 1999a), another joint project with Dr. Liz Parsons was developed on the charity retail sector. This project involved qualitative and quantitative research and examined how the professionalisation of the charity retail sector had impacted on the branch managerial workforce. The project recognised the general growth of the charity retail sector and its accompanied professionalisation and commercialisation of its activities and adoption of strategies developed in commercial retail contexts. Qualitative

research was undertaken with 20 senior managers at charity retail head offices; 22 charity shop managers at branch level and a questionnaire survey with 826 branch and assistant branch managers of seven UK retail charities.

The project began with a series of in-depth interviews with retail trading senior managers (or their nominees) in 18 charity retail head offices. The topics explored in the interviews gained an understanding of the implications for the human resource function of the continuing professionalisation of the sector. They focused on the requirements necessary and skills sought by head office in the recruitment, retention, training and career management of individual shop managers in response to the changes taking place in the retail charity environment (Broadbridge and Parsons, 2003a; 2003b; Parsons and Broadbridge, 2003).

Another article (Parsons and Broadbridge, 2004) looked at the impacts of the moves to professionalisation of the charity sector on branch managers. The article explored managers' reactions to changes taking place in the charity retail sector and examined the extent to which policies were said to be successful.

In an article exploring gender and career choice (Broadbridge and Parsons, 2005) the positions of charity retail management were explored. Unlike mainstream retailing, charity retail management is an occupation dominated by women and therefore can be claimed to be women's work (Levinson and Levinson, 1996). These positions have changed from being voluntary to paid. However, salaries are low and expectations of managers are high (more often salaries are equivalent to the minimum wage and so more likely to correspond with sales assistants' rather than managers' salaries in mainstream for profit retailing). This article uncovered the reasons for choosing to work in the charity retail sector. The paper also explored managers' future career aspirations. The research found that charity retail

management served an important purpose for many women in the transition from the home to working environment. It provided the balance necessary to effectively combine the multiple role demands between personal and professional lives. Career success for these managers was less to do with occupational status or income, but encompassed the satisfaction, autonomy, challenge and self-fulfilment the job presented them, and so more in line with the descriptors used by Sturges (1999). As such, the majority had little interest in progressing their careers linearly as this would have meant taking an area manager or head office position and the complications this might pose domestically. An article investigating the role of job characteristics and communication in relation to job motivation and satisfaction amongst UK charity shop managers followed (Parsons and Broadbridge, 2006). Managers were found to exhibit low levels of satisfaction with factors such as pay, job status and working conditions. However, such dissatisfaction was ameliorated by the fulfilment gained from interpersonal relationships with other staff members and the knowledge that their efforts were benefiting a charitable cause.

A further article arising from this research (Parsons and Broadbridge, 2007) explored how gender identity was played out in charity retail and the impacts that increased managerialism had on the process of identity construction. The analysis was based on a small sample of qualitative interviews, therefore the findings and this 'vignette' approach allowed exploration in some depth of the relations between identity construction and organisational context. The process of increased professionalism of the sector valued and promoted the discourses of 'retail' but marginalised those of 'charity and of 'care'. This presented serious dilemmas of identity for charity shop managers and was a source of considerable strain for them. However it was also found that managers used the discourses of 'charity' and of 'care' to resist those managerial processes, in their effort to maintain their own identity.

#### ***A.3.4 Student perceptions of retailing as a graduate career***

The beginning of the 2000s saw another strand in the research associated with the broad area of careers and retailing. The acknowledgement of the demographic changes in the UK population along with knowledge that it was difficult to attract good quality managers into retailing (Dawson and Broadbridge, 1988) led to a quantitative project that examined student perceptions of retailing as a destination career (Broadbridge, 2003b; 2003c). With the transformation and professionalisation of British retailing it was expected that a career in retailing would be more appealing than previously found to be the case (Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard *et al.*, 1991). The results of a questionnaire survey of 369 undergraduate management students found that, on average, while some students were attracted to the industry, overall a neutral or negative perception prevailed. Many students had a distorted view of the retail industry and the opportunities it could provide to graduates (Broadbridge, 2003c). Overall, retailing was not regarded by the students to be an attractive career option and it was concluded that the appeal of retailing as a career option had not changed significantly since the work of Swinyard (1981) and Swinyard *et al.* (1991). The most frequently cited attributes associated with a career in retailing (consumer oriented, people oriented, poor salary, limited advancement, poor working hours) found by Broadbridge (2003c) did not compare favourably to those associated with their *preferred* career (interesting, opportunities for advancement, challenging, rewarding, satisfying). This was conveyed from a general ignorance as to what a retail management job involved or the variety of career opportunities it provided. Often, students have only their experiences as consumers or as part-time retail employees in forming their perception of it as a future career. Personal and word of mouth work experience can either help to persuade or dissuade the perceptions of retailing as a destination career. Recommendations on how to raise the profile

of the industry were made including communicating effectively the excitement of retailing as a graduate career; developing liaisons between the industry and Higher Education establishments; and by the provision of meaningful work experience.

#### **A.4 The mid 2000s**

##### ***A.4.1 Earning and learning: how term time employment impacts on students' adjustment to university life***

Previous interest in the issue of stress (Broadbridge, 1999c; 2000a; 2000b; Broadbridge *et al.*, 2000), and also students' perceptions of retailing as a destination career (Broadbridge, 2003b; 2003c) led to the development of the next research project (with Dr. Vivien Swanson) which was aimed at undergraduate full time students and their experiences of term time employment and how this employment affected their university life (both academic and recreational). The theoretical background to the project arose from findings of the previous work on stress that suggested that the issue of stress in the home/work interface was complex and that the demands in each domain may be positively or negatively related depending on the characteristics of the demands themselves or the individual characteristics of the respondents. The same idea was applied to students and the interface between their university life and employment during this time. Methodological problems with previous research studies had made it difficult to draw firm and generalisable conclusions regarding the interrelationship between university life and term-time employment roles. Much existing research suggested that combining 'earning and learning' could be detrimental to university life, generating role conflicts, increasing stress, and reducing academic success, participation and overall

adjustment to university. Potential positive effects of term-time employment on wellbeing were often neglected.

A conceptual article (Broadbridge and Swanson, 2005) suggested that a psychological transactional approach focusing on both positive and negative outcomes of role interrelationships could be adopted to inform universities, student bodies, and employers of optimal ways of combining study and employment. This led to primary research involving nine group discussions and a questionnaire survey which measured perceived role congruence, adjustment to university life and psychological state and trait characteristics. This was sent to the census of full time undergraduate students at Stirling University. The results of this research (Broadbridge and Swanson, 2006; Swanson *et al.*, 2006) showed that both positive and negative aspects of combining work and studying were experienced and provided a balanced picture of combining the two roles. As with the stress work above (Broadbridge, 2000a; Broadbridge *et al.*, 2000), the results were discussed in relation to the models of complementarity, spillover and separation. The findings suggested that students generally perceived employment and university roles to be in balance, and there was no difference in adjustment for students whether or not they were currently in term-time employment. However, psychological factors, particularly positive affectivity and stress were important mediators of the relationship between role congruence and adjustment.

#### ***A.4.2. Generation Y and retail employment***

As a direct follow up of the research on student perceptions of retailing as a graduate career (Broadbridge, 2003b; 2003c), another research project that examined the views of Generation Y students was instigated with colleagues from Glasgow Caledonian University (Dr. Gillian

Maxwell and Dr. Susan Ogden). This project adopted exploratory qualitative research in the form of eight group discussions and two in-depth interviews, the purpose of which was to examine the job experiences, career perceptions and initial employment expectations of Generation Y students, i.e. potential graduate entrants to UK retailing (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2005). The findings showed that many of the propositions contained within the Generation Y literature were reflected among participants in relation to their future career and lifestyle aspirations. Recommendations were made to retailers to carefully manage graduate expectations and experiences to ensure commitment to the sector. A follow up quantitative questionnaire student survey was conducted with 486 students to explore these findings in more detail (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007). Seventy percent of the total sample had some experience in retail employment. This experience was slightly more positive than that found by Broadbridge (2003b; 2003c). However, only a quarter of the students contemplated a career in retailing after graduation. It was still regarded as an unappealing graduate career by the majority of the students questioned. Recommendations were made to retailers on how they might better attract and recruit potential graduate employees (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2009). A further article from this research project has explored career expectations and aspirations in the hospitality industry (Maxwell *et al.*, 2010). An international comparison of Generation Y and the impacts that this generation has on retail employment issues is currently being developed with colleagues from the University of Iowa and Michigan State University. A similar research project looking at the hospitality industry was conducted and reported (Barron *et al.*, 2007).

## **A.5 Summary**

This appendix has outlined the research projects conducted by the author on employment issues in retailing. It can be seen from the breadth of this work that the core themes of career management, retail employment and gender has permeated these research projects. There has been a logical development to the research areas selected and this has culminated in a broad knowledge of the area. The findings from the questionnaire survey undertaken during the 1990s on retail managers' careers provided some quantitative background details about retail managers and their career management. As we have seen this was supplemented by further qualitative research into certain areas such as stress and retail management. The research projects outlined in this appendix are indirectly related to the published papers contained in the thesis. Some of the more directly related papers are described in Chapter four.

## APPENDIX 2: RETAIL EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH IN THE UK

Broad Subject Area	Employment type/ key words	Author	Date
Careers	Female employees	Foster <i>et al</i>	2007
Careers	Female managers	Maxwell and Ogden	2006
Careers	Female managers	Maxwell <i>et al</i>	2007
Careers	Generation Y graduates	Maxwell et al	2010
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	1996a
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	1998
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	1999a
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	1999b
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	2004
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	2008a
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	20008b
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	2009b
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	2010b
Careers	Managers	Broadbridge	2010a
Careers	Students	Broadbridge <i>et al</i>	2005
Careers	Students	Broadbridge <i>et al</i>	2007
Careers	Students	Broadbridge <i>et al</i>	2009
Careers	Women employees	Harris <i>et al</i>	2007
Careers	Women managers	Brockbank and Airey	1994a
Careers	Women managers	Brockbank and Airey	1994b
Careers	Women managers	Brockbank and Traves	1995
Careers	Students	Houlton and Thomas	1990
Careers	Women managers	McIntyre	2000
Careers	Students	Schmidt and Corbett	1994
Careers	Women managers	Sharples	1986
Careers	Women managers	Tomlinson <i>et al</i>	1997
Careers	Women managers	Traves <i>et al</i>	1997
Charity shop retail	Charity head office staff	Broadbridge and Parsons	2003a
Charity shop retail	Charity head office staff	Broadbridge and Parsons	2003b
Charity shop retail	Charity shop managers	Broadbridge and Parsons	2005
Charity shop retail	Charity shop managers	Parsons and Broadbridge	2006
Charity shop retail	Charity shop managers	Parsons and Broadbridge	2007
Charity shop retail	Charity shop managers	Parsons and Broadbridge	2004
Charity shop retail	Charity shop volunteers	Horne and Broadbridge	1994
Charity shop retail	Charity volunteers	Broadbridge and Horne	1994
Charity shop retail	Charity volunteers	Broadbridge and Horne	1996
Culture	General employees	Harris and Ogbonna	1998
Culture / change	Food retailing	Ogbonna and Harris	2002
Culture / change	Middle managers	Ogbonna and Wilkinson	2003

Customer care issues	Conceptual	Sparks	1990/91
Customer care issues	General employees	Patterson and Baron	2010
Customer care issues	Front line	Peccei and Rosenthal	2000
Customer care issues	General employees	Marchington and Parker	1990
Customer care issues	General employees	Ogbonna and Wilkinson	1990
Customer care issues	General employees	Peccei and Rosenthal	1997
Customer care issues	General employees	Sparks	1992a
Customer care issues	General employees	Harris and Ogbonna	2010
Diversity issues	Part-time employees	Lynch	2005
Diversity issues	General employees	Foster	2004b
Diversity issues	General employees	Foster	2005
Diversity issues	General employees	Foster and Harris	2005
Diversity issues	Managers	Broadbridge	2001
Diversity issues	Managing diversity	Foster and Newell	2002
Diversity issues	General employees	Harris and Foster	2004
Employee perceptions	General employees	Foster <i>et al</i>	2009
Employee perceptions	Shop floor and managers	Broadbridge	1987
Employee perceptions	General employees	Whysall <i>et al</i>	2009
Employee relations	General employees	Marchington and Harrison	1991
Employment Relations	General employees	Freathy and Sparks	1996
Ethical issues	General paper	Whysall	2000
Flexibility/ working time	General paper	Baret <i>et al</i>	2000
Flexibility/ working time	General paper	Baret <i>et al</i>	1999
Flexibility / working time	general employees	Freathy and Sparks	1995b
Flexibility / working time	Employees in food retail stores	Freathy and Sparks	2000
Flexibility / working time	Employees in supermarkets	Penn and Wirth	1993
Flexibility / working time	Lone parents and flexibility	Nickson <i>et al</i>	2004
Flexibility / working time	Shop workers	Pelham and Townsend	1987
Flexibility / working time	General paper	Doogan	1992
Flexibility / working time	Managers	Freathy and Sparks	1993
Flexibility / working time	Managers	Freathy and Sparks	1995a
Flexibility / working time	Unsociable hours	Kirby	1992
Flexibility / working time	Working conditions and trading week	Kirby	1993
Flexibility / working time	Flexibility	Leman	1992
Flexibility / working time	Flexibility, skill and technological change	Penn	1995
Flexibility / working time	Flexible working & equal opportunities	Perrons	2000
Flexibility / working time	Job share in management	Tiney	2004
Flexibility / working time	Flexibility	Walsh	1991
General issues	General paper	Freathy	1997
General issues	General paper	Sparks	2000
General issues	Front-line staff	Hopkinson	2003

General issues	Salespeople	Piercy <i>et al</i>	2002
General issues	General paper	Robinson	1993
General issues	Managers	Broadbridge	2007
General issues	Shop floor staff	Broadbridge	1991
General issues	General paper	Sparks	1992b
General issues	General	Nodding	2006
General issues	General overview	Broadbridge and Dawson	1987
General issues	Independent workers	Liff and Turner	1999
General issues	General	Reynolds	1993
General issues	General paper	Marchington	1996
General issues	General paper	Rajins and Pearson	1986
General issues	Women	Witz and Wilson	1982
Health issues - stress	Managers	Broadbridge	1999c
Health issues - stress	Managers	Broadbridge	2000
Health issues - stress	Managers	Broadbridge	2002a
Health issues - stress	Shop floor workers	Broadbridge <i>et al</i>	2000
Health issues - AIDS/HIV	General paper	McLean and Moore	1997
Health issues - AIDS/HIV	General paper	Moore and McLean	1998
Health issues	General employees	Phillips	2002
Historical	Historical perspective	Findlay and Sparks	2008
Historical	General paper	Bowlby	1988
HRM in retailing	General paper	Couch	1992
International comparisons	General paper	Gregory	1991
Job Satisfaction	General paper	Rose	2007
Leadership	Gender	Pal <i>et al</i>	2010
Loyalty	General employees	Foster <i>et al</i>	2008
Motivation	Independent workers	Bent and Freathy	1997
Motivation	General paper	Woodward <i>et al</i>	1994
Part-time working	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1984
Pay Issues	Shop floor employees	Lowe and Crewe	1991
Pay Issues	Part-time employees	Robinson and Wallace	1973b
Pay Issues	General paper	Broadbridge	1995
Pay Issues	General paper	Broadbridge	1997a
Pay Issues	General paper	Craig and Wilkinson	1985
Pay Issues	General paper	Lucas and Bailey	1993
Pay Issues	General paper	Omar and Shittu	2005
Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1972
Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1973a
Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1973c
Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1973d
Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1974a
Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1974b

Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1975
Pay Issues	General paper	Robinson and Wallace	1976
Perceptions of employees	Front line employees	Foster	2004a
Perceptions of employees	Shop floor employees	Walters	2005
Performance issues	Shop floor employees	Hendrie	2004
Performance issues	Salespeople	Clark	1983
Performance issues	Shop floor employees	Ogbonna and Harris	2001
Performance issues	General paper	Uncles	1995
Performance issues	General paper	Broadbridge	2002b
Recruitment and Retention	General paper	Hogarth and Barth	1991
Recruitment and Retention	General paper	Reynolds and Brue	1991
Small business	Women managers	Ogden and Maxwell	2006
Superstore employees	DIY superstore employees	Freathy and Sparks	1994a
Superstore employees	Female and part-time employment	Sparks	1982
Superstore employees	Superstore employees	Dawson <i>et al</i>	1986a
Superstore employees	Superstore employees	Dawson <i>et al</i>	1986b
Superstore employees	Superstore employees	Dawson <i>et al</i>	1987a
Superstore employees	Superstore employees	Dawson <i>et al</i>	1988
Superstore employees	Superstore employees	Freathy	1993
Superstore employees	Superstore employees	Freathy and Sparks	1994b
Superstore employees	General employees	Sparks	1981
Superstore employees	General employees	Sparks	1983a
Superstore employees	General employees	Sparks	1983b
Superstore employees	General employees	Sparks	1991
Superstore employees	General employees	Thompson	1993
Superstore employees	Female employees	Dawson <i>et al</i>	1987b
Technology	General employees	Smith	1988
Technology	General paper	Lewis	1985
Temporary workers	Non managerial employees	Collinson	1987
Trade unions	Female part-time workers	Walters	2002
training and development	Managers	Broadbridge and Davies	1993
Training and Education	Case study	Maxwell	1995
Training and Education	General paper	IMS	1993
Training and Education	General paper	Jarvis and Prais	1988
Training and Education	General paper	Robinson	1984
Trends in employment	General paper	Sparks	1984
Trends in employment	General paper	Sparks	1987

# Barriers to ascension to senior management positions in retailing

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*Using a case study of retailing, this paper examines the continued under-representation of women in senior management positions. Via a questionnaire survey, it reveals that those factors retail managers (men and women) themselves attribute to the disproportionate number of women in senior positions. The findings revealed that the main factors were associated with women's 'other' role: the family. Thus, lack of child care facilities and high family commitments were regarded as especially problematic and the organisation of retailing with its long anti-social hours and lack of flexi-time at managerial levels contributed to these problems. Other factors were also regarded as important including company cultures that uphold patriarchal social systems. The paper demonstrates how women's primary position in the home and domestic domain and men's primary position in the economic domain have shaped the way retail organisations are organised and the roles that men and women are traditionally expected to adopt within them.*

**Keywords:** retailing; retail management; gender; career advancement; human capital; masculinity; flexible working; patriarchal social systems

## Introduction

The growth of women in the UK workforce since the latter part of the twentieth century is well documented and women now constitute half (49.7%) of the UK workforce (Office for National Statistics, 2006). They also occupy 34.5% of all managerial positions (Eurostat, 2006), a three fold increase since 1988 (Davidson, 1991), and compared to just 2% in 1974 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006). Reasons for such a growth have been attributed to women's investment in their human capital via higher education (Institute of Management, 2001), a decreasing fertility rate (Hakim, 2003) and greater social acceptance for women with children to work (Institute of Management, 2001). In addition to organisational policies to promote equal opportunities, the growth of an information- and service-based economy which benefits women's employment in management positions, is also a factor (Powell, 2000). However, while there has been undoubtedly a growth of women represented in managerial positions generally, they remain under-represented at senior management levels throughout the majority of sectors of the economy (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006; Linehan, 2002; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004, 2005).

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Using the case of the retail industry (a sector which is numerically populated by women employees) and drawing on primary research with UK retail managers themselves, this paper contributes to existing debates, and locates this inverse distribution of men and women in management positions in organisations to the traditional roles prescribed for men and women. It demonstrates how women's primary position in the home and domestic domain and men's primary position in the economic domain has shaped the way retail organisations are organised and the roles that men and women are traditionally expected to occupy within them. The retail sector has been chosen because not only is it a crucial employment sector in the UK, accounting for around 1 in 10 all jobs in the UK, but is also an important employer of women: they comprise two-thirds of all employees in retailing (Office for National Statistics, 2006). A strong female customer base (Katz & Katz, 1997), the provision of a suitable location and convenient working hours make it a particularly attractive place to for women to work, although many are employed in non-managerial (Broadbridge, 1996) and low paid positions (Broadbridge, 1995).

Further, as a sector, retailing is alleged to be more likely to employ women in management positions than in other sectors of the UK economy (Davidson, 1991; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Hammond & Holton, 1994; Schein, 2001; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2003). An estimated 41% of managers in retailing are women [Equal Opportunities Commission quoted in Singh & Vinnicombe (2003)], and so in comparison with the national average, the retail sector is an apparently attractive sector for women to gain managerial employment. However, while there may be some parity between the numerical distribution of the sexes at lower levels of the retail management hierarchy, research has indicated that women are disproportionately represented in the senior management and director levels of retailing (Broadbridge, 1996, 1998, 2004; Thomas, 2001). For example, the research by Broadbridge (1996) showed an inverse relationship between women and men according to position in the occupational hierarchy, with women outnumbering men by a ratio of 2 to 1 at departmental management levels, but with men outnumbering women by a ratio of 3 to 1 at deputy management levels; by 9 to 1 at branch level positions and by 20 to 1 at area management positions. This relationship was no better at head office where men managers outnumbered women managers by a ratio of three to one. Major explanations for women not reaching senior management levels were ascribed to women's domestic responsibilities and organisational attitudes (Broadbridge, 1998). The retail managers themselves (both men and women) attributed women's unequal progress to senior retail management positions as relating to company cultures that uphold outdated attitudes towards women, and embrace transactional leadership styles, long working hours and lack of flexible working at senior levels, a disregard for the need to accommodate family commitments (Broadbridge, 1998, 2004) together with the operation, in some instances, of informal processes of progression (Broadbridge, 2004).

At the very senior positions in retailing, research by Thomas (2001) suggested that while women's access to retail boards has improved, it remains severely limited. He argued that those women who did hold director positions were predominantly in secondary positions at the margins rather than at the centre of corporate influence in retailing. Similarly, research by Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) also showed that some women were achieving executive level positions in retail companies. Of the top FTSE 100 companies, there were 5 executive and 11 non-executive female directors on retail company boards. While this might be an improvement on the position of some women in senior positions in retailing, they remain disproportionately represented in these senior policy-making positions, despite the fact that a business case can be made to employ women in these positions. For example, Broadbridge (1998, 2005) found

that women brought different qualities to the retail manager's role than men, providing a more balanced managerial perspective and drawing on transformational leadership styles now acknowledged within the retail management hierarchy. Such leadership styles have been claimed to enhance organisational effectiveness (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Further, mixed work teams understand a wider range of customer needs (Greenslade, 1991) while women bring knowledge of female market segmentation (Daily, Certo, & Dalton, 2000) and serve as role models for others (Bilimoria, 2000). Hence, this feminised workplace make it an important sector to bring the reader up to date with the relative current position of women at senior management levels.

### **Prior research**

Various explanations have been proposed for the disproportionate representation of men and women in the management hierarchy. A useful starting point is that of Wajcman (1998) who categorises the explanations for the existing pattern of gender segregation in employment into two broad positions – those that derive from the sexual division of labour in the family and those that derive from the organisation of employment itself. These explain the disproportionate representation of women and men in organisations to be owing to traditional roles ascribed to men and women, and the intransigence of organisations to accommodate other such role patterns.

#### ***The sexual division of labour and women's lack of human capital***

The explanations that derive from the sexual division of labour in the family uphold the prominence of family life in women's lives and their childbearing role (and consequent patterns of work) which does not equip them for management (Wajcman, 1998). The male model of work endorses an uninterrupted career pattern and so disadvantages those who want to take a career break. Women are the sole child bearers and still more likely to be the major contributor to the home domain (Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2006; Eurostat, 2006; Gordon & Whelan-Barry, 2004), even in dual career households (Burke, 2002). From these arguments stem the assumptions that women are less committed and interested in career advancement, and it is their personal choice or preference not to pursue a career in management (e.g. see Hakim, 1995, 1996, 2000). However, this argument can be criticised for being naïve. This theoretical position explains women's relation to employment as derived solely from their domestic and family experiences. It treats women as one homogeneous group and ignores the reality that women have differing non-work (domestic and family) experiences. This explanation also ignores how career theory is rooted in male values (Dalton, 1989; Marshall, 1989), and that most occupational environments are more conducive to men's rather than women's success (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994).

If women put their family life before their career, then an argument follows that in comparison to men they will acquire less human capital. Human capital refers to the competencies and capabilities of the workforce, and individuals accrue it via their education, training and work experience (Becker, 1975). Acquisition of human capital is regarded as one measure of success in an organisation and one on which to make decisions about career advancement. Adopting an argument that places women's primary position in the home environment, women have traditionally accrued less human capital than men because of their interrupted

employment pattern (or because employers invest less in their women employees than their male employees on the assumption that they will eventually leave to have children). This theory does not, of course, adequately explain why women with an uninterrupted career pattern or all men do not reach senior management positions (or why employers should necessarily invest less in women than in men unless they are discriminating against women in some way). Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that many women are gaining as much human capital as men in higher education. In 2003–2004, 59% of further education students and 57% of higher education students were women (Babb, Butcher, Church, & Zealy, 2006) and are postponing or foregoing having a family (Babb et al., 2006), else take the minimal maternity leave (Baur, Young, & Salway, 1993), thus not decreasing their acquisition of human capital to any large extent. Moreover, as boundaryless and protean careers become more common, so it might be equally likely that a man will leave his current employment to take a job elsewhere (and human capital ignores the place of non-work activities in a man's life). So, as a theory human capital, while useful, can only offer partial justification for explaining the lack of women in managerial positions.

### ***The organisation of employment – patriarchal social systems and the masculinity of organisations***

In attempting to understand the sexual division of labour and women's lack of human capital, one needs to complete the picture by turning to Wajcman's (1998) other category to help understand existing patterns of gender segregation in employment, the organisation of employment. Various researches have concentrated on the issues that may affect men and women in their managerial careers, and many explanations have been attributed to the traditional way work is organised and constructed around patriarchal social systems (Powell, 2000). Men still dominate organisations and have the power and authority to define what constitutes occupational success. Men influence organisational rules, procedures, formal job definitions and how people interact, which led Wajcman (1996) to argue that management is socially constructed by men. Even recent research shows that management and what is considered to be a 'good' manager is still perceived as being characterised in masculine terms (Heilman, 2001; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Schein, 2001).

Definitions of success and commitment in organisations are based around male models, although research shows that women define success differently (Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Stroth & Reilly, 1999; Sturges, 1999; Vinnicombe & Harris, 2000). The way work is organised also upholds male definitions of commitment (Cooper & Lewis, 1999). Working long hours is just one form of demonstrating commitment, with Collinson and Hearn (2000) noting how working long hours (particularly in post-delaying cultures) can become a test of manhood, with some men managers enjoying the 'buzz' of staying late at the office. In the retail management context, many managers (both men and women) boast of the long hours they work (e.g. see Broadbridge, 1999) and many men in particular legitimise this by stating that they enjoy working such long hours. However, working long hours is difficult for anyone who has other responsibilities or commitments (as well as being tiring/exhausting (Broadbridge, Swanson, & Taylor, 2000, Broadbridge, 2002) counter productive (Cooper, Cooper, & Eaker, 1988) and upsetting the work–life balance ratio), and women managers have consistently suffered from the problems of inflexible hours and lack of child care facilities (Hammond & Holton, 1991; Hansard Society Commission, 1990; Orth & Jacobs, 1971; Thomas, 1984). Heilman (2001) claims that there is a perceived lack of fit between the requirements of traditionally male jobs and the stereotypic

attributes ascribed to women. As such they are viewed as being less able to perform the job competently (see also Marshall, 1991). As a result of patriarchal social systems there has traditionally been overt and covert forms of discrimination (Charlesworth, 1997; Hennig & Jardim, 1976; Kottke & Agars, 2005; Nicholson & West, 1988; Simpson, 2000; Wood, 2003) and the existence of a glass ceiling for women (Adler, 1993; Burke & Nelson, 2002; Davidson & Cooper, 1994; Mathur-Helm, 2006; Maume, 2004; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; Powell, 1999; Simpson & Altman, 2000; Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002), outdated attitudes to women's roles (Coe, 1992; Hansard Society Commission, 1990; Sutton & Moore, 1985) and a lack of female role models (Catalyst/Conference Board, 2003; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Gulati & Ledwith, 1987; Hansard Society Commission, 1990; Olsson & Pringle, 2004; Rosen, Miguel, & Pierce, 1989; Truman, 1986). Tharenou (1999) in her review of previous research concluded that women started in jobs with few prospects for advancing to executive levels, interrupted their employment because of family reasons, incurred discrimination and less favourable social environments and were preferred less because they were dissimilar to the male managerial hierarchy. The current research will examine whether these broad issues have changed in the twenty-first century.

As women aspire to more senior positions, they therefore have to consider how their own behaviours and perceptions fit with those associated with successful careers in their organisation (Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). According to Vinnicombe and Singh (2002), as men occupy the top of many organisations and women are found lower down in supportive roles, masculine and feminine characteristics are believed to be associated with occupational positions and organisational level rather than their sex. Hence, they argue, when looking for senior level jobs, people possessing masculine characteristics are sought, and as Heilman (2001) noted, the traits typically associated with men and women are not just different but oppositional. With many organisations upholding male values as the cultural norm (Fischer & Gleijm, 1992; Marshall, 1987, 1991), so these cultures can therefore appear hostile to many women and so more women than men will be adversely affected, else they have to adapt their management style and outlooks in order to emulate these masculine characteristics and suppress their feminine ones. So, male-based organisational cultures can be also perpetuated by the few women who have made it past the glass ceiling. For example, Thomas (2005) quotes a woman retail managing director who asserts that male chief executives are obsessive compulsive workaholics, and argues that to compete against this group, women need to be the same. In doing so, she ignores the gendered nature of organisations and appears to accept and uphold the traditional (male) values associated with working practices and senior management positions. She does not question that board level positions might be compatible with other forms of working practices, and that these might be changed to accommodate a better lifestyle for both men and women chief executives. Rather, by not challenging such working practices, it merely perpetuates the situation and cultural norms, and confines these positions to those who are able, and willing, to work in such ways.

### ***The current position***

The division of traditional roles ascribed to men and women has been preserved and defended by some men as a result of the way that organisations are currently constructed. For example, Collinson and Hearn (2000) explain that the social changes of the 1990s (equal opportunities, organisational downsizing, work intensification) threatened gendered power relations and

masculine identities. Men managers in particular, they argue, have to recognise that their working lives are constantly being evaluated and assessed. The advancement of women can be perceived to be a threat to male organisational members and the organisation as a whole (Kottke & Agars, 2005). First, there are fewer job opportunities for men, which means their promotional opportunities are under threat, while the advancement of women changes the environment to which men have become accustomed and threatens existing organisational culture and identity. This may further threaten men's self-esteem and masculine identity. These perceived threats, Kottke and Agars (2005) argue, can lead to rigidity of responses and to limited opportunities for the inclusion of women on projects (which affects their acquisition of human capital) and in both formal and informal networks (which affects their acquisition of social capital – see Broadbridge, 2007 for a fuller explanation), although these discriminatory practices are conducted in subtle yet powerful ways. For example, women might have less opportunity for the acquisition of human capital in the experiences that they receive in the working environment (e.g. see Agars, 2004).

Collinson and Hearn (2000) argue that managers are increasingly assessed according to their ability to control their lives (and in particular the divide between their work and home lives) which reinforces the dominant position of the two spheres. As a result, Collinson and Hearn (2000) argue, men have distanced themselves from their children and family responsibilities, and organisational working practices serve to reinforce these distancing strategies and demonstrations of commitment. Within organisations these distancing strategies are interpreted in a positive light as evidence of commitment to the company and of individual ability to control their 'private life'. When we consider the position of women managers, it would appear that an inability or unwillingness of women managers to likewise 'control' their lives, will be viewed negatively by organisations, and as such they will be regarded as less committed and less able to control their private life than their male counterparts. As such, this will legitimise men ascending the managerial hierarchy over women. This also reinforces Powell's (2000) argument that women are more likely to attempt to balance home and work lives (while men are more likely to separate the two domains). As many organisational cultures and top management jobs do not truly support a 'balancing' of home and work lives but pay lip service to it despite research that has shown the organisational advantages of doing so (Burke, 2001), they continue to attract individuals who adhere to the traditional male model of career success. Burke (2001) regards the work–life balance as an either-or concept; either you are a committed employee or a committed family person, but you can't be both. Thus, having a family continues to be a career liability for many women, yet it is not the case for men who have been socialised to separate the two domains. Women then, who want to advance their careers against these organisational expectations of how top managers should perform, might face the added dilemma of whether to start, or postpone, having a family. Powell (2000) further acknowledges that men are more likely to make sacrifices in their personal lives, and that they too may be constrained by the socialisation process that determines what is expected behaviour for them to follow. Men's relationship to work is regarded as having little connection with domestic and family life, and follows the classical theoretical career models (e.g. Ginzberg, Ginsberg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951; Hall, 1976; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Schein, 1971, 1978; Super, 1957), although these models hold less relevance in the twenty-first century as organisations have become flatter, and careers have become more boundaryless (Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), multi-directional (Baruch, 2004;

Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth, & Larsson, 1996; Walker, 1992) and protean (Baruch, 2004; Hall & Mirvis, 1996).

Using male-based standards of career and career success, it is little wonder that women who attempt to combine a career with family life/domesticity are regarded as failing professionally (Gallos, 1989). Women construct their configuration of themselves, their lives and the world around them differently from men (Gilligan, 1982), but this does not mean they have less career motivation as much as a different perspective towards what a career means to them (Gallos, 1989). In gendered social contexts, women face different constraints than men in exercising their decisions over their careers (Devine, 1994; Doorewaard, Hendrickx, & Verschure, 2004; Ginn et al., 1996; Healy, 1999; McRae, 2003). Attempting to combine work and family responsibilities can lead to overload and conflict, thus providing barriers to career advancement (Tharenou, 1997). Although multiple roles do not impede advancement, women's family duties impede factors leading to advancement (e.g. acquisition of human capital), so the break/lesser perceived commitment to the job relates back to the male-based culture of continuous uninterrupted, long hours culture. Careers need to accommodate the reality of women's (and men's) lives so that they can make a meaningful investment in both occupational and family roles. The value placed on continuity of employment and commitment and inflexible working hours serve to exclude some women from some managerial jobs.

Against this background, the paper now considers the current situation of ascension to senior management positions in the retail environment. It is a service sector industry, employing a high proportion of women employees for many of whom the way the work is organised suits their competing responsibilities. It serves a predominantly female customer base, and has increasingly embraced transformational leadership styles alongside transactional ones. It is a sector where women are more likely to be employed in management positions, yet the evidence still suggests that a glass ceiling remains at senior levels. In an era which sees women's more equal investment in human capital, together with growth of equal opportunity policies, the reasons for this phenomenon need to be examined to understand what factors, if any, prevent the relative equal ascent of women into senior retail management positions. To do this, primary research was conducted with a sample of retail managers.

## **Methodology**

The research instrument used to uncover the reasons why women are unequally represented in senior management positions in retailing was a self-completed questionnaire survey. This comprised of a series of 24 items, drawn from previous research findings. Respondents were invited to state their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

This formed part of a wider research project which explored with retail managers issues related generally to their career development to date (including the factors they perceived had assisted or hindered their own careers). Demographic information was collected from the respondents including their sex, age, education level, and whether they had dependents. A background to the respondents work histories was also collected in the form of the number of companies they had worked for, their total years of work experience and years at managerial level, along with details of their current position.

The sampling procedure was based on non-probability sampling methods. The purpose was not to establish a random sample but to identify those people who have information about the

process (Hornby & Symon, 1994). A questionnaire for self-completion was devised and posted to members of a retail network. These are all retail managers, the majority of whom are managers within UK retailing. Following a sampling procedure used by Davidson and Cooper (1983), each member was sent seven questionnaires. One was to be completed by themselves, and they were asked to distribute a questionnaire each to one woman senior manager, middle manager and junior manager and one questionnaire each to one man senior manager, middle manager and junior manager in their organisation. This was to ensure as far as possible that an equal number of men and women at various levels of managerial experience would be represented by the sample and that the final sample would not be atypical of the original retail network. In total, 938 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 286 were returned, giving a response rate of 30.49%. An equal proportion of network members and non-network members responded to the questionnaire. The response rate was considered to be reasonable given the method of questionnaire administration.

## Findings

### *Background of respondents*

There were some gender differences between the demographic characteristics of the questionnaire sample (Table 1). The women managers were significantly younger (under 40) than the men. The men were significantly more likely to have children than the women managers. Of those respondents who did have children, the women were significantly more likely to have just one child than the men who were more likely to have two or more children (which might be partially attributed to the age difference in the sample). The women were also more likely than the men to consider that having children had restricted their career. The women managers were significantly more likely to have a partner also in full-time employment than the men and to report being responsible for housework and caring activities in the home environment. Thus, supporting some of the previous literature, the women in this sample appear to be attempting to balance their careers and home lives to a larger extent than the men managers.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the work and educational experience of the sample. Men had been working longer than the women and had more years of managerial experience, which largely reflects their average age differences. There were significantly more men in senior positions of management, in operational fields (store and area management) and in generalist management positions. Men and women have worked for the same number of companies throughout their career to date. The findings showed that equal proportions of men and women had been educated beyond A level and they were equally likely to hold professional qualifications, hence their accumulation of human capital was not significantly different with respect to education. Men generally reported working longer hours per week than the women. Men were significantly more likely to work beyond the hours recommended by the working time directive. For example, 58% of men against 34% of women worked more than 50 h per week. Despite this significant difference, it is clear that many managers work beyond those stipulated by the working time directive, while the majority of men (89%) and women (77%) managers work beyond a 40 h week. A quarter of the men and women reported taking work home with them most evenings, while a minority equally reported liking working long hours. A large proportion

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the retail management sample.

	Male	Female
Sex	150 (53%)	135 (47%)
Age (years) ( $p = 0.003$ )		
20–29	17 (12%)	37 (28%)
30–39	80 (54%)	56 (42%)
40–49	39 (26%)	36 (27%)
50–59	12 (8%)	5 (4%)
Average age (years)	37.50	35.15
Marital status		
Single	18 (12%)	22 (16%)
Married/cohabiting	120 (80%)	100 (74%)
Divorced/separated	4 (3%)	6 (4%)
Other partner	8 (5%)	7 (5%)
Whether children? ( $p = 0.001$ )		
Yes	105 (70%)	46 (35%)
No	45 (30%)	87 (65%)
Number of children ( $p = 0.048$ )		
One	27 (26%)	20 (44%)
Two	53 (51%)	21 (46%)
Three or more	25 (24%)	5 (11%)
Having children has restricted my career (% agreeing, where appropriate)	16 (15%)	24 (59%)
Ages of children		
All pre-school	23 (22%)	12 (27%)
Pre-school and school age	22 (21%)	7 (16%)
All school age	43 (41%)	16 (36%)
School and post-school age	4 (4%)	5 (11%)
All post-school age	13 (12%)	5 (11%)
Whether other dependents		
Yes	20 (13%)	13 (10%)
No	130 (87%)	121 (90%)
Caring responsibilities has restricted my career (% agreeing)	9 (9%)	20 (42%)
Working status of partner ( $p = 0.001$ )		
Full-time	54 (43%)	98 (92%)
Part-time	43 (34%)	4 (4%)
No paid employment	29 (23%)	5 (5%)
I am primarily responsible for housework responsibilities (% agreeing) ( $p = 0.001$ )	18 (13%)	79 (62%)
I am primarily responsible for child care responsibilities (% agreeing, where applicable) ( $p = 0.001$ )	3 (3%)	28 (64%)

of both men (42%) and women (64%) managers however stated they would welcome more flexible working arrangements.

### ***Factors preventing women's ascension to senior management positions***

Table 3 reveals that the reasons why women are under-represented in senior management positions in retailing can be divided into five groupings: work–home commitments; the way work is organised; women's invisibility at senior levels; masculine dominated organisational cultures; and women themselves. However, both men and women retail managers consider the main reasons for women's apparent lack of progress to senior retail management positions to be related specifically to women's dual role position where they are required to balance the home and

Table 2. Work and educational experiences of retail management sample.

	Male	Female
Total years of work experience (average) ( $p = 0.01$ )	18.84	15.72
Total years of managerial experience (average) ( $p = 0.01$ )	12.53	8.58
Years with present employer	10.02	7.74
Years in present position	3.04	2.72
Number of companies worked for	3.36	3.36
Management level* ( $p = 0.001$ )		
Junior	16 (11%)	28 (21%)
Middle	59 (39%)	46 (34%)
Senior	55 (37%)	44 (33%)
Director	19 (13%)	6 (4%)
Other (e.g. trainee)	1 (0.7%)	11 (8%)
Job location* ( $p = 0.001$ )		
Store	41 (29%)	27 (20%)
Head office, distribution	85 (59%)	103 (77%)
Area/field management	18 (13%)	3(2%)
Job function* ( $p = 0.001$ )		
Functional specialist	58 (40%)	70 (54%)
Generalist	89 (61%)	60 (46%)
Number of companies worked for		
One	30 (20%)	21 (16%)
Two	35 (24%)	32 (24%)
Three	28 (19%)	28 (21%)
Four or more	56 (38%)	53 (40%)
Average (number)	3.36	3.36
Hours worked* ( $p = 0.001$ )		
13–39 h	15 (11%)	32 (24%)
40–49 h	43 (31%)	57 (43%)
50–59 h	48 (34%)	26 (20%)
60–70 h	34 (24%)	18 (14%)
Average hours worked per week	50.04	45.45
% Full-time	100%	96%
I take work home most evenings (% agreeing)	35 (24%)	33 (25%)
I would welcome more flexible working arrangements ( $p = 0.002$ )	62 (42%)	84 (64%)
I like working long hours	20 (13%)	14 (11%)
Educational attainment* ( $p = 0.08$ )		
None	4 (3%)	2 (2%)
GCSE/O'level	21 (14%)	15 (11%)
A level or equivalent	34 (23%)	36 (27%)
First degree	35 (24%)	38 (28%)
Post-graduate diploma	17 (11%)	26 (19%)
Higher degree	37 (25%)	16 (12%)
Have additional professional qualification		
Yes	54 (37%)	51 (38%)

work domains (this finding mirrors that of BITC/Catalyst, 2000). Child care and family commitments are perceived by approximately three quarters of both men and women retail managers as the major reasons for women's under representation in senior management positions. While these explanations are on first inspection seemingly unconnected with the retail sector *per se*, the long and anti-social working hours and lack of flexi-time available to senior women retail managers were also strong reasons provided for women's under-representation in senior

Table 3. Reasons why women are under-represented in senior management positions (all reasons provided – total sample).

Factors	Women (No.)	Women (%)	Men (No.)	Men (%)	$\chi^2$ sig ( $p$ =)
Lack of child care facilities	103	79	107	74	n.s.
High family commitments/responsibilities	95	73	98	68	n.s.
Lack of flexi-time	91	70	85	59	n.s.
Long anti-social hours	89	68	77	53	0.010
Lack of female role models	81	62	72	49	0.058
Male dominance in the organisational hierarchy	81	61	72	49	n.s.
Outdated attitudes to women's roles	76	58	69	47	n.s.
Women's lack of confidence	66	50	28	19	0.001
Gender stereotyped beliefs	65	49	54	38	0.015
Failure of senior management to be accountable for women	60	46	48	33	n.s.
Lack of understanding re women's career ambitions	57	43	25	25	0.003
Company culture and reluctance to change	54	41	43	30	0.016
Lack of advice re women's careers	50	39	35	24	0.012
Lack of support	47	36	34	23	0.013
Lack of access to informal social networks inside the organisation	45	34	22	15	0.001
Retailing is physically demanding	39	30	29	20	n.s.
Lack of access to informal networks outside the organisation	39	30	10	7	0.001
Management restructuring	37	29	6	4	0.001
Lack of mentors	44	33	53	36	n.s.
Women's distaste for politics or lack of political awareness	30	23	12	8	0.003
Women's reluctance to accept management positions	27	21	26	18	n.s.
Equal opportunities given a low priority	26	20	21	14	0.009
Women prefer to work part-time	16	12	22	15	n.s.
Unequal access to training and development	12	9	7	5	0.004

management positions. It would appear that the organisation of working hours at senior levels within the retail sector places considerable constraints on the career development of women who also hold familial responsibilities. Although these four reasons dominated the volume of responses provided, other explanations were also vocalised by around half of the sample. These reasons are connected with the organisation of employment and patriarchal social systems. Most notably, both men and women respondents stated the lack of female role models at senior levels and male dominance in retail organisations, in addition to outdated attitudes towards women managers as other central factors inhibiting women's ascension to senior management positions.

Table 3 also reveals that, of the 24 factors, 14 significant differences were recorded in the responses between the men and women retail managers in their assessment for why women are under-represented in senior retail management positions. For each of the 14 factors, the women managers were significantly more likely than the men managers to state that particular factor as a possible explanation for women's under-representation at senior management levels. It is possible to divide these reasons into person-centred (individual) factors and situation-centred (organisational) factors. The person-centred (individual) factors include women's lack of confidence and, to a lesser degree, women's distaste for politics or lack of political awareness.

The situation-centred (organisational) factors are connected with a patriarchal organisational culture and climate, which is not conducive to women's progress (including gender stereotyped beliefs, a lack of understanding and support for women's careers, a reluctance to change company culture, a lack of access to networks, and other organisational working practices and policies). If organisations have a cultural climate that is not conducive to women's career progress, uphold male models of working, and do not present female role models, it is not surprising that women therefore suggest that a lack of confidence deters them from reaching senior management positions. The significant differences between the men and women's responses reveal similar findings to those of Vinnicombe and Singh (2002), in that it would appear that men might be reporting a sense of 'change for the better' for women's career advancement, while women managers reported continuing discrimination and stereotyping. It also appears to reflect other research (BITC/Catalyst, 2000; Conference Board, 2002) that found that male executives were unaware of certain barriers in women's career development (stereotypes and preconceptions about women's roles and abilities).

### *A profile of senior management respondents*

Given the dominance of the top four reasons to explain women's under-representation in retail management positions, and their close connection with women's assumed primary role within the home environment, it is worth noting some additional details regarding the senior women and men managers. Disaggregating the findings for just senior managers from the survey, showed consistent results with just 40% of senior women managers against 73% of senior men managers having children, although the senior women were marginally older than their junior counterparts (average age of 38.2 years). Thus, the majority of women (60%) in senior positions have possibly taken the decision not to let children interfere with and intrude into their organisational life and career development. Those that do, however, tended to agree that having children had restricted their careers [57% (against 9% for men)]. Moreover, they were still significantly more likely than the senior men managers to state their primary responsibility for housework [59% (against 14% for men)] and child care duties [53% (against 15% for men)], suggesting that many senior women are performing at 'superwoman' levels in both the work and home domains.

With regard to hours worked, senior staff (both men and women) report working longer hours than their junior and middle management counterparts. The men were more likely to work beyond a 50 h week (76%) than the women (52%), although those reporting working beyond a 40 h week was high for both (99% of men and 94% of women). As well as working longer hours than the junior and middle managers, senior managers also were more likely to report taking work home with them (29% of men and 32% of women). A similar percentage of senior women would welcome more flexible working hours (63%) than the other women, which perhaps mirrors the frustrations of senior managers with prevailing long hours as found by Drew and Murtagh (2005). The reverse was found for senior men, although a sizeable third (36%) would still welcome more flexible hours.

### *Opportunities for flexible working arrangements*

Another part of the questionnaire asked respondents to what extent their current job could be performed on a more flexible basis. Table 4 reveals the findings for the senior managers only (given that the preceding analysis has shown inflexible working to be a major barrier to

Table 4. The extent to which senior managers' jobs can be performed on a more flexible basis.

Factor	All aspects – men	All aspects – women	Most aspects – men	Most aspects – women	Some aspects – men	Some aspects – women	Not at all – men	Not at all – women
Job can be done at home	–	–	3 (4%)	3 (6%)	58 (78%)	39 (78%)	13 (18%)	8 (16%)
Job can be done via flexitime – men	6 (8%)	11 (22%)	16 (22%)	8 (16%)	28 (39%)	20 (41%)	22 (31%)	10 (20%)
Job can be done several days a week – men	2 (3%)	10 (21%)	15 (21%)	4 (8%)	27 (37%)	16 (33%)	29 (40%)	18 (38%)
Job can be done via job share – men	2 (3%)	6 (12%)	8 (11%)	8 (16%)	17 (23%)	11 (22%)	46 (63%)	25 (50%)
Job can be done via term-time working – men	1 (1%)	–	–	–	13 (18%)	7 (15%)	58 (81%)	41 (85%)

ascending to senior management positions). From it, it is clear that various aspects of a senior manager's job can be conducted on a more flexible basis than currently exists. In particular, at least some aspects of the senior managers' jobs can be conducted at home (82% men; 84% women); via flexi-time (69% men; 80% women); over several days a week (60% men; 63% women); and via job share (37% men; 50% women). The only aspect which might pose more of an issue is that of term-time working (19% men and 15% women) which is a reasonable assumption. Furthermore, around a third of the men and women senior managers claimed that most or all aspects of their job could be done via flexi-time and around a quarter of both the men and women senior managers claimed that most or all aspects of their jobs can be done over several days a week rather than a 5- or 6-day norm.

## Discussion

The findings from this research have demonstrated that the views of retail managers have changed little since the mid 1990s when previous research was conducted (Broadbridge, 1998). The reasons provided a decade later to explain the lack of women in senior management positions in retailing can be classified into Wajcman's (1998) distinctions of the sexual division of labour in the family, and the organisation of employment itself. The major reasons proposed are still related to intransigent working arrangements that do not enable family commitments to be better accommodated, along with patriarchal company cultures that uphold and perpetuate stereotypical beliefs and outdated attitudes towards women's roles. The findings also do not suggest that retailing, given its association with the employment of women and strong female

customer base differs significantly from other occupational categories. At the executive levels, the sector still appears to uphold and perpetuate masculinist cultural values.

In particular, the sexual division of labour which locates women as having primary responsibility in the home domain, and which requires them to balance home and work domains appears to be a major barrier for women at senior retail management levels. Similarly, women's traditional family role has been cited as a barrier in their career progression by others (cf. Equal Opportunities Commission, 2004, 2006; Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2003; Wentling, 2003). In support of Burke (2001), having a family appears to continue to be a career liability for women retail managers. It would seem that some women retail managers from this research are following male cultural values by also separating their work and home domains (witnessed by the amount of women, particularly senior women, who were childless). However, in general, the findings confirm prior research that women in dual career households continue to be the major contributors to the home domain, and that women are far more likely to attempt to balance the two domains than are the men, and undertake a double shift (Hochschild, 1989). Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the way work is organised at senior levels – i.e. long and inflexible hours – places considerable constraints on those wanting to combine a career with other responsibilities. Supporting arguments by Powell (2000), it appears that top management retail jobs do not encourage a 'balancing' of home and work lives.

Furthermore, retail organisations adhere to traditional views of the organisation of employment that embrace male-based definitions of career, commitment and career success and ignore the different life patterns of women (as well as ignoring the role of non-work domains in a man's life). Women are still assumed to put family roles before any other, and men put their work before family. Both men and women face constraints, although they are different and more obvious in the work arena for women. The long hours culture with few forms of flexible working at senior levels was perceived as the major organisational barriers for women reaching senior management positions. This pattern of working is not unique to retailing, but also found in other service sectors (cf. Doherty, 2004; Singh, Kumra, & Vinnicombe, 2002), and acts as a deterrent for many women to even apply for senior positions.

Within the retail senior management environment, we can deduce that the long anti-social hours associated with senior positions serves to perpetuate a senior management hierarchy as a workaholic culture (as posited by Thomas, 2005) and that organisational working practices reinforce self-control and distancing strategies (Collinson & Hearn, 2000) between work and home domains. While women endure the attempts to balance work and home lives, men who conform to the organisational practices are rewarded for separating the two domains and their ability to 'control' the various aspects of their lives. By association, those managers (i.e. many women and some men) who are unable or unwilling to demonstrate organisational commitment as defined in these ways are effectively kept out of senior management positions. Furthermore, the other majority reasons for why women do not reach senior management positions in retailing (the lack of female role models, male domination at the top of organisations and outdated attitudes towards women's roles) serve to reinforce the prevailing male-based cultural norms, the sexual division of labour between the home and work arena and the way work is consequently organised.

However, to what extent this view will remain relevant in the twenty-first century needs to be questioned. Traditional career research (e.g. Hall, 1976; Schein, 1978; Super, 1953) assumed that people's career goals were linear, consistent and contained within one company. Alongside

the problems with these career theories, in that they are gender biased towards a male pattern of work, other problems have arisen with them over time as organisational structures and people's values change. The organisation of work in the twenty-first century identifies that these career structures are less relevant, especially with the move towards multi-directional and protean career structures. However, there is still evidence to suggest that promotion is still common in organisational life (Holbeche, 2003), and there is still a tendency to think of careers in a traditional linear way. Nevertheless, Baruch (2004) argues that along with the hierarchical ladder climb, other criteria also held important in the modern day are inner satisfaction, life balance, autonomy and freedom. Prior work suggests that both men and women from Generation Y (those born between 1979 and 1994) seek a more balanced lifestyle between their work and non-work lives and have different expectations from their work role than Generation X and other older employees (Kerslake, 2005; Morton, 2002). In their study, Marshall and Bonner (2003) discovered the identification of the 'lifestyle' career anchor (which is rooted in the need for a balanced home and work life) was amongst the first two most important career anchors for people across a variety of ages. This they identify as a significant shift in values and motivations in the workplace, given that this career anchor was not identified by Schein's (1978) study. They argue that the possible increasing number of employees who value lifestyle will impact significantly on the relationship between organisations and individuals in meeting their respective work and career values.

Various retail companies might claim to offer flexible working arrangements and child care and career break options as was found by Wajcman (1998). Burke (2001), however, suggested that many companies pay lip service to such provisions, and the findings from this survey would tend to support this view. The provisions might exist but the practicalities of taking them up, or the perceived detriment to career progress if viewed to take them up serves to render them ineffective for those wanting to progress their careers. Thus, it reinforces the message that career and kids do not mix – you can't be fully committed to both. It also reinforces Vinnicombe and Singh's (2002) findings that masculine characteristics are sought for senior level positions. One must question whether the workaholic culture currently operating at senior levels within the retail environment that reinforces the distancing strategies of home and work domains can be maintained and upheld in the future. Given the emphasis placed on balanced lifestyles and other criteria valued by Generation Ys, it is imperative that retail organisations understand, acknowledge and incorporate these values in to the career structures of the future generation of retail managers. It may take time for the new values and beliefs of Generation Y to be embraced by organisations. However, more proactive organisations should be recognising this now and instigating genuine changes currently to incorporate more balanced lifestyles. Not only will this be in line with the value systems of Generation Y, it could reduce other organisational issues (e.g. stress, absenteeism, labour turnover etc) and lead to better overall productivity levels.

It would appear that retail organisations lack a supportive organisational infrastructure, reported by Mattis (2002) as reflective of organisational good practice, which would allow women to break through the glass ceiling into the senior positions of their companies.

If an individual suffers from subtle sexism, the cumulative effect for that individual may effect their motivation, career aspirations and even performance (Agars, 2004), the resultant implications therefore may be a lack of confidence to apply for senior positions or perceived lack of human capital necessary for advancement. Lack of confidence is common among women and in Singh, Vinnicombe, and James (2006) study, 7 of the 10 women professionals

said that they lacked confidence (worrying about what people thought of them, worried about politics, putting themselves down, being naturally shy, concerned about how to influence people). Without female role models to aspire to and a culture that is unfamiliar to them, so many women will lack the confidence to apply for (interpreted as 'failing' or 'choosing not' to reach) these senior positions. This might serve to reinforce a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## Conclusions

This paper contributes to our understanding of the disproportionate representation of men and women in senior positions within UK retail companies. It demonstrates this imbalance is related to the way work is organised and is perpetuated by established patriarchal company cultures. The apparent inflexibility (and length) of working hours at senior management levels is rather ironic given that the way work is organised at non-senior levels of retailing enables women (and some men) to successfully combine employment with their other competing responsibilities. As noted by Piercy, Lane, and Cravens (2002), the resolution of work-home conflicts and the introduction of different forms of working arrangements may be of particular significance in the career development of women (which they contend might pose a problem of being perceived as inequitable by other employees, although one way to circumvent this is to make the provision available to all staff). Yet of full-time employees in the UK just 10.2% of men and 16.1% of women claim to have flexible working hours (Babb et al., 2006). There are business benefits for organisations supporting a better work-life balance for their employees (and these will be even more apparent when dealing with Generation Y employees). Burke (2001) found employees in such organisations reported greater job, career and family satisfaction; higher levels of emotional well-being and less job stress and fewer psychosomatic symptoms, and fewer intentions to leave. Thus, organisations have the potential to benefit from the reduced costs of absence and turnover, and their associated costs of loss of productivity and disruption to other employees and customer service. Advances in technological developments further enable an ability to operate more flexible working arrangements at senior levels. The labour scheduling processes that enable large retailers to manage their staff hours at non-management levels could be equally effective for management positions. The proactive retailers should also be attempting to embrace the expectations of their Generation Y employees and make provisions for their managers at all levels of the organisation to better balance their career and home lifestyles.

Overcoming the barriers for women to reach senior positions in retail companies is a difficult task. High family commitments (which is directly associated with the accumulation of human capital) might be a plausible argument used by retailers for explaining why there is a lack of women in senior positions. The lack of flexi-time and long anti-social hours of retailing can be attributed to trading issues within retail (although Head Office operates different hours to stores). What is more concerning is the apparent reluctance to change working practices at managerial levels might be masking a fundamental unwillingness of companies to change organisational structures and policies that might better accommodate their managers' work-home life balance. Long hours are valued because they represent commitment and productivity (Lewis, 2001), despite counter arguments that working beyond a 40 h week actually decreases productivity (Cooper et al., 1988). With outdated attitudes to women's roles and a male dominance

of the organisational hierarchy, it is difficult to comprehend how women might progress on an equal basis to men. As Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) noted, the age and length of tenure of the chairman was significant in relation to the amount of women at board level. What is questionable is whether as boards become younger and naturally embrace the values of Generation Ys will their attitudes change towards women in senior positions or instead might there be a reinforcement of men in board level positions as the similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne & Neuman, 1992; Schneider, 1987) is perpetuated? This cynicism is pragmatic given that promotional routes are limited, while a falling population could see the rise of Government initiatives in encouraging women to have families and 'return' to the home. Moreover, the research uncovered an apparent unawareness by the male respondents of the extent of the barriers women face in their career development. Hence, they are blind to the range of issues involved and until they are fully educated and embrace these facts, so little change is likely to occur. Hopefully, this paper has begun this educational process.

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# Senior careers in retailing

## An exploration of male and female executives' career facilitators and barriers

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Senior careers  
in retailing

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Retailing as a sector employs many women and serves a female-dominated customer base. It also employs proportionately more women in management positions than in other occupational sectors. However, at senior levels, the proportion of women to men diminishes. This paper aims to examine the perceived facilitators and problems of senior retail managers' career development in order to see if it offers any insights for others to achieve senior managerial positions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The main research instrument was a quantitative questionnaire with 124 UK senior retail managers.

**Findings** – The findings revealed that apparently more similarities than differences were reported by the men and women senior retail managers. These findings need to be treated with some caution however given that retailing operates in a strong masculine culture. Therefore, to assume that men and women encounter similar facilitators and problems ignores that they are being compared against a norm of male characteristics and values.

**Practical implications** – The senior women may have achieved their positions by ignoring their feminine characteristics and putting their career before their personal lives; they may have adopted the male cultural norms and developed a style top management are more comfortable with, else they may have more characteristics that are closer to the male norms than the average woman. Men further down the hierarchy may also suffer and may not achieve senior positions because they too are not prepared to conform to idealised and outdated male cultural norms.

**Originality/value** – The contribution of this paper is its concentration on the views and experiences of retail managers in senior positions, as these are the ones who have seemingly broken through the glass ceiling.

**Keywords** Women, Senior managers, Retailing, Gender, Career development

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

Previous research has shown that social structures are important to managerial career advancement, and that women are more likely to gain initial management jobs and advance to senior positions when the managerial hierarchy is less proportionately male and subordinates are women rather than men (Tharenou, 1997; Cohen *et al.*, 1998; Dreher, 2003). One sector where women make up large numbers of employees in certain areas is retailing, and retailing has been identified as an occupation where women are more likely to be found in management positions than in other occupations (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2003), while a large proportion of their customer base is female (Katz and Katz, 1997). Thus, one might hypothesise that the facilitators and barriers facing women's progression generally may be different within the retail sector and that women may face fewer constraints in advancing in retailing than in other occupations. Although the ratio of men to women in the retail hierarchy favoured men at the higher



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levels of the management hierarchy (Broadbridge, 1996), Singh and Vinnicombe's (2004) research indicated that retailing was increasing its numbers of women board level positions. Thus, now is an apposite time to consider the career issues surrounding men and women retail managers in the twenty-first century. While much prior research dealing with retail employment issues has concentrated on non-managerial employees (Penn and Wirth, 1993; Freathy, 1993, 1997; Marchington and Harrison, 1991; Freathy and Sparks, 1994; Sparks, 1987, 1991, 1992; Jones and Schmidt, 2004; Foster, 2004; Hendrie, 2004; Tiney, 2004) or various managerial levels collectively (Brockbank and Airey, 1994; Traves *et al.*, 1997; Broadbridge, 1998, 1999a, b; Maxwell and Ogden, 2006), the contribution of this paper is its concentration on the views and experiences of retail managers in senior positions, as these are the ones who have seemingly broken through the glass ceiling. In particular, it explores the factors perceived by senior managers as having facilitated and hindered their career progression to date. The current research includes men and women directors and senior managers, some of whom constitutes what Tyson (2003) described as the marzipan layer (those just below main board director level).

### **Theoretical explanations**

Much prior research has examined a series of variables that might explain men and women's advancement or barriers in their careers. This study is guided by this prior research. Various attempts have been made to categorise these variables within an academic framework, and one approach adopted by several researchers has been to divide the categories into individual, interpersonal and organisational factors (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Tharenou, 1997; Metz, 2003). Other theoretical debates have surrounded the issue of women's "sameness" or "difference" from men with regard to barriers women face at work (Webb and Liff, 1988; Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Liff and Cameron, 1997; Wajcman, 1998; Liff, 1999). Some research has claimed that women are no different to men in the way they manage (Dipboye, 1987; Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Alban-Metcalfe, 1989; Powell, 1990; Colwill and Vinnicombe, 1991; Alban-Metcalfe and West, 1991; Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1996). Others claim that there are gender differences (Loden, 1985; Grant, 1988; Rosener, 1990; Brockbank and Airey, 1994; Daily *et al.*, 2000; Lyness and Thomson, 2000; van Vianen and Fisher, 2002; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Wise and Bond, 2003; Fels, 2004) and that women do bring different qualities to management positions and help organisations maintain a competitive advantage (Broadbridge, 1998, 2007a). As Wajcman (1998) points out both approaches position women as the problem and accept men's life experiences as the norm. This is because they are based on a comparison point which is a white male (Liff, 1999). So, for example, Liff and Wajcman (1996) argued that the conventional approach where all equal opportunity policies are based on sameness/equal treatment (techniques to ensure women are assessed in the same way as men) require women to deny, or attempt to minimize, differences between themselves and men. Liff (1999) further argues that a procedural approach to equality focuses on changing behaviour but leaves attitudes and beliefs relatively untouched. The provision of initiatives (such as childcare, single-sex training) to "help" women be like men have been open to criticism that they provide women with an unfair advantage rather than equal treatment (Wajcman, 1998). Other equal opportunity reforms have been to make job requirements more neutral and thus enabling women to qualify for access to certain jobs.

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These Wajcman (1998) points out have been criticised by men as lowering of standards, rewriting the rules to suit women, or giving them special help and so she calls for a more radical approach.

The alternative to equal opportunities and promoting “sameness” is to consider managing diversity strategies and recognise “difference” between people. This draws on arguments that having a diverse management team brings advantages to the firm, and so it is up to organisations to effectively manage “difference” between its employees, be inclusive to all, and educate managers about organisational barriers and how they can counter stereotypes. Liff (1996) was concerned that managing diversity, rather than valuing difference, would dissolve it. In so doing she cautioned that by treating everyone as different could result in ignoring gender and that there is no strategy for dealing with how the structure of jobs and the personnel practices that accompany them advantage white men and disadvantage any other groups. Hence, we see that the notion of a male standard of characteristics and behaviour against which “sameness” or “difference” is judged (Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Wajcman, 1998) potentially disadvantages members of other groups. Wajcman (1998) further argues that we understand male and female characteristics in relation to each other rather than as independent categories and that the construction of women as different from men is one of the mechanisms whereby male power is maintained. Women have also been treated as a unified group facing the same problems in a workplace and expected to benefit from the same solutions. Liff and Wajcman (1996) also argue that a single binary division between men and women both polarizes the difference between them and exaggerates the homogeneity of each category (rather than recognising that there are differences within the categories of men and women).

Wajcman (1998) argues that in practice workplace equality initiatives have always involved both sameness and difference, and that the way to emerge from the circularity of sameness and difference approaches is to concentrate on the issue that women workers are disadvantaged: so sometimes women are disadvantaged by being treated differently when they are the same; and other times being treated the same when they are different. Thus, Liff and Wajcman (1996), claim both approaches may be useful and we need to recognise their relevance to particular situations. Organisations are gendered (Acker, 1990), they adopt male norms and men have the power within them. As Wajcman (1998) argues, a model of equality in which women have to adapt to pre-existing male norms is fundamentally flawed. Men, she argues, have the authority to define what constitutes occupational success and they monopolise it. In order to succeed, women are expected to deny aspects of themselves and become more like men, yet systematic inequalities between men and women ensure that their experience as managers cannot be the same. Webb and Liff (1988) argue that it is very difficult for women to gain equal treatment because job conditions are constructed around men’s skills and patterns of work (full-time uninterrupted).

Wajcman (1998) further argues that contemporary patriarchy is all about the subordination of women within the framework of equality. She concludes that it is not that women are different, but that gender difference is the basis for the unequal distribution of power and resources. She also argues that to achieve position power, women must accommodate themselves to the organisation, not the other way round. This requires them sacrificing major elements of their gender identity and “manage like a man” (Wajcman, 1998, p. 160). Managers continue to make decisions on the basis of

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stereotypes, value people similar to themselves and hold strongly sex-typed views of job requirements and high performance. Furthermore, Liff and Cameron (1997) report that men's exclusionary behaviour includes their tendency to share information predominantly with other men, recruit in their own image, ostracise and undermine women and generally act to perpetuate ways of working and forms of interaction with which they feel comfortable. So, one explanation for women's under representation at senior management levels is that organisational cultures are dominated by traditionally masculine values and behaviour (Hopkins, 2000; Jones, 2000; Kimmel, 2004).

### **Prior research on senior managers**

The main prior research with senior managers and CEOs into the facilitators and barriers facing women in senior management in the UK was conducted in 2000 by BITC/Catalyst, and while criticisms can be levied at it, the report does provide a fairly succinct account of senior management's opinions regarding their advancement. Like Broadbridge's (1998, 2007a) and Singh and Vinnicombe's (2004) respondents, these senior women were highly motivated to reach higher levels in their organisations. In order to do so, they had adopted various individual career strategies which are largely grounded in attribution theory (Heider, 1958) and human capital theory (Becker, 1964). Unfortunately, no corresponding strategies were provided for men in senior management. The career strategies adopted by the senior women included the need to exceed performance expectations, develop and adhere to their own career goals, gain line management experience and seek highly visible job assignments, network with influential colleagues and develop a style male managers were comfortable with. Moving functional areas, having an influential mentor or sponsor and upgrading educational credentials were also considered to be fairly important factors. The senior women regarded these personal career strategies, rather than the effect of any organisational strategies, as contributing to their success. This might indicate their more protean attitude towards their careers (Hall and Mirvis, 1996), which focuses on the individual, rather than the organisation, to take responsibility for their career advancement. On the contrary, it could point to a realisation that organisational strategies are embedded in male cultural norms and thus are more difficult for women to thrive in, because women are disadvantaged relative to men in the way they are treated.

### *Senior managers' beliefs*

The factors senior women perceived as being barriers to women and men's advancement to senior levels are shown in Table I. Similar to other findings (Coe, 1992; Charlesworth, 1997; Wajcman, 1998; Metz, 2003), many of the barriers senior women believed they faced were attributed to their primary role in the family and discriminatory organisational practices. Many women also reported as barriers, those areas they had identified as personal career strategies. The issue of family responsibilities and preconceptions of women's roles were identified as key barriers for women despite the majority of these senior women, like those in other studies (Lyness and Thomson, 2000; Kirchmeyer, 1998), not conforming to these stereotypes (81 per cent were in dual career households and a large minority (45 per cent) did not have children). Career advancement was perceived as dependent on putting career before personal or family life, thus upholding men's life experiences as the norm.

Factor	Barriers facing women (per cent)	Barriers facing men (per cent)	CEO re women (per cent)	CEO re men (per cent)
Commitment to family responsibilities	83	20	76	11
Stereotyping and preconceptions of women's (men's) roles	81	8	65	6
Lack of senior visibly successful female (male) role models	70	4	69	3
Inhospitable organisational culture	69	15	60	8
Exclusion from informal networks of communication	66	16	46	7
Failure of senior management to assume responsibility for women's (men's) advancement	65	9	65	11
Lack of significant general or line management experience	63	53	53	48
Personal style differences	61	39	26	36
Lack of mentoring	58	38	58	49
Lack of awareness of organisational politics	57	43	35	26
Lack of professional development opportunities	54	26	44	25
Lack of opportunities for visibility	52	23	40	12
Lack of opportunities to work on challenging assignments	45	10	32	8
Sexual harassment	40	5	27	0
Few women (men) can/want to do what it takes to get to the top	30	11	23	11
Not having been long in the pipeline	28	1	40	2

Source: BITC/Catalyst (2000)

**Table I.**  
Barriers to women and men's advancement to senior levels (perceptions of senior women) ( $N = 1,188$ ) and all (men and women) CEOs ( $N = 117$ )

Flexible working arrangements were treated with suspicion as they were not regarded as being valued or respected by employers (they do not conform to a male model of work), thus many senior women did not take them up for fear of being labeled as uncommitted to their careers. The prevalence of gendered preconceptions and stereotypes mean that women are compared against a male norm (Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Wajcman, 1998; Liff, 1999), and thus are vulnerable to be devalued. The report revealed that senior women perceived that senior men encountered fewer barriers which are unsurprising given the male comparison point and the fact that men hold the majority of senior posts in the UK organisations. Moreover, the main barriers for men were perceived to be different from those reported by the women. This calls into question to what extent men and women senior managers can be regarded as the "same" or "different" in organisations, and the underlying assumptions about the prevalence of male norms and values which will be less likely to disadvantage men as they will women.

*CEO beliefs*

Also included in Table I are the collective responses of a sample of 74 men and 43 women CEOs. In general, the CEOs and senior women were in agreement on the top barriers facing women and men's advancement. However, other parts of the report indicated that there were some important differences between the responses of the men and women CEOs, with male CEOs being apparently less aware of the barriers facing senior women managers. For example, the men CEOs were far less likely than the women CEOs to attribute stereotyping of women's roles, the exclusion from informal networks, personal style differences, the lack of mentoring, lack of awareness of organisational politics, lack of professional development opportunities and sexual harassment as being barriers women face in their career advancement. This is of concern in any attempts we face when trying to gain top level management support to challenge the barriers women face in their career advancement.

Moreover, a large proportion of the CEOs located the barriers to women's advancement as being situated with the women themselves rather than any failing of the organisation. This was explained in various ways by the CEOs. First, is the pipeline theory (Forbes *et al.*, 1988; Ragins *et al.*, 1998) which states that women simply had not been long enough in the pipeline (and that through time, the problems of women's advancement will be solved, an argument based on acquisition of human capital). This theory ignores the gendered nature of organisations which would overthrow this "time" argument. The second relates to women's own shortcomings, with the CEOs attributing women's own lack of self-confidence and their tendency to be more self-critical than men (a finding also found by the work of Singh *et al.*, 2006) as hindering their career advancement. This results in women being reluctant to put themselves forward for promotion or call attention to their achievements. So, it is clear that CEOs blame women themselves for their relative position to men in the management hierarchy, and attribute it to their own deficits (women have not grasped the opportunities offered to them) rather than look inwards to the organisational structure, gendered nature and cultural climate for the underlying problems. This view mirrors Liff and Cameron's (1997) arguments who criticise approaches that focus on women as having problems which need to be redressed rather than on changing organisations. It also ignores the way organisations have historically been constructed around cultural norms that uphold male-based values (such as definitions of success, commitment, management style) and as a consequence female values and traits are devalued. Against such comparisons, it is no wonder women and men progress differently and that women might lack confidence and subsequently accumulate less human and social capital. They are being compared against the life experiences of men, and as long as organisational male cultural norms go unchallenged, so this will continue and the situation will be perpetuated rather than resolved.

So, many CEOs failed to recognise (or ignored) the diverse ways in which their inhospitable culture manifested itself as a barrier to women's development, else they firmly located any problems as associated with women's own shortcomings (confidence, pipeline and family responsibilities). The report concluded that CEOs were more optimistic than senior women about the progress that has been made in advancing women to leadership roles in the UK organisations, which is not surprising and of concern. The CEOs believed they could effect organisational change through top down initiatives. However, organisational initiatives to bring about cultural change

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were reported as not working; half the senior women considered employment equality policies and practices to have no impact on their own careers. They also spoke of the need to develop a management style male managers were comfortable with. This emphasises a “sameness” approach and reinforces that it is women who need to change to accommodate themselves to the organisation rather than the other way round (Wajcman, 1998). The fact that so many CEOs believe women have not been in position long enough to achieve advancement (suggesting that time alone will resolve issues) is of particular concern as it appears to be blind to the issues connected with organisational cultures and resistance to change, as well as the underlying assumption of women’s primacy in the family environment.

The arguments show that with few exceptions, upper level managerial positions appear to be characterised in hegemonic masculine terms, that stereotypical male qualities are thought necessary to being a successful executive (Heilman, 2001), and that work is organised and constructed around patriarchal social systems (Powell, 1999). As women aspire to more senior positions they have to consider how their own behaviours and perceptions fit with those associated with successful careers in their organisations (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). Thus, there is a perceived lack of fit between women’s attributes and the senior job’s requirements. With many organisations upholding such hegemonic male values as the cultural norm (Marshall, 1991; Fischer and Gleijm, 1992; Wajcman, 1998), so these cultures can appear alien to many women (as well as some men). Women might find that they have to emulate these masculine characteristics and suppress their feminine ones if they are to advance, thus conforming to a “sameness” approach rather than one that values difference. Heilman (2001) further claims that the perceived lack of fit is likely to produce expectations of failure which gives rise to a clear bias towards viewing women as ill equipped to perform the job competently. If a woman succeeds, her success is a violation of the prescriptive norms associated with gender stereotypes, so there is a bad fit between what the woman is perceived to be like and conceptions of what she should be like and this induces disapproval. Advancement is based on competence and social acceptance and the negativity that can be associated with a competent woman can be lethal in their strive to get ahead (Heilman, 2001).

The findings from the BITC/Catalyst report support a view that organisations have been socially constructed around men’s lives (Liff and Cameron, 1997), and management is regarded as a male preserve (Liff and Ward, 2001). Adopting this approach, men and women managers’ differences in their career development can be attributed to the subtle gendered processes in organisational cultures that reflect male values and norms (Broadbridge, 1998), and so emphasises “sameness” rather than value difference. Organisational structures, cultures and processes are essential inputs for career systems (Baruch, 2004) and they can be deeply embedded in male norms and values; they are not gender neutral (Acker, 1990), thus making it more difficult for women to construct their careers on an equal basis. Thus, career progression is less to do with individual preference (a proposition made by Hakim, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2000) but more to do with the issues that might present opportunities and barriers for certain individuals to progress within organisations.

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**Other research on barriers to management**

Despite Cooper and Lewis's (1999) observations that male models of work are giving way to a post-modern pluralism and that men's provider roles are being challenged, there is still evidence that male models of work are upheld in order to achieve the highest positions in companies. So, definitions of career success often encompass measures that are more likely to be identified by men than women as success factors (Sturges, 1999; Vinnicombe and Harris, 2000). Definitions of commitment to work also follow a male model. Thus, visibility and a long hours culture are often still expected in order to openly display one's commitment to the job and progress linearly (Cooper and Lewis, 1999; Lewis, 2002). This disadvantages anyone who wishes to adopt a different pattern of working, and given that women continue to have primary responsibility for the home and for childcare duties (Gordon and Whelan-Barry, 2004; National Statistics, 2004; Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, 2006; Eurostat, 2006), it makes it particularly difficult for them to compete against men in the managerial environment. Impression management techniques can also help to demonstrate commitment and facilitate career success (Kilduff and Day, 1994; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000) and interpersonal communications, such as networking and being visible to those with influence. Women, however, are less likely to use impression management techniques, and be aware of their influence, than are men (Singh *et al.*, 2002). Other research has illustrated the importance of networking and visibility in organisations (Kanter, 1977; Brass, 1985; Coe, 1992; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Rutherford, 2001; Linehan, 2001; Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2004) and this is associated with the accumulation of social capital (Lin, 2001; Burt, 2005). Self-categorisation theory claims that similar people are more likely to become friends and be a source of information about the workplace (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). It is closely associated with the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne and Neuman, 1992) and can result in managers recruiting in their own image (Liff and Cameron, 1997). Pelled *et al.* (1999) argue that gender dissimilarity in the work unit is a disadvantage in terms of organisational inclusion. Therefore, at management levels, we would expect men to have a better ability to form networking relationships than women do because of the male-dominated hierarchy in many organisations. Thus, informal networks can be exclusionary for women managers. As a consequence, women are denied contacts, opportunities and excluded from the information networks provide. As information equates to power, and politics and networking systems are bound up with power, so women's exclusion from these networks can result in them being disadvantaged in the workplace and unable to compete on a level playing field. Alternatively, Dreher (2003, p. 556) argued that "as managerial sex ratios become more balanced, female managers should be able to form coalitions and support networks that enhance the chances of female career advancement". Hence, it is interesting to see if this is the case in retailing which has been found to have proportionality more women in management positions than in other occupations.

The foregoing discussion has illustrated the importance that organisational structures and the values held by those in the most influential positions (CEO and board level) can play in determining the career development of individuals further down the management hierarchy. The perceived relevance of these factors for men and women in senior level retail positions has never been identified. Earlier, we pointed out that retailing was a highly feminised industry, thus making it an interesting sector to study.

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There have been various transformations in the UK retail industry in recent years. For example, we have seen increasing market concentration so that each sector of retailing is dominated by a few very large organisations. At the same time, there has been other changes happening within the internal and external environment including, amongst others, rapid technological developments, changes in consumer behaviour, changes in store operations and design, globalization and branding issues. These advances in the industry have brought with them a more professional approach to operations and have opened up the scope for a variety of careers in the industry, both in the UK and internationally. Thus, they have resulted in more dynamic and interesting career opportunities for their employees. These expansions have been accompanied by subsequent training and development opportunities for managerial employees, and the sector is becoming a more attractive graduate career option for men and women. Careers range from the more generalist operational roles at branch levels to highly specialised and functional roles at head offices.

The way that many retail organisational cultures are structured, however, remain embedded in patriarchal social systems and the industry is still recognised as cut throat, fast changing, highly competitive and aggressive. For many managers, career progression is perceived as being connected with openly demonstrating their commitment to the job and so this reinforces and perpetuates a culture of work intensification, long hours and visibility. Many managers are expected to sign a waiver to the 48 working time directive, and many conform as a refusal is perceived as constricting their career. The challenges experienced by many senior retail managers stem from a culture of rapid pace of change, increased time pressures and deadlines, performance pressures, long hours, lack of flexibility and a need for mobility (Broadbridge, 2002). Such issues may act as constraints for those managers who want and/or need to more effectively balance their work and home lives.

This paper now turns to explore the factors senior retail managers believe have helped or hindered their careers to date. In particular, it addresses some research questions:

- RQ1.* What factors do men and women senior retail managers attribute to facilitating their career development to date?
- RQ2.* What factors do men and women senior retail managers attribute as being problematic in their career development to date?
- RQ3.* Do men and women senior retail managers experience similar or different facilitators and problems, and how does this contribute to our understanding of the career development process within the retail sector?

### **Methodology**

Exploratory research in the form of biographical/life history interviews were conducted with six women and 11 men holding senior or director level positions within retailing. This approach was adopted to enable respondents to discuss freely (without having factors that may influence career development superimposed on them) about those factors that they perceived had either helped or hindered their career development. A more detailed analysis of these interviews are reported elsewhere (Broadbridge, 2007b), and are used for illustration purposes only in this paper. The main themes from the findings of this exploratory phase together with evidence from

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previous research (Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Gold and Pringle, 1988; Wentling, 1992; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Charlesworth, 1997; Tharenou, 1997; Broadbridge, 1998, 1999a; Fielden *et al.*, 2001) were used to develop a self-completed questionnaire survey that was distributed to the UK retail managers. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about the respondents' careers, and within it, it explored the factors that the respondents considered had personally assisted (43 items, Likert scale) and caused problems in their careers to date (45 items). The sampling procedure was based on non-probability sampling methods. A questionnaire for self-completion was devised and posted to members of a retail alumni group, all of whom were managers within the UK retailing and comprised a census of this group. In order that the final sample was not atypical of alumni members, each senior manager was asked to complete a questionnaire themselves and also to distribute a questionnaire each to another woman and man senior manager. A response rate of (30.49) per cent was achieved which was considered to be reasonable given the method of questionnaire administration. The achieved questionnaire sample consisted of 124 respondents (50 women and 74 men).

Similar to the findings of the BITC/Catalyst (2000) report, there were some gender differences between the demographic characteristics of the questionnaire sample (Table II). There were slightly more women senior managers in their 20s and slightly more men in their 50s, although no significant gender differences were found between those below and above the age of 40. The men were significantly more likely to have children than the women senior managers and the women were significantly more likely than the men to be in a dual career household where their partner was also in full time employment. Women also reported being significantly more likely to be primarily responsible for household and child care duties where applicable. Thus, it appears that the men are enacting out traditional role patterns in the domestic arena. This follows to some extent with the women although, as previous research suggests (Liff and Ward, 2001), they appear to have possibly sacrificed having a family in order to progress their career. With regard to work and educational experiences (Table III), no significant differences were found between men and women regarding their managerial level, job location, job function or number of companies worked for. However, the men were found to work significantly beyond a 50 hour week than the women. With regard to the accumulation of human capital via education, no human capital deficit was noticeable between the sexes: there were no significant differences in the men and women's educational attainments or acquisition of professional qualifications. Unfortunately, these types of demographic data are not available industry wide and so it is not possible to compare this sample with industry norms.

## Findings

### *Factors assisting senior managers' careers to date*

Similar reasons were posited by the senior men and women as having facilitated their career (Table IV). In particular, the same top six factors were mentioned by both men and women and can be attributed to themselves (individual traits such as determination, attitude to work, performance) and the accumulation of human capital (breadth of experience and interpersonal skills). These results are not surprising and are grounded in human capital (Becker, 1964) and attribution theory (Heider, 1958). They also reflect the BITC/Catalyst (2000) report's findings that women's career strategies are associated

	Women (per cent)	Men (per cent)
Sex	50 (40)	74 (60)
<i>Age (years)</i>		
20-29	4 (8)	0 (0)
30-39	25 (51)	39 (53)
40-49	19 (38)	26 (36)
50-59	1 (2)	8 (11)
Average age (years)	38.22	40.29
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	4 (8)	5 (7)
Married/cohabiting	38 (76)	64 (87)
Divorced/separated	5 (10)	3 (4)
Other partner	3 (6)	2 (3)
<i>Whether children?<sup>2a</sup></i>		
Yes	20 (40)	54 (73)
No	30 (60)	20 (27)
<i>Number of children</i>		
One	7 (37)	12 (22)
Two	9 (47)	28 (52)
Three	3 (16)	12 (22)
Four or more	0 (0)	2 (4)
Having children has restricted my career (percentage of agreeing, where appropriate) <sup>b</sup>	11 (57)	11 (9)
<i>Ages of children</i>		
All pre-school	4 (21)	6 (11)
Pre-school and school age	4 (21)	11 (20)
All school age	8 (42)	23 (43)
School and post-school age	2 (11)	2 (4)
All post-school age	1 (5)	12 (22)
<i>Whether other dependents<sup>c</sup></i>		
Yes	2 (4)	13 (18)
No	47 (96)	61 (82)
Caring responsibilities has restricted my career (percentage of agreeing) <sup>d</sup>	7 (37)	3 (6)
<i>Working status of partner</i>		
Full-time	36 (88)	24 (38)
Part-time	0 (0)	23 (36)
No paid employment	5 (12)	17 (27)
I am primarily responsible for housework responsibilities (percentage of agreeing) <sup>e</sup>	29 (59)	10 (14)
I am primarily responsible for child care responsibilities (percentage of agreeing, where appropriate) <sup>f</sup>	10 (53)	8 (15)

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup> $\chi^2 = 13.481$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; <sup>b</sup> $U = 226$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ; <sup>c</sup> $\chi^2 = 5.007$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.025$ ; <sup>d</sup> $U = 301.5$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ; <sup>e</sup> $U = 944$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ; <sup>f</sup> $U = 281$ ,  $P = 0.004$

**Table II.**  
Demographic characteristics of the questionnaire senior retail management sample

with individual rather than organisational factors. Women, however, were more likely to attribute a wider set of factors as helping their careers “a great deal” more than the men. Furthermore, reflecting the similarities between men and women, of the other factors regarded as assisting careers just seven out of a set of 43 were found to be statistically significant when tested using the non-parametric test, Mann-Whitney U. In six of these

	Women	Men
Total years of work experience (average)	18.79	21.34
Total years of managerial experience (average)	12.2	15.63
Years with present employer	9.41	10.51
Years in present position	2.53	3.44
<i>Management level</i>		
Senior	44 (88 per cent)	55 (74 per cent)
Director	6 (12 per cent)	19 (26 per cent)
<i>Job location</i>		
Store	9 (18 per cent)	10 (14 per cent)
Head office, distribution	38 (78 per cent)	49 (66 per cent)
Area/field management	1 (2 per cent)	9 (12 per cent)
Other	1 (2 per cent)	5 (7 per cent)
<i>Job function</i>		
Functional specialist	22 (45 per cent)	23 (31 per cent)
Generalist	27 (55 per cent)	50 (68 per cent)
<i>Number of companies worked for</i>		
One	7 (14 per cent)	12 (16 per cent)
Two	11 (22 per cent)	17 (23 per cent)
Three	11 (22 per cent)	13 (18 per cent)
Four or more	20 (40 per cent)	32 (43 per cent)
Average (number)	3.53	3.49
<i>Hours worked<sup>a</sup></i>		
13-39	3 (6 per cent)	1 (1 per cent)
40-49	21 (42 per cent)	16 (23 per cent)
50-59	14 (28 per cent)	28 (41 per cent)
60-70	12 (24 per cent)	24 (35 per cent)
Average hours worked per week	49.45	53.07
Percentage of full-time	98	100
I take work home most evenings (percentage of agreeing)	16 (32 per cent)	21 (29 per cent)
I would welcome more flexible working arrangements <sup>b</sup>	31 (63 per cent)	26 (36 per cent)
I like working long hours (percentage of agreeing)		
( $U = 1,438.5$ ; $p = 0.029$ )	6 (12 per cent)	13 (18 per cent)
<i>Educational attainment</i>		
None	0 (0 per cent)	3 (4 per cent)
GCSE/O'Level	2 (4 per cent)	7 (10 per cent)
A level or equivalent	11 (22 per cent)	15 (21 per cent)
First degree	15 (31 per cent)	14 (19 per cent)
Post-graduate diploma	12 (25 per cent)	5 (8 per cent)
Higher degree	9 (18 per cent)	29 (40 per cent)
<i>Have additional professional qualification</i>		
Yes	22 (46 per cent)	27 (38 per cent)

Notes: <sup>a</sup> $\chi^2 = 7.007$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.3008$ ; <sup>b</sup> $U = 1,161.5$ ,  $p = 0.001$

**Table III.**  
Work and educational  
experiences of retail  
senior management  
sample

cases, the women were significantly more likely than the men to report the factor as having assisted their careers. With the exception of one factor (interpersonal skills), the other significant factors relate to interpersonal factors in the form of the accumulation of social capital (Lin, 2001; Lin *et al.*, 2001; Field, 2003; Burt, 2005), and in particular, attracting support from higher levels of the management hierarchy, and being offered and having access to high-profile assignments. This was also borne out by the accounts

	Women		Men	
	Mean	Rank order	Mean	Rank order
Determination	1.30	1	1.48	2
Attitude to work (conscientious, hard working)	1.44	2	1.44	1
Interpersonal skills <sup>a</sup>	1.54	3	1.79	6
Breadth of experience	1.54	4	1.55	3
Concern for results	1.74	5	1.66	4
Past and present performance	1.76	6	1.74	5
Support from a line/senior manager <sup>b</sup>	1.78	7	2.19	15
Demonstrating critical skills for effective job performance	1.80	8	1.97	9
Attracting top level support <sup>c</sup>	1.82	9	2.41	25
Relevant skills	1.82	10	2.05	11
Being offered visible assignments <sup>d</sup>	1.86	11	2.22	16
Being offered challenging work	1.88	12	2.00	10
Ambition	1.90	13	1.96	8
Being accepted by the organization	1.96	14	2.18	13
High visibility	2.04	15	2.32	20
Access to high profile/challenging assignments <sup>e</sup>	2.10	16	2.43	27
Broadening general management experience	2.10	17	2.18	13
Assistance or coaching by others	2.14	18	2.12	12
Receiving support and encouragement	2.14	19	2.36	23
Self-esteem	2.14	20	2.37	24
Being valued	2.16	21	2.35	22
Certain job moves	2.16	22	2.27	19
Support from home or partner	2.17	23	1.87	7
Willingness to take risks	2.28	24	2.32	20
Loyalty	2.29	25	2.26	17
Knowing and influencing the right people	2.38	26	2.68	29
Displaying entrepreneurial initiative	2.43	27	2.42	26
Training	2.46	28	2.26	17
Accurately identifying the company values	2.50	29	2.74	31
Willingness to be mobile	2.55	30	2.46	28
Educational credentials/qualifications	2.71	31	2.90	34
Luck – being in the right place at the right time	2.72	32	2.74	31
Networks/contacts <sup>f</sup>	2.75	33	3.31	38
Willingness to “play the game”	2.92	34	2.73	30
Role models	2.98	35	2.86	33
Access to appropriate networks <sup>g</sup>	3.07	36	2.67	42
Impersonal decisions made at a higher level	3.08	37	2.93	35
Being mentored	3.14	38	3.19	36
Having a career plan	3.17	39	3.25	37
Performance management and appraisal schemes	3.25	40	3.33	39
Internal politics	3.33	41	3.41	40
Off the job experiences/interests outside work	3.39	42	3.49	41
Being sponsored	3.42	43	3.68	43

**Notes:** 1 – a great deal; 2 – quite a lot; 3 – moderate; 4 – little; 5 – not at all; <sup>a</sup> $U = 1,476$ ,  $p = 0.48$ ;  
<sup>b</sup> $U = 1,310$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ; <sup>c</sup> $U = 1,178$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ; <sup>d</sup> $U = 1,330$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ; <sup>e</sup> $U = 1,361.5$ ,  $p = 0.034$ ;  
<sup>f</sup> $U = 1,079$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ; <sup>g</sup> $U = 865$ ,  $p = 0.002$

**Table IV.**  
Factors facilitating  
senior women and men's  
careers to date

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of women in the qualitative research, where the importance of being given career opportunities to acquire experience, to prove themselves and become visible was highlighted as influential in their career advancement. Interestingly, other factors which are also associated with the influence of other people were given less prominence and were regarded as less likely to have facilitated the men and women's careers to date (most notably these were internal politics, being mentored and being sponsored). It was noted elsewhere in the questionnaire, however, that 37 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women had never been mentored and both rated this as a barrier to their career development.

Although the quantitative research revealed that the men were less likely to regard the influence of informal networks as assisting their careers, by contrast, the qualitative research found all the senior men to talk about the importance of networking and visibility (which demonstrates the value of adopting a multiple methodological approach to research). From the biographical conversations with men and women senior managers, it was apparent that the men used their networking and impression management techniques more strategically than did the women (Broadbridge, 2007b), and for some these had proved crucial in their career progression. Evidence of self-categorisation theory (Hogg and Abrams, 1988), the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne and Neuman, 1992) and recruiting in their own image (Liff and Cameron, 1997) was found. Two male directors also explained that promotional decisions were based not just on possessing the right credentials (human capital) but also the importance of other people's opinions of the candidate (see Broadbridge, 2007b for a fuller account).

*Problems in senior managers' careers to date*

Respondents were provided with a list of 45 factors drawn from previous research that might cause problems in their career progression, and asked to select those that they had personally experienced. Table V shows the results. As with the factors assisting careers, various apparent similarities were found between the men and women's responses with eight of the top ten factors ranked by the women as the main problems experienced also being similarly ranked by the men. However, proportionately, women were more likely to report a factor as having caused a problem to them in their career to date. At least, half of the senior women regarded organisational/internal politics (70 per cent), the absence of mentors (55 per cent) and conflicts between personal and home life (50 per cent) as having been problematic to them. This latter category could encompass a variety of issues if we remember that just 40 per cent had children. It is likely to be connected with their primary responsibility for housework and childcare duties, or else their dilemma to start or forego having a family in order to pursue their career. Moreover, two of the three senior women with children from the qualitative research said that various work-home conflicts caused barriers in their careers. The third woman also spoke about this but had chosen to put her career first, explaining that there were no facilities to enable her to better combine her home and work responsibilities (which would appear to echo the findings of the BITC report). A couple of the senior men from the qualitative research also said that their families had presented a barrier in their careers, but only from the perspective that it might have curtailed their mobility. The top three factors that were regarded as most problematic for the senior men were limited promotional opportunities (59 per cent),

	Women		Men	
	Per cent	Rank order	Per cent	Rank order
Organisational/internal politics	70.0	1	56.8	2
Absence of mentors	55.1	2	43.8	7
Conflicts between personal and work life	50.0	3	39.7	10
Lack of training provision <sup>a</sup>	48.0	4	30.1	16
Lack of feedback on performance	46.0	5	53.4	3
Limited promotion opportunities	46.0	6	58.9	1
Personal factors (e.g. being too blunt, outspoken)	44.9	7	30.1	16
Personality clash with line manager	44.0	8	49.3	4
Lack of career guidance	44.0	9	45.2	5
Double standards for evaluating performance	42.9	10	40.5	8
Competition from peers	42.0	11	44.4	6
Prejudice of colleagues	42.0	12	41.1	9
Lack of own career strategies	42.0	13	37.0	11
Lack of support from male bosses <sup>b</sup>	40.0	14	23.3	22
Lack of support from male colleagues <sup>c</sup>	38.8	15	21.9	24
Social pressures (e.g. from friends/family) <sup>d</sup>	38.0	16	19.2	27
Pay inequalities	36.7	17	33.3	12
Men's club network <sup>e</sup>	36.0	18	Nil	45
Lack of confidence	36.0	19	32.9	14
Organisational attitudes towards women <sup>f</sup>	32.7	20	1.4	42
Hitting the glass ceiling (blocked career progress)	32.0	21	32.9	13
Inflexible working practices <sup>g</sup>	30.0	22	15.1	33
Family commitments	30.0	23	31.9	15
Lack of female role models	30.0	24	18.1	30
Lack of assertiveness	28.6	25	20.5	25
Exclusion from informal networks <sup>h</sup>	28.0	26	13.7	34
Organisational culture	28.0	27	23.3	23
Not being sponsored	28.0	28	28.8	18
Lack of challenging, high-profile assignments	26.0	29	26.0	19
Lack of significant general management and line experience	22.0	30	17.8	31
Prejudice of colleagues	22.0	31	12.3	37
Lack of support from female colleagues	20.4	32	19.2	28
Difficulty with child care arrangements	20.0	33	11.0	38
Feelings of marginalization	20.0	34	15.3	32
Lack of political awareness	18.0	35	24.7	20
Lack of support from female bosses	17.4	36	18.3	29
Inability to shift function	16.0	37	24.7	20
Bullying/harassment	16.0	38	13.7	34
No barrier	14.6	39	12.7	36
Lack of mobility	14.0	40	8.3	40
Sexual discrimination	10.4	41	4.1	41
Age discrimination	10.0	42	9.6	39
Sexual orientation discrimination	6.0	43	1.4	42
Insufficient education <sup>i</sup>	4.0	44	20.5	26
Race discrimination	Nil	45	Nil	45

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup> $\chi^2 = 4.044$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.044$ ; <sup>b</sup> $\chi^2 = 3.941$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.047$ ; <sup>c</sup> $\chi^2 = 4.073$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.044$ ; <sup>d</sup> $\chi^2 = 5.355$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.021$ ; <sup>e</sup> $\chi^2 = 30.785$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.001$ ; <sup>f</sup> $\chi^2 = 23.926$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.001$ ; <sup>g</sup> $\chi^2 = 3.969$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.046$ ; <sup>h</sup> $\chi^2 = 3.865$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.049$ ; <sup>i</sup> $\chi^2 = 6.822$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.009$

**Table V.**  
Problems in senior  
women and men's careers  
to date

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organisational/internal politics (57 per cent) and lack of feedback on performance (53 per cent). A few of the male senior managers from the qualitative research also stated issues of networking as acting as barriers in their career, not being known by the people who matter and trying to get into the right circle of networks (Broadbridge, 2007b) which is likely to be connected with organisational/internal politics. Upholding attribution theory (Heider, 1958), while factors assisting careers are credited to themselves and the accumulation of human capital, most of the barriers are attributed to interpersonal and organisational factors. Of the 45 factors, just nine were found to be statistically significant when conducting  $\chi^2$  tests. In eight of these instances, women were significantly more likely to perceive the factor as causing a problem in their career to date and many of these factors can be attributed to interpersonal factors and organisational cultural issues.

### Discussion

This paper sought to examine the factors perceived as assisting and hindering senior women and men's career progression within the retail sector in an attempt to better understand how senior retail staff, and in particular women, can develop their careers. Many of the main factors perceived as assisting and hindering senior managers' career development to date have been apparently very similar for both men and women. Like others, they were highly motivated to achieve high-management levels (Broadbridge, 1998; BITC/Catalyst, 2000; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). The perceived main factors that assist retail managers (ambition, ability, performance, work ethic, preparation and results) are similar to the individual factors found elsewhere as linked to promotion (Howard and Bray, 1988; Ferris *et al.*, 1992; Ruderman and Ohlott, 1994; Tharenou, 2001; Metz, 2003). Hence, no discernable differences were found as assisting retail managers' career development compared with those in other occupational sectors. Career advancement was chiefly perceived as being related to their knowledge and skills and confirms these managers' protean career strategies (Hall and Mirvis, 1996), in addition to supporting human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973). Given the educational attainment of the sample, the findings also support an assertion that women's increased education may help them to break the glass ceiling (Powell, 1999; Metz, 2003). However, the findings also highlighted the importance of being given career opportunities as a tool to help career advancement (Lyness and Thomson, 2000; Metz, 2003). This was a particularly important finding for the women senior managers, who reported significant differences from the men over various interpersonal encounters that had been perceived as facilitating their careers. This draws into question the reliance of human capital and attribution theories alone as explanatory factors for career development, and additionally points to the influence of social capital in explaining career advancement. It also highlights that women senior retail managers might be particularly aware of the importance of impression management techniques and being visible to top level management, and to have formed coalitions and networks as proposed by Dreher (2003). In a similar vein, the perceived main factors that hinder the men were also experienced by the women, although the women reported encountering proportionately more problems in their careers than the men.

Although many of the perceived facilitators and problems in the careers of senior women retail managers largely resembled those of their male counterparts, it is relevant to understand these in relation to the preceding literature. So, for example, we

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might argue that women may be regarded as experiencing some similar facilitators to the men because they deliberately have conformed to hegemonic male characteristics and behaviour. We saw that many women in this study had foregone or postponed having a family, conforming instead to a male model of full-time, uninterrupted work with long hours (Broadbridge, 1998, 2007b; Cooper and Lewis, 1999). So, when compared against men's life experiences as a norm (Wajcman, 1998), is it really reasonable to claim that men and women actually report similar facilitators and problems? Moreover, it is perhaps unsurprising that women senior retail managers experienced proportionately more problems in their careers than their male counterparts if they are being compared against a male standard of characteristics and behaviour (Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Wajcman, 1998). Furthermore, as the qualitative research revealed, explanations behind some of the factors where women and men were perceived to be similar in the problems they had encountered may in fact have been experienced differently by the men and women. This illustrates some caution that is necessary when comparing men and women's responses to the questionnaire survey, and is an area worthy of further research.

Following the argument that accepts men's life experiences as the norm (Wajcman, 1998), and so compares women against these norms (Liff, 1999), Heilman (2001) noted that the characteristics associated with men (aggressive, forceful, independent and decisive) and women (kind, helpful, sympathetic and concerned for others) are not only different but oppositional, with members of one sex thought to be lacking what is thought to be most prevalent in members of the other sex. If as Wajcman (1998) claimed, we understand male and female characteristics in relation to each other it is not difficult to see that women will be devalued in comparison to men. Thus, Heilman (2001) further claimed that being competent does not ensure that a woman will advance to the same organisational level as an equivalently performing man (and this draws into question the perceived career facilitators reported by the senior managers in this survey). Retail management has been associated with male cultural norms, and a cut-throat, aggressive, long hours culture (Broadbridge, 2007b). Following Wajcman (1998) and Heilman (2001) then, it would appear that aspiring women need to sacrifice their own gender identity and adopt male characteristics and norms and manage like a man. It is clear that further research is needed to explore whether women have achieved senior positions in retailing by emulating the male characteristics and behaviours and suppressing their feminine ones, or whether those women who achieve senior positions in retailing have characteristics that are closer to the male norms than the average woman.

While some women reported interpersonal factors as significantly helping their careers, there were equally some women who were significantly more likely than the men to perceive the support of male colleagues and bosses, organisational attitudes towards women and access to networks as problematic in their careers. This points to an additional obvious area for further research. Exclusion from old boy networks can help to perpetuate male customs, and traditional and negative attitudes towards women in organisations (Travers and Pemberton, 2000). The findings also supported a view of women's primacy in a familial role, and despite many of the senior women not conforming to the traditional family roles, they were significantly more likely than the men to be negatively affected by inflexible working hours and social pressures from their families. Adopting the "sameness" approach, Wajcman (1998) argued that

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ignoring women's relationship to the private sphere conceals the way women are penalised for their difference. Unless difference is recognised and taken account of women will not be able to compete equally. Whether these stereotypical views are also related to their significant lack of training provision than the men (on the basis that their organisations believe they are not worth investing in this human capital) needs to be investigated further.

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Overall, we might construe that the findings indicate that organisational social structures and cultural issues have been more problematic for women than they have for men in reaching and performing at senior management levels and this is witnessed by the disproportionate number of women in senior retail management positions (Broadbridge, 1996; Thomas, 2001; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). Men were aware of some of the issues women retail managers potentially face in ascending to senior management positions (Broadbridge, 2008). To enhance women's representation at senior levels, these issues need to be tackled and changed to embrace an inclusive culture rather than a masculine one – an arguably difficult task to tackle when most executive positions in retailing are dominated by men. Furthermore, as Wajcman (1998) recognised, many men find themselves constrained by idealised male constructs; not all of them aspire to the dominant male model and some are alienated from the macho culture of corporate power. In recommending that masculine cultures be broken down to encourage a more inclusive culture that allows more women to move into senior management, additionally enables other men (with subordinate masculinities) to move into these positions and dilute the hegemonic cultural power at the top even further. A problem with this approach, of course, is gaining the support of top management (who perpetuate these masculinist cultures) to do this, an issue raised earlier in the discussion of the findings of the BITC/Catalyst report. Without the awareness and support of CEOs, so the existing inhospitable cultures are inclined to be perpetuated and little genuine change will be achieved. For example, Liff and Cameron (1997) claimed that most organisations have shown little interest in considering how they can organise work differently, while Liff and Wajcman (1996) argue that full-time work represents the dominance of the male model and part-time work is consequently regarded as inferior and not a realistic option for the career minded manager. Within retailing, while the flexibility of working practices are upheld as exemplary in non-managerial positions, there appears to be an apparent reluctance to accommodate these working practices at managerial levels; instead, a long hours male-based culture persists and is perpetuated which clearly disadvantages those unable or unwilling to conform to it.

In thinking about what advice might be given to junior and middle retail managers who want to progress their careers vertically, it would appear initially from the findings that it is critical to have an attitude of mind and the determination to get you that position. While this might help to some extent as it provides a focus for the individual concerned, this approach might be criticised for being an over-simplistic view. Individuals also need to gain the support of significant others further up the managerial hierarchy. When this management hierarchy operates within a social structure that upholds a masculinist hegemonic culture, it is not difficult to understand that men and women do not have the same access to senior positions. As has been found elsewhere, the dominant culture can be perpetuated through male definitions of commitment, impression management, exposure and visibility and the appointment of

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like with like (Cooper and Lewis, 1999; Lewis, 2002; Byrne and Neuman, 1992; Liff and Cameron, 1997; Pelled *et al.*, 1999). Those who succeed will emulate this position. Unsupportive organisational cultures, in turn, can lead to a lack of confidence for those disadvantaged by the dominant culture and so they do not apply for promotion apparently “choosing” or preferring (Hakim, 2000) not to progress thus leaving these positions open to those able and/or prepared to emulate the required characteristics. Coupled with a lack of female role models and continued outdated attitudes towards women, so it is clear that women and men do not start off with equal chances to progress their careers. Furthermore, the continued primacy of women’s roles in the household and for childcare holds back career women. It is difficult for those who want to combine their career with raising a family, and retailing as a sector does not appear to accommodate the fusion of the home-work interface very easily at senior levels.

### **Concluding remarks and future research directions**

Retailing is a feminised sector, employing many women and serving a predominately female customer base. It additionally employs proportionately more women in management positions than in other occupational sectors. However, at senior levels, the proportion of women to men lessens. This paper contributes to our understanding of career progression generally, by its specific examination of the perceived facilitators and problems encountered by retail managers already occupying senior positions. At the beginning of this paper, we speculated whether women faced less constraints in progressing their careers in retailing than in other industrial sectors and whether the facilitators and barriers facing women’s progression in retailing was different from their experiences elsewhere in employment. The findings along with those of other research studies would appear to indicate that this is not necessarily the case. The findings revealed that the men and women senior retail managers reported more apparent similarities than differences in the facilitators and problems encountered their careers to date. These findings need to be treated with some caution however given that retailing operates in a strong masculine culture. Therefore, to assume that men and women encounter similar facilitators and problems ignores that they are being compared against a norm of male characteristics and values. The senior women may have achieved their positions by suppressing their feminine characteristics and putting their career before their personal lives; they may have adopted the male cultural norms and thus developed a style top management are more comfortable with (BITC/Catalyst, 2000), else they may have more characteristics that are closer to the male norms than the average woman. Men further down the management hierarchy may also encounter difficulties and may not achieve senior positions because they too are not prepared to conform to idealised and outdated male cultural norms. While at one level, one may call for a review of company policies within retailing, these will only result in superficial changes unless a more fundamental re-examination of organisational cultures that questions the norms that dominate senior retail management takes place. This is particularly difficult to do as it requires the very men who have benefited from these cultural norms to now engage in debates of how to challenge and change them.

There are several possibilities to extend this research. Further in-depth research is needed that looks specifically at the relative experiences of men and women managers in retailing. This might call for a longitudinal qualitative approach that, through a gender lens, tracks the factors perceived to help and hinder career development for

retail managers over a period of time and at various stages of their careers, optimally from entry level positions. This would also enable the significance of interpersonal variables as factors helping or hindering the careers of retail managers to be examined in more detail. Supplementary research with those women who have achieved executive level positions is required to explore in more depth their career patterns and the factors that have contributed to their success stories and any sacrifices they might have had to make along the way. This might provide practical advice to other women on how they can best ascend the retail management hierarchy. Drawing on Singh and Vinnicombe's (2004) conclusions, there is an opportunity to conduct comparative research between women executives across different occupational sectors to ascertain the relative importance of the facilitators and barriers to advancement for women managers in retailing with women in similar positions in other sectors. Additional research on the "sacrificing" of family for career is also recommended. It is necessary to unpick whether women's apparent sacrifice or postponement of children is indeed a generational move, and represents a genuine liberation of women who are able to make their own choices and enables them to pursue their careers over family. The alternative view is that a more complicated issue of the continued structural norms of organisations that make it difficult to effectively combine childcare issues and career progression remains. These questions are important to raise with those (men and women) at the beginning of their careers today. This generation of individuals do hold differing views from previous generations and so some further research into their whole life concerns (Las Heras and Hall, 2007; Piderit, 2007) is warranted.

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### Further reading

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## **Sacrificing personal or professional life? A gender perspective on the accounts of retail managers**

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This article examines the issue of multiple role demands experienced, and the sacrifices managers make, in their career and personal lives. A series of 22 in-depth biographical interviews were conducted with retail managers of large companies in the UK. Respondents reported various instances of conflict between their work and personal lives. The findings revealed more of an asymmetrical permeability for both men and women managers, with work demands more likely to spillover to personal life. Combined together, these can represent very real problems in terms of the sacrifices managers need to make with regard to their work and /or personal lives. Women managers were found to undertake the majority of household duties and are therefore more likely to suffer from role overload. However, the findings also showed that both male and female managers are making sacrifices in one domain in order to accommodate the other. Significantly, women were more likely than men to have made sacrifices with regard to having children. It is acknowledged that the research cannot be generalised to the wider population of UK retail managers. However, the findings revealed some relevant issues that should be addressed by retail companies if they want to gain competitive advantage via the people they employ.

**Keywords:** gender; managers; retail; sacrifices; work–life conflict

### **Introduction**

Society is fast changing, not only witnessed by technological advances, but also the shifting demographic composition of families, and the participation levels of men and women in higher education and the workforce (Self and Zealey 2007). Nevertheless, conventional views of the *expected* roles of men and women in society have been slower to change, despite not all men in today's society being career driven (Powell and Mainiero 1992) and not all women wanting children and/or to stay within the domestic arena. Because of traditional views, we might argue that people who want to progress their career need to make various sacrifices in their private lives. By the same token, those people wanting to raise a family and spend more time at home (even for a partial time-period) may be expected to make sacrifices in their career. It is recognised that the term 'sacrifice' is an emotive word and it involves forfeiting behaviours that might otherwise be desirable to the individual. The Concise Oxford Dictionary definitions include 'giving up of a valued thing for the

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sake of another', 'loss incurred deliberately to avoid greater loss or to obtain compensating advantage', 'thing thus given up' (Sykes 1976). They are considered as sacrifices or trade-offs because rather than being a choice, these 'decisions' are enforced on women and men by a society that seems reluctant to accommodate both roles simultaneously.

The study of work–life balance emerged in the 1970s as a women's issue (Moore 2007). Burke (2001) argued that work and personal life are seen as 'either–or' concepts, with organisations being generally unsupportive of a work–personal life balance or for organisations to regard employees' private lives as separate from, and irrelevant to, their working lives (Powell and Mainiero 1992; Burke 2001; Davies and Thomas 2002). This is borne out by Huffman, Payne, and Castro (2003) who reported that 70% of workers are not satisfied with their work–family balance. This is a particularly important issue to research when we consider that Generation Y (those born between 1977 and 1994, and so those currently entering managerial positions) place high value on achieving a balanced lifestyle, far more so than any previous generation (Morton 2002; Eisner 2005; Kerslake 2005; Anonymous 2006; Broadbridge, Maxwell, and Ogden 2007); it is no longer just a women's issue.

Traditional career structures were based on a person making a series of upward career moves usually within a single company (Levinson et al. 1978; Schein 1978). However, since the beginning of the 1990s, and as many organisations (including retailing) have downsized and de-layered, so career paths have become blurred. Thus the traditional linear career model has been supplemented by other career models such as the boundaryless career (Arthur 1994), the protean career (Hall and Mirvis 1996) and multidirectional career systems (Baruch 2004). However, despite new career formats emerging there is still evidence to suggest that promotion is common in organisational life (Holbeche 2003), and when thinking of careers, a traditional linear career structure is often considered the most successful and the most sought after. This has traditionally been reinforced by many organisational structures, cultures and remuneration packages along with definitions of success and commitment which uphold male-based values (Tharenou, Latimer, and Conroy 1994; Sturges, 1999). This article is not defending a linear career structure as the desirable route but it was the structure that was paramount from the narratives of both the male and female retail managers. Thus, this explains the inferences to opportunities to progress in the organisational hierarchy within the text.

Although some authors define careers very tightly, confining them to the work arena, others recognise the interplay that other elements can have on careers (e.g. Arthur and Lawrence 1984; Betz, Fitzgerald, and Hill 1989; Super 1992). One such element is the interface of work with the non-work domain, and research by Pleck, Staines, and Lang (1980) revealed that a substantial proportion of employed adults report conflict between their work and family roles.

The aim of this article is to explore whether retail managers, in describing their careers, reported making any sacrifices in either their work or non-work lives, and the implications this has for them. The article examines the difficulties reported by retail managers in combining their home and work lives, thus exposing some of the sacrifices or enforced choices they believe they need to make in one domain over the other. The overall research project was about men and women's retail careers. This article arose from the amount of managers who spoke about their non-work lives in the context of their careers. It became apparent that for many respondents the two areas of work and non-work were inextricably linked and this highlighted the benefit

of studying whole-life concerns when exploring people's careers. The findings also demonstrated that other forms of career patterns, such as kaleidoscope careers (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005), where different elements of whole-lives alter according to life-stage and gender, may be useful to understand men and women's careers.

### **The relationship between work and home life**

Much research has been conducted on the intersection of work and family lives (see for example, Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999; Friedman and Greenhaus 2000; Lewis 2001; Frone 2003; Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Piderit 2006) and the extent to which work and family roles are interdependent (Edwards and Rothbard 2000). There are different theoretical perspectives on the nature of work–family conflict. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three types of work–family conflict: (1) time-based conflict (where time devoted to one role makes it difficult to participate in the other role); (2) strain-based conflict (where strain from one role interferes with the other role); and (3) behaviour-based conflict (where particular behaviours in one role are inappropriate to the other role). Others have researched the relationship between work and non-work life arguing that this can involve 'spillover', 'compensation' or 'segmentation'. The 'spillover' model between the home and the non-work domain is where attitudes or behaviour employed in one domain are carried over into the other. The effects of the relationship between each domain can be positive or negative. If positive, multiple occupational and domestic roles are seen to complement one another. Skills and competencies acquired in one domain are seen as transferring to the other resulting in enhanced well-being (Thoits 1983; Cooke and Rousseau 1984; Verbrugge 1986). If negative, multiple occupational and domestic roles are seen as conflicting, leading to reduced well-being, and a perception of overload, and increased stress leading to 'strain' or 'burnout'. Various studies have examined the notion of spillover (see for example, Pleck 1977; Evans and Bartolome 1980, 1984; Staines 1980; Cooke and Rousseau 1984; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Wiley 1987; Hall and Richter 1988; Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1992; Ginn and Sandell 1997). The second approach views the relationship between work and non-work life as being negatively associated or 'compensatory'. Either domain is seen as compensating for problems or deficiencies in the other. Examples of this approach treat home life as a 'refuge' from the demands of work (Bartolome and Evans 1979), or alternatively perceive opportunities for self-realisation and skill use in occupational settings as an antidote to the 'drudgery' of domestic roles (Brown, Bhrolchain, and Harris 1975; Haw 1982; Baruch, Biener, and Barnett 1987; Campbell, Campbell, and Kennard 1994). A third approach of 'segmentation', is where the work–family relationship is independent, that is both environments can be described as separate from each other (Glowinkowski and Cooper 1985).

Traditional ways of work are organised and structured around male hegemony and its associated norms, behaviours and values (Hearn and Parkin 1988; Harlow, Hearn and Parkin 1995; Rindfleish and Sheridan 2003). The reorganisation and restructuring of the work arena in the 1990s resulted in flatter management structures and had profound implications for the nature of managerial work (Worrall and Cooper 1998). As such, work increasingly intensified as competition for managerial places increased. The associated working practices that have ensued and are rewarded (e.g. long hours culture, single-minded commitment, uninterrupted career paths) serve to reinforce, rather than challenge, traditional male norms and

values. Moreover, technological advances mean the distinction between work and home space may be increasingly blurred (Cooper and Lewis 1999), and while this could have a positive outcome of enabling individuals to more effectively manage their multiple role demands, it can also contribute to the work intensification and long hours culture. It has long been established that the intensification of work, and the associated working practices with it, can have subsequent long-term detrimental consequences for the health and well-being of the organisation and its employees (Cooper, Cooper, and Eaker 1988; Daniels 1995; Institute of Management 1996) with women being particularly vulnerable (Davidson and Cooper 1992). Working reasonable hours however has been shown to enhance performance as well as improve employee morale and family life, and reduce stress (Eagly and Carli 2007).

With work reorganisation and intensification, and as the boundaries between work and non-work domains have blurred, we might argue that today's managers may suffer the consequences of negative spillover from work to family and leisure time. Indeed, previous studies have generally concluded that the demands of work negatively affect family life to a greater extent than the demands of home life negatively affect work (cf. Ginn and Sandell 1997; Hochschild 1997; Swanson, Power, and Simpson 1998; Broadbridge 1999; Barnett and Gareis 2000; White et al. 2003), and that higher levels of responsibility are correlated with more spillover to family life (Scase and Goffee 1989; Ginn and Sandell 1997), while women experience more work–family conflict (Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991) and overall pressures (Hilfinger Messias et al. 1997) than men. The organisation of employment would also suggest that retail managers are highly likely to experience time-conflict and behaviour-based conflict between their work and non-work lives.

### **Personal sacrifices**

Family status and responsibilities are factors that have been found to impact on managerial careers (Kirchmeyer 1998; Vinnicombe and Singh 2003; Wentling 2003). Managers make various personal sacrifices in their home lives for their work, and various research has reported on the conflicts between work and family life (c.f. Pleck, Staines, and Lang 1980; Greenhaus, Bedeian, and Mossholder 1987; Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991; Frone, Russell, and Cooper, 1992, 1997a; Frone, Yardley, and Markel 1997b; Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Liff and Ward 2001). These can manifest themselves in many extreme ways such as senior staff cancelling holidays (Broadbridge 1999; Liff and Ward 2001), taking minimal maternity leave (Broadbridge in review) to women having children by caesarean section during their annual leave (Baur, Young, and Salway 1993). Research has also consistently found that women managers are more likely to be in dual career households (c.f. Liff and Ward 2001) and undertake the bulk of the homemaker's role (Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities 2006; Broadbridge 2007) which contributes to overload. Male managers are more likely to have a home support network with a partner who is not engaged in full-time employment (cf. Wajcman 1998; Broadbridge 1998, 2007), which allows them to focus on their career goals, an arrangement that has been found to be positively linked to career progression (Schneer and Reitman 1993). Furthermore, some women sacrifice motherhood in pursuit of a career on the assumption that motherhood would signify the end of their career and that promotion for women is perceived as synonymous with childlessness (Liff and Ward 2001). Other women may choose to postpone having children to a later age, a notion

that is supported by statistical evidence that fertility rates for women over 30 have increased since the 1980s and decreased for women under 30 (Zealey and Self 2008). These strategies reinforce the traditional norms and values associated with career progression.

It is important to acknowledge that men too may be constrained by the socialisation process which determines the behaviours (Kush and Stroh 1994; Powell 2000). For example, Lewis, Rapoport, and Gambles (2003) claimed that men found they were increasingly isolated from family and leisure activities as work intensification pressure grew. Collinson and Hearn (2000) note that managers are assessed according to their ability to control their lives (and especially the division between work and home). Therefore men, they argue, have distanced themselves from their children and family responsibilities, and organisational practices reinforce these distancing strategies and interpret them in a positive light as evidence of commitment to the company and of individual ability to control (or segment) 'private life'. So both men and women can experience conflicts between their work and home life and some might report this experience differently. For example, Liff and Ward (2001) found that men were more likely to report regretting being unable to see more of their children, while women reported exhaustion from trying to maintain the two roles (also found in Vinnicombe and Singh's [2003] research).

These findings imply that in the 21st century the traditional division of labour is still in existence, and that career women are still more likely to be attempting to juggle the two domains of work and home while men (and some women) may be forgoing one domain for the other. Ballout (2008) argues that there are gender differences in work–family conflict due to social role differences between working men and women and that women take a more holistic approach to their lives, spend more time on family obligations and experience greater work overload and work–family conflict than men.

## **Retailing**

Employing around a tenth of all employees in the UK, the retail industry is an appropriate sector to study. The culture of many large retail companies is regarded to be cut-throat, aggressive and adhering to masculine norms and values (Broadbridge 1999, 2008) and these values are rewarded (Broadbridge 2007). As an industry it is fast and dynamic, and has undergone many structural and operational changes in recent years. It operates non-standardised working hours and many companies now function 24 hours a day, seven days a week within a global economy. Within the retail industry managers have reported working long hours in excess of the EU Working Time Directive, and a large proportion of men and women reported that work took precedence over their non-work lives, else bled into their home life by taking work home most evenings; thus indicating an asymmetrical spillover of work into the home domain (Broadbridge 1999, 2007).

Moreover, a quantitative survey showed that the majority of retail managers (70% of the men and 60% of the women) believed they had made personal sacrifices in order to build/progress their careers (Broadbridge 2007). Family commitments and conflicts between their personal and working lives were reported equally by the men and women as being problematic to their careers to date. In line with prior research, women were significantly more likely than men to report responsibility for

the housework and, where appropriate, childcare arrangements, and to put their partner's careers ahead of their own. Unsurprisingly women were significantly more likely than the men to want more flexible working arrangements, although a considerable proportion of both men (42%) and women (64%) would welcome such arrangements. To progress their careers, retail managers felt they needed to prioritise their work over their home lives. For many women this meant sacrificing or postponing having children (the women were significantly less likely than the men to have children), else attempting to manage the competing demands of work and home life. It was less clear from this quantitative survey the nature of the personal sacrifices women and men experienced. Returning to the aim of this article therefore, we now examine in more depth than is capable in a quantitative survey, the various sacrifices or trade-offs retail managers describe when talking about their careers. In so doing we consider the extent to which male and female managers experience relationship conflict (spillover, compensation or segmentation) and the types of conflict experienced (time, strain, behaviour).

### **Methodology**

The methodological approach involved qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews. Drawing on a social constructionist approach and following approaches by others (Jones 1992; Mann 1992; Veale and Gold 1998) a series of 22 biographical history interviews were conducted. This enabled the collection of rich qualitative data without superimposing a rigid structure by the researcher that could be open to questions of subjectivity. The nature of the research meant that it was important to let categories emerge from the data rather than impose them a priori. Thus, the interviews took an unstructured yet focused approach (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000). This allowed enough flexibility without losing focus on the most salient features. By telling their story, respondents provided an interpretation that was historically and culturally grounded (Fisher 1987), while this approach is crucial to the articulation of experience (Johansson 2004).

As stated earlier, the primary focus of the research project was to examine the careers of retail managers. The respondents were asked to provide a career map indicating the highs, lows and plateaus of their careers. These were used as a basis for the interviews. The interviews were response-driven so as to reflect the areas the respondents themselves considered to be most pertinent to their careers. The majority of the respondents mentioned their non-work lives when talking about their careers. In some instances they were not prompted any further by the researcher; in others they were asked 'So how do you balance work and non-work?' or 'How has your career affected your family/home life or your non-work life affected your career?' Where it was felt appropriate a respondent was asked 'Have you made any personal sacrifices in your non-work environment in order to progress your career?' In each instance these questions were asked as a natural follow up question from the preceding conversation.

Convenience sampling was used to select the participants. Josselson and Lieblich (2003) contend that 'saturation' is the key to determining sample size, and Rudestam and Newton (2007) argue that the longer, more detailed and intensive the transcripts, the fewer the number of participants needed (anywhere between five and 30) for there to be saturation of data. Thirty middle and senior managers (15 men and 15 women) from a retail educational database of large UK companies were contacted to

participate in the research in an attempt to aim for a gender-balance. The response was positive with most agreeing to participate. However, inevitably for a variety of reasons, circumstances meant that some interviews were unable to be conducted. This resulted in 22 participants in the research process, consisting of 13 men and nine women, each from a different organisation. With the exception of one (woman) manager, all worked full-time.

Table 1 shows some basic demographics of the sample. An attempt was made to get an equal balance of men and women occupying different positions in the managerial hierarchy. Age was not controlled for and the resulting mean age of the women respondents was 34 while the mean age of the men was 43. Most of the respondents were in marriages or partnerships. No attempt was made to control for the presence of children although it was noted that four of the women had no children against only one of the men. This might be age-related as it was the youngest women who were childless. The respondents chose the time and location for the interviews to take place because it was important to the research that they felt in comfortable surroundings. By providing a comfortable and unthreatening environment it was believed this would produce 'less affected' data. Many respondents were very generous with their time and enjoyed talking about their career and life stories. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and three hours, the majority lasting 90 minutes. They were taped and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was reviewed to understand the key moments described by the respondents. Once this process was complete, the key themes that the research process identified were explored in more detail. This article concentrates on the discussion by respondents of the interaction and/or conflicts of their work and home lives and it includes quotations from an equal number of women and men.

## **Findings**

Both men and women spoke of the difficulty of trying to combine their work and personal lives in a culture characterised by long hours, work intensification and uninterrupted career patterns. Like Liff and Ward's (2001) findings, there was evidence that the men and women experienced the conflict between their work and non-work life differently. The men that were interviewed all conformed to the traditional role expected of them in relation to their careers and non-work life. But as Powell (2000) asserts, they also could be said to have made some sacrifices in their lives.

The interviews revealed that some managers were making sacrifices in one domain in order to accommodate the other; while others were attempting to juggle the two domains. Because we want to consider whether there are any gender differences in any sacrifices described, and whether conventional cultural norms and values have an effect, the presentation of the findings is divided into the narratives of women with children, women without children and men.

### ***Women with children***

Women with children need to combine their work and family responsibilities as effectively as possible, and the interviews revealed that, depending on the strategy adopted, there were a variety of difficulties and sacrifices associated with combining the two roles. Considered below is the case of the four women with children: Abby, Susie, Alison and Wendy.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Respondent/Factor	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	R21	R22
Sex	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	F	F	F	M	M
Age	34	32	30	40	29	37	55	44	36	42	48	41	55	38	35	31	40	38	31	34	44	51
Marital status	M	M	M	M	M	Sep	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	Div	M	M	M	M	M
Partner in employment?	No	FT	FT	FT	FT	-	FT	No	No	?	FT	PT	PT	FT	PT	PT	-	FT	FT	FT	FT	PT
Children?	1	No	No	2	No	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	5	2	3	No	2	2	No	No	1	3
Other dependents?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No						
Highest qualifications	PG	A level	PG	PG dip	PG dip	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	PG	A level	PG	PG	PG
Managerial level	S	S	S	D	S	S	S	S	S	D	D	S	S	S	S	D	D	M	M	M	M	M

**Key**

- Sex  
F = female; M = male.
- Marital status  
M = married or cohabiting.
- Partner in employment  
FT = full time; PT = part time.
- Highest qualifications  
PG = post graduate qualification.
- Managerial level  
D = director; S = senior manager; M = middle manager.
- Sep = seperated; Div = divorced.

Abby and Wendy worked full-time in senior positions. They were cognisant of the sacrifices they were making in their private lives; both women exhibited time- and strain-based conflicts between their home and work lives. Abby worked full-time in a senior retail manager role while her husband was a full-time homemaker – they had made a conscious decision to reverse the traditional roles. Her account however was unlike any of the men with children. She explained:

I come home at 7 pm and she's [daughter, aged two] still usually up. I leave at 7 am in the morning and she's usually asleep ... so when I get home I will then sort of take over and do bath time and you know we can play and I can put her to bed. (R1, Abby, senior manager, aged 34, one child aged 2)

This had its knock on effects and is resonant of Liff and Ward (2001) and Vinnicombe and Singh's (2003) findings of women's sheer exhaustion of combining the two roles:

I was finding I was quite tired because I am up at 6.30 am and I am on the move constantly until about 9.30 pm and only at that point in time do I go 'phew', so fitting anything else in is quite difficult other than that and there have been moments when I've thought you know 'this is too much to fit in any one day, it's quite tough'... She has only just recently started sleeping through the night properly and that was tough because I was waking up in the morning sometimes feeling zombified because I hadn't had a good night's sleep and you know there is always that rush when you leave work, you want to get straight home and every minute counts when you get home ... I think in an ideal world I'd be considering maybe a four day week if I had my choice but I don't really have that choice.' (R1, Abby)

Abby differed from the men taking this conventional career path in her attempts to juggle the two domains by undertaking the second shift when she gets home (despite her husband being a full-time homemaker), and this clearly manifested itself in overload and some spillover effects.

In recognition of Burke's (2001) 'either-or' concepts regarding work and personal life Wendy, a retail director, had taken a non-conventional route for women by putting her career first. She openly recognised that she was sacrificing her home life for her career, yet demonstrated the accompanied guilt she felt regarding the level of her involvement in the children's activities. This level of guilt (which could be associated with behaviour-based conflict) was not vocalised to the same extent by any of the men interviewed:

My career has definitely affected my family life. But it was a sort of conscious decision really ... I don't spend enough time with my children ... I leave the house at 7am and I get home at 7pm ... I don't pick them up from school. I don't know any of the other mums in the class so on sports day I don't know who they are. Just little things like that. All the children turn up for my children's parties and I don't know who the children are. I have to ask them. It's just embarrassing really. (R4, Wendy, director, aged 40, two children aged 3 and 6)

It was interesting that Wendy had somewhat regretted some of her earlier decisions:

With the first child I was off for I think 16 weeks [maternity leave]. I just wanted to get back to work again and the second time I was off for nine weeks. I could have had more time if I wanted it but I didn't want to. I wish I had in hindsight mind you. (R4, Wendy)

Again, this statement reinforces that Wendy has suffered from behaviour-based conflict.

Susie and Alison had taken a more conventional route expected of women's careers. Following having their children, Susie had gone part-time while Alison had taken a complete career break. In so doing they both realised that this had resulted in various sacrifices or trade-offs; this time on their careers. Susie described how she had 'chosen' to work part-time in order to better balance her multiple role demands (demonstrating elements of Greenhaus and Beutell's time-based conflict). The term 'chosen' is used loosely as Susie nevertheless recognised that this had a detrimental effect on her career to the point of halting it altogether, but the way her employment was organised meant she was unable to effectively combine her career with raising a family, thus her requirement to work part-time:

When I think back to the hours that I worked at [various retail companies in head office positions] they were jobs that required five days a week, and 9 am until you could stand it you know. I've never, ever worked 9am until 5pm and I just think when would I ever see the children? So the idea of working part-time appeals . . . but you can't give it [job] your best because your best requires more hours and hours is something I don't have . . . finding the balance is just impossible and I don't know how other women do it. (R18, Susie, middle manager, aged 38, two children aged 3 and 4)

Her account expresses the inadequacy of Preference Theory (Hakim 2000) to explain the patterns of women's careers. Susie definitely believed that she had made personal sacrifices in terms of her career brought about by the organisation of employment and the deficit in her accumulated human capital:

The next step would be Merchandise Controller and the sacrifices involved in that in terms of family life would just be much, much, much bigger. So my career's really finished you know. So as far as that career path in retail is concerned I don't think that there is a next step. The rate of technological change in retailing is vast; it is always changing and if an employer had the choice of employing somebody who was returning to work after a six-year break or somebody who was you know, ten or 15 years younger with no children and who can be there at 11 o'clock at night – I'm not trying to be defeatist – but I mean it's just not practical that they would employ me. (R18, Susie)

So Susie's career had been made difficult because of her perceived (and actual) need to follow an uninterrupted career that entailed working long hours.

Alison spoke about the difficulty in trying to return to work after a career break and the discrimination she suffered from prospective employers, which was reminiscent of Burke's (2001) 'either-or' concept regarding careers and children:

It was just basically, 'oh, you have had a career, but you have got two children, oh my God, we can't have you here'. That's what it felt like, a leper . . . My salary plummeted. I had to go right back down again. I missed salary, I missed career opportunities. A three-year break did a lot of damage to my career I would say . . . However, the upside of it was I managed to spend three years with my babies, which was invaluable. You certainly cannot put a price on that. (R6, Alison, senior manager, aged 37, two children aged 8 and 10)

The narratives of all four women with children uphold the notion that motherhood and careers are competing loyalties many women retail managers have to face. Although Alison's career break had been a positive experience for her, the aftermath

in career terms was less so; she felt she had to effectively start her career again, with the added 'baggage' having children brought. Hence, through Susie and Alison's stories we can see how some retail companies' management structures are incompatible with enabling people to take career breaks or effectively combining caring responsibilities. This results in the women needing to prioritise one domain over the other or attempting to juggle both domains, which has the potential for overload and the associated negative spillover effects.

### ***Women without children***

The childless women also made sacrifices in their personal lives in order to build their careers. The long hours culture of retailing resulted in a disruption of home life which manifested itself in several ways. As a result, some women had postponed the idea of having children as this was believed to be incompatible with the pursuit of their career. This was the case with Joanna (R5), who although married and in her late 20s, felt that given the culture of retailing, she needed to be completely focused on developing her career. She hadn't ruled out having children but she was definite that they were a hindrance while attempting to progress her career; children, she believed needed to come after your career was firmly established, and couldn't co-exist alongside it. Similarly, in relation to starting a family Maria did not perceive that she would be able to combine the two roles easily. Rather, there appeared to be a decision to make some sort of sacrifice in her career if she were to have a family:

I'll do the long hours and sacrifice social life and whatever else [to progress my career and demonstrate commitment]. On the other side of it, I'm 31 now so if I was lucky enough to be able to start a family I would have to decide in the next couple of years and that's certainly in the back of my mind as well. (R19, Maria, middle manager, aged 31, no children)

Maria faces the *decision* whether she should start a family, and is aware of the consequences this might have on her career. This is not a decision men normally have to make and so Leahy and Doughney (2006) argue women therefore face unreasonable choices regarding sacrificing or delaying having children to pursue their careers. But like the women with children, Maria and Joanna's narratives demonstrate their perceived difficulties of combining their careers with raising a family: like Burke's (2001) 'either-or' concept, one domain needs to take a backseat – there is no real balancing of the two roles. Hence, their recognition that their career would need to change as they attempted to combine it with caring responsibilities. One might reflect whether this is indicative of behaviour-based conflict as it reflects the incompatibility of women's traditional domestic roles and pursuing a career in retail management.

Various managers spoke about how their home lives were disrupted by the expectations of their employers, thus demonstrating an asymmetrical spillover effect from work to family life. For example, Vivienne (senior manager, no children [R2]) commented that the board members all lived away from home during the week (none had children) and so therefore were able to work long hours. To be seen to be 'committed' she maintained that staff were also expected to work these long hours, and as a consequence she worked on average 65 to 70 hours per week. Vivienne suffered from the effects of negative spillover from work into the home. She recalled that she had not had a day off for four months and that weekends were disrupted by work-related calls to her home. She further explained that, because of a new project,

she needed to cancel a pre-arranged family holiday and spoke of the fear of telling her husband. As a direct consequence of her work demands she perceived that she was more tired, irritable and bossy at home and reported that her husband hated her working at this company. She additionally stated that she was responsible for the home, and although she expected her husband to undertake more housework chores, he did not; if he did, this was perceived as ‘helping’ her and she was expected to say thank you. Her account demonstrated that her multiple occupational and domestic roles were cumulative, resulting in negative spillover from work into family life, and the associated time- and strain-based conflict that accompanied it. Similarly, other managers spoke about time-based conflict and how this impacted negatively on home life: Maria stated that she regularly worked until midnight to finish a project. Again this was an attempt to demonstrate her commitment to the company and progress her career, although it had the negative spillover effects on her personal life.

The women’s narratives illustrate the interplay of work and non-work factors on their career development. Women’s career decisions need to be viewed in a holistic way of the context of their non-work lives. Their career histories and decisions were **relational**, in that their career decisions were part of an intricate web of interconnected issues and people (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005). The women followed two main patterns to their careers. They had either postponed or discounted having children in the knowledge, as Burke (2001) noted, that they could not combine the two roles satisfactorily, and therefore had made a conscious decision to put their careers first. Else, they were attempting to juggle their home and work lives, often undertaking the second shift (Hochschild 1989) when they got home (whether they had children or not). Like others found (Liff and Ward 2001; Vinnicombe and Singh 2003), this led to overload, exhaustion and negative spillover to their home life because of their multiple role demands.

### **Men**

The men that were interviewed all conformed to the traditional roles expected of them in relation to their careers and home life. They were also more likely than the women managers to exhibit the range of relationships between work and non-work life: spillover, compensation and segmentation. As Powell (2000) asserts, they also could be said to have made some sacrifices.

Thomas had followed a traditional career pattern and reported sacrificing his family life for his career, although as he had got older he had realigned his priorities:

I mean my family life went out the window and I was prepared to do that. I separated from my wife, I lived on my own for seven years but looking back on it I lost the marriage on the basis that my career was more important. (R20, Thomas, middle manager, aged 44, one child aged 15)

Having lost his marriage he adopted a compensatory role at work in order to make up for his lack of home life, and so worked further hours at work. Although, he too, has the benefit of hindsight:

I was prepared to put the hours in. The hours didn’t matter to me, I was doing it because of job satisfaction, and I didn’t have a personal life so it didn’t matter to me. You know in hindsight perhaps that might not have been right for me. I’m in my third relationship now and I now value the relationship above my work. (R20, Thomas)

Stuart acknowledged the sacrifices he has made in his personal life but has no regrets, perhaps because he was enacting the traditional male role expected of him:

I have made some personal sacrifices like not seeing the kids grow up because you were always at work and stuff like that which I don't regret . . . I quite enjoy working long hours [he currently works 12 hours per day five days a week which is less than he used to] so I don't have a problem with it. I've pretty much left weekends fairly sacrosanct. So they're not horrendous hours by modern standards but they're long enough. (R8, Stuart, senior manager, aged 44, three children aged 12, 13 and 15)

His talk of keeping weekends sacrosanct might describe the best way that he is trying to segment his work and home domains. He talked about the support of a line manager in relation to a prolonged personal crisis involving the hospitalisation of close family members, but the comment is interesting in the context of the amount of hours he stated working:

Once he was very supportive . . . it was a very emotionally charged time for me and he was incredibly supportive in terms of *letting me off an hour early* to go and see them'. [emphasis added] (R8, Stuart)

Ivan had also followed a traditional linear career path, prioritising it ahead of his relationships and family life. He explained how he had been eager to progress his career and considered he had been 'rewarded' for that, although he acknowledged time- and strain-based conflict and the sacrifices it had on his personal life:

Well the first sacrifice is obviously when I was working in the centre and working six days a week, getting up at 6am in the morning and getting home about 8pm or 9pm at night. I've had to sacrifice a lot of family time which I've been gradually getting back in and sorting out but I think I've sacrificed some health as well if I'm honest. So they are the main sacrifices which are pretty substantial I think but it's all done on results. When I took over the centre it became the most profitable centre . . . So what's been seen is the results of what I've been doing so I've been rewarded for that. (R10, Ivan, director, aged 42, two children)

It is noteworthy that once some of the male managers had climbed the managerial hierarchy they were ostensibly better able to balance (and segment) their personal lives as the following quotes suggest. This is perhaps a function of getting older and realising that life is finite, but it also illustrates how many men adopt a career path of focusing firstly on their job (perhaps in their attempts to conform to the breadwinner role) and only after it is well-established being able to balance and focus on others, which adds some further credence to Burke's notion of an 'either-or' concept and Mainiero and Sullivan's Kaleidoscope career model:

I realised it's just not worth having blind loyalty and working your butt off because it doesn't necessarily lead you anywhere. I had no hobbies and no external interests and I felt bereft. So one of the things for me has been to develop interests outside of work. Now to do that I need to have sufficient time to do that. I need a fairly stable environment in which to do it. If I'm busy trying to get to the next rung on the ladder it may impede on my ability to develop more fully as a person and do other things whereas I took the decision subconsciously perhaps that well actually life is more than just working and getting to the next rung on a ladder. I don't really feel it's that important. I mean 15 years ago I'd probably have given you a different answer. It's only really been the last ten years that my outlook has changed. I'm still motivated to get up and go to work and add value but to get to the next rung on the ladder is really not that important to me (R11, David, director, aged 48, two children aged 16 and 18)

Paul had followed the traditional sequential route to his career but as he reached senior management, he was better able to balance and segment it with his personal life:

The commuting time to work was an hour every day and it wasn't unusual for me to be up at 5am in the morning and not getting home till 8pm at night and I did that for about seven years and up until even probably in the last year or two ago it was not uncommon. I'd have to work at home of a night time virtually five days a week and now I really have started to draw the line in terms of saying 'when I leave the office of a night time I don't really take anything home with me' and you know I'm getting more disciplined in terms of I'm normally in the office between 7.30am and 7.45am and generally leave at between 6pm and 6.30pm and you know once I leave here that's work's left behind. It's always easier when you've got people working for you rather than doing the job yourself. It always gives you the opportunity to delegate. (R16, Paul, director, aged 31, no children)

Graeme mentioned his children and not being prepared to relocate as a hindrance in his career yet he has no regrets. His wife had made a conscious decision to put her professional career on hold to raise the family and she had now returned to it. He explained how he would take time off work if necessary for childcare arrangements, and while he recognised the cost this had in terms of his career, he also was aware of the need to balance both domains:

I'm going to my children's sports day on Friday ... Earlier in my career I would have beaten myself up silly and wouldn't have felt easy taking that time off to do that ... but now I've got to a point where I'm sort of fairly satisfied, so sort of think 'hang on, there's a balance to be sought'. (R14, Graeme, senior manager, aged 38, two children aged 8 and 11)

Sean had followed a traditional career, had experienced the outcomes of negative spillover resulting in his divorce and the subsequent need to better balance work and family life:

I was with [Retailer A] for three years, incredibly high pace. I covered the whole of the south and there was a massive store opening programme and I was working six or seven days a week, living away from home four nights a week. It was very exciting and incredibly demanding but you know I had a wife with two young kids and that was when life fell apart at home and we split up and I moved out and we sort of lived apart and my ex-wife then met somebody else within a relatively quick period of time so life started to, for the first time career map started to overlap with home map and I realised that, you know, everything was work and nothing was home. The company wanted me to move up North and I had a choice ... then I was approached by [Retailer B]. For the first time I took a decision based on the fact that it would be not as exciting as [Retailer A] but at least domestically I'd have a life ... You know I seized the opportunity to balance life. (R17, Sean, director, aged 40, divorced, two children aged 8 and 11)

This decision was right for him and he had recently sacrificed another career move because of his family:

I actually got head hunted about a month ago for what I thought would be the perfect job and apart from the geography I would have loved it. It was a fantastic job but my kids were down in the southwest and I couldn't do it. (R17, Sean)

Like the women, the men also spoke of the interplay between the two domains but in a different way; their narratives showed that they adopted a more conventional route for men which entailed a more **sequential** pattern of focusing on career goals first and then thinking about others and balance. Unlike the women, none of the men's stories

mentioned going home to undertake the second shift: they had a home infrastructure that supported and enabled them to better balance and separate the two domains, thus enabling them to focus on their career goals. Only once they had made progress in their careers and had reached a certain managerial level or career stage did the men seem to value relationships more, and be able to better balance their work with their non-work lives.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

Through a series of in-depth interviews, this article has contributed to our understanding of the difficulties that retail managers face in their careers and personal lives, and some of the sacrifices or trade-offs they make in the 21st century. The career women are usually in dual-career households where they also assume the bulk of domestic responsibilities, while career men have (or have had in the past) a supportive infrastructure at home that better enables them to concentrate on, and put their career first. Therefore, like Ballout (2008), we might conclude that the women experienced greater non-work challenges than men stemming from obstacles they face in balancing work and family roles. It is noteworthy that the women in talking about their careers and non-work lives related it largely to the presence/absence of children. Men's accounts also did this but their accounts were also broader.

The findings implied that sacrifices were being made by the retail managers in one domain over the other, and they support an argument of asymmetrical permeability for men and women managers, with the demands of work being more likely to affect personal life to a greater extent than personal life affects work (Ginn and Sandell 1997; Hochschild 1997; Swanson, Power, and Simpson 1998; Broadbridge 1999; Barnett and Gareis 2000; White et al. 2003). However, women were more likely to experience overload and feel the need to juggle the demands of their work and home domains. This resulted in negative spillover, and time, strain and behaviour conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). The men prioritised career above personal life, and demonstrated a wider range of relationships between work and non-work domains. Some experienced 'spillover', but others had experienced 'compensation' and/or 'segmentation'; the men were better able to separate and control the various aspects of their work and non-work lives than the women. They also showed evidence of time- and strain-based conflicts. Like some of the women, some men with hindsight were regretful of the sacrifices they had made in their home lives, yet others were not, accepting it as inevitable features of the sexual division of labour and the primacy of paid employment in their lives.

With retail company cultures embracing working models and practices that conform to male norms and values, some women managers might experience behavioural-based conflict. Greenhaus and Beutell, in their description of this type of conflict explained that it required managers to undertake incompatible behaviours in one domain. Their explanation was based on the role conflict experienced by men and how their behavioural styles at work are incompatible with behaviours desired by their children. They do not question that women managers might suffer from such behaviour-based conflict when they are expected to adopt the traditional management styles associated with retail management. In order to fulfil the expectations of their employers (and their own careers) some of the women conformed to the traditional male definitions of commitment, working long hours and doing whatever was necessary to progress their careers. So women like Wendy and Abby were keen to demonstrate to their employers their ability to distance themselves from their

children (Collinson and Hearn 2000), in their attempt to prove that they can control, and compartmentalise their lives like men. Others had foregone or postponed starting a family for similar reasons. Thus various women were allowing work to take precedence over, and disrupt, their personal lives. Such women will work the hours necessary and not ask for flexible working arrangements even if they would like them (Abby), because of the perception, like Liff and Ward (2001) found, that this disqualified themselves as being serious about their career. Thus the women were conforming to expected male patterns of behaviour and so could be argued to experience behaviour-based conflict.

The accounts of the male retail managers also presuppose that various sacrifices have been made by them, again in an attempt to conform to an expected role in society, that of the breadwinner. Their sacrifices have generally been connected with their non-work lives (Thomas and Sean losing their marriages; Stuart and Ivan generally missing quality time with their families; David and Paul having little leisure time or external interests). Overwhelmingly, men pursued their careers first and foremost, sacrificing their non-work life for their career until they had reached a certain position when delegating and balance was easier to achieve. Contrary to other research (Scase and Goffee 1989; Ginn and Sandell 1997) male managers in senior positions did not appear to experience high levels of negative spillover to family life. As the male managers became more senior, they seemed to be able to apparently achieve a better balance between their work and personal lives (consider Graeme and Paul's stories). This might be a function of position power: at this stage of their career men have the power and authority to be able to combine the two roles more effectively should they choose that route. However, this was not the same for the women senior managers who were far more likely to be juggling work and home domains and, as a consequence, report exhaustion and little time for any other leisure activities. This is an area worthy of further investigation.

The findings generally endorse the idea that organisations are unsupportive of a work–personal life balance (Burke 2001); else see an employee's personal life as unrelated to their working lives (Powell and Mainiero 1992). In many retail organisations managerial positions are less conducive to flexible arrangements, although the reality shows that many retail managers, even at senior levels, believed that their jobs could be performed on a more flexible basis (Broadbridge 2007, 2008). Many women don't reach senior management levels because of their earlier need to balance, which seems to be a paradoxical situation. The alternative, like Liff and Ward's (2001) findings, was that the senior women sacrificed having children as part of their (coping) strategy to advance their careers. The findings appear to complement those of Powell and Mainiero (1992) who suggested that men can *choose* to accommodate competing priorities between work and family and career decisions, whereas women primarily handle the bulk of family responsibilities and therefore the decision for women almost necessitates some type of accommodation in career. Nevertheless, the men's stories tend to support a view that men's attitudes are changing and that some are demonstrating a greater interest in childrearing. There was also some evidence (albeit slight) that some men (especially divorced men) were turning down job situations that made it difficult to handle their family responsibilities (Kush and Stroh 1994), and so perhaps those in non-conventional families are forced to make some sort of choice between their career and family roles.

The findings indicate that managers are constrained by conventional norms and values which prescribe that they should follow an uninterrupted career that entails

long working hours to get ahead. The value placed on continuity of employment and commitment and inflexible working hours may exclude some women from some managerial jobs. Women's career paths have always been more complex and ambiguous than men's (Stroth and Reilly 1999). Women have traditionally constructed their conceptions of themselves, their lives and the world around them differently from men (Gilligan 1982; Gallos 1989) but this does not mean they have less career motivation as much as a different perspective towards what a career means to them (Gallos 1989). Hirsh and Jackson (1989) argued that careers needed to accommodate the reality of women's lives, so that they could make a meaningful investment in both occupational and family roles. From the analysis of the men and women's accounts, it would appear that men have conformed to the traditional and sequential career paths expected of them. The women had adopted three prime routes: some had conformed to the traditional roles expected of women and put their family before their career, thus suffering the consequences of a thwarted career; other women had conformed (at least in part, given that they were career women) to the conventional relational patterns expected of them and were therefore attempting to juggle the two domains together; else they adopted a more traditional sequential male pattern of putting career first before thinking about a family life, in their recognition that combining the two effectively might prove impossible (there was very little real evidence of the women combining the two roles well and it resulting in positive spillover from one domain to the other). So, 20 years on from Hirsch and Jackson's recommendations, it appears women's lives are still not accommodated in the structure of retail organisations and management careers.

When men and women were attempting to segment their work and non-work lives, the men were better able to accomplish this. The women who attempted to segment their work and non-work lives nevertheless still described negative spillover from the work to home domains. For some women, their attempts at segmentation were different to the men in that it involved them denying aspects of their personal lives for their work (postponing/foregoing having children) while the men (because of their supportive home infrastructure) were better able to segment the various aspects of home and work life.

Like Barnett and Gareis (2000), work–family conflict was regarded as a trade-off for some, with managers unable to fulfil family responsibilities because of work. The findings appear to uphold the idea that combining children with a career proves to be very difficult for women. In general, it would appear that top management jobs do not encourage a balancing of home and work lives (Powell 2000; Broadbridge 2007); instead personal and work lives can be seen as 'either–or' concepts (Burke 2001), and the outcomes of work–family conflict, like other research (Duxbury and Higgins 1991) can result in lower quality of (work and) family life. Interestingly though, and one to investigate further, is the probability that senior men are better able to circumvent this than women.

### **Managerial implications and areas for further research**

In general, a managerial career in retailing is not compatible with enabling an effective balance between career, non-work life and children unless the manager has a home infrastructure that will sustain that. The industry follows male values of work intensification and the accompanied long working hours this entails to demonstrate commitment and the accrual of the capital necessary for career

progression. Therefore only certain types of managers who are willing to conform to these norms will reach the very top. This risks perpetuating an intransigent boardroom culture and a system of promoting like-minded people with similar characteristics. The respondents in the current research were baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1964) and from Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and so more likely to conform to these values than Generation Y (born between 1977 and 1994). Generation Y are more concerned with whole-life concerns (Las Heras and Hall 2006; Broadbridge, Maxwell, and Ogden 2007) and demand more balance than any previous generation (Morton 2002; Eisner 2005; Kerslake 2005; Anonymous 2006; Broadbridge, Maxwell, and Ogden 2007). So we could argue will such a culture prevail with Generation Y? The more proactive retail companies should be rethinking their employment policies so that they can better accommodate the values of their future Generation Y employees, particularly as a supportive work–life balance has been shown to result in a healthier, happier, more stable workforce with greater productive capacities (Kush and Stroh 1994; Burke 2001), and working reasonable hours can potentially increase organisational competitiveness (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000; Brett and Stroh 2003). It makes economic as well as moral sense. Attention in the past has tended to focus on how women might better manage the competing conflicts of their home and work domains. What it needed is for organisations to acknowledge the various sacrifices/ trade-offs that men make in one domain for the other, and attempt to improve the situation for *both* male and female managers.

Those organisations who realise this and proactively work towards meeting the values of their workforce and Generation Y stand to reap the benefits from recruiting and retaining talented well-balanced employees. With more flexible working practices being possible in retail management, proactive organisations should consider what practical working patterns can be introduced to make it easier for managers to better balance their work–life issues, while at the same time ensuring that the bottom line is not negatively affected. The advancement of technologies which mean there is potentially more blurring of the work and non-work interface (e.g. working on blackberries while at home) can have both positive and negative outcomes for managers. They can enable individuals to better control when they undertake certain aspects of their jobs, and so might contribute to a better balancing of work and family lives.

It is recommended that further research examining the attitudes and careers of Generation Y women and men is conducted to see if there is indeed a generational effect, particularly among the men and their expectations of better work lifestyle balance. Further research specifically concentrating on Generation Y managers is recommended and important in ensuring a healthy and productive future workforce. Arguably, those companies who do consider the needs and values of Generation Y are the ones who stand to gain from added competitive advantage in the talents they can attract and retain from their future managerial workforce. The issue of kaleidoscope careers in which it is recognised that women's career decisions are relational while men's are more sequential should be investigated further with Generation Y individuals, and it would be interesting to examine whether the notions of sacrifices/trade-offs also change when examining Generation Y.

The findings of the current research demonstrate the importance of non-work life in understanding people's careers. Although this was only brought about implicitly from the research it has shown that it is important to consider whole-life concerns

when investigating people's careers. A further research project examining the careers of senior executives and retail directors has since been conducted and extending the findings of this research, the issues of non-work was explicitly investigated alongside work issues.

It is difficult to assess whether the issues raised in this article are any more acute in retailing than any other area of managerial employment. To understand this in more detail would require a comparative study of various occupations. However, the characteristics of the retail industry indicate that the culture upholds particular norms and values which might explain some of the difficulties expressed by the respondents in their narratives. The nature of workplaces needs to change to accommodate the changing values of men and women in society today. Calls for flexible working have been made in the past; perhaps there is never a more important time than the present that retail companies take this issue seriously and look for ways that their managers (women *and* men) can better balance the conflicting demands of work and non-work.

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## Women at the top in British retailing: plus ca change?

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Building on Thomas's research a decade ago, this article provides an update on women's representation on retail boards. Findings show that women directors were more likely to be found in the retail sector than many other business sectors: women were represented on all six FTSE 100 retail boards and comprise almost a quarter of all non-executive directors (NEDs) in these companies; market capitalisation was significantly higher for companies with women on their boards than for all-male boards; and a high proportion of the women retail directors are represented on the key committees. However, all the retail firms' boards were male dominated and 42% had no women in board-level positions. Male executive directors and NEDs outnumber women in a ratio of 8:1. The power base of retail boards remains a male preserve. Thus, it would seem that women board members in retail today have not significantly changed since Thomas's findings in 1997.

**Keywords:** women; directors; retailing; FTSE companies; executive

### Introduction

It is well established that men continue to outnumber women in leading positions of organisations, women's advancement to board positions is slow paced, board selection is not gender neutral, and women remain in the minority on the vast majority of company boards (Ahmanson & Ohlund, 2008; Farrell & Hersch, 2005; Martin, Warren-Smith, Scott, & Roper, 2008; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Sealy, Vinnicombe, & Dolder, 2009; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004a). The purpose of this article is to contribute to existing knowledge on women in boardroom positions. The article's point of departure is to concentrate on the retail sector by examining in more depth the representation of women in retail directorships in the FTSE UK retail companies. The rationale for choosing retailing is that it has been attributed as having a higher proportion of women managers than other occupational sectors (Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2003), although the boardrooms are predominantly male dominated (Thomas, 2001). Nonetheless, retailing has been identified as an industry with a higher prevalence of women directors than other sectors in the USA (Joy, 2008), and a similar position appears to be the case in the UK. Singh and Vinnicombe (2003, p. 351) argued that the retail sector 'is an area where women really have started to break through the glass ceiling' and where 'women are making inroads into the boardroom, in increasing numbers' (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004b, p. 13). Furthermore, it can be considered as a feminised sector, that is, it employs a high proportion of women workers as well as having a large female customer base. Few authors have specifically addressed employment issues within the UK retail sector, especially in the last decade (e.g. Baret, Lehdorff, & Sparks, 2000; Bent & Freaty, 1997; Foster, 2004; Foster,

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Whysall, & Harris, 2008, 2009; Freathy, 1993, 1997; Freathy & Sparks, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996; Hendrie, 2004; Kirby, 1992, 1993; Ogbonna & Harris, 2001; Omar & Shittu, 2005; Penn & Wirth, 1993; Sparks, 1981, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1987, 1991, 1992). Very few (Broadbridge, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Brockbank & Airey, 1994a, 1994b; Brockbank & Traves, 1995; Maxwell & Ogden, 2006; Maxwell, Ogden, & McTavish, 2007; Traves, Brockbank, & Tomlinson, 1997) have considered the career development of retail managers, particularly in relation to gender.

While women comprise 61% of the GB retail workforce (Office for National Statistics, 2007), they are often concentrated in part-time employment at non-managerial levels. It is clear that the positions that women employees occupy are highly segregated, and while they comprise the majority of front-line service workers, they are disproportionately under-represented in managerial positions, particularly senior positions. Various research has indicated the imbalance of women in senior management positions within retailing (Broadbridge, 1996, 1998; Maxwell & Ogden, 2006; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004a, 2004b; Thomas, 2001). Broadbridge (2007) warned of the lack of balance that exists within the senior management team if women are absent. This included the different approaches that men and women might have in their leadership and management styles, and the different perspectives that women can bring to senior management positions (such as more intuitive and sensitive perspectives on management).

Broadbridge (2008a) found that senior management was still considered to be a male preserve by both men and women retail managers; the perceived barriers being family responsibilities (lack of child-care facilities and family commitments); the way work is organised (the long anti-social hours of retailing and lack of flexi-time); organisational cultures (e.g. male dominance in the organisational hierarchy, outdated attitudes to women's roles and gender stereotyped beliefs); the invisibility of women at senior levels (a lack of female role models); and women themselves (lack of confidence and lack of political awareness).

When comparing different levels of management, junior and middle women managers reported the same top five facilitators that were mentioned by the senior managers in Broadbridge (2008b), and these can be located in personal traits and the accumulation of human capital. However, senior women were significantly more likely than the junior and middle women managers to attribute their success to the support of others, visibility, and networking issues. With regard to the potential problems they have encountered in their careers to date, junior and middle managers foresaw the factors that might be rooted in paternalistic company cultures as being *less* of a barrier to their career than the women senior managers, while women senior managers placed significantly more emphasis on 'organisational politics' than their non-senior counterparts. These findings imply that the ascent from middle to senior management positions incorporates different factors from when attaining first line and middle management positions, and that the further up the hierarchy one goes the more influence informal policies have in helping to ascend the career ladder.

Despite existing research on retailing and employment issues, little is known about women board members of multiple UK retail companies. It therefore constitutes an interesting and relevant sector for further research into the relative boardroom positions women hold. It is a decade since the last article was published (Thomas, 2001), and so this article provides the current positioning of women on FTSE-listed retail boards. Before examining the data, first we provide a context by outlining some previous literature on board positions, the barriers to women's ascension to top leadership positions, and the prevailing work on the position of women directors in retailing.

## Literature review

### *Definitions and power base*

The role of the Board of Directors is to design, develop and implement strategic plans for their organisation in the most cost-effective and time-efficient manner.<sup>1</sup> The term executive director (ED) (or inside director) refers to those members of a Board of Directors who are also senior managers of the company. They are distinguished from non-executive directors (NEDs or outside directors) who are not actively involved in the day-to-day running of the company and are not employees of the company or affiliated with it in any other way. A NED is valued because of their breadth of experience and knowledge, their contacts outside a firm and their independence from the CEO and other top executives (Kesner, 1988). They monitor the executive activity and have responsibilities to constructively challenge and contribute to the development of strategy; they are assumed to bring a fresh perspective to the board, influencing either through work experience or from membership on other boards (Stevenson & Radin, 2009). They scrutinise the performance of management in meeting agreed goals and objectives and monitor senior management and succession planning. NEDs should also provide independent views on resources, appointments and standards of conduct. Burgess and Tharenou (2002) note that NEDs are appointed by invitation of the board chair or nominating committee.

Powell and Graves (2003), quoting Kanter, argued that organisations want to minimise uncertainty, and one way of doing this is to close top management positions to people who are regarded as different. Stevenson and Radin (2009) claim that not everyone is connected in the same way to the network of board ties, and not everyone has the same amount of power on the board. Boards become socially differentiated and an elite inner board may form around the CEO or chairman. This inner elite may form a clique or dominant coalition (Stevenson, Pearce, & Porter, 1985) that exercises the most power on the board. Oakley (2000) observes that male executives are often deferential to the CEO so as to gain his approval and enter this inner clique. She further notes that the CEO highly values this behaviour in men, yet if a woman exhibits such behaviour she is regarded as weak. Hill (1995) observed that although directors of public companies are legally equal, in practice their status and influence is differentiated in various ways; the chair, chief executive and finance director roles are the key positions. Zelechowski and Bilimoria (2004) argue that women NEDs had less influence and stature than their male peers and would therefore be likely to be treated as tokens in the executive suite. Similarly, Thomas (2001) pointed out that NED positions are secondary influences to ED positions within the board. Those centrally located and who possess many ties are usually found to be the most powerful actors in an organisational network (Brass, 1992). Singh, Vinnicombe, and Terjesen (2007) also found that women had significantly more minor board experience than men and somewhat different experience on international boards. Men were more likely to have CEO experience, and significantly more likely to have experiences as chair of a board.

Kesner (1988) maintains that although corporate boards meet frequently to discuss key issues and vote on various matters, most decision making takes place in smaller groups or committees. There are four committees with the greatest influence on corporate activities: the audit, nominating, compensation, and executive committees, and membership in these groups tend to hold the greatest power and influence over corporate affairs (Stevenson & Radin, 2009). Bilimoria and Piderit (1994) argued that women were systematically disadvantaged in their likelihood of executive committee membership. A decade on, Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) argued that women were increasingly having a voice on their boards with 44% of all women directors in the FTSE 100 companies being on the remuneration

committees and a third on audit and nomination committees. This led them to argue that women were moving from token to minority status on boards although progress was still extremely slow.

Erkut, Kramer, and Konrad (2008) consider whether the number of women on a board makes a difference and they argue that among other things lone women are often not listened to or taken seriously; are excluded from socialising with other board members and some decision making. They may also be expected to represent all women's views. They assert, as does Foust-Cummings (2008), that one woman on the board is not enough to influence the board significantly and that it is difficult for a lone woman to exercise her leadership skills. Two women board members, Erkut et al. claim, validate each other and can help to raise an issue or reinforce a point that otherwise would not have been heard. Having two women board members may also help to dispel the view that all women are the same and can be stereotyped. They spoke about how the culture of the board changes, becoming warmer, and with a wider range of topics discussed. Nevertheless, they still found evidence of two women being treated as tokens and argue that a critical mass is needed; only with three or more women does the board become 'normalised'. If a board becomes normalised in terms of gender composition, it is reasonable to expect that these women might then question the prevailing masculine norms, thus challenging the powerful dominant sub-culture that may exist. Remaining in token positions means such women are particularly visible in an organisation. This brings with it more on the job pressure as their performance is scrutinised.

### ***Women directors on corporate boards in the UK***

The general paucity of women directors in the UK is highlighted in two recent studies. Martin et al. (2008), in a study of all quoted and unquoted UK firms with registered operations in Great Britain, and two or more directors (over half a million), concluded that the overall proportion of female directors in the UK has grown in recent years but at a particularly slow rate, and currently just over a quarter of UK directors are women (28%). They revealed that 62.8% of all firms in the UK are male dominated, and this was particularly so in the larger firms. For every firm with a female majority on the board of directors, there were 10 firms with a male majority; among larger firms this ratio rose to 226:1. Complementing Martin et al.'s work is that of Sealy et al. (2009) who, in their latest Female FTSE Report, show that 75 of the top FTSE 100 companies now have women on their boards; with 37 companies having two or more women. The percentage of women directorships in the top FTSE 100 companies currently stands at 12.2% (5.2% ED; 15.2% NED) and comprises 131 directorships. The women were on average 2.3 years younger (55.0 years) than their male counterparts and had a shorter tenure. Sealy, Vinnicombe, and Singh (2008) found that both market capitalisation<sup>2</sup> and board size are significantly and consistently higher for companies with women on their boards than for all-male boards. However, on the down side they found that ethnic minorities are still under-represented among the female FTSE 100 directors. Sealy et al.'s (2009) analysis extended to the FTSE 250 (companies ranked from 101 to 350 in terms of market capitalisation). Here, they found 115 companies (just 46.0% companies) to have women directors, which Sealy et al. (2008) speculate may be owing to the smaller size of such boards. Female-held directorships comprise just 7.3% of the total FTSE 250 directorships (3.8% ED; 9.0% NED), and there had been a decrease in the percentage of female senior executives in these companies (currently 13.3%). These figures are fairly consistent with previous years.

### *Theoretical perspectives*

Bilimoria (2008, p. 234) has argued that future research on gender diversity at corporate board levels should emphasise strong theoretical foundations, arguing for 'resource dependence theory, institutional theory, agency theory and social network theory on the organisational side and identity theory, leadership and career development theories on the individual side'. Singh et al. (2007) also recognised the contribution of such theories in highlighting the hurdles women face in gaining directorships. Social identity theory is based on the premise that people prefer to be with, and so recruit and promote people like themselves. Singh et al. (2007) claim that directors form a privileged closed group with its own rules and ways of thinking, and they facilitate invitations to join other boards by recommending and sponsoring colleagues like themselves whom they know are likely to fit the existing mould. Leadership theories assume that women and men have different leadership styles; men are transactional while women are transformational leaders. The traits of transactional leadership are often upheld as those associated with the most successful companies although this has been recently disputed by Alimo-Metcalfe (2007) who argues that major barriers to change are the recalcitrant and archaic attitudes of men who currently 'gate keep' top positions. Traditional career theories (Ginzberg, Ginsberg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951; Hall, 1976; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Schein, 1971; Super, 1957) were based on male samples and so ignored the different circumstances of women and other minority groups. Agency theory looks at conflicts of interest between people with different interests in the same assets. Social network theory assumes that people with access to valuable resources for the company are more likely to have the chance to enter the elite network. Institutional theory argues that organisations are influenced by external belief systems and predicts that when gender diversity on the board is a feature of successful companies, other companies will copy and appoint at least one woman board member. Singh et al. (2007) warn, however, that this can lead to addressing a visible lack of diversity which can be remedied by appointing a woman NED. Hence, they argue, the proportion of female NEDs far outweighs the proportion of executive women.

Resource dependency theory has been used by various authors when considering corporate directorship positions (e.g. Hillman, Canella, & Paetzold, 2000, 2002; Singh, 2007; Singh, Terjesen, & Vinnicombe, 2008). This theory which can be strongly affiliated with human and social capital theories, assumes that in increasingly uncertain business environments, boards should be composed of individuals who can provide access to a breath of resources. Using resource dependency theory, Hillman et al. (2000) developed a four-fold taxonomy of the role of directors: *inside directors* who are current/former officers of the firm and contribute expertise on corporate strategy and have specific knowledge of functional areas; *business expert directors*, who are current/former senior officers of other large for-profit firms, and contribute expertise gained (and an alternative view) from similar firms; *support experts*, such as lawyers, bankers, insurance company and PR executives who provide access to specialised sources of information and financial and legal resources; and *community influentials* who bring experience, understanding and linkages to the public world such as political, university, social, and community arenas. Singh et al. (2008) added a fifth category to Hillman et al. (2000) – business experts *and* community influential, while Singh (2007) added the category of insiders *and* community influentials. Hillman et al. (2002) found that white men were more likely to come from a business background, and white women were more likely to be support specialists and community influentials than business experts. Given resource

dependency theory, their results indicated that directors do bring a wide range of resources to boards, and that women bring a variety of occupational expertise and knowledge, advanced educational and accelerated ties to other organisations. Like Kesner (1988) and Bilimoria and Piderit (1994), they found that a majority of women (78%) served on one of the four important board committees.

### ***Human capital credentials***

Education is a reflection of human capital and so Hillman et al. (2002) argue that they expect directors to exhibit higher levels of education than the general population. For women, they argue, education is a key mechanism for securing widespread recognition of individual achievement and expertise; it helps to overcome stereotypes and biases. So, educational credentials can help 'level the playing field' in arenas traditionally dominated by white men (Kanter, 1989) in that education often provides access to opportunities. Educational knowledge is commonly regarded as an indicator of valued knowledge (Kanter, 1977). A graduate degree demonstrates more credibility and depth of expertise. Doctoral or professional degrees (e.g. lawyers, medical doctors, PhDs) represent a knowledge and experience base of the highest level. Hillman et al. (2002) argue that whether accurate or not women and racial minorities have been considered outsiders in the business world, thus through education they can establish credibility as potential directors. Singh et al. (2008) also found that directors are very highly qualified, with women holding higher educational qualifications than men; and a fifth of women possessing elite degrees. The women were significantly less likely to be EDs but unlike Hillman et al. (2000) no less likely to be business experts; although they were more likely to be business support experts and in the community influential category. Their findings refute that women do not have the right human capital to become directors; in fact, they argue that women's human capital may be different *but* that is the added value of having diversity on the board.

### ***Barriers top-level women face***

Women face greater challenges and constraints than men in their attempts to climb to the top of the corporate ladder (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; BITC/Catalyst, 2000; Goodman, Fields, & Blum, 2003; Morrison, White, & VanVelsor, 1987, 1992; Oakley, 2000; Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004a). The barriers top women generally face in management are well documented and range from individual barriers to institutional and cultural barriers (Bennet, 2009; Dalton & Dalton, 2008; Farrell & Hersch, 2005; Huse & Solberg, 2006; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Powell, 1999; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Sheridan, 2002; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2003, 2004a; Singh et al., 2007, 2008). Nevertheless, diversity brings various benefits to boards, including new ideas, better communications, debate, transformational leadership styles, and serving as role models (Singh et al., 2008). Having women (and other minorities) on the board can improve the output of the board; bring a range of perspectives and experiences, and can enhance a company's insight into markets or women consumers (Foust-Cummings, 2008).

### ***Retailing***

Of the secondary data available, Sealy et al. (2008) illustrate that the sectors with most women directors are Utilities, followed by Insurance and Finance and Food and Retail.

In 2009, they report that in the FTSE 100 companies ‘there are no real differences between sectors’ (Sealy et al., 2009, p. 19). They demonstrated that 10% of the 121 women FTSE 100 directors are in retail companies (this has increased to 13% in 2009). Two of these companies (Marks and Spencer and Tesco) comprise two of the 17 female EDs in the FTSE 100 companies in 2008. In 2009, this had increased to four out of 15 female retail EDs (Burberry being new to the FTSE 100). So while there has been a decrease in the overall number of female EDs in the FTSE 100 companies, proportionately retail companies are better represented and comprise over a quarter of all women executive directorships in 2009. Sealy et al. (2008) also reported that 7 of the 111 female senior executives are from retail companies in the FTSE 100 (these are positions companies are not required to disclose). Extending analysis to the FTSE 250 companies, there were 12 retail company female directors from a total of 142 female directorships in 2008, and they report just ‘Game Group’ to have at least 20% of its board being female (two women), a position that had not changed in 2009. Seventeen female retail senior executives were listed in Sealy et al.’s (2008) analysis of FTSE 250 companies from a total of 200 women senior executives. Comparative statistics for women senior executives were not provided in the 2009 report. So although Sealy et al. (2009) report no real differences between the sectors in 2009, retail companies do appear to be more favourably represented.

Little research has been conducted specifically on women in director positions in retailing. Thomas (2001) undertook a gender composition of boards over a 42-year period from 1956 to 1997, although he provided no theoretical background to his study. His findings showed a substantial increase of women directors over this time period from 1 firm to 19 firms, although no firms had more than two women directors. This increase had been prominent within the previous 5 years with 91% of the women directors having been in position 5 years or less. This was also noticed in their age differences: almost two-thirds of the women were under the age of 50, while two-thirds of the men were over the age of 50. The trend had also been towards recruiting more directors who are graduates in recent years; almost two-thirds (61.4%) of the directors in 1997 were graduates; 39.2% of whom were Oxbridge graduates (although men were twice as likely to be Oxbridge graduates as the women).

He found that there were 221 retail directorships in 1997, 25 of which were held by 23 women (10%). Two-thirds of the men occupied executive directorship positions, while two-thirds of the women occupied non-executive positions in the retail companies, so while the number of women on retail boards had increased considerably in the previous few years, this had mainly occurred through recruitment to ‘less central non-executive positions’ (Thomas, 2001, p. 7), leading him to conclude that women ‘occupy predominantly secondary positions at the margins rather than the centre of corporate influence in retailing’ (Thomas, 2001, p. 11). Moreover, he argued that the positions of the chair, chief executive, and finance director were the key positions, noting that no women had ever been chair or chief executive, thus concluding that men retain the most influential positions in the retail companies surveyed. In relation to directorships held outside of retail firms, he found that the men and women retail directors were equally likely to hold such positions, but closer examination discovered that of these women, all but one held just the one external directorship while a third of the men held two or more such directorships. Furthermore, the women were found to be less-established in the top corporate networks than the men. In his conclusions, Thomas (2001) observed that while women’s access to boards of the dominant firms in the retail sector had improved markedly, it remained severely limited.

An immediate observation from Thomas's (2001) findings is the number of retail companies used for his analysis that no longer exist or whose power base has significantly changed over the time period (15 of the total sample firms of 36). These changes are indicative of the nature of the retail industry: fast paced and dynamic. Thus, now is an apposite time to re-evaluate the composition of retail boards in the present day. Although it appears that women have made some progress in board-level positions, the sources suggest that this is severely limited and they hold but minority status (Sealy et al., 2008, 2009; Thomas, 2001). More detailed analysis on the position of women in retail directorships is unavailable and this is what the rest of this article redresses. The article addresses a number of research questions:

- What is the composition and characteristics of retail directorships held by women in the FTSE retail companies and, in particular, the top 350 companies?
- What positions do women occupy on boards (ED/NED) and what is their presence on major committees?
- How do current figures compare with the work of Thomas (2001)?
- What theoretical perspectives help our understanding of women and men's composition at the top of retail companies?

### **Methodology**

A database listing of the FTSE-listed companies (BoardEx) was consulted on 24 November 2008. The FTSE is a Financial Times/London Stock Exchange (LSE) index of the largest companies listed on the LSE and ranked by market capitalisation. For the purpose of this research, all companies listed as retailing were selected for in-depth analysis. Similar to Singh (2007) and Singh et al. (2008), the variables collected for examination (where available) related to demographic and company information. Included among the demographic characteristics were gender, age and nationality; among the company demographics was size of boards, composition of boards, gender diversity of board, market capitalisation and number of employees. The human capital characteristics examined were qualifications; director type (ED/NED), tenure and other board director experience. The social capital characteristics were more difficult to ascertain but included links to government and politics, business institutions, educational institutions, international bodies, financial institutions, and charity/voluntary sector. Supplementary information, where missing from the Board Ex data, was gathered from Internet searches for the individuals where possible.

### **Limitations regarding analysis of Board Ex material**

It is acknowledged that privately owned companies who may be significant in size are not listed in the Board Ex data because this database is confined to FTSE-listed companies. Obvious examples would be Asda-Walmart (170,000 employees) and The Arcadia Group (2500 outlets). These companies are not mandated to disclose their board composition. Therefore, we exercise some caution in drawing conclusions on the composition of the boards of retail companies, although anecdotal evidence would suggest that these company boards are no more diversified than the ones on which we are able to provide specific data (e.g. of the eight main board directors of Asda, just one (CFO) is a woman).

There were also some companies classified as retailing in the BoardEx database which the author has excluded for purposes of the current analysis. This is either because they have been classified incorrectly or their services are business to business or obscure.<sup>3</sup>

In the main, the companies included in the data analysis represent high street chains or retailers with direct customer contacts, i.e. what we consider to be mainstream retailing (see Table 1 for a full listing of these companies).

Less detailed data were available for FTSE AIM, Fledgling and Small Cap companies, and so while some initial analysis is presented on all the FTSE-listed companies, more detailed analysis is confined to the FTSE 350 companies which comprise 96% of the UK market capitalisation. These comprised 21 firms which approximated Thomas's sample of 20 firms in 1997 (eight such firms were analysed by Thomas in 1997). Another limitation of the data is that they convey but a snapshot of the companies and directorships at a particular juncture (here, November 2008). Companies change their composition of directors on an ongoing basis, and so some directors may now have moved to a different company. Similarly, as we are aware with the economic recession, some of the smaller FTSE companies have gone into administration; most notably Woolworths, MFI, and Land of Leather (another reason for excluding these from the more detailed analysis).

## Findings

### *All FTSE retail companies 2008*

The total FTSE retail companies used for analysis are in Table 1. Taking the entire list, women comprised 10.8% of the EDs and 11.2% of NEDs, which would still place them in minority status (Kanter, 1977) overall within retail companies. The combined proportion of female retail directorships (11%) is similar to Thomas's (2001) and Sealy et al.'s (2008, 2009) FTSE 100 findings. While it compares unfavourably with Martin et al.'s (2008) findings of 28%, bear in mind that their database also included small- and independent-sized businesses. Disaggregating the figures according to the type of FTSE company, however, shows some differences. These are inconsistent but reveal that women have moved beyond minority status in two categories: women EDs of fledgling companies (23.1%) and women NEDs of FTSE 100 companies (24.3%). Given the low percentage of women EDs in the FTSE 100 (8.3%), we might speculate whether this is owing to companies ensuring they have some (token?) representation on their boards rather than a true reflection of companies championing for change. For the three fledgling companies, these women were lone women on their boards, but it is encouraging to see such results.

Of all the FTSE companies listed in Table 1, 33 of the 57 companies (57.9%) had women on their boards (16 companies had women EDs (28%) and 22 (38.6%) had women NEDs). This fared marginally better than Thomas's findings of 52.7% companies with women directors. Just two of the companies (Burberry and Debenhams) had more than one female executive (both had two women) which is disappointing and suggests their token, or to use a retail metaphor 'window dressing', status. Moreover, 24 companies (42%) do not have any women in board positions, not much of a decrease from Thomas research at 47%. While Martin et al.'s (2008) sample was considerably larger and found two-thirds of all UK firms were male dominated, *all* the boards of retail firms listed in the FTSE were male dominated. This might be explained by Martin et al.'s sample including all limited companies with at least two employees. Given the propensity for women to leave organisations and start up their own businesses, Martin et al.'s figures are not surprising. Reflecting figures by Sealy et al. (2008), Burberry had the largest proportion of total women directors (43%), followed by Marks and Spencer (33.3%), Sainsbury (30%), and Game Group (29%).

Of the executive retail positions in 2008, 89.1% were occupied by men and 10.8% by women (an increase from 3.8% for women found by Thomas – Table 1). Of the NED positions, 88.8% were filled by men and 11.2% by women (the corresponding figure by Thomas for women was 17.5%). So although women are better represented in ED retail positions in 2008, they fare worse than Thomas's findings for NED positions. This might be because of the increased numbers of women EDs in 2008. It is clear, however, that the power base of the vast majority of retail companies remains a male preserve. Similar to Sealy et al.'s (2008) findings, the market capitalisation was significantly higher for retail companies with women on their boards than for all-male retail boards.

We now turn to examine some of the characteristics of the women directors in the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250 companies and make some comparisons to their male counterparts so as to understand the general and gendered aspects of the directors' careers.

### ***FTSE 100 companies***

Paying attention to the FTSE 100 retail companies, women comprised 18.0% of directorships (8.3% executive directorships; 24.3% non-executive directorships) (Table 2). This compares favourably with Sealy et al.'s (2008/2009) figures of 11.7%/12.2% of FTSE 100 women directorships (4.8%/5.2% executive directorships; 14.9%/15.2% non-executive directorships). So as Singh and Vinnicombe (2003, 2004b) suggest, women retail directors are appreciably better represented in the FTSE 100 retail companies than women in FTSE 100 companies as a whole. The figures reflect Singh et al.'s (2008) assertion that women are particularly likely to occupy non-executive positions on boards allowing men to retain the positions of influence and thus supporting Singh et al.'s (2007) claim that women NEDs may be appointed for remedial action or 'window dressing'. This is additionally disappointing given NEDs are less visible to the female employees of the company and so are less able to provide the role models women need.

Comparing with Sealy et al.'s (2008/2009) findings of 78%/75% of the top FTSE 100 companies having women on their boards, all six of the retail companies listed in the FTSE 100 had women on their board (and is an improvement on Thomas's findings). However, just two of these companies had a woman EDs (M&S; Tesco). Encouragingly, given that power often rests with the various committees (Kesner, 1988), four of the six companies had a representation of women on their audit, nomination, and remuneration boards, while the other two companies had a woman on their nominating and remuneration committee. However, in accordance with Thomas's (2001) findings, the key positions of CEO, chairman of the board, and Finance directors in all of the six FTSE 100 retail companies were occupied by men. Furthermore, similar to Thomas's (2001) findings for the largest companies, Table 2 shows women in the FTSE 100 retail companies were more likely to be in non-executive positions (9) than in ED positions (2). Table 3 shows the numbers of retail directors since 2001. When these figures are compared with Thomas's, the numbers seem to have peaked in the mid- to late 1990s. There has actually been a drop since 2003, although the inclusion of Burberry in the FTSE 100 list has helped boost the figures in 2009. However, some companies are no longer in the FTSE 100 (10 in 2001 to 6 in 2009). Looking at the position of the same six companies since 2001, we see that proportionately there has been fluctuation but a slight increase in numbers of women (from 9 to 12).

Contrary to Hillman et al.'s (2002) findings, women in the FTSE 100 companies were more likely to be business experts than community influentials and support specialists.

Table 1. FTSE retail companies: composition of directors (November 2008).

Company	Market capitalisation (£ million)	Number of employees	Female EDs	Male EDs	Female NEDs	Male NEDs	Board size	% women board	Women committee membership
FTSE 100	–	–	2 (8.3%)	22 (91.7%)	9 (24.3%)	28 (75.7%)	61	18.0	–
Kingfisher	2566	71,000	–	2	1	6	9	11	N, R
Marks & Spencer	3234	75,389	1	2	2	4	9	33.3	A, 2N, 2R (ch R)
Morrison's supermarkets	6414	54,502	–	5	1	4	10	10	A, N, R (ch)
Next	1918	61,751	–	4	1	5	10	10	A, N, R
J Sainsbury	4830	98,600	–	3	3	4	10	30	A, 3N, 2R, 2CR (ch)
Tesco	22,491	345,737	1	6	1	5	13	15	N, R
FTSE 250			6 (15.0%)	34 (85.0%)	9 (12.1%)	65 (87.8%)	114	13.2	
Brown (N) Group	590	3059	None	2	None	5	7	None	None
Burberry	694	5660	2	None	1	4	7	43	A, 2N, R
Carpetright	244	3549	None	5	1	3	9	11	A (ch), N (ch)
Carphone Warehouse	1035	21,380	None	2	1	6	9	11	A, N, R
Debenhams	206	26,490	2	3	None	8	13	15	CR (ch)
DSG International (Dixons Group)	235	40,730	None	2	1	4	7	14	C, A, N, R, & A, N, R, (sec) (includes two senior managers)
Game Group	461	7959	1	1	1	4	7	29	A(ch), N, R
Greggs	325	18,827	None	3	1	4	8	12.5	A, N, R(ch)
Halfords	497	10,417	None	3	None	3	6	None	None
HMV Group	426	12,998	None	3	1	4	8	12.5	A, N, R
Home Retail Group (Argos)	1435	53,197	None	2	1	3	6	17	A, N, R
Kesa Electricals	343	27,657	None	2	None	5	7	None	None
Mothercare	249	7626	None	2	1	4	7	14	A, N, R

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Company	Market capitalisation (£ million)	Number of employees	Female EDs	Male EDs	Female NEDs	Male NEDs	Board size	% women board	Women committee membership
Sports Direct International	357	15,700	None	3	None	3	6	None	None
WH Smith	509	18,000	1	1	None	5	7	14	N
FTSE AIM			5 (9.6%)	47 (90.4%)	2 (4.3%)	45 (95.7%)	99	7.0	
ASOS PLC	205	196	None	3	None	2	5	None	None
Cassidy Brothers	2	16	None	2	None	2	4	None	None
Coffeeheaven International	22	670	None	2	None	3	5	None	None
Expansys	2	197	1	3	None	2	6	17	None
H&T Group	59	407	None	3	None	3	6	None	None
Hardy Amies	3	28	None	2	None	2	4	None	None
Hot Tuna International	2	28	1	2	None	2	5	20	None
Ideal Shopping Direct	15	505	None	2	1	1	4	25	N, R
Jacques Vert	9	1283	1	2	None	2	5	20	None
Just Car Clinics	5	517	None	2	None	2	4	None	None
Liberty PLC	62	327	None	2	None	5	7	None	No Committees
Majestic Wine	80	778	None	3	1	2	6	17	A, R(ch)
Mulberry	40	645	None	2	None	5	7	None	None
ResponzeTV	n.a.	n.a.	None	5	None	3	8	None	None
Stylo	6	6278	None	5	None	4	9	None	None
Tandem	3	126	None	2	None	1	3	None	None
Toye & Co	0	185	1	3	None	2	6	16.7	None
United Carpets	6	141	1	2	None	2	5	20	None
FTSE Fledgling			3 (23.1%)	10 (76.9%)	1 (4.5%)	21 (95.5%)	35	11.4	
Alexon	7	6565	1	1	None	4	6	16.7	None
Beale	7	1397	1	2	None	2	5	20	None
Flying Brands	8	291	1	1	None	5	7	14.3	None

Jessops	3	2553	None	1	None	1	2	None	None
Land of Leather	2	943	None	2	1	3	6	16.7	A, R
Moss Bros	26	1173	None	3	None	6	9	None	A (senior manager)
FTSE Small Cap			2 (5.4%)	35 (94.6%)	4 (9.1%)	40 (91.0%)	81	7.4	
Laura Ashley	116	2510	1	1	1	6	9	22	N, R
Blacks	16	5418	None	2	None	3	5	None	None
Clinton Cards	24	9578	1	6	None	3	10	10	None
Dunelm Group	284	5236	None	2	1	2	5	20	A, N (ch), R (ch)
French Connection	39	3247	None	3	1	1	5	20	n.a.
Galiform (MFI)	106	6395	None	3	None	5	8	None	None
JD Sports	112	8627	None	3	None	2	5	None	None
JJB Sports	76	12,040	None	2	None	4	6	None	None
Ted Baker	124	1520	None	2	None	3	5	None	None
Thorntons	66	4566	None	4	None	3	7	None	None
Topp Tiles	37	1722	None	3	None	4	7	None	None
Woolworths Group	21	29,312	None	4	1	4	9	11	N, R
Total			18 (10.8%)	148 (89.1%)	25 (11.2%)	199 (88.8%)	390	11.0%	women, 89.0% men

Source: BoardEx, 24 November 2008.

A, Audit Committee; N, Nomination Committee; R, Remuneration Committee; C, Chairman CR Corporate Responsibility Committee; (Ch), Chair of the committee.

Table 2. Number of women directors in the FTSE 100 retail companies (November 2008).

Company	Name	Years on board	Current role	Age	Qualifications	Nationality	Current quoted board positions	Current private board positions	Other past board positions	Committee membership	Committee member current	Committee member past
Kingfisher	Janis Carol Kong	1.9	Ind NED	57	Harvard – Advanced Management Program; BSc Edin; OBE Honorary Doctorate	British	3	1	8	N, R	6	6
Marks & Spencer	Lady (Louise Alexandra) Patten of Wincanton	2.8	Ind NED	54	MA Oxford	British	2	0	12	N, R (chair)	4	23
Marks & Spencer	Martha Lane Fox	1.4	Ind NED	35	MA Oxford	British	1	1	5	A, N, R	3	3
Marks & Spencer	Kate Bostock	0.7	ED clothing	51	Honorary doctorate	British	1	0	0	None	0	0
Morrison's Supermarket	Susan Elizabeth Murray	3.3	Ind NED	51		British	4	0	5	A, N, R (chair)	11	14
Next	Christine Cross	3.8	Ind NED	57	BA; MSc; Diploma	British	3	2	2	A, N, R	6	12
Sainsbury	Valerie (Val) Frances Gooding	1.8	Ind NED	58	BA Warwick; CBE	British	2	3	7	N, R	4	15
Sainsbury	Anna Ford ex BBC journalist	2.5	Ind NED	65	BA (Hons) Man; PG Diploma in Adult Education; 4 hon docs; Author	British	1	2	0	CR (chair) N, R	3	3
Sainsbury	Mary Harris	1.3	Ind NED	42	MA Harvard; BA Oxford	British	3	0	0	A, N, R	5	5
Tesco	Karen Rachel Cook	4.1	Ind NED	55	MBA; BSc	British	1	0	2	N, R	2	6
Tesco	Lucy Jeanne Neville-Rolfe	1.9	Director – Corporate/Legal Affairs	55	MA Oxford Queen's Award; AMBA; various Government positions	British	1	1	2	None	0	3
Average		2.3 years		52.5 years		All British	2	0.91	3.91		4	8.18

Source: BoardEx, 24 November 2008.

A, Audit Committee; N, Nomination Committee; R, Remuneration Committee; C, Chairman CR Corporate Responsibility Committee; (Ch), Chair of the committee.

Table 3. Retail women directors 2001–2009 FTSE 100 companies.

Company	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
M&S	3	3	4	2	0	1	2	3	3
Kingfisher	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Morrison's	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Next	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Sainsbury	1	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	3
Tesco	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	2	3
Boots	2	2	1	1	1	2	–	–	–
Dixons/DSG	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	–	–
GUS	1	1	1	1	1	–	–	–	–
Safeway	1	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
Home Retail – Argos	–	–	–	–	–	0	1	–	1
Burberry	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3
Number of companies	10	10	10	9	9	9	8	6	8
Total women	14	16	16	11	9	11	13	11	16
Total women in the same six companies	9	11	12	8	7	8	11	11	12

Source: The Female FTSE Reports 2001–2009.

–, not listed; 0, no women on board.

Four women were classified as business experts; two business expert and community influentials; two business experts *and* support specialists; one community influential, one insider and one insider and community influential.

Table 2 outlines some of the characteristics of the FTSE 100 women retail directors and some details of their employment. On average, the women were two years younger than the men although contrary to Thomas's findings just two (18%) of the women were under the age of 50 (yet like Burgess & Tharenou's (2002) findings 91% were over the age of 40). In line with those findings of Thomas (2001), all the women directors had been in their current positions less than 5 years. The women and men occupied a similar number of current positions on quoted boards (averaging 2.0 for women; 1.98 for men) and private boards (0.91 for women; 0.88 for men). However, women were significantly less likely to have held past board positions averaging 3.91, against 6.53 for men. They have been more likely to be members of committees more so than men – 4 current; 8.18 past for women, compared with 2.88 current positions and 6.37 past positions for men. This higher figure is probably owing to the relative paucity of women to men in such positions. Therefore, women may be expected to be representatives on more committees on average than men.

All of the women directors were British (compared with 91% of the men). The men held a wider range of positions of the retail boards (six CEOs; one chairman executive; three EDs; four Group finance directors; one CFO; one commercial director; one logistics director; one international director; one finance(s) strategy director; two group directors; one group stores operations director; one trading director; and 28 NEDs). The women FTSE 100 directors were much better educated than the men, with 82% of them having a degree. Moreover 5 of the 11 women (45%) held Ivy League degrees (distinguished US Universities and Oxbridge) – far more than Singh et al.'s (2008) findings. In comparison, although the male retail directors have various professional qualifications, only 50% had degrees, and 16% Ivy League Degrees. The women retail directors also brought a breadth of experience to their boards. A third had been on public-sector

boards, a fifth had been on the boards of financial institutions, and another fifth had been on voluntary sector boards. As Sealy et al. (2008) found, all but one of the retail women directors brings experience from sectors outside retailing, including manufacturing, transport, financial institutions, consultancy firms, media, Government, and educational institutions.

### ***FTSE 250 companies***

Table 4 shows the personal and employment details of the women directors in the FTSE 250 retail companies. Twelve (80%) of the FTSE 250 retail companies have women directors which again compares particularly favourably with Sealy et al.'s (2008/2009) findings for FTSE 250 companies (44.4%/46.0%). Moreover, approximately a quarter of the 250 FTSE retail *companies* had women EDs. The retail 250 FTSE companies comprised slightly fewer total women directors (13.2%) than the FTSE 100 companies although a higher percentage of these were EDs (15.0%) and a lower percentage NEDs (12.1%). The corresponding figures found by Sealy et al. (2008/2009) were 7.0%/7.3% (3.9%/3.8% ED and 8.7%/9.0% NED), which again portrays a relatively favourable position for women in retail companies. With regard to the positions of CEO, chair of the board, and Finance directors in the FTSE 250 retail companies, the overwhelming majority (91%) were filled by men. The exceptions were a female CEO and Finance director at Burberry and the CEOs of Game Group and WH Smith. As Ryan and Haslam (2005) argue, often women are appointed to such positions when the company has experienced financial difficulties. This has been the position for WH Smith and Burberry in recent years. However, this compares favourably to Thomas's findings a decade earlier where no women held such key positions. The retail women FTSE 250 directors consisted of six insiders; one business expert; seven business experts and community influentials; and one community influential. None of these women were classified as support experts.

We only know the nationality of 60% of the FTSE 250 women directors, all of whom were British. For the men, the nationality of only 73% is known, and of these 86% were British. Table 4 shows that these women comprised six EDs and nine NEDs (against 36 EDs and 62 NEDs for men). The women FTSE 250 directors were well educated with 73% of them having a degree, 27% of which were Ivy League degrees. Of the male directors where education was known 69% had degrees, 36% of which were Ivy League Degrees. The women in the FTSE 250 companies were considerably younger than their male counterparts with almost an 8-year difference (48.4 years versus 56.16 years), and around two-thirds of these women were under the age of 50. Similar trends were found in the FTSE 250 companies as with the FTSE 100 companies regarding membership of various boards and committees. Their current board tenure averages 3.91 years which compares with an average for men of 5.79 years, with two-thirds of the women having been on their boards for less than 5 years. However, despite their age differences, the women were similarly represented on current quoted boards (averaging 1.86 against 1.74 for men), yet less likely than the men to hold additional current private board positions (0.66 against 1.22). Considering the women are somewhat younger, they have only slightly less average experience on past board positions (6.6 against 7.15). Like the FTSE 100 women, these women on average have more current and past committee membership than their male counterparts (3.6 versus 2.69 currently and 8.0 versus 5.80 in the past).

Table 4. Number of women directors in the FTSE 250 retail companies (November 2008).

Company name	Name	Years on board	Current role	Age	Qualifications	Nationality	Current quoted board positions	Current private board positions	Other past board positions	Committee membership	Committee member current	Committee member past
Burberry Group	Stacey Lee Cartwright	4.7	CFO	45	MSc (LSE) ICAEW	British	1	0	1	0	0	1
Burberry Group	Angela Jean Ahrendts-Couch	2.8	CEO	48	BA (Ball State University)	Unknown	1	0	1	n.a.	1	1
Burberry Group	Stephanie George	2.7	Independent NED	52		Unknown	1	0	0	A, C, N	3	3
Carpetright	Baroness (Sheila Valerie) Noakes	7.8	Senior Independent NED	59	LLB; Life Peerage; CBE; 3 honorary doctorates Shadow Government minister	British	2	1	8	A, C, N	4	18
Carphone Warehouse Group	Baroness (Sally) Morgan of Huyton	3	Independent NED	49	BA; MA; life peer; teacher; worked for Labour party	British	2	2	6	A, C, N	6	6
Debenhams	Angela Spindler	0.8	MD	46	Exec Prog Harvard	Unknown	1	0	1	0	0	0
Debenhams	Suzanne Harlow	0	Trading Director	n.a	City univ grad	Unknown	1	1	3	n.a.	2	2
DSG International (Dixons)	Rita Ann Clifton	5.2	Independent NED	50	MA Cambridge; visiting professor; author	British	1	2	3	A, C, N	3	6
Game Group	Lisa Jayne Morgan	8.8	Group CEO	38		British	1	0	3	0	0	1

(Continued)

Table 4. Continued.

Company name	Name	Years on board	Current role	Age	Qualifications	Nationality	Current quoted board positions	Current private board positions	Other past board positions	Committee membership	Committee member current	Committee member past
Game Group	Ishbel Jean Macpherson	3.1	Independent NED	48	MA	Unknown	4	0	3	A, C, N	12	13
Greggs	Julie Margaret Baddeley	3.7	Independent NED	57	MA (Hons) Oxford	British	2	2	8	A, C, N	4	15
HMV Group	Lesley Mary Knox	6.6	Interim Chairman (Independent NED)	55	MA Cambridge	British	4	0	38	A, C, N	7	25
Home Retail Group Plc (Argos)	Penelope (Penny) Lesley Hughes	1.9	Independent NED	49	LLD; BSc	British	3	0	18	A, C, N	6	20
Mothercare (was Storehouse)	Karren Rita Brady	5.3	Independent NED	39		British	2	2	2	A, C, N	4	4
WH Smith	Kathryn (Kate) Elizabeth Swann	2.3	Group CEO	43	BSc Bradford; Honorary degree	British	2	0	4	N	2	5
Averages		3.91 years		48.4 years			1.86	0.66	6.6		3.6	8

Source: BoardEx, 24 November 2008.

A Audit Committee; N Nomination Committee; R Remuneration Committee; C Chairman CR Corporate Responsibility Committee.

(Ch) Chair of the committee.

## Conclusions

Building on Thomas's research on women retail board directors a decade ago and Sealy et al.'s current position of women in the FTSE 350 companies generally, this article provides a comparison of women's representation on retail boards. On first inspection, the findings look promising, and like Joy (2008) women directors were more likely to be found in the retail sector than many other business sectors; their representation on retail boards was higher than Sealy et al.'s average findings for *all* FTSE 350 companies. Women were represented on all six FTSE 100 retail boards and comprise almost a quarter of all NEDs (24.3%) in these companies. Moreover, while the proportion of women directorships remains static to Thomas's findings, there are currently comparatively more ED positions (10.8%) than Thomas found (3.8%). Aligned with Sealy et al.'s (2008) findings, market capitalisation was significantly higher for companies with women on their boards than for all-male boards. A higher proportion of the retail directors are represented on the remuneration, audit, and nominating committees than was found by Singh and Vinnicombe (2003), and the average woman generally serves on more boards than the average man. Women directors are better educated than their male counterparts as well as being younger. But all is not good news.

Considering all the FTSE retail companies, all the retail firms were male dominated and 42% had *no* women at the board level. Few companies have more than one woman director (12%). Only around a quarter of companies have women EDs and just above a third have women NEDs. Male EDs and NEDs outnumber women in a ratio of 8:1. Therefore, according to Kanter's (1977) definition, women retail directors generally remain in minority positions on UK retail boards. Taking the controlling companies with 96% of market capitalisation, of the FTSE 100 companies' women comprise 8.3% of EDs and 24.3% of NEDs. While this is better representation than all women in FTSE 100 companies as a whole, they still retain minority status at ED levels; and just two of the six companies had women EDs. All the key positions of CEO, chairman of the board, and Finance Director were held by men. The findings were slightly more positive for the FTSE 250 companies where women comprise 15% of EDs and 12.1% of NEDs, and 9% of the above key positions. These women were considerably younger than their male counterparts and the women from the FTSE 100 companies.

Overall, however, we can conclude that the power base of FTSE retail companies remains a male preserve. Despite retailing being described as a feminised sector (with its employment and customer base being predominantly women), and women's increased presence at the board level (Thomas, 2001), this progress has been extremely slow and they continue to be under-represented at the very top-level positions. Thomas (2001) questioned whether the increased presence of women at board level represented 'mere tokenism' or a genuine dissolution of gender barriers. The 2008 figures suggest that women's board presence has not significantly improved over the last decade and with a few variations has remained fairly stable. Within retail board positions in the FTSE 100, women particularly dominate the non-executive directorships, those positions that have been noted as having less power in organisations. Excluding the number of FTSE retail companies without women (24), in most cases there was only one woman director (25), thus they embody the lone woman syndrome; in only three companies (M&S, Sainsbury's, Burberry) were there three women directors rendering the board 'normalised' (Erkut et al., 2008). This is a disappointing finding when reflecting on the true diversity of retail boards; women still have limited voice in the retail board rooms. The slow/static pace of change over time implies that unless there are radical changes the situation is likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

At the beginning of the article, we introduced various theoretical perspectives that have been proposed to understand the position of women board directors. Below we consider whether these theoretical positions, particularly on the organisational side, are useful in understanding the current and future position of women retail directors. Complying with Hillman et al's (2002) findings and resource dependency theory, it is encouraging to see that women retail directors are bringing a variety of experience and roles to their boards as this reflects the diverse resources needed to cope with a fast paced, dynamic, and turbulent environment. In addition to previous research (Hillman et al's 2002; Singh, 2007; Singh et al., 2008), a further category was found by the current research: business experts *and* support specialists. Like Singh et al. (2008), women retail directors are contributing more to the roles of business experts than the research by Hillman et al. (2002). The women retail directors are contributing a wide range of occupational expertise and knowledge, have advanced education and accelerated ties to other organisations. In line with social network theory, we might speculate that women's connections and access to valuable resources for the company has helped their appointments to the various retail boards. As well as serving on the important board committees (albeit in a token capacity), women's reputational capital (e.g. educational credentials, titles, Ivy League status) should help to establish their credibility with men, and in future reduce the perceived 'risk' of appointing a woman board member. As boards become more diversified so we expect to see a growth in the appointment of more minority groups. If so, with time women should no longer hold minority status but be equally represented for the contribution they can make. But as Liff and Cameron (1997) warn, legislation and organisational changes are not enough – in order to achieve real change, an attitudinal change in society has to be achieved rather than reluctant compliance. Upholding social identity theory and agency theory, there is a danger that the informality of some board room appointments (Singh et al., 2007) will merely perpetuate a male board room culture and keep women out or in 'window dressing' positions. While analysing the data, it was noted that various board appointments at an individual company level were made at the same time and were associated with the appointment of the chief executive or board chair. This might imply that people are appointed to the board, who share similar characteristics, or are known to the chair or chief executive. These are the ones who need to be educated about the advantages that having a diverse board can bring to the success of the company. Until they have an attitudinal change, progress will be slow.

The imbalance of female NEDs to EDs might be partially explained by Institutional Theory, but it can also help to support the improved position of women EDs generally since Thomas's research. The findings are mixed, however, when one considers that 42% of the FTSE-listed retail companies do not contain any women board members. Institutional theory may be having more of an affect in the larger companies however, when we consider that only 19% of the FTSE 350 company boards do not contain women and all the FTSE 100 retail companies have at least one woman director.

### **Areas for further research**

Singh et al. (2007) claimed that new women directors have fairly similar and sometimes additional human capital to their male peers, while Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) argued that women were moving from token to minority status on boards although progress is still extremely slow. The same might be said for women retail directors. Those women particularly in the FTSE 250 retail companies are worth monitoring as they are younger and better educated than their male counterparts. It will be interesting to track the success of these

younger women retail directors over time, and see whether the next generation of retail directors comprises more women board members as their credibility grows within the sector in terms of their human capital and social capital attributes. These women may constitute what Thomas (2001) spoke about as a genuine dissolution of gender barriers rather than mere tokenism and should be watched. It would also be worth tracking those companies with women at the very top positions to see if their board composition changes over time to represent a more balanced structure. Although evidence suggests that not all women will champion for other women to attain high-level management positions (Mavin, 2006, 2008), further research in this area is worthwhile and necessary. Board-level women are particularly exposed because of their minority status, so it would be interesting to explore to what extent those who have reached the top positions consider themselves as important role models for others, and if so, to whom?

Ragins et al. (1998), BITC/Catalyst (2000), and Pye (2001) found that CEOs's explanations for the lack of women's progress were that they had not been in the system long enough (i.e. the pipeline debate). It would be interesting to gain the views of current CEOs to gauge if they consider this to still be true of women directors. It is also interesting to speculate on how much gatekeeping is still happening by intransigent cultures and board members rather than women having equal opportunities of getting to the top of retail company boards.

The current research was based on analysis of secondary data. Further primary research with women board members themselves could be conducted to explore how appropriate leadership and career development theories are to these women's accounts in addition to examining the other theoretical perspectives in more depth. So further research on the management and leadership styles of these women directors is required to assess whether women retail directors are more likely to adapt to a male culture and environment, developing a management style with which male directors are more comfortable (Ragins et al., 1998). Alternatively, is women's leadership style more close to that which creates the most successful organisations? (Alimo-Metcalf, 2007). This would constitute important research to assess to what extent the cultures of retail organisations are changing at the top. If this were the case and there is some genuine culture changes then we might begin to see the gradual better representation of women in management positions in retailing in line with their representation at junior managerial levels.

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### **Notes**

1. Singh et al. (2007) explain that the UK has a unitary board governance system and FTSE 100 companies have an average of 11 members, comprising of a non-executive chairman, three or four EDs (chief executive, chief financial officer, and often a chief operations office) and six or seven NEDs.
2. Market capitalisation is the estimation of the value of a business obtained by multiplying the number of shares outstanding by the current price of the share.

3. Therefore, it is noted that of the FTSE 100 companies Cadbury plc was excluded for the analysis as this has been incorrectly classified as retailing. Other companies that have been excluded in the current analysis include the following FTSE AIM companies: Bakery Services; EBT Mobile China; Education Development International; Slingsby, Stagecoach Theatre Arts, Stanley Gibbons Group, Strategic Retail PLC, Falkland Island Holdings, Managed Support Services PLC, Waterline Group, GNE (Global Natural Energy). The FTSE Small Company to be excluded is Findel (Fine Art Developments), while Mallett (Antiques) is excluded from the FTSE Fledgling list.

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# Choice or constraint? Tensions in female retail executives' career narratives

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the usefulness of Hakim's preference theory in the understanding of the attitudes of women retail senior managers and directors towards their career and non-work lives. It provides a critical analysis of the main tenets of preference theory and evaluates the extent to which women have "free choice" in their careers.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative methodology consisting of 13 in-depth interviews with women at senior executive and director levels in retailing was adopted. The interviews examined women's career paths and uncovered the choices and constraints impacting on their career progress and other aspects of their lives.

**Findings** – The findings demonstrate the complexity of careers and choices. While several women talk about the choices they have made, it is apparent that these choices have been constrained by extraneous variables, both at an individual and organisational level.

**Practical implications** – The findings from the paper can enhance practitioners' understanding of some of the choices and constraints women make in their working lives, which in turn might lead to improved organisational policies for women to better accommodate work-life balance issues.

**Originality/value** – The paper questions whether choice equates to preference and assesses the usefulness of Hakim's preference theory as a means of understanding the careers of women in contemporary organizations.

**Keywords** Retailers, Women, Senior managers, Career development

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The call for papers for this special issue concerns how women through the discourses of meritocracy, difference and choice make sense of the contradictions and tensions they experience in their working lives. While this paper covers all three of these aspects, it particularly focuses on the issue of "choice" and examines, through empirical evidence, the contradictions and tensions women highlight in talking about their careers. It considers whether women do have a choice or whether they are making (un)conscious trade-offs in their work and/or family lives. The issue of "choice" is pertinent, particularly when taking a gender perspective. For example, the life cycle position of women in particular poses various constraints and will affect the choices women can make.

Drawing on Hakim's preference theory, the paper questions whether women actually have real choices in their employment or whether they are constrained by organisational cultures and stereotypical portraits of how women and men should behave. The purpose of the paper is to consider the notion of choice and preference in

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the narratives of women retail senior executives and directors in describing their careers. It considers whether women themselves are conscious of contradictions and tensions or whether they are implicit in their accounts. In so doing it challenges assumptions that career “choices” equate to “preferences”. The retail sector is selected because it is a sector which is dominated by women employees and customers, as well as being a sector with proportionately a higher number of women directors than other sectors (Sealy *et al.*, 2008; Broadbridge, 2010). The organisational level was selected as it represents those who have “broken through the glass ceiling” to achieve their positions. In so doing we might expect that some have made sacrifices or choices in the interplay of their work and non-work lives. The paper is structured as follows: first an overview of the main dimensions of preference theory is provided together with some contemporary criticisms of this approach. The research design is then introduced and findings follow. Finally, some conclusions are drawn regarding how women perceive choice in making sense of their organisational and home lives.

### Preference theory

#### *Outline of preference theory*

Hakim (1991, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003a, b, 2006, 2009) has spent the last two decades examining lifestyle choices, orientations to work and family roles. Earlier in her career Hakim (1991) categorised women into “self-made women” and “grateful slaves”. These she later classified under “preference theory” into three ideal types: “work-centred”, “adaptive” and “home centred” women. Hakim (1998) argues preference theory is a theory for the twenty-first century. It breaks with previous theorising in that she developed it specifically with reference to women not men (although she argues it is also applicable to men). She explains:

Preference theory is a new theory to explain women’s choices between market work and family work. The theory is historically informed, empirically based, multidisciplinary, prospective rather than retrospective in orientation, and applicable in all rich societies (Hakim, 2002, p. 433).

The core of her argument is that women (particularly those born after 1960) have genuine opportunities and choices in how to shape their lives. The basis for her theory is fourfold. She argues that historical changes have produced new options and opportunities for women; that women are heterogeneous in their preferences and priorities; that this heterogeneity may create conflicts between groups of women, and is the main cause of women’s variable responses to social engineering policies. The historical changes that she claims have enabled women to make genuine choices are: contraception; equal opportunities; the growth of white collar jobs; the creation of secondary earner jobs; and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in lifestyle choices (hence why she claims that they are particularly valuable to those born after 1960). She further claims that other social attitudes are either unimportant as predictors of behaviour or else have only a very small impact.

The essence of her argument was that unlike previous economic theories, preference theory recognises that women are different, hence her proposal of three ideal types with varying patterns of behaviour.

Various criticisms have been levied at Hakim’s work (Devine, 1994; Bruegel, 1996; Ginn *et al.*, 1996; Crompton and Harris, 1998a, b; Procter and Padfield, 1999; Healy, 1999;

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Fagan, 2001; McRae, 2003; Doorewaard *et al.*, 2004; Walters, 2005; Leahy and Doughney, 2006; Corby and Stanworth, 2009). In this paper, we focus on two strands of Hakim's theory:

- (1) the three ideal types of women's behaviour; and
- (2) whether women have genuine opportunities and choices (which incorporates the historical changes Hakim discusses).

*Hakim's three ideal types of women's behaviour*

While a contribution of preference theory is the acknowledgement that women are heterogeneous, a resulting difficulty is that Hakim proceeds to group them into just three distinct "ideal types", arguing that women will choose among the three lifestyles. However, these three categories inadequately describe the market situation of all women workers, and in particular, can be criticised for failing to accept that women might be equally career and family oriented, rather than wanting to choose one domain over the other. Interestingly, Hakim (2000, p. 157) herself does recognise that "few women have lives that conform exactly to these three ideal-types".

*Ideal types of women: home centred and work centred*

With reference to the three ideal types, Hakim (2003a) claims that home centred women are in the minority (ranging from 10 to 30 per cent of women), preferring to give priority to their family life and avoid paid employment. For the purpose of this paper, we do not elaborate on this ideal type. Similarly, she claims that work centred women (also accounting for 10-30 per cent of the population) are committed to employment in preference to motherhood, so they fit their family life around their work, delegating childcare (and domestic work) to others. Alternatively they remain childless. The problem with this ideal type is that it does not allow for both work and home to be equally preferred. Rather, Hakim (2000, p. 164) describes these women as careerist, leading her to claim that:

[...] it is pursued with single-minded determination throughout life [...] Some work-centred women have children, but motherhood never provides their core self-identity and principal activity in life. Their priorities do not change suddenly after childbirth, as with some adaptive women. Work-centred women have children in the same way as men do: as an expression of normality, and as a weekend hobby.

With reference to men, Hakim treats them as a homogenous category arguing that the work-centred profile is imposed on the vast majority of men, as they cannot voluntarily leave the labour market as women do. Her theory does not recognise or question that men may also be equally interested in home and family life and not all men regard children as a weekend hobby.

*Ideal types of women: adaptive women*

Hakim uses the term "adaptive women" as a catch-all for women who want to combine employment and family work without giving a fixed priority permanently to either, and estimates they account for 40-60 per cent of the population. Hakim (2000, p. 157) claims that these women "could also be seen as ambivalent, torn between the conflicting pulls of family life, especially children, and employment". She argues that adaptive women want the best of both worlds but "this choice often means lesser achievements

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in one or both spheres compared to women and men who decide on one main priority” (Hakim, 2000, p. 169). Her subsequent arguments assume that it is in the sphere of market work where women choose to achieve less. This is where the ideal type falters. She claims that adaptive women move in and out of the labour market at different stages of their life (Hakim, 2003b), which might not always be the reality of women choosing to combine employment and family work. She also refers to adaptive women as “secondary earners” arguing that their earnings are supplementary or secondary to another person (Hakim, 1996, p. 66). She does not appear to question this assumption regarding the relative significance of work in relation to a partner and how the secondary status of this relationship is perpetuated by gender pay differentials and other processes of socialisation. The theory also assumes these women work part-time or intermittently in term-time or seasonal type jobs. While they want to work they are not totally committed to careers, choosing certain occupations because they facilitate a more even work-family balance. Hakim (2000) also claims that adaptive women’s plans are determined largely by their husband’s status. She thus assumes that these women have husbands and that their husband’s jobs take priority. Uncomfortably, she argues with regard to adaptive women that:

If they marry a wealthy businessman, an ambitious politician or a dedicated academic, they may engage in a two-person career, actively supporting and assisting their husband in all his endeavours rather than developing a business career of their own [ . . . ] If they do not marry, or marry later in life, they may work throughout life, and thus appear, in behaviour, to be work-centred women. However, they differ from work-centred women in not being committed to a career from the start (Hakim, 2000, p. 166).

Women in professions seem to be an after thought in the adaptive category of her preference model. If women have a profession, she argues, it would be one chosen by those who want to fit paid work around their domestic role, rather than vice versa. The examples she provides for such professional women are part-time locum pharmacist, teacher or nurse. For other professional women, Hakim (2000, p. 167) maintains that:

Adaptive women in professional, managerial and other occupations that do not offer plentiful opportunities for part-time or intermittent work adopt other strategies to combine continuous full-time work with family life. Perhaps the most common strategy is to have only one child. Substitute childcare is purchased, and husbands are invited to contribute to the child-rearing and domestic workload.

A further difficulty with the category of adaptive women is that Hakim (2003a, p. 358) also adds to this category “drifters” and those with “unplanned careers”. Hakim (2000, p. 166) describes drifters as women with no definite ideas about the life they want, saying they respond to opportunities as they arise. She describes those with unplanned careers as developing successful employment more by accident than by design. This raises questions concerning the category of adaptive women. Given that many people have unplanned careers where career choice may be unintended (Baruch, 2004) and with career aspirations capable of modification over a person’s life depending on individual circumstance and extraneous variables (Baruch, 2004; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), this category may be significantly large to be worthy of separate categorisation.

A major criticism of Hakim’s preference theory is that women choose between two life priorities on the basis of their commitment to either career or family (Procter and Padfield, 1999) when in reality a combination of both is practically possible.

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Hakim's three ideal types do not seem to encompass those women who combine a full-time career and child care. Even if we were to accept Hakim's definition of careerist women above, it does not reflect the reality of the lives of many women with children. Many women go home and undertake the second shift (Hochschild, 1989) of child care as they still retain responsibility for the home environment. Many children of dual career couples go to bed later, which helps overcome the feelings of "guilt" some parents have of not being with them during the day. This second shift can contribute to these women's feelings of overload and exhaustion (Broadbridge, 2009).

*Women do not have genuine opportunities and choices*

Various authors contend that Hakim underestimates the role played by early processes of socialisation, cultural attitudes and employers' policies (Ginn *et al.*, 1996; Bruegel, 1996; Crompton and Harris, 1998a; Walters, 2005). For example, Hakim claims that preference theory predicts that men retain their dominance in the labour market because only a minority of women are prepared to prioritise their jobs in the same way as men. Thus, she places the onus on women rather than organisations and societal attitudes for women's minority status in the labour market rather than questioning women's ability to prioritise their jobs in the same way as men. Furthermore, this argument is also unconvincing when we consider that much occupational choice can be attributed to the process of socialisation and the types of occupations that are considered appropriate for men and women. Hence, there persists occupational segregation and patterns of horizontal and vertical segregation.

Despite the Equal Pay Act, 1970, the gender pay gap in the UK continues to be in favour of men, and is currently 16.4 per cent for hourly earnings, rising to 22.9 per cent for management jobs and 28.1 per cent for private sector employment (Office for National Statistics, 2009). This can act as a further constraint on men and women's preferences and choices. So Hakim ignores the influence of extraneous factors (such as organisational cultures and societal attitudes, pay inequities). Instead, she argues that social attitudes play only a very small part in predicting behaviour.

In relation to the historical changes Hakim describes as providing genuine opportunities and choices for women, these too can be critiqued. Contraception does genuinely give women a choice of when they will conceive, and fertility rates and age of first births (Hughes, 2009) suggest that many women are postponing having children until they have established a career. As we shall see later in this paper, this may act as a constraint on women's careers. The increase in white-collar jobs has resulted from the move from a manufacturing to a services economy. However, many of these jobs will be non-managerial, and Hakim does not comment specifically on management and professional occupations in this context. Moreover, her argument regarding the creation of jobs for secondary earners implies that these workers are women and it is only women who will choose to prioritise home over work. While Hakim argues that there is an increased importance placed on attitudes, values and personal preference in lifestyle choices, she presents only three groupings for women (and only one for men) that cannot fully reflect the lifestyle choices in the twenty-first century.

Finally, the argument relating to equal opportunities which asserts that women have equal access to all positions, occupations and careers in the labour market is questionable on various counts (including the occupational segregation argument above). More generally, while formal policies have no doubt helped women to access

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equality of opportunity to employment issues, informal organisational policies based on patriarchal values remain and can serve to exclude women and other minority groups (Broadbridge, 2008). So Hakim's argument that social attitudes are unimportant or have only a small impact can be questioned. Like Bruegel (1996) and Walters (2005, p. 196) recognises that women and men are not able to make "real" and "free" choices over their employment, and that circumstances frame preferences and so need to be understood in the context in which they are formed: "A country's welfare state model and (more indirectly) societal attitudes toward gender roles can have a profound effect on women's labour force participation". Walters notes, however, that women in professional and highly qualified occupations are more able to deal with structural constraints, as they can better afford childcare and receive higher maternity pay.

Further, Hakim argues that work-centred women will remain in the minority because the vast majority of women change their priorities after childbirth. With this claim she is in danger of homogenising the group "women with children" rather than embracing their heterogeneity. So her arguments support the influence of traditional sex role stereotypes and overlook the reluctance or inability of organisations to accommodate career mothers. As previous authors have demonstrated, the constraints on women take many forms including organisational cultures where long hours and uninterrupted work patterns are expected of those interested in a career and promotion. In addition, male dominated networks and the assumptions of male selectors can have a negative impact. Thus, Hakim's arguments can be seen to be established on the "male model" as the norm and the premise that women are themselves to blame for their minority status. As Corby and Stanworth (2009, p. 165) state:

[...] a recurring theme among Hakim's critics is that at best she downplays, and at worst virtually ignores, the constraints on women arising from the gendered nature of organisations.

Corby and Stanworth argue that employers have policies that offer reduced hours of work, but in practice they only reward and value staff who work long hours. So while equal opportunity policies might be in place, the dominant organisational culture has the power to resist them and therefore some such policies become a constraint rather than a choice.

#### *Towards a more appropriate approach?*

Simon (1959) introduced the concepts of "satisficing" and "maximising" in the economic context of the firm. The term "satisficing" was subsequently used by Chafetz and Hagan (1996, p. 201) in their analysis of the growing impact of women's employment on family life. In contrast to Hakim, they, as do Walters (2005) and Corby and Stanworth (2009), argue that rather than attempt to maximise one domain to the detriment of the other women will increasingly attempt to achieve success in both employment and family life goals without maximising either, and that they look for satisfactory or "good enough" choices, rather than maximal, levels of outcomes. In comparison, Crompton and Harris (1998b) use the term "maximisers" for women who (rather than satisfice) refuse to compromise their ambitions in respect of either employment career or family life and instead have sought to maximise their goals in respect of both employment careers and family lives'. The terms "satisficers" and "maximisers" reflect multi-stranded work life objectives in contrast to Hakim's terms that polarise approaches as either work centred or home centred.

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Given the preceding literature, this paper now examines whether retail executives and directors can be classified into Hakim's three types scenario. One would hypothesise that they would most logically fit into the "work centred" category. The paper examines to what extent this is the case and explores the notion of choice and preference in the careers of retail senior executives and directors. A series of research questions were developed:

*RQ1.* How do women articulate choice in talking about their organisational and non-work lives?

*RQ2.* What value do women ascribe to the concept of choice in negotiating tensions experienced?

*RQ3.* In their quest to progress their careers have women been forced to make choices in their lives (work/non work) that have impeded/obstructed either of these two domains?

*RQ4.* Does choice equate to preference in the narratives of women retail senior executives and directors?

### **Method**

The overall aim of the research was to explore the career patterns of senior executives and directors in the retail sector. A qualitative approach was adopted as the intention was to seek an in-depth understanding of the relevant factors for a small sample (following Marshall, 1984). Using the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 350 list of retail directors, the population of women retail board directors, both executive (eight) and non-executive positions (18), were contacted outlining the overall project and requesting an interview. A matched sample of male executive and non-executive directors was contacted from a population of 56 and 93, respectively, (for more details of the composition of these retail boards see Broadbridge, 2010). Some of these initial contacts led to referral sampling (Welch, 1975) to directors and senior executives in large multiple non-listed companies. In total, 25 men and women main board directors and senior executives (who Tyson (2003) described as the marzipan layer) were interviewed. For the purpose of this paper, the narratives of 13 women respondents were analysed. All the respondents had employment experience with large multiple UK retail companies involved in general retailing.

The interviews were structured around themes relating to their careers (perceived facilitators, barriers, influences, sacrifices, future ambitions, non-working lives). These were used as a base to develop conversations rather than a question/answer format. Respondents were encouraged to talk about these themes in as much or little depth and detail as they felt necessary (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The intention was thus for the respondents to express their own accounts in their own terms. This allowed respondents to reflect on all aspects of their working and non-working lives and consider the choices and constraints that they had faced over the course of their careers. The interviews were recorded and full transcriptions produced as a basis for data analysis. This analysis involved a process of "immersion" (Marshall, 1981) to identify common themes and patterns with a particular focus on perceptions of the influence of choice and/or constraint in their working and non-working lives.

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The sample comprised nine senior executive directors and four main board directors. Eight were specialists and five were general managers. Ten of the women were university graduates, while seven had other qualifications. Their ages ranged from 39 to 56. Of the women, 12 were married or cohabiting. In five instances, partners/husbands did not work. Two of the 13 were voluntarily childless – in both cases for reasons unconnected with career. Of the remaining 11 women with children, all were combining career and child rearing (nine had more than one child). Interview data suggest that the three categories Hakim described as well as notions of “unconstrained choice” are limited in their usefulness for understanding managerial women’s work experiences.

### Findings

In some of the accounts the women freely used the term “choice” to describe their patterns of work and non-work. However, the extent to which some of these accounts were genuine choices might be questioned. Below we explore the discourses of the women respondents in an attempt to understand the usefulness of Hakim’s preference theory in categorising retail senior executives and directors.

#### *Work centred patterns of behaviour*

Many women appeared to conform to Hakim’s work centred women, placing value on their careers:

When I first had my first kid I had no idea that I’d necessarily be able to hack it to go back you know [...] but anyway I got a nanny and it was fine and I love working so that was good (Sandra, Main Board Director, 55).

I think every so often, you think “oh I should have, I dunno, I should be doing more, I should be more involved” [at home] but you can’t. You can’t, so the weekends are very precious because the week really goes without much involvement (Frances, Executive Director, 39).

Some had taken short maternity leave in order to return to work – also indicative of work centeredness in the choice made. However, as the following quote demonstrates, these choices can be seen to be strongly influenced by work context:

I thought “they’re gonna give someone else my job and although they’ve got to give me back a similar job I don’t want to go back to something different. I like what I do and it’s gonna be more difficult to come back to something completely different” so I sort of rushed to go back [...] I mean I did go back full time and I think if I had the choice now I wouldn’t have done but I do think I would never be where I am in my career if I’d taken a break (Hilary, Main Board Director, 56).

Hilary uses the term “choice” but this choice is clearly determined by the fear of not being able to return to her previous job. Her statement also implies that progression follows a traditional/classic male career path of full-time continuous working, something that is more difficult when attempting to balance family responsibilities.

Similarly, when asked whether there was a particular reason for only taking a short period of maternity leave (six and eight weeks) as well as engaging in some form of work during this leave, Hazel explained:

No it was a personal choice, I had just been promoted into a really good regional role and didn’t want to miss the start-up of the new region so it was kind of like, okay, yeah get back to work asap (Hazel, Executive Director, 40).

While Jenny observed:

I had six weeks off with one and four weeks off with the other so hardly any time. I was managing director and you know if I'd had a year off there was no way that they could have put somebody else to do that job for a year whereas for four weeks other people can cover, and as I wanted to go back to the same job then that was my choice really (Jenny, Main Board Director, 43).

These statements highlight the difficulty of combining career and family at higher managerial levels. Genuine choices may be constrained by employment expectations, and the fear that women may not be able to return to their original job and forced to take a less satisfactory position if they were to take longer leave. This shows how firms can manipulate (and subvert) equal opportunity policies.

The contraception revolution (which Hakim argues creates genuine choices for women) indeed has seen a pattern of many women establishing their careers before starting a family. Yet the women interviewed acknowledged the difficulty of combining children and career, and several advocated having children earlier rather than later in their careers. This was in order to fit in with the organisational norm and has clear repercussions for individual career plans – something contemporary women may not always fully appreciate. Like Jenny above, Margaret argued:

It's easier if you want to come back to work after having your children say for an employer to cope with filling your job if your job is a junior job (Margaret, Executive Director, 53).

This idea was echoed by Sandra when she said:

I've got my kids behind me if you like (Sandra, Main Board Director, 55).

Therefore, while contraception provides more freedom and choice for women, it can also potentially damage and limit career progression if their careers are already well established before starting a family. They may then have to make “choices” to prioritise their career over their family life to retain their senior positions. Contrary to Hakim's argument, the ten women born after 1960 did not appear to have more genuine choices than the three born prior to 1960. Overall, there was some evidence that the women continue to fit family life around work, and delegate various childcare responsibilities to others.

#### *Truly work centred?*

Unlike Hakim's claim of work centred women, many respondents had not pursued their career with single-minded determination. Priorities do change after childbirth. All the women were clearly career focused. Yet their children came first even though they had full time demanding careers at senior management levels. Children were not a “weekend hobby” as Hakim suggests and sacrifices were made in leisure time (“me time”) rather than in time for the children.

Hazel spoke about how she had changed companies in order to better accommodate one of her children's ongoing illness:

I was on a very good career path with [Multiple Retailer A] and I was being developed to move to one of their larger stores as a retail director but my [child developed a long-term illness] which just changed and turned the whole world upside down. My husband had a far more responsible role than I had so it was my career if you like that had to change [...] I was struggling to say well how am I gonna cope because [Multiple Retailer A] no matter what

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anybody says is a 24/7 business, it's early mornings, it's late nights, it's whenever you're needed [...] So I actually joined [Multiple Retailer B] and one of the things that they committed to do was I could work from home [sometimes] but it was like moving from the outside lane on the motorway to the inside lane on the motorway at the time (Hazel, Executive Director, 40).

Hazel's account demonstrates the complex nature of career decisions and how these need to be understood in the context of whole life concerns. Hazel does not easily fit either the work centred or adaptive ideal types. She is both career and family orientated and prioritises one domain over the other according to certain circumstances. Thus, Hazel was torn between the conflicting domains of work and family and had "chosen" to slow her career, at least temporarily (consider her analogy with motorway lanes) because her husband's career took priority (denoting her secondary earner status). Yet, she was attempting to balance career and caring roles rather than totally subcontract her childcare to others as Hakim's work centred and professional adaptive women are assumed to do. She had moved on from Multiple Retailer B. Her current position is a full time executive director of a large FTSE company and her aspirations are for a main board position in another similar company.

Hilary further demonstrates the complex nature of choices faced:

My family has always been much more important than my career you know. I would have given up my career at a moment's notice if anything had, if I felt any of them was at risk in my family so that was the main thread for me but I found my career very, you know, challenging and rewarding as well and it's been great that I could do both and they've dovetailed quite well together in the long run (Hilary, Main Board Director, 56, more than one child).

This suggests the need to integrate whole life concerns into our understanding of careers and the choices people make. Although many women were clearly career focused and had reached very high positions in their organisations, they also spoke about prioritising family concerns – which according to preference theory casts doubt over their "work centred" status.

#### *Combining work and children – work centred or adaptive behaviour?*

Women from the study also failed to accommodate Hakim's description of "adaptive professional women". Counter to Hakim's argument that professional women who are unable to work part-time or intermittently will limit themselves to just one child, nine of the 11 women with children in the current study had two or more children. Although substitute childcare was purchased in eight of these cases (with family members accounting for the other three), many women considered themselves career women juggling families. Their senior position enabled them a degree of flexibility to alter some working arrangements so as to better accommodate both roles, and a few believed this indirectly showed other women that maintaining a high-powered career and family was possible. Most, however, did not challenge social mores and openly crusaded for a more supportive organisational culture to better enable employees to balance both domains.

When asked if she had encountered any barriers in her career Hazel replied:

Ehm no. I have made choices in my career about balance of work and life you know [...] I have to leave [work] at a certain time and sometimes that's uncomfortable for the organisation; sometimes it's uncomfortable for me. I've consciously said I won't have a hugely European

role or I won't have a role that includes huge amounts of nights away and that type of stuff until they're at an age where they're able to cope and stay on their own but you know that's my choice, I've chosen to do that [...] and I actually think that I've done fairly well considering the constraints that I've put on myself to say well yeah I can operate at this level and I can still get home in time for the kids (Hazel, Executive Director, 40).

Hazel talks about choice but also puts this in the context of the constraints she faces in her full-time job. Responsibility for managing the two domains of work and home is located with women (rather than the organization or government):

I think you have to be realistic. If you [women] want to be career driven with a family then you have to find a way that suits and I opted not to say I want a live in nanny or I want whatever else but you have to make that work (Hazel, Executive Director, 40).

Her overall narrative suggests a reluctance to champion for organisational change to better accommodate women's roles. In this respect, she may be classified as a conformist to traditional organisational rules and roles.

These women were committed to their careers and had achieved the highest positions in their organisations yet unlike Hakim's suggestions, they placed children central to their lives rather than pursuing their career with single-minded determination. While she remains career focused, Frances's priorities have changed over time particularly when becoming a family unit, which might cast doubt over her "fit" with Hakim's work centred status:

Work had always, up until the point really I met my partner and had my son, work had always come first, it's been, everything else has gone at the expense of that (Frances, Executive Director, 39).

Frances had always prioritised work over leisure time but she was no longer willing to do this at the expense of time with her family. However, this did not make her any less ambitious. This was typical of many other women – they talked about sacrificing "me time" or leisure rather than family time. Lynne also stated:

I mean the children of course will always come first [...] they're not massive obstacles for me they're part of life [...] you can juggle it if that's what you choose to do (Lynne, Executive Director, 40).

The analysis so far has suggested that the retail senior executives and directors do not fit Hakim's work centred or adaptive women categories comfortably – suggesting that a different categorization may be appropriate to describe such women and their experiences.

#### *Choice, opportunities and gender*

Simpson and Lewis (2007, p. 50) highlight that respondents sometimes have difficulty in talking about gender as an issue that has an impact on them – a theme that has emerged from this as well as other research projects (Wilson, 2008). Anderson *et al.* (2010) have noted the high regard and affection women often have towards their firms and their perceptions of disloyalty should they acknowledge some of the difficulties facing them. This too was the situation with several of the women interviewed. Here, women talked about the choices they had made in their careers – choices that can be seen as gendered in that they were not encountered by men in the same way. Several women described the difficulties in combining childcare with paid employment, yet they did not question the

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organisational culture accommodating career women or that it is only women's responsibility to balance the two. They remained loyal to their organisations. Even Hazel showed a loyalty and respect to Multiple Retailer A who could not accommodate her needs in better balancing her career with a disabled child.

The following extract demonstrates the complexity of the issue of choice and how circumstances frame preferences. In some circumstances women referred to a "real" choice even though this can be seen to be constrained by other factors:

You know a lot of people say "oh then you reach the glass ceiling". I think it's just women's choice you know that, and there's a lot written about it, but I do think it doesn't really exist and actually some women can go all the way to the top because they choose to. Other women don't because they don't want to and there's a lot written about "oh it's a glass ceiling", I just think that's nonsense to be quite honest. I think a lot of women do find it very, very difficult to balance children and a full time or a part time job and then their guilt just completely overwhelms them and therefore it's a choice that they make that they don't want to go any further [...] I just think if you want to do it you will do it (Lynne, Executive Director, 40).

Lynne's account implies that career progression requires personal determination. By dismissing the glass ceiling she denies significance to gender as an influence and instead suggests that women do have a (real) choice. They will reach the top if they are sufficiently determined. Her account overlooks the fact that child care falls predominantly on women; that company cultures are largely based on traditional gender norms and expectations; that organisations are gendered. As a result of all these, choices may be constrained. Women therefore draw on and give value to the concept of choice as they negotiate tensions experienced in their careers. The discourse of choice helps validate and give legitimacy to career outcomes. It also forecloses a more critical stance towards the gendered nature of organisational cultures and the implications this has for men and women.

Some women referred to "balance" and to satisfactory outcomes. Julie's account of her current situation matches Corby and Stanworth's (2009) notion of "satisficing" rather than Hakim's adaptive or work centred category:

I do think I could go further if I put effort into it but I've got two beautiful kids you know, my husband's got a job too and it's all about balance [...] if I ever thought this was compromising my family life I would make a different decision definitely (Julie, Executive Director, 39).

Similarly, Tracey explained:

I've turned down bigger roles because I have children and I don't want to sell my life so I've turned down bigger specialist roles than this and I've turned down going into line roles so [Multiple Retailer C] wanted me to be the deputy MD and you go "well actually no I have this other bit" [...] I think that's quite a dilemma for people because sometimes people want both and both is achievable for some periods of time in some roles in some organisations but it's not achievable from what I've seen in all roles all of the time in all organisations so you do have to make a choice and I know it's my choice and I don't suppose my husband has ever been asked to make that choice or would feel he would make that choice (Tracey, Executive Director, 46).

Choices can thus be seen to be constrained by contextual and organizationally based factors but are seen as a matter for the individual (Tracey, however, does acknowledge the gender dimension in her recognition that her husband would not face the same dilemma).

Like Walters (2005), Tracey talked about the ability of those at the highest positions to be able to overcome the structural constraints placed on them:

I don't think blokes have so many choices [to make] [...] so sometimes people will make choices around how ambitious they want to be based on what else they want out of life, work is only one aspect and then the higher up a ladder you go the more you earn, money gives you choices (Tracey, Executive Director, 46).

Frances described how she and another woman director swapped tales of combining work and family demands – showing the difficulties of confronting the organisational values:

I mean they [directors] will phone me whenever they want to phone me it doesn't matter what day of the week it is, it doesn't matter what time of the day it is [...] I think that you do feel you are on call to the chairman [...] the MD will be on the phone sort of half six in the morning cos that's when he's got in his car and we'll be trying to wrestle one child or other off into nursery and you're balancing the phone like this [demonstrates phone on shoulder] trying to have a conversation with him (Frances, Executive Director, 39).

These accounts cast doubt on the extent to which women face or are able to make “genuine”, i.e. unconstrained choice. In this respect, Hakim may be critiqued for underplaying the constraints that outside factors impose on women in exercising choice. These choices often involve compromise in various aspects of their lives. The accounts also demonstrate that these high-achieving career women do not necessarily fit the mould of “work centred women” and that the category of “adaptive women” is also inadequate to describe these women's experiences.

### Conclusions

From an analysis of 13 in-depth interviews, this paper examined the discourses drawn upon by women senior executives and retail directors to manage, justify and explain the contradictions and tensions they experienced when talking about their careers and the choices they have made. However, choice was found not always to equate with preference. Women adopted a variety of ways in which they articulate “choice” when talking about their careers; some believe they have freedom of choice in their careers; some use the term “choice” in order to validate their career outcomes; while others recognise that they have to make certain choices between their careers and home lives.

The analysis of the data highlighted revealed various problems with the tenets of preference theory. Hakim's claims concerning the emergence of historically rooted “genuine choice” for women are dubious as was noted earlier. Women's accounts of their working lives were infused with notions of choice but these choices are often constrained and are related to traditional and stereotypical views of gender roles and to outdated company cultures and attitudes. This therefore casts doubt as to whether they are genuine choices. The organisational culture within retailing creates difficulties for managerial women with children and thus imposes various constraints. Retailing embraces a long hours culture based on presenteeism and women may decline certain roles which require them being away over night or for longer periods of time. In a labour market that assumes the norm of the full-time manager who is unencumbered by family responsibilities, there are limited options for women and men who seek to work in a different way. Even Hakim's argument regarding the contraceptive revolution being a “freeing force” to enable women to make genuine choices might be

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a constraint in the retail industry. As the findings suggested, women may be better off having their children early as they are better able to return to junior rather than senior positions yet still be young enough to advance their careers.

Hakim has drawn attention to some of the choices women face in contemporary organizations. However, the categories she uses to “explain” women’s heterogeneity may not fully reflect their experiences. In particular, the category of adaptive women may need to include several different groupings in order to fully explain the position of women senior executives and directors. Similarly, her assumed homogeneity of men’s experiences and choices, overly reflective of patriarchal attitudes and values in the centrality given to work, may not take into account the changing values of emerging generations and an increased interest among Generation Y (those born between 1977 and 1994) men and women for a better work life balance (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007, 2009).

The paper has demonstrated the complexity of the notion of choice and whether choice equates to preference or constraint. Choices are constrained by organisational cultures and processes of socialisation and are tied up with whole life concerns. This follows Leahy and Doughney’s (2006) claim that many women are often burdened with “unreasonable” choice regarding their families and careers. It is unreasonable because it is a choice that men generally do not need to make. The paper has shown that Hakim’s preference theory does not fully explain the behaviour and work patterns of women senior executives and directors in the retail industry. The data showed some of the difficulties of applying her category of work centred or adaptive women. Many women were attempting to achieve in both their career and family domains simultaneously. Moreover, it appears that the terms “satisficing” (Corby and Stanworth, 2009) or “maximising” (Crompton and Harris, 1998b) may more appropriately describe many women retail senior executives’ positions and also the patterns of behaviour of the younger generation in the twenty-first century.

### Areas for further research

Although the purpose of this paper was to explore the situation of women in senior management positions, it is recognised that men may be constrained by choices. The norm of the ideal worker deters ambitious men from participating more in the care of their children (Wirth, 2001; Nussbaum, 2002). Are men similarly bound by outdated stereotypical ideas of how they should behave in the work and non-work arenas?

This warrants further research especially in an age of Generation Y who value the separation of the work and home domains more closely than previous generations. Organisations ought to be vigilant that it makes business sense to change working structures to incorporate the values and expectations of Generation Y. By doing so they stand to gain the most from their employees, retain the best managers and optimise organisational performance. Perhaps this is a better mantle for women to adopt in challenging for such changes – that the younger generation of employees and the future of organisations rest on better organisational structures that can better accommodate both men and women’s lives and values.

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# Social capital, gender and careers: evidence from retail senior managers

Social capital,  
gender and  
careers

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The article aims to show how using the framework of social capital can be useful in understanding the careers of senior retail managers.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative research design in the form of 17 biographical interviews with 11 men and six women was adopted to understand the perceived influence and active involvement of social capital factors in retail career development at senior levels.

**Findings** – Men and women were equally aware of the importance of accumulating social capital factors for career development purposes, although they considered that the accumulation of human capital factors to be crucial in their own career development. Evidence indicated that women and men had benefited from borrowing social capital early in their career. However, having reached senior status the ways and reasons women accumulate social capital seemingly differ from the men's. Overall, men acquired social capital and used networking techniques more strategically and instrumentally than the women with regard to career development purposes. Senior women talked about engaging in expressive networks for social support and to overcome macho cultures.

**Research limitations/implications** – The research is limited to 17 qualitative interviews and so cannot be generalised to the wider population. Rather, it is intended to instigate debate over the importance of social capital in careers.

**Practical implications** – The findings imply that gender impacts access to and accumulation of social capital for career development purposes. It highlights issues that need to be explored in more detail so as to enable a more complete understanding of the factors important for people's careers.

**Originality/value** – The paper contributes to an understanding of men's and women's career development in relation to social capital, an area that has received limited attention in the human resource and retail fields.

**Keywords** Retail trade, Career development, Social capital, Gender, Managers

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Various explanations for the lack of women in top management positions can be ascribed to factors that might suggest women's differential accumulation of social capital to men although few have been directly attributed to this literature. Concentrating on social capital as an individual attribute and adopting a network-based approach (Burt, 1998; Lin, 2001), this article contributes to our understanding of the factors perceived to be important in the careers of senior managers. The article arose from a research project that explored aspects of the career development of managers in the retail sector, one where management is male dominated, particularly so at senior levels (Thomas, 2001a; Author, 2010). The term career development used in this research refers to how individuals manage their careers within and between organisations and how organisations structure the career opportunities of their employees.

In this article data are analysed through a social capital lens and how senior retail managers talked about accessing resources when discussing their careers generally are explored, some of which might be connected with social capital. A gender perspective



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is adopted as many prominent authors in the field have ignored this important issue (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Seibert *et al.*, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002; Cross and Parker, 2004). Indeed, Lin (2001) calls for more research on differential access to social capital. The application of a social capital framework for understanding careers has been a relatively unexploited area within the human resource and retail fields. Nevertheless, the accumulation of social capital brings various individual-level benefits (Burt, 1998; Lin, 2001; Lee, 2009) including those directly related to career (Granovetter, 1973; Saxenian, 1996; Jones, 1996; Burt, 1997; Gabbay and Zuckerman, 1998), as well as business-level benefits (Bates, 1994; Mulholland, 1997; McEvily and Zaheer, 1999; Fernandez *et al.*, 2000; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Bolino *et al.*, 2002; Cross and Prusak, 2002; Field, 2003). This makes it a pertinent topic for current research. The article contributes to the understanding of gender and social capital theory. It shows that there may be similarities between men and women in their acquisition of social capital early on in their careers, but once they attain senior positions their accumulation of social capital ostensibly differs.

### Capital, gender and careers

Capital has been defined as “the accumulation of assets, resources, and sources of strength that are used to aid in accomplishing an end or furthering a pursuit” (Tymon and Stumpf, 2003, p. 14). Although various forms of capital exist such as structural, economic, symbolic, career, knowledge, organisational, financial and intellectual, Lin (2001, p. 55) classified capital into two main types: human capital and social capital. Whereas human capital consists of resources possessed by the individual such as education, training and experience (i.e. it is a quality of people and deals with the “what” a person knows), social capital is the accessed resources of individuals (it is a quality created between people and refers to opportunity, and deals with “who” a person knows); social capital is the ability of people to acquire benefits through their membership in social networks or other social structures and the reputation they have because of their connections (Portes, 1998; Naphapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Because human capital is a well-established concept, the attention of this article focuses on the issue of social capital and the relevance this concept might have in the workplace. However, brief mention is made to human capital in order to contextualise how the accumulation of both human capital and social capital factors contribute to career development.

Although human capital theory is not without criticism (e.g. Bowles and Gintis, 1975; Pratt and Hanson, 1991), it has received much research attention and has been positively linked to managerial career advancement (Tharenou, 1997a, b, 2005; Metz and Tharenou, 2001). For example, Baruch (2004, p. 91) maintains that “Education is perhaps the single most important factor in determining whether a person will *obtain* a managerial position” [emphasis added]. Many individuals assume that sheer hard work and the accumulation of human capital (based on an assumption of neutral principles of merit) is critical for their career progression (Author, 2008). However, opportunity structures within organisations (many of which function via the operation of informal processes and networks) have also been identified as important for advancing careers (Tharenou, 2005). The power of these opportunity structures should not be underestimated and they are intertwined with the gendering of organisations. They can be insidious in nature and tied up with a lack of transparency that promotes hegemonic masculine organisational cultures. Although many people may assume that organisations are gender neutral, in reality management is deeply gendered in many

ways (Bendl, 2008); management has been socially constructed by men which places men in authority positions and measures women against masculine norms and values (Wajcman, 1996; Liff, 1999). As a result women and men find themselves being compared by internalised subjective criteria that benefit men more often than they do women. This helps to perpetuate the close identification between men and management (Wajcman, 1996).

A growing number of scholars recognise that it is the combination of human capital and social capital that is important for career development purposes (Coleman, 1994; Tymon and Stumpf, 2003; Burt, 2005). Human capital is necessary for success, but Burt (1998) and Woolcock (1998) suggest that it is useless without the social capital of opportunities in which to apply it; an individual's reputation for performance within an organisation depends on both actual performance and their associations with prominent others (Kilduff and Krackhardt, 1994). Accumulating social capital then is considered by some to be essential to managerial advancement as human capital (Tymon and Stumpf, 2003; Eagly and Carli, 2007) and arguably more so in advancing to senior management positions (Metz and Tharenou, 2001; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). At higher management levels, decision makers rely on sponsors to provide them with information on promotion candidates (Burt, 1998) else have preconceived ideas about who should perform the role or the attributes of job holders (Powell, 2000). This illustrates how subjective measures may overtake the importance of objective ones when deciding on senior positions. Managers with more social capital get higher returns to their human capital because they are positioned to identify and develop more rewarding opportunities (Baker, 2000; Burt, 2005); similarly, less accumulation of social capital might in turn result in a deficit of the accumulation of human capital. So social capital is the contextual complement to human capital in explaining advantage (Burt, 2005) and can be a source of competitive advantage to the individual and their organisation (Tymon and Stumpf, 2003).

### **Social capital and networking**

Social capital is distinguished from ordinary networking in that while networking increases the number of contacts a person has, social capital requires the individual to take some form of action (Baker, 2000); it occurs when the networking becomes a resource for the participants (Tymon and Stumpf, 2003) and the resulting opportunities and benefits accrued from doing so. While relatively little has been written on gender and social capital, gender and networking activity has a more established literature (e.g. Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1992, 1993, 1997; Linehan, 2001; Kilduff and Tsai, 2003; Forret and Dougherty, 2004; Brass *et al.*, 2004; van Emmerik *et al.*, 2006; Groysberg, 2008; Benschop, 2009). Network structures are reciprocal (Lin, 2001); they are relationships between people and the support these relationships create (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Networks can be formal (through specified relationships between employees within their work groups and across functional groups (Ibarra, 1993)) or informal (through individuals' own choices either to aid work related tasks and/or to provide social benefits (Travers and Pemberton, 2000)). Both can accrue social capital for the individual. Various authors have consistently noted that networks are often gender segregated being (almost) exclusively male or female dominated, and that homophilous networks for a range of reasons are more detrimental for women than for men (e.g. Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1997; Silvey and Elmhirst, 2003; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Benschop, 2009). Moreover, Benschop (2009) questions the underlying masculine connotations of networks, arguing that networks for and by men are not intentional but natural – they simply happen and are therefore

exclusionary. Eagly and Carli (2007) also point out that it is not a lack of awareness of the value of networks (or the importance of accumulating social capital) on the part of women. Their differential access can be traced to their minority organisational status and practices of homophily which Ibarra (1993) argues contributes to the creation of a “glass ceiling” effect for women.

**Social capital: accessed resources through types of networks**

Lin (2001) argues that social capital theory assumes two primary driving forces for most people’s interactions – to maintain and/or to gain valued resources. Social capital relationships can be developed consciously or can emerge as a by-product of other social activities (Coleman, 1988). Burt’s research focuses on variables indicating the position of the individual inside social networks and the ties they have. Various authors have identified their own terms to describe the two main types of social capital resources. The first and more common network structure and interactions undertaken by individuals in accruing social capital is “direct ties”[1] with people close to the individual, for example, working in the same department, team or cluster. Burt refers to them as “redundant” contacts, as they lead to the same people and the same information. Dolfisma and Dannreuther (2003) describe them as “horizontal and among equals in a community”, thus demonstrating their homogeneity and solidarity (Putnam, 2000). These kinds of networks have been identified to occur more often and be more satisfying among participants with similar socioeconomic characteristics, lifestyles and attitudes (Lin, 2001; Burt, 2005). The second type of network, “indirect ties”[2], extend beyond normal day-to-day interactions and are contacts that have the opportunity to reach more people and more information. They are the contacts between groups, where most variation in belief and practice occurs, and where advantage and opportunities can be sought. These ties are associated with individual self-pursuit (Burt, 1997), for the achievement of certain goals and for gaining valued resources especially with people with more or better resources (Lin, 2001). They are seen as critical for getting ahead (Woolcock, 1998). Burt (1992) maintains that the size of a person’s contacts and the strength of a person’s ties are not as important as the diversity of a person’s contacts – what he calls “structural holes”. As an illustration, structural holes occur when a person (A) has contact with others (e.g. B and C) who themselves are disconnected. Burt (1992) argues that person A benefits from non-redundant information and has the power to control the information flow between contacts B and C (he calls this “brokering” the relationship). The more the holes spanned, the richer the information benefits of the network, and a person’s chances of being included in new opportunities and creating an impression with each contact, while fewer structural holes means poorer social capital (Burt, 1997, 1998). Promotion and positive career benefits have been associated with people who have these indirect networks (Podolny and Baron, 1997; Burt, 1998, 2005). So while both kind of networking interactions can enhance career development, it is arguably the indirect ties that provide particular career opportunities, owing to their wider reach to heterogeneous groups and information sources.

**Gender issues in accessing social capital**

Burt (1998) claims that people perform better where they are most comfortable: for men he contends this is in indirect networks but for women this is in direct networks; the reasons he attributes to women’s legitimacy problems in organisations and the barriers women face in entering established networks. This led him to argue that men and women benefit from differential access to structural hole contacts. Burt (1998) argues

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that men can either build (establish their own ties) or borrow (establish ties through a sponsor) social capital, claiming that an established male manager is more successful when he builds social networks (*cf.* Moore and Butner, 1997) but women (and newly recruited men) are more successful when they borrow the social capital of an established manager or well-connected mentors. These managers then act as “sponsors” and facilitate/broker introductions to other senior managers, who in turn can help the individual accumulate more social capital and human capital, as well as developing their confidence and visibility in the organisation. Benschop (2009) criticises Burt on his assertion that women need to borrow networks in order to be as effective as their male counterparts, on the grounds that it reinforces a hierarchical gender order, that gender is a socially constructed practice and that networking is a dynamic gendering process in organisations. Women’s experience of organisational practices and norms are often different from men’s, which has led authors to claim that men are regarded as the “norm” while women are cast as the “other” (Czarniawska and Hopfl, 2002; Bendl, 2008). Women can consequently be held back or expected to conform to the organisational masculine norms in order to succeed and be accepted. Some women may reject these networking opportunities because they are incompatible with their own values and beliefs. Others choose to conform, which enables traditional masculine organisational norms to proceed unchallenged.

Although Burt acknowledges that women have a legitimacy problem in organisations, there are other problems with some of his assertions. For example, his contention that women feel more comfortable in direct networks is based on the assumption that these are strong cohesive work groups. However, his analysis overlooks that each work group has its own norms and values, and the strong cohesiveness of the work group will represent the dominant voice and views of the people most closely matching the dominant characteristics of the group. Thus, we would expect dominant members to have naturally stronger social ties. Recognising the gendering of organisations, and the knowledge that management is generally associated with masculine discourse and practices (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993, 1998) therefore the dominant group members in work teams and departments are likely to be those most closely matching these norms and characteristics. If, as Burt also asserts, people with similar characteristics form natural alliances, there may be a further gender dimension in the cliques within these groups (e.g. dominant males). Consequently, dominant group members have more potential to access and control information flows (and thus enhance their chances to accumulate social capital) than minority group members.

Burt also suggested that women with dense networks of female colleagues had a competitive advantage in breaking through the glass ceiling into the senior ranks, arguing that they can look out for one another’s interests, speak up for one another and inform each other of opportunities. This assertion is flawed as it ignores the gendering of organisations and overlooks that women’s networks are less powerful in organisations (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Moreover, varying evidence would suggest this solidarity behaviour between women not always to be the case (Marshall, 1984; Mavin, 2006, 2009).

Numerous organisational structures and practices uphold masculine norms and values, perpetuate systems which favour men and can particularly facilitate men’s access to and accumulation of social capital. As well as homosocial practices (*cf.* Kanter, 1977; Pelled *et al.*, 1999; Sheridan, 2002; Colly, 2002) are the use of impression management techniques (Rosenfeld *et al.*, 1995; Singh *et al.*, 2002; Caproni, 2005; Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2010) and opportunities for mentoring, sponsorships, visibility and networking (e.g. Wirth, 2001; Knouse and Webb, 2001; Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2004;

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Granleese, 2004; Cross and Linehan, 2006). One might therefore criticise Burt (1998) for the relative simplicity of his assertion that women do better when they borrow social capital, although his argument does have some credence.

The foregoing analysis highlights how it may be useful to consider career development issues using a social capital lens. Senior women in a BITC/Catalyst report (2000) adopted clear strategies necessary to aid their career advancement and these can be attributed to the accumulation of both human capital and social capital. The perceived relevance of social capital factors for men and women in retail management positions remains unclear. This article reveals instances where, in the course of discussing their careers, managers mentioned events and factors (consciously or unconsciously) that may be attributed to their access, accumulation and use of social capital. The research questions were to discover whether senior men and women retail managers were aware of the importance of the acquisition of social capital for career purposes; whether they differed in their approaches to accumulating social capital and what they used it for.

### **Methodology**

Veale and Gold (1998) contend that the glass ceiling phenomenon in organisations demands a methodology that can access its subtle manifestations. With this in mind the research approach adopted took the form of biographical interviews, a method that rests on the belief that each individual has a unique personal construct system which cannot be fully appreciated through traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods. Story telling is crucial to the articulation of experience (Johansson, 2004) and biographical interviews offer their own structure (Phillips Carson and Carson, 1998) thereby accessing the experiences, memories and interpretations of respondents (Jones, 1992). The nature of the current research was to explore career development issues and the researcher wanted respondents to talk freely about their careers and enable categories to emerge from the data rather than impose a set of rigid questions which might introduce potential subjectivity and bias. Each respondent was thus encouraged to talk through their careers and this enabled them to highlight those areas in their work and/or home lives they believed had impacted them in some way. To summarise and clarify their narratives, at the end of the interview some general questions were asked such as what they had considered to be the main factors facilitating and hindering their careers and why this was the case. The interviewer was careful not to interrupt the respondents' narratives, although where it seemed appropriate they were asked to clarify a detail or provide an example to illustrate the point they were making. Like Bouty (2000, p. 52), the purpose of the interviews was to gather anecdotes and accounts of past experiences in the respondents' careers rather than general considerations, opinions and doubtful judgements. Hence, the interviews took an unstructured yet focused approach (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). This provided flexibility without losing focus on the most prominent areas. The approach adopted offered a complementary diversion from the conventional approaches of quantitative and qualitative methods previously used by the author and might help to inform and construct future methodological approaches to researching this area (e.g. by data triangulation).

The research design was to gather rich qualitative data, an approach which does not rely on specific sample sizes, although an attempt was made to ensure the sample was appropriate and adequate (Morse, 1998). Because of the absence of a sampling frame, and since the research could be considered to be sensitive in nature, respondents were

purposively selected using business contacts known to the author from a retail alumni database. Initial contact was made with 21 retail senior managers and directors (all of which are classified as senior management positions, i.e. they had people management responsibilities; the directors occupied head of a section positions and although they were not on the main board of directors themselves, many reported directly into them or the executive team). Most agreed to participate although, for some, finding a mutual time and location to conduct the interviews proved difficult. This resulted in 17 biographical/career history interviews being conducted with six women and 11 men[3]. While this proportion positively reflects the distribution of women and men in senior positions of retail companies, it was disappointing that more women could not participate in the research. By virtue of their senior management status, the women in this research had clearly overcome various barriers in their career development. Their stories then, alongside those of the men, provide an interesting account of the perceived influence and active involvement of social capital factors in retail career development. Although conclusions cannot be drawn from such small numbers, the sample was not meant to be representative or exhaustive or to involve conclusions based on frequencies. Rather, it was exploratory in nature and regarded as a starting point that warrants further research. Nonetheless, the research findings remain relevant; as Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 30) argued "A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property".

The interviews lasted on average 90 min; each was taped and transcribed literally. The research process resulted in a set of very different narratives. A biographical approach relies on impressionistic analysis where conclusions are drawn based on narratives that capture mood, feelings, motivations and belief systems underlying decisions (Phillips Carson and Carson, 1998). The analysis took the form of reviewing each interview transcript to provide a more informed understanding of each individual respondent's circumstances. The data were manually coded and indexed using open coding and categorisation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This categorisation did not rest upon a predetermined code; rather it was emergent, cumulative and data-driven.

This article reports on examples of issues that emerged from the respondents' narratives that may be associated with their acquisition of social capital. The participants in the research did not use the term social capital themselves; rather the data were analysed using a social capital lens, taking into consideration how the participants spoke about accessing resources and how their association with others were considered instrumental in their own career.

### **Perceived relevance of the acquisition of human and social capital for careers**

First, it is worth mentioning that the men and women perceived factors attributed to the accumulation of human capital along with individual traits (such as determination and ambition) as critical in the development of their careers and none of them considered that they personally lacked human capital. However, while they very much attached the importance of performance (i.e. human capital) in advancing their careers, in accordance with others (Kilduff and Krackhardt, 1994; Burt, 1998; Eagly and Carli, 2007) the importance of social capital networks as an aid to the acquisition of human capital was recognised by both the men and women respondents. Upholding Vinnicombe and Singh's (2003) findings, they recognised the influence that supportive bosses providing them with significant responsibilities could have (particularly early on) in their careers. This gave them confidence and increased their visibility to a wider range of senior managers through their borrowed networks

(*cf.* Thomas, 2001b). Thus, they became better known and this facilitated their opportunities to accumulate additional human capital and establish their credibility and career further.

Supporting Powell (2000), senior people's opinions were seen as vital in the decision making process for promotion and the more that a person is known and visible to these senior people via indirect networks, the more chance they might have of a positive outcome. A male director explained the procedures taken at board level when considering promotions:

We base decisions on core capabilities, which we measure as part of a formal review process, and also in terms of people's understanding of those people. You might have a very big sponsor in terms of your line manager, but you need to have visibility with their line manager or even their peer group to be able to form opinions of you, because a lot of the discussions we would have would be about the next set of people moves up, people's promotions or training programmes. The more widely known you are amongst that group, the more people can contribute about you, and often if you've got a consensus of opinion about an individual it makes it much easier to be able to move their careers on. For some reason, unknown people are obviously less able for people to contribute about and therefore there's always a bit more nervousness around them (Paul, director, aged 31).

While Paul acknowledged the contribution of human capital in career development issues (core capabilities and training programmes), the narrative is revelatory in highlighting how critical the accumulation of social capital (particularly weak tie structural hole networks) is in career progression. It demonstrates how decision makers use the individual's social capital as a proxy of capabilities (Ibarra and Smith-Lovin, 1997; Burt, 1998). It resonates with Liff and Ward's (2001) argument that the characteristics to succeed depend on needing the right people to back you (or at least not block you) which illustrates the value that social capital can have. Supporting Powell's (2000) assertions and as Liff and Ward (2001, p. 34) concluded "the informal relations between managers (at all levels) and the organizational culture of which they are part are at least as important as formal policies and procedures in determining women's success in promotion".

### **Acquisition of social capital in early career**

In reflecting on their earlier careers, like Burt (1998), there was evidence of both men and women accumulating social capital via borrowed networks. Abby benefitted from accessing social capital early on in her career although the value of this was not fully recognised by her until later on in her career:

What really made it for me at [first company after graduating] was the manager I had. He was there looking out for me and this was probably in hindsight a very crucial time in my career to have somebody like that behind you. I've been looking a bit at these relationship things, it was almost a parent relationship. He almost sort of looked after me in that sense, ehm recognised the potential I've got, gave me opportunities to exploit it, and protected me really, you know, in difficult situations and, you know, maybe try and help me out of them. He pushed my career and got people to recognise who I was and as I say, I think it was a very crucial time to have that because my confidence was, you know, really high at that time so it really was so important when you look back on it (Abby, senior manager, aged 34).

David believed "people must have put in a word" for him and perceived that his exposure to senior management had helped establish his career:

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All the way through my career [FTSE 100 Company] did not invite applications for positions. You were posted and some postings were good and that was a promotion and some were bad and that was a demotion and they really depended on how you were doing, what your last appraisal was like, whether your face fitted [...] and I began to realise that actually how I did really depended on not really on my technical skill which I think was always very sound, it was whether my face fitted and whether I had a sponsor [...]. At [X store] I was exposed to many head office visitors because lots of head office staff – directors, managers, whatever, lived in [town] and they would come to [store] routinely so the director of the [product] group as he was at that time used to visit the store every Saturday so I'd take him round. Now that was really good for my confidence because I felt exposed to senior people and I felt trusted to take them round on my own and I was only 20 at the time. I was about 22, I was very young (David, director, aged 48).

Both Abby and David spoke about these encounters being serendipitous. David talked about a sponsor implicitly but he had accessed social capital via his store manager who was willing to expose David to the senior head office management team by doing the “store walk” alone. He had not consciously set out to do this at the beginning of his career [... I began to realise ...]. Similarly with Abby – she had not intentionally gained a sponsor nor had realised the significance of his sponsorship initially [... in hindsight ... when you look back on it ...]. Yet both David and Abby had benefitted from the importance that sponsors and exposure could be for career purposes early in their careers and this had set them up for the rest of their careers.

### **Acquisition of social capital later in career**

#### *Conscious formation of networks for career purposes?*

As their stories unfolded, it became clear that some managers started to consciously build structural hole networks in order to gain exposure and visibility in the company. This was particularly apparent with the male respondents who gave various examples of this kind of behaviour:

You have to sort of make sure that you make yourself available to a number of different execs in head office by working in their areas and working on for their good as opposed to your own good [...]. (Joe, senior manager, aged 55).

Like the other women, Joanna recognised the importance that the accumulation of social capital could have. Her behaviour differed from the other women, however, in that she was actively cultivating networks and attempting to build and borrow her social capital. She spoke of working extremely long hours, taking work home, never saying “no”, going out drinking with male colleagues and foregoing starting a family: she had moulded herself to the cultural norms of the business and was emulating behaviours valued by men. She was conscious of employing impression management and ingratiation techniques with senior staff, something others (Burt, 1998; Singh *et al.*, 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2007) argue women are less well equipped for and, incidentally, the other women in this research were less likely to report:

The more exposure you get across the full business has got to help in terms of getting to that executive level. Certainly the guy I work for who is called [name], he actually reports into [Chief Executive] as well as within a division function. So the exposure is fantastic. I'm getting a direct feed through my boss of what [Chief Executive] thoughts are [...]. Every day has been very much in the face of the sort of senior people [...]. If you turn up and just do your job, then that is all you'll ever do, that is what I'd say (Joanna, senior manager, aged 29).

In contrast, although she recognised that acquiring social capital was a good thing career wise, Wendy's story reveals that she does not consciously network for career purposes nor does she expect networks to facilitate a job move:

It is something that I don't do a lot of [networking]. And really none of my career moves have had anything to do with any of the external networks. Because I would say I don't network. But I do sub-consciously now. I form relationships with a lot of other retail logistics directors who I have reasonably good relationships with because we see each other all the time at different dos and things. It helped me in my career, in doing my job better because I can refer to them to understand what they are doing well, because it is all about understanding what they are doing and learning from each other type of thing. But I don't think that would actually help me in getting a job (Wendy, director, aged 40).

As Tymon and Stumpf (2003) allege, networking alone without it becoming a resource does not constitute the accumulation of social capital, and Wendy is not actively using or does not believe (owing to the male-dominated culture and operation of homophilous networks) her networks would help her get another job.

*Senior retail managers' approaches to accumulating social capital and what they used it for*

The way that networks form can be subtle and the practice of homophily can exclude women from building structural hole networks for career purposes. Various male senior managers explained how they had got their current jobs through their social capital networks. As Eagly and Carli (2007) observe, these relationships yield valuable information, access to help and resources, and career sponsorship. Their accounts additionally confirm the importance that structural hole networks outside the organisation can have for career advancement purposes (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). In both instances the managers were offered career opportunities from a network contact:

He [previous work colleague] rang me up one day and said "how do you fancy moving into systems cos I think that might be a good thing for your career and I've got a job going in [company A]" and you know "do you want to talk about it?" (Stuart, senior manager, aged 44).

My former operations director from Company X was working for Company Y [...] he had me in mind and gave me a call so I didn't even apply for that one to be honest [...] it happens a lot and I've been offered two jobs in the last couple of years from people that I used to know (Richard, senior manager, aged 36).

The narratives of the men and women regarding their approaches to and purpose of forming social capital networks suggest that a gender dimension was present. Supporting Burt's (1998) research, the men appeared to be more conscious of, comfortable and active in building their own networks (whether direct or indirect) than the women for career development purposes. Overall, unlike the women, the men talked more strategically about accumulating social capital to develop their associations with important others and to use these as a career leverage. They appeared to adopt a more active approach in the formation of structural hole networks for career development purposes than the women, and so on the whole were more instrumental in their accumulation of social capital for career development. Men, of course, are arguably better advantaged to connect with others in such ways owing to the masculine-based culture in which they work that incorporate practices of homophily. Whether it was based on his previous experience of accumulating social capital for career purposes (see above), Stuart

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was acutely aware of the importance of building networks with prominent others who might help manoeuvre his career:

At the moment I'm working for the guy that is the chief executive so I've got a window of opportunity with him to start forming a relationship with a guy which I don't have at the moment. I've also got my new boss joining shortly who's another [ex company] merchant, although not a guy I know well and I need to use him as a lever too; you know, he'll create his own network and I need to make sure I'm part of that gang sort of thing. So it's just you know, those sorts of things, fairly obvious things really. I'm not particularly sophisticated at the politics side of things but I'm reasonably okay at networking and stuff like that, it's just a question of doing those things [...] I'm reasonably tuned into it but I'm not quite at the top table with them and that's where I want to be (Stuart, senior manager, aged 44).

Stuart could be described as engaging in aspirational networking which Benschop (2009) notes is orientated towards the higher levels of the organisation, believing these contacts to be important to him career wise.

Similarly, the men were more likely than the women to acknowledge issues relating to the accumulation of social capital as acting as barriers in their career, i.e. not being known by the people who matter and trying to get into the right circle of networks. The following extract by a male director illustrates the significance of acquiring social capital for career development and how other people can influence another person's career:

I think your barriers and hindrances can be not being known by people within, personalities, politics. [...] I think networking is very, very important. I really do and I think it's important not only within an organisation, I think it's important when you're looking for employment outside the organisation. I think it's the most fruitful way of doing things [...] because it's tried and tested (Ivan, director, aged 42).

With the exception of Joanna, the other women in senior positions, despite acknowledging the importance of visibility in organisations, were less vocal in specifically highlighting their accumulation of social capital for their own career development. The women's narratives, then, talked about the formation of women only networks, and as prior research shows (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995) their *raison d'être* are often very different, and they are less influential within the organisation. Indeed, in relation to their careers, the women were more likely to talk about their networks to provide social benefits and as a mechanism for coping with a male (and hostile) dominated organisational culture rather than as a specific aid to their career development. For example, Wendy used her networks to deal with a hostile macho culture and for friendship and security:

It is very male dominated here. But there are two or three senior women and we have sort of now established our little coven as we call it. We will go out for lunch and stuff like that. And it is all about overcoming the organisational cultural things that are going on. And similarly with my old friends [from a previous retail company], it's just because I get on well with them. It's not because I want anything out of the relationship with them, just a bit of a laugh now and again [...] A classic for me is the Logistics Forum they call it. Which is about 800 logistics people on a boat. You go out and you tour for three days. And to be honest it's like 800 people, thirty women. Naturally I have formed relationships with some of the other women just because it's a bit of security really (Wendy, director, aged 40).

This kind of narrative was not expressed by any of the male senior managers in their accounts of describing their careers. However, these findings reflect other research which found women to use networking for its social support whereas men were more

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instrumentally active to use their networking to promote their careers (Ibarra, 1992; Burke *et al.*, 1995). Thus we see that the men were more likely than the women to mention using their social capital as a strategic resource to aid work-related tasks (and to help accumulate human capital) or as a means to formulate friendships that would specifically result in the enhancement of their careers (as opposed to being for their own sake or as a coping mechanism).

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### Discussion

This article has analysed retail managers' narratives about their careers in an attempt to illustrate the relevance that a social capital framework might have for understanding some of the issues involved in retail managers' career development. Like Eagly and Carli (2007) both the men and women in this research were aware of the importance of accumulating social capital, whether built or borrowed, for career development purposes. As may be expected, and in accordance with attribution theory (Heider, 1958), the respondents firmly attributed their own career success first and foremost to the acquisition of human capital. The adoption of a qualitative biographical research approach, however, enabled deeper exploration of the retail managers' careers. Analysis of the texts revealed the relative importance that the accumulation of social capital has for retail managers in their careers. From their narratives it was evident that the accumulation of human capital and social capital was inextricably linked. Corresponding to Burt's (1998) findings, some women and men had acquired social capital early on in their careers which had had a beneficial subsequent effect on their career. Their accounts suggest that they may have regarded this acquisition of social capital as serendipitous initially, but on reflection they had recognised its importance in the development of their careers, i.e. bringing lots of benefits and building their confidence, visibility and access to challenging work assignments.

However, the findings signify that gender can impact access to, and accumulation of, social capital for career development purposes. Like others (Tharenou, 1997a, b; Lin, 2001; Eagly and Carli, 2007), women do suffer an apparent deficit to men in their accumulation of social capital particularly at senior levels which can impinge on their career prospects. Once they had reached senior management status the ways and reasons women and men accumulate social capital seemingly differ and they articulate different goals for networking. Both the men and women were acting out gender appropriate behaviours. Senior men capitalise on their earlier reflections and outwardly engage in direct and indirect aspirational homophilous networking activities so as to specifically further their careers (*cf.* Stuart and Joe), whereas senior women like Wendy build expressive networks and engage in choice homophily (McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987) for social support and as a barrier against the male organisational culture. This is an important observation because owing to organisational gendering processes that provides opportunity structures that favour men, and masculine modes of behaviour may be more difficult for women to accumulate social capital for career development purposes. Although they were each building social capital when in senior-level positions the distinction was their purpose for doing so. The senior women were less likely to recount instances where they had consciously accumulated social capital for career purposes. In this respect they stay close to traditional meanings of masculinity and femininity, and remain within the boundaries of the gender order (Benschop, 2009).

Men's acceptance, socialisation and dominance in organisational management arguably makes them more comfortable, and has better prepared and enabled them to

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be more strategically minded and instrumental than the women in forming social capital networks (particularly structural hole networks) for career purposes. In contrast, women in senior management positions form a minority and their status can be under close, and often negative, scrutiny (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). Of course there are exceptions and some women like Joanna do gender differently and conform to organisational cultural norms and emulate men's behaviour from the start of their career. Joanna showed signs of instrumental networking and her social relations were a means to an end of furthering her career. In the words of Benschop (2009, p. 233), Joanna "does gender differently in her instrumental networking that values usefulness over friendly relations and business over sociability". But even when men and women manage and behave in similar ways, double standards apply and women suffer from more negative associations of acting out of character and not being sufficiently feminine when behaving agentically, while men are praised for demonstrating communal behaviours (Mavin, 2009). As a result, many women may feel the need to form networks to cope with the organisational structures as best they can (this might not have been as apparent to them earlier in their careers when they formed less of a minority). If notions of "maleness" continue to be accepted as the standard organisational norm, the "female" (and other minorities) will be cast as "the other", regarded as deviant in some way thus making acceptance and therefore progress more difficult.

### Conclusion

This article has outlined how a social capital perspective can be useful to understand the careers of female and male senior retail managers. In so doing it has contributed a better understanding of the practices of gender in accumulating and using social capital in careers. The article has brought a new dimension to understanding retail careers as prior studies have hitherto not explored this dimension. It therefore challenges assumptions that sheer hard work and the accumulation human capital alone will reap career rewards in retailing. It also contributes to the wider existing research on social capital, much of which ignores a gender analysis.

The adoption of a biographical methodological approach enabled far greater awareness of the factors attributable to career development issues than the more superficial results of a questionnaire survey, or even may be that of a structured in-depth interview. By allowing respondents to talk freely about their careers, the data emerged and were constructed in such a way that brought to the surface the role that the accumulation of social capital plays in their careers. Although it might be suppressed in other forms of methodological approaches, the biographical approach revealed that acquiring social capital is a fundamental activity in retail management. Some managers (often male) consciously worked to form such networks, while others attribute them to serendipity, particularly at the beginning of their careers. Although the intention was never to generalise about gender differences, the analyses of these texts did suggest that at senior levels women might be more likely to accumulate expressive social capital networks while men were more likely to build instrumental networks that would specifically enhance their career.

Further research is necessary to test Burt's assertion that senior women do better when they borrow networks as the evidence from the current research suggests that a more complex position, that reinforces dynamic gendering processes in organisations, is at play. Because of the gendering of organisations, the notion that women, particularly at senior levels, engage in forming expressive rather than

instrumental networks in order to “survive” in a male-dominated culture is significant and needs to be explored further. For example, it is intriguing to examine whether women’s behaviour would differ in the ways they access social capital if they were not in such a minority status at senior levels. Thus, examination of sectors where women form a majority in senior positions would be useful to develop this work further. Preliminary analysis of data collected with women retail managers at lower levels of the management hierarchy suggests that they are less aware than their female senior counterparts of the importance that accumulating social capital might contribute to their careers. This might be for a number of reasons (e.g. they have not been exposed to social capital relationships or do not yet fully realise the value these relationships can have on their careers) and needs to be explored further. Nevertheless, it is recognised that the respondents might be “doing gender” in their narratives, and therefore the construction of their accounts may not be reflecting a reality, but are tailored to construct them as men and women. The analysis of the texts did seem to suggest that men and women were acting in gender appropriate manners. As West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 136) note: “to ‘do’ gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*” [emphasis in original]. This whole area requires further research.

Collectively, a combination of issues can contribute to women and men’s differential access and accumulation of social capital. Gendered organisational structures and practices contribute to women’s legitimacy problems in organisations and continue to hinder their development, while enabling men to accumulate greater social capital, and by association human capital, thus being better qualified, prepared and confident for advancement. As McPherson *et al.* (2001, p. 415) noted people’s personal networks are homogeneous and this influences the information they receive, the attitudes they form and the interactions they experience, while ties between non-similar people dissolve at a higher rate. The data endorse that promotional activities to higher-level management positions can be insidious, and that informal organisational policies located in entrenched organisational norms and practices continue. The influence of networking and accumulation of social capital in career development is strong and unlikely to be eradicated. Therefore, at a practical level, there is a need for more gender-sensitive ways for people to acquire social capital. This requires providing opportunities for all staff within organisations to acquire social capital. More inclusive working practices are needed, and mentoring and training programmes may help in this respect. So can exposing staff via work projects and presentations to senior management. However, achieving gender-sensitive policies can be difficult as they require the breaking of established norms that have traditionally benefitted white, middle class men. Until organisations assume an inclusive culture the informal organisational processes that advantage men’s accumulation of social capital for career purposes over women’s will continue to dominate, and so perpetuate the imbalance of men and women at the apex of the management hierarchy.

### Notes

1. They are analogous to what others term “bonding” social capital (Putnam, 2000), “closed group networks” (Baker, 2000; Burt, 2001), “clique networks” (Baker, 2000) and “homophilous interactions” (Lin, 2001). Lin (2001) also classifies them as “expressive” actions, taken for their own sake.

2. These are similar to Putnam's (2000) "bridging" social capital, Baker's (2000) "open networks", Burt's "entrepreneurial networks", Granovetter's (1985) "weak ties" and Lin's (2001) "heterophilous interactions" or "instrumental actions". Burt also refers to them as "non-redundant" contacts or "structural hole contacts".
3. Each respondent currently worked full-time for a different major retail company. In total however the research represented 14 non-retail and 45 retail companies (43 of which were major UK companies and two were from Ireland). This was owing to the respondents having changed companies several times over the course of their career paths. The women were aged between 29 and 40; they were married (one was separated); only one had a partner who was not in employment; three had children (preschool and primary school age); none had other dependents and their qualifications ranged from A level (highest school qualification) to degree level (three had MBAs). The men ranged in age between 31 and 55. Apart from one, they were all married or cohabiting (one in a same sex household) and several had partners who were not in paid or full-time employment. With the exception of one all had children (of various age ranges), but did not have other dependents for whom they were caring; all were qualified to postgraduate degree level.

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**Further reading**

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