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“I’M JUST SO USED TO SEEING MEN SUCCEEDING”: GENDER INEQUALITY AND THE GLASS SLIPPER OF SUCCESS IN THE EVENTS INDUSTRY

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This mixed methods study investigated differences in men’s and women’s career success in the events industry. A “glass slipper” of success was identified that aligns more readily with some bodies/people than others. An online survey tested the extent to which this glass slipper “fits” men and women. Results illustrate that men are more successful than women on all measures, indicating that the glass slipper of success is gendered. Interviews were used to explore experiences of success (or otherwise) and to investigate the workings of the glass slipper. Women were often aware of their lack of fit, whereas men did not recognize the gendered norms that make it easier for them to have their merit acknowledged and rewarded. The gendered glass slipper contributes to ongoing gender inequality in the events industry, making it harder for women to be recognized—by themselves and others—as successful in their careers.

Key words: Career satisfaction; Events; Gender; Glass slipper; Objective career success; Subjective career success

Introduction

The global events industry was valued at \$1,135.4 billion in 2019 and, despite suffering severe setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is estimated to reach \$1,5552.9 billion by 2028, a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.2% between 2021 and 2028 (Verified Market Research, 2021). The events workforce is complex and varied,

characterized by a multitude of contracts and working arrangements, encompassing full-time, part-time, permanent, contract, freelance, casual, and volunteer roles (Mair, 2009), and spanning positions such as waiting staff, technical specialisms, and professional and managerial expertise. The events workforce has been characterized as “pulsating” (Hanlon & Cuskelly, 2002), consisting of a relatively small core of permanent staff who are

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supplemented by temporary and casual workers for the running of an event, staff who are then shed rapidly in the postevent period. This can make for a complex organizational structure and poses unique human resource management problems (Carlsson-Wall et al., 2017). It may also raise challenges for individual events professionals in establishing and maintaining a long-term, successful, and satisfying career.

In common with the wider tourism and hospitality sectors, the events industry is gendered (Costa, Bakas, Breda, Durão et al., 2017b). Although it is numerically dominated by women, who constitute approximately 70% of the industry (Dashper, 2018), men make up a disproportionately large share of those in senior positions, evidence of a glass ceiling that negatively impacts the careers of (some) women (Dashper, 2020) and a glass escalator that supports (some) men's career advancement (Williams, 2013). Although there are some industry initiatives that are trying to redress gender inequality on a small scale, such as mentoring and women's leadership programs (Dashper, 2018), this is unlikely to lead to significant change without wider measures to address structural and systemic inequality embedded in events organizations, occupations, and career pathways (Dashper, 2019). Persistent and unaddressed gender inequality is likely to affect career satisfaction and performance, potentially leading to the loss of talented individuals from an industry that does not provide them with sufficient opportunities to progress and construct a successful and meaningful career.

Career success is generally defined as the "accrued positive individual and work outcomes that are the result of employees' career decisions, behaviours and work experiences" (Zacher, 2014, p. 23). There has been limited attention paid to the idea of "a career" in the events industry, with more research focusing on casual staff and volunteers engaged in short-term and/or episodic positions (e.g., Michopoulou et al., 2020; Qi et al., 2018). However, the idea of a career, and importantly what constitutes a successful career, is important to individuals' sense of self and commitment to a profession, affecting retention, progression, and performance (Gunz & Heslin, 2005). Wider research suggests there are gender

differences in career success (Evers & Sieverding, 2014; Orser & Leck, 2010), although this has not previously been examined in the context of the events industry.

Concepts of "success" and "successful careers" are seemingly gender neutral and based on non-gender-specific criteria and attribution of merit. However, as Acker (2012) has argued persuasively, it is much easier for some groups and individuals to embody characteristics associated with success and to have their actions recognized as worthy than it is for others. The ideal worker, and particularly leader, is based on an implicit model of a white male, making it much more difficult for women, and people of color, to be recognized by both others and themselves as "successful" (Acker, 1992; Costa, Bakas, Breda, Durão et al., 2017b). In this article we draw on Ashcraft's (2013) concept of the glass slipper, which draws attention to "the ways that occupations come to appear possessed of inherent characteristics that render them a natural fit for some and a stretch, if not an impossibility, for others" (p. 16). We suggest that, in the context of the UK events industry, leadership positions represent "success" in careers and that this "glass slipper" is a much easier fit for men than women. As such, women feel less successful in their careers, as the glass slipper does not stretch easily to fit them. Drawing on Simpson and Kumra's (2016) associated concept of the Teflon effect, we explore some of the implications of misalignment with the "glass slipper" of success, as merit and associated rewards do not "stick" to the bodies of women as easily as to those of men, perpetuating gender inequality. Taken together, these two related concepts help explain the persistence of a glass ceiling in the events industry and "how a misalignment between social identity and the nature of the job may lead to persistent disadvantage" for women (Simpson & Kumra, 2016, p. 572). This article thus makes an important contribution to understanding gender inequality in the events industry by (a) identifying factors that make up the "glass slipper" of successful careers; (b) examining differences between men's and women's ability to embody these norms of success; and (c) exploring men's and women's experiences of and attitudes towards success in their own careers.

Theoretical Framework

The study of gender inequality in organizations has been advanced through a series of “glass” metaphors to help explain the persistent and insidious inequality that women and minorities face. The glass ceiling led the way, a term first coined by the *Wall Street Journal* in 1986, identifying an invisible but impenetrable series of barriers preventing women reaching senior positions. The glass cliff extended this by showing how women are more likely to reach senior positions in poorly performing organizations where there is a higher chance of failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The glass escalator metaphor was introduced to show how discrimination for some begets privilege for others, as the disproportionate success of white men in female-dominated occupations indicates (Williams, 2013).

Ashcraft (2013) noted that, while analytically useful, the glass metaphors failed to account for the embodied nature of advantage and disadvantage and the association between occupations and the people who do those jobs. Playing with the fairy-tale of Cinderella, she introduced the concept of the glass slipper that “encapsulates how occupations come to appear, by nature, possessed of central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics that make them suited to certain people and implausible for others” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 7). Ashcraft (2013) drew on Kirkham and Loft’s (1993) study of accountancy to illustrate how a profession gains or loses status in association with those who do that role. As accountancy was professionalized, it became symbolically associated with technical expertise and higher status, as more men performed the work, and dissociated from the female-dominated and low-status role of book-keeping. Ashcraft (2013) proposed “a bilateral view of the work-practitioner relation, wherein people derive identity from work and work derives identity from people” (pp. 12–13). In the case of accountancy, people (i.e., accountants) derive identity from their work as accountants (including ideas of professionalism, prestige, and status) but the profession of accountancy also derives meaning from those most associated with doing that work (i.e., white, middle-class men, and the associated attributions of power).

The glass slipper metaphor, as with other glass metaphors in management studies, draws attention

to systematic patterns of disadvantage. However, whereas the glass ceiling metaphor implies that disadvantage accrues to women and people of color *within* work and organizations (and therefore implies it is their responsibility to find ways to challenge this) the glass slipper recognizes that disadvantage in work is associated with disadvantage beyond work as embodied social identities (such as those related to gender and race) align with occupational identity in the workplace to systematically embed advantage (for those for whom the glass slipper “fits”) and disadvantage (for those for whom it does not) (Ashcraft, 2013). As with the ugly sisters of the fairy-tale, some bodies will not be able to wear the slipper convincingly, no matter how hard they try. Frequently, women’s attempts to wear the glass slipper of success and leadership do not “fit” and are not deemed credible.

Simpson and Kumra (2016) developed Ashcraft’s (2013) work, focusing on the consequences of misalignment between women and the glass slipper of leadership. They argue that women experience a “Teflon effect” “when *misalignment* occurs in that merit, on which promotion and progression decisions are often based, goes unrecognised and fails to ‘stick’ onto those who possess it” (Simpson & Kumra, 2016, p. 562). Despite women striving to achieve markers of success, “it may fail to adhere to the bodies of women in management and leadership roles” (Simpson & Kumra, 2016, p. 563). Thus, women struggle to be recognized as authentic and credible in leadership positions and success often slips away.

Taken together, the glass slipper and Teflon effect expose the gendered nature of work, occupations, and organizations (Acker, 1990). However, the dominant narrative of business is one of gender neutrality in which organizational practices, structures, and markers of success are deemed to be equally achievable by all (Kelan, 2009). It is thus very difficult for individuals to recognize the gendered workings of the glass slipper and the Teflon effect, and clear outcomes of gender inequality—such as gender pay gaps and the shortage of women in leadership positions—are attributed to women themselves (either their failure to “lean-in” or their “choice” to not combine family and career, for example) rather than gendered discrimination (Dashper, 2019; Kelan, 2009).

In this study we wanted to explore gender and ideas of career success in the events industry. Drawing on the theoretical framework outlined above we sought to identify (a) what makes up the glass slipper of success in the events industry; (b) whether there are differences between men's and women's ability to wear the glass slipper; and (c) the experiences of both alignment and misalignment with the glass slipper of success.

Identifying the Glass Slipper of Career Success in the Events Industry

According to Muskat and Mair (2020a), event organizations are complex organizational structures that operate at high speed in usually temporary and project-based structures, with a high functional and contract-based heterogeneous and highly fluctuating workforce. This may mean there is less focus on long-term strategic thinking, particularly in relation to workforce management. Work in the events industry shows many similarities with hospitality and tourism in that it is often relatively low pay, insecure, and stressful, requiring worker flexibility and mobility without reciprocal organizational benefits (Y. F. Wang, 2013). Mooney et al. (2016) suggested that hospitality work is often seen as something temporary rather than a career, and McLeod et al. (2019) noted the potential for exploitation of workers on atypical contracts in the events industry. The industry provides a unique working context (Muskat & Mair, 2020b), but this does not mean that well-established aspects of human resource management and leadership are not relevant to guiding and supporting events professionals and trying to overcome some of these challenges. Ignoring such issues contributes to problems with retention and organizations would benefit from greater efforts to demonstrate that a career in the events industry is both possible and rewarding, in order to develop and enhance talent (Scott & Revis, 2008).

However, most people want not just a career, but a successful career. Career success has been a popular topic of research for nearly a century as many people want to feel successful at work, but Heslin (2003) questioned whether we really know what we mean when we talk about "career success." Success is a very complex issue and can vary by person, but

is a central concern in Western societies where people often ask themselves: Am I successful? (Gunz & Heslin, 2005). As such, careers are integral to many people's sense of self-identity, value, and worth. Having a successful career is an important element of identity and personal fulfillment.

Within the careers literature, the concept of career success is commonly divided into two correlated but noninterchangeable constructs: objective career success (OCS) and subjective career success (SCS).

Objective Career Success

Objective career success (OCS) refers to measures that can be evaluated by an impartial third party. This usually includes pay, promotions, and level of seniority (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Hofmans et al., 2008).

There is wide evidence to illustrate the existence and persistence of a gender pay gap, with men consistently paid more than women (Boll & Lagemann, 2018; OECD, 2017). Women in tourism and hospitality tend to be in positions with lower pay and lower status than male workers (Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015). This is exacerbated by occupational segregation wherein some roles, such as housekeeping, are tainted by their association with low-status domestic work, whereas other roles, such as chefs, are transformed when they move from the domestic (low status) sphere to the public, commercial sphere of work (higher status) (Swinbank, 2002). Low status domestic positions tend to be occupied by female workers, whereas high status positions tend to be occupied by male workers (Costa, Bakas, Breda, & Durão, 2017a). A gender pay gap has been identified in the UK events industry, with women paid just 88p for every £1 men earn; this gap is even starker in relation to bonuses, where women receive just 55p for every £1 that men receive (IBTM, 2022).

Number of promotions is the second measure of OCS, taken as indicative of progression and recognition of achievement. As such, promotions play an important role in enhancing one's core sense of self. Promotions also influence managers' evaluation of an employee's potential, possibly predisposing a manager towards positive evaluations and subsequent further promotion (see Javdani & McGee, 2019). Dashper (2020) argued men are

disproportionately likely to be in senior positions in the events industry, which suggests they are more likely to have received a higher number of promotions to get there than are women.

The third measure of objective career success is level of seniority within an organizational or industry hierarchy. There is widespread evidence to show that men dominate the most senior positions in these hierarchies across a wide range of sectors, including hospitality (Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015), with the same being true of the events industry (Dashper, 2018, 2019, 2020). So-called “objective” career success measures, while appearing to be gender neutral, are thus based on implicit masculine norms which make it easier for men to embody them than women.

Subjective Career Success

Measures of subjective career success (SCS) are more about personal evaluations of one’s career, satisfaction, and comparative judgements (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Stumpf & Tymon Jr., 2012). Ng and Feldman (2014) defined SCS as “individuals’ perceptual evaluation of, and affective reactions to, their careers” (p. 170). SCS is believed to be increasingly important in relation to contemporary organizational and working contexts as responsibility for both career development and the interpretation of career success is placed on the individual worker (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017). Colakoglu (2011) suggested that “in the pursuit of highly heterogeneous and unique career paths, only individuals themselves can meaningfully define and assess their own career success with reference to self-defined standards, needs, values, career stages and aspirations” (p. 47). SCS has important organizational outcomes, including influencing job performance, commitment, and retention, so is an important consideration for individual workers and workforce planning (Herrbach & Mignonac, 2012).

Satisfaction is usually taken as one of the most important measures of SCS. Muskat and Mair (2020b) examined job satisfaction in the events industry, finding that permanent employees gain satisfaction from the challenges of the fast-paced environment, as well as opportunities for career progression. Zopiatis et al. (2018) found career satisfaction of workers within a Cyprus hotel was

related to intrinsic factors, such as the work itself, growth, recognition, and satisfaction with one’s achievements and efforts (see also Y. F. Wang, 2013). Otto et al. (2022) found that promotion had a more profound influence on satisfaction for men than women. However, S. Wang et al. (2019) found that men and women have similar career aspirations in hospitality, supporting Abele and Spurk (2009) who found no gender differences in career satisfaction, with men and women equally interested in “making a career.”

However, there is broad evidence to suggest that gender inequalities in careers become wider and more apparent with age. Evidence from US workforce analytics firm Vissier reveals that gender differences in measures such as pay and promotions are not apparent when people are in their 20s, but take hold when individuals enter their 30s, never equaling out again over the course of a career (Kiff, 2016). This finding is backed up by data from the ONS in the UK, which illustrate that the gender pay gap broadens considerably as women get older (Howlett, 2021). This is likely to affect women’s satisfaction with their success as they get older and progress through their careers.

SCS is not only an individual factor, and notions of success are normative—we compare ourselves to others (Herrbach & Mignonac, 2012). Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of other referent measures of subjective career success, with no clear gender differences identified (Herrbach & Mignonac, 2012; Hofmans et al., 2008). However, based on the measures discussed above, women will likely be considered less successful than men in their careers as markers of success fail to “stick” to them and will consequently be less satisfied with their careers in relation to their peers, who include many men.

Satisfaction is not the only measure of SCS, and Heslin (2005) argued work–life balance (WLB) is extremely important to many workers and their evaluation of their careers, although it is an issue rarely considered in the career success literature. WLB is a major issue for many women in particular, and professional women often report difficulties with balancing a demanding career and wider family responsibilities (Alok et al., 2021; Padavic et al., 2020). This is certainly the case in the events industry, given that the nature of work in the sector

often requires long and unpredictable working patterns, something that has been identified as particularly challenging for some women and a factor inhibiting women's career development (Dashper, 2013, 2020; Fast Forward 15, 2021), further compounding feelings of lack of fit and success.

Simpson and Kumra (2016) used the idea of "merit" in their development of the concept of the Teflon effect, arguing that merit is presented as an objective measure of individual ability that helps create a "level playing field" wherein everyone is rewarded based on merit, rather than other factors. However, studies of women in the professions illustrate that "merit" is not an objective and neutral measure at all and instead "operates as a rhetorical device shaped by power," based on masculine norms (Thornton, 2007, p. 391). This inherent bias is hidden, and thus women and marginalized groups who struggle to meet supposedly objective criteria are seen as failing and not evidencing the merit required to be deemed successful (and rewarded

with promotions, pay rises, and prestige) (Simpson & Kumra, 2016). OCS and SCS are widely used measures of success in the wider careers literature. In the careers literature, when gender is considered as a relevant factor it is usually as a variable and men and women are compared on the basis of OCS and SCS measures. In this study, we repositioned these measures as constituents of the "glass slipper" of successful careers in the events industry (Ashcraft, 2013), considering "success" in similar terms to Simpson and Kumra's (2016) discussion of merit (see Fig. 1).

Success (or merit) can then be identified as "a dominant form of resource allocation in Western organisations, [that] is differentially valued according to both the nature of work and the embodied social identities aligned with it, i.e., it is contingent, largely, upon the 'glass slipper fit'" (Simpson & Kumra, 2016, p. 570). Individuals who embody OCS and SCS are recognized as successful, by others and by themselves. However, not everyone will

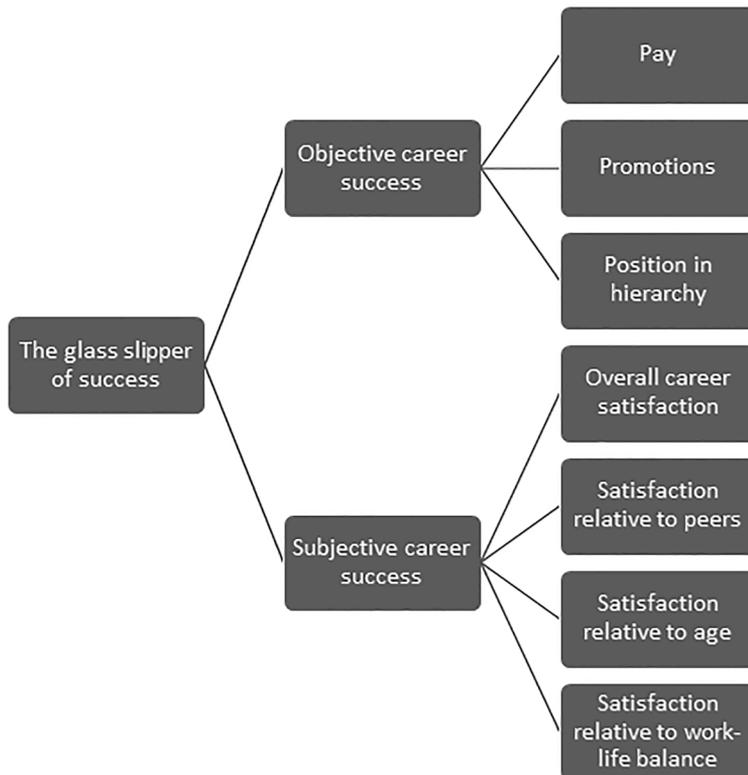


Figure 1. The glass slipper of success.

find it easy to align with this glass slipper of success, due to the ways in which certain roles (in this case leadership in the events industry) align more readily with some bodies than others. In this study we adopted a two-stage multimethod design to (a) test the extent to which the glass slipper of success “fits” men and women in the events industry; and (b) explore some of the consequences of both alignment and misalignment with the glass slipper for men and women working in the industry.

Study 1: The Glass Slipper of Success in the Events Industry: Who Does it Fit?

We adopted a two-stage sequential multimethod approach (Morse, 2003). Study 1 was designed to test the extent to which there are differences in how men and women relate to the established measures of OCS and SCS, what we identify as the glass slipper of success (see Fig. 1). A survey was appropriate for this stage of the project, following the approach commonly used by careers researchers investigating OCS and SCS. This approach provided empirical evidence about differences between men’s and women’s alignment with the glass slipper of success but offered no insight into the experiences related to those differences. Study 2, using qualitative interviews, was designed to address this gap and focus on the lived experiences of men and women in the events industry and their feelings of success, or lack thereof.

Study 1: Methodology

To examine gender differences in career success among events professionals, an online survey was created to assess both OCS and SCS. In addition to collecting demographic information related to age, gender, ethnicity, education level, geographic location, number of children, and working pattern, the survey assessed OCS through collecting data on (a) current salary; (b) number of promotions received over career to date; and (c) level of seniority in organization/events industry (self-assessed as either nonmanagement, lower management, middle management, upper management, or executive). SCS was assessed on the basis of both self- and other referent criteria, using a 7-point Likert scale, drawing on the work of Greenhaus et al. (1990),

which has been validated and widely used in previous research on career success (see Zacher, 2014). Self-referent SCS was assessed in terms of overall career satisfaction (How successful do you feel your career has been to date?). Other referent SCS was assessed in relation to age (How successful do you feel you are in your career, relative to your age?) and in relation to peers (How successful do you feel you are in your career, relative to your peers?). WLB was also assessed as a measure of SCS, as recommended by Heslin (2005) (How satisfied are you with your work–life balance?).

The survey was developed in Survey Monkey and distributed through an events industry partner. The partner organization is a global agency in the events sector with a stated commitment to addressing equality and diversity issues. An invitation to take part in the survey was sent out through the partner’s mailing list and social media platforms. The research had ethical approval from the researchers’ university and potential participants were informed of the purpose of the survey, their right to withdraw, how the data would be used, and assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Reliability of Likert scale data (measures of SCS) was examined using Cronbach’s alpha and its value was 0.747, which is higher than the threshold of 0.7, showing adequate reliability (Monteiro et al., 2022). Two nonparametric tests (i.e., Mann–Whiney *U* test, to compare differences between two groups of independent variables, and Kruskal–Wallis *H* test, to determine if there are statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable) were utilized. If difference among groups was found to be significant a pairwise comparison with Bonferroni correction was performed as a post hoc test to determine where any differences lie between groups. Analysis was performed using SPSS 26.

Study 1: Findings

A total of 632 respondents participated in the survey (although 632 respondents participated, some did not complete all questions, and these responses were not included in analysis of the relevant issue). After 24 invalid responses were removed, 608 responses were used for analysis. In total, 73.2% ($n = 437$) identified as female and 26.6% ($n = 159$)

identified as male, which is roughly comparable to wider figures for gender representation in the events industry (see Dashper, 2018). No participants identified as nonbinary.

As discussed above, OCS is made up of three measures: pay, number of promotions, and level of seniority (see Fig. 1). Table 1 shows the results of the survey in relation to all three measures. For pay, the results of the Mann–Whitney U test for salary differences show that the average salary of male participants is significantly higher than female participants ($p = 0.005$). Previous research indicates that men receive more frequent promotions than do women (Javdani & McGee, 2019). This finding was replicated in this study in relation to the events industry, as men were significantly more likely to receive a higher number of promotions than were women ($p < 0.001$). Finally, in terms of level of seniority, previous qualitative research has identified a glass ceiling whereby senior positions are disproportionately occupied by men (Dashper, 2019, 2020). This finding was replicated in the current study, which illustrated men were significantly more likely to be in higher management positions than were women ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, on all three measures of OCS—pay, promotions, and level of seniority—men were significantly more successful than women.

The second aspect of the glass slipper of success is SCS, which is made up of four measures (see Fig. 1). Table 2 shows results in relation to SCS.

Self-referent SCS is the first measure. Although previous research has shown no significant difference between men and women’s self-referent SCS (Herrbach & Mignonac, 2012), this study found that male participants were significantly more likely than women to feel satisfied with their overall career success ($p = 0.005$). The second measure of SCS is success relative to age. Findings indicate that men in this study were significantly more likely than women to feel satisfied with their level of career success in relation to their age ($p = 0.001$). The third measure of SCS is success relative to one’s peers. The findings of this study indicate that men were significantly more satisfied with their career success in relation to their peers than were women ($p = 0.002$). WLB is the final measure of SCS measured in Study 1, as recommended by Heslin (2005). Previous research suggests that issues of WLB in the events industry are gendered, with women experiencing difficulties balancing work and personal/family activities (Dashper, 2020; Fast Forward 15, 2021). This insight was confirmed in the current study, with male participants being significantly more satisfied with their WLB than were female participants ($p = 0.005$).

The women in our study were less successful than the men whether measured against supposedly objective criteria *or* in relation to their own perceptions and comparisons to others. Those measures of success are constituent parts of what it means to be

Table 1
Impact of Gender on Measures of Objective Career Success (OCS)

Measure	<i>N</i>	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Median	Test Statistics ^a
Pay				
Female	298	53689.13 (42210.152)	41666.00	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> : 11869.500
Male	98	69411.56 (52545.144)	58846.00	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> : 56420.500
Total	396	57580.04 (45429.322)	45000.00	<i>Z</i> : -2.780 Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed): 0.005
Promotions				
Female	383	3.96 (1.790)	4.00	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> : 21235.500
Male	138	4.57 (1.713)	5.00	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> : 94771.500
Total	521	4.12 (1.788)	4.00	<i>Z</i> : -3.527 Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed): 0.000
Level of seniority				
Female	389	3.15 (1.413)	3.00	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> : 17271.000
Male	140	4.06 (1.098)	4.00	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> : 93126.000
Total	529	3.39 (1.394)	4.00	<i>Z</i> : 6.597 Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed): 0.000

Note. ^aGrouping variable: Gender.

Table 2
Impact of Gender on Measures of Subjective Career Success (SCS)

Measure	<i>N</i>	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Median	Test Statistics ^a
Overall career satisfaction				
Female	382	5.76 (1.057)	6.00	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> : 22529.500
Male	139	6.05 (0.895)	6.00	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> : 95682.500
Total	521	5.84 (1.024)	6.00	<i>Z</i> : -2.816 Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed): 0.005
Career success relative to age				
Female	381	5.23 (1.486)	6.00	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> : 21671.500
Male	139	5.63 (1.440)	6.00	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> : 94442.500
Total	520	5.33 (1.483)	6.00	<i>Z</i> : -3.264 Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed): 0.001
Career success relative to one's peers				
Female	384	5.43 (1.241)	6.00	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> : 22085.000
Male	139	5.81 (1.049)	6.00	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> : 96005.000
Total	523	5.53 (1.204)	6.00	<i>Z</i> : -3.144 Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed): 0.002
Career satisfaction relative to work–life balance				
Female	382	4.74 (1.547)	5.00	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> : 22054.00
Male	137	5.12 (1.650)	5.00	Wilcoxon <i>W</i> : 95207.00
Total	519	4.84 (1.582)	5.00	<i>Z</i> : -2.793 Asymp. Sig. (two-tailed): 0.005

Note. ^aGrouping variable: Gender.

successful in contemporary organizations, part of the glass slipper of successful careers (see Fig. 1). A successful individual is one who is highly paid, whose excellent performance is rewarded through promotion, and who achieves a senior position as a visible marker of their success. The results of our study indicate that women struggle to embody these norms more than men. However, there is increasing recognition that success is not just about pay and status but also encompasses career satisfaction and the balancing of work and other aspects of life. Again, the women in our study struggle more than the men to embody these normative ideals. The glass slipper of success is, therefore, not an easy fit for many women. In Study 2, we investigated the experiences of men and women working in the events industry to try and understand more about both alignment and misalignment with the glass slipper of success in events careers (Simpson & Kumra, 2016).

Study 2: How Does it Feel to Try and Wear the Glass Slipper of Success?

Methodology

The results from Study 1 identified significant differences in men's and women's OCS and SCS,

so Study 2 involved 10 qualitative interviews with male (five) and female (five) events professionals to explore some of the reasons for and experiences of those differences.

Semistructured interviews were utilized to enable discussions to cover multiple issues and allow probing for further exploration where necessary, while also helping collect comparable responses (Smith, 2015). Questions related to the measures of success utilized in Study 1, and participants' experiences of and opinions related to gendered aspects of work in the events industry. Interviews were conducted by the second author, herself a woman with some experience of working in the industry, over Microsoft Teams. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in full for analysis.

All participants were selected due to their experiences of working in the events industry, with a minimum of 5 years and maximum 32 years, so all were able to reflect on their experiences of working in the sector (see Table 3). Eight out of 10 were in senior positions—one measure of career success. Purposive sampling was used to identify both male and female participants, who were contacted through the researchers' professional networks and snowballing techniques (Goodman, 1961). The majority of participants were White, reflecting the

Table 3
Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Level of Seniority	Length of Experience in Events	Children?	Stated Disability?	Ethnicity
Amy	Female	20–30	Middle	12 years	No	Yes	White
Beth	Female	30–40	Senior	22 years	Yes	No	White
Carl	Male	50–60	Senior	32 years	Yes	No	White
Dan	Male	50–60	Senior	16 years	Yes	Yes	White
Ethan	Male	40–50	Senior	30 years	Yes	No	White
Faith	Female	30–40	Senior	18 years	No	No	Woman of color
Georgia	Female	30–40	Senior	17 years	Yes	No	Woman of color
Harry	Male	40–50	Senior	10 years	Yes	No	White
Isaac	Male	20–30	Middle	5 years	No	No	White
Jess	Female	40–50	Senior	25 years	Yes	No	White

lack of ethnic diversity in the industry identified by Dashper and Finkel (2020). Ethical approval was granted by the researchers' institution. Table 3 provides key demographic details of participants, including pseudonyms used to protect anonymity.

Data were analyzed thematically, which enabled flexibility while also providing some structure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified through patterns and repetitions in the data, as informed by the theoretical framework outlined above.

Findings

Findings from Study 1 illustrate that not only are women less likely to be rewarded in their careers through pay, promotions, and taking on senior roles (OCS), but they also *feel* less successful and satisfied (SCS). In Study 2, we explored some of the reasons why women may feel that way, and also why men may feel closer alignment to the norms of success.

The concept of the glass slipper draws attention to the embodied aspects of work, which are often absent from theorizing on organizations and diversity (Ashcraft, 2013). As Simpson and Kumra (2016) explained:

Bodies are not just the containers of capital (skills and knowledge) and the primary source of effort—but also carry meanings that are intimately related to gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation and able-bodiedness. These meanings imply that some individuals may be seen as more “suitable” for some forms of work. (p. 564)

Women have long faced a double bind in being seen as a successful leader (Pizam, 2017)—they are deemed inauthentic or unlikable when they try to embody ideas of success, they are not seen as inherently “suitable” for leadership positions. Amy explained:

If a woman is direct and straight to the point, people will call her the B-word, but if a man is direct and straight to the point, people are like “he’s assertive, he knows what he’s talking about.”

Women often experience gendered microaggressions in their dealings with male colleagues, which reinforce this sense that they are not as valued as men in their organizations, as Faith explained:

No one’s done anything that is directly degrading or anything like that, but if I delve deeper into it and I think about the ways people have phrased things to me or things they have said, I actually do think that’s because of my gender. It’s like when men talk over me. Would do they do that to another man in the room? It doesn’t happen in the same way.

Repeated negative encounters can lead to a deterioration in women’s confidence, an issue that has previously been identified as a barrier to women’s career progression in the events industry (Dashper, 2018). For Faith, a sense that the world of senior leadership is implicitly designed for men has made her question herself and hold herself back in her career:

It’s a confidence issue, I’m just so used to seeing men succeeding and things being created for men

that I think maybe this isn't the place for me, it's like a form of self-bias, not believing that you can do it.

Beth also told us that lack of confidence was a barrier to her success, although she recognizes that this is due in large part to factors beyond her control:

It's not that you're not confident, it's the barriers society puts up that are there to make you feel unconfident.

Sometimes, in masculinist organizational settings, women's bodies can be used more explicitly to position them as outsiders to norms of success. Georgia told us about the "banter" that occurs in her team, wherein male colleagues sexualize female colleagues and reduce their value in the team to their bodies:

We had to get the contract signed and one of the guys was like, "just get your tits out and then they'll sign the contract!" and we just have to sit there and be like "ha, ha, ha!"

Georgia feels she has no choice but to go along with such "jokes," which nonetheless serve to position her (and other women) at a distance from the norms of success, highlighting her body as different and less serious and professional.

Issues of maternity/paternity and childcare were mentioned frequently by our participants as barriers to women's—but not men's—success in the events industry. The embodied realities of bearing, giving birth to, and nursing young children position women outside the norms of the ideal worker and successful events professional. For some of the men in our study this is a regrettable but inevitable consequence of organizational requirements. If women leave the workforce for several months they will get left behind, and there is little an organization can do about this, as Harry explained:

I do think that can be a hiccup in a female career. If you take 12 months out of your career, you come back, and companies move on very quickly and that's the downside. You would hope that it wouldn't happen, but the fact of life is business moves quickly. People move quickly.

For Harry, this "fact of life" is an unavoidable outcome of women's embodied realities, and not a

consequence of gendered organizations that fail to account for the needs of having and raising children as an integral aspect of employees' realities. For Harry, having children led to little career disruption as he was able to remain connected to work through his limited paternity leave and his wife took the extended career break:

I got straight back into work because my wife took 12 months. I didn't take too much paternity leave, I think I had a month off when the baby was born so I could support her, but I stayed pretty close to the business, dealt with emails and stuff like that at night time and other things when I probably shouldn't have, just to keep my hand in with the business.

Harry was aware this gave him a career advantage over his wife (and other female colleagues) but saw this as unavoidably related to bodies:

It's not had as much of an impact on my career, just because of who has the most duties to do, obviously I can't breastfeed.

In such ways women—especially when they have children—do not embody the norms of the successful worker within the supposedly gender-neutral organization; the glass slipper does not fit. Women take the career hit for this, affecting their career trajectories and success, and organizations are excused from redesigning work in ways that recognize and support women who have babies. Even when women try to embody these norms and return to work after having a baby, they struggle to be recognized as a credible employee with potential to progress. Georgia told us about a close friend who, on returning to work after maternity leave, was told by her boss:

"Your senior boss has left and although you would probably be better for the job, we're not going to do that because you've just had a baby and you wouldn't want to take on all that pressure right now." . . . So no one comes out and says we would prefer a man to do your job, but they are saying you will be penalized if you have babies.

In contrast, the men in our study did not recognize the gendered aspects of success that make it much easier for them to wear the glass slipper. Referring to a rhetoric of gender neutrality wherein

success is based on merit rather than the ability of individuals to align with organizational norms (Kelan, 2009), Carl explained:

I'm a firm believer that anybody can be good at what they do. . . . You've got to be good at your job, first and foremost, whether male or female.

Similarly, Harry stated:

I think a lot of it comes down to creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and so on and if you show those signs whether you're male or female doesn't really matter.

Such attitudes fail to recognize the gendered aspects of success in the events industry, and who can be recognized as legitimately displaying "energy" and "enthusiasm." Isaac adopted a similar view:

I try not to see gender. A colleague is a colleague.

Having always worked in teams with lots of women, Isaac explained:

I haven't noticed any explicit ways in which I've been treated differently, but I mean that may well speak to male privilege that I haven't had to notice.

This insight illustrates the ways in which those who do embody the norms of the glass slipper—in relation to success in the events industry, this is more likely to be men, as Study 1 demonstrates—often fail to notice that the slipper fits them because it is easy and comfortable, they align with and can easily embody those norms.

In contrast, women are aware of their lack of fit. Simpson and Kumra's (2016) concept of the Teflon effect illustrated the ways in which, despite their best efforts and achievements, some people struggle to embody norms of success—what we identify as the glass slipper (Ashcraft, 2013). Success fails to "stick to" many women and instead "slides off" them, like Teflon:

The events industry is what it is. It's set with the makeup that it is, so women are at this level, and men are more at this level.

Georgia's comment was made with a sense of resignation. Women struggle to be recognized as

successful—by others and by themselves—in large part because the industry is not set up to support women to achieve and excel in their careers. Following Ashcraft's (2013) analogy, women will never be able to squeeze themselves comfortably into the glass slipper of success, which seems made for men.

Conclusions and Implications

Theoretical Implications

This article makes important theoretical contributions to understandings of gender inequality and career success in the events industry. We have identified the existence of a glass slipper of success that more readily fits men than women in the events industry (Ashcraft, 2013). Drawing on the established concepts of objective career success (OCS) and subjective career success (SCS), we identified the factors that make up this glass slipper (Fig. 1). In Study 1 we investigated whether this glass slipper "fits" men and/or women in the events industry. The results of Study 1 could be interpreted as evidence that women are underperforming in their careers in the events industry in relation to men. Men are more successful on all measures, objective and subjective. However, when viewed through the lens of the glass slipper it is the measures of success themselves that become problematic, based as they are on an implicit masculinized model of success that aligns more readily with male bodies and identities than female bodies and identities. That the women in our study were less satisfied with their careers than men on all measures examined—overall, relative to age, relative to peers, and relative to work–life balance—suggests that women are very aware of this lack of fit and feel dissatisfaction with their own inabilities to embody supposedly gender-neutral norms of success. It is not that the women in our study are not performing well in their careers in many ways, but the lower satisfaction reported in relation to measures of SCS suggests that they are struggling to recognize themselves as successful, indicative of the Teflon effect in action (Simpson & Kumra, 2016). Recognized markers of success, as well as a sense of being successful in one's career, slide off women and more easily "stick to and are absorbed into the bodies of men" (Simpson &

Kumra, 2016, p. 570). It is thus easier for men to be recognized—by others and by themselves—as successful in their careers in the events industry.

Therefore, we argue that notions and markers of “success” cannot be accepted as gender neutral and are instead based on implicit masculine norms that “stick” more easily to men than women (Simpson & Kumra, 2016). As Ashcraft (2013) has argued, the alignment of some bodies (in this case, male bodies) with certain roles and ideas of success is not a natural but a manufactured fit. Women often struggle more than men to embody norms of success, whether they be externally validated markers, like level of seniority, or individual feelings of satisfaction. Women often struggle to assert their expertise and credibility in gendered organizational settings (Williams et al., 2012). Women’s difficulties in embodying the glass slipper of success in the events industry are shrouded in a rhetoric of gender neutrality wherein this lack of fit becomes a problem of individual women, rather than the gendered norms of successful careers (Dashper, 2019; Kelan, 2009). As the findings in Study 2 illustrate, this leads to women feeling demoralized and out of place in their careers. In contrast, men often fail to recognize the gendered workings of the glass slipper precisely because it does fit them so easily. This contributes to ongoing gender inequality in the events workplace as men attribute their success to their own merit, judged on supposedly gender-neutral measures, and women’s failure to embody success as readily is recast as their individual failings, rather than the impossibility of the glass slipper of success easily fitting due to gendered norms and practices.

This study thus illustrates the value of critical gender analysis of careers and ideas of success in the events industry. Our application of the concepts of the glass slipper (Ashcraft, 2013) and the Teflon effect (Simpson & Kumra, 2016) to supposedly gender-neutral concepts of career success shows them to be anything but gender neutral and helps explain ongoing and persistent gender inequality in the events industry. The glass slipper metaphor “captures the difficulty of fitting or faking when the identity of work was made against you, or at least not for you” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 16). It thus helps explain the persistence of the glass ceiling in and beyond the events industry, despite efforts to redress it. Gender pay gaps remain, men continue

to be disproportionately represented in senior positions, and women struggle with work–life balance, self-confidence, and satisfaction in their careers (Dashper, 2018; IBTM, 2022) as norms of “success” and markers of “merit” are based on implicit masculine norms that are very difficult for many women to embody. In contrast, men fail to recognize the ease with which they align with the glass slipper of success, which was made to fit them (e.g., through being associated with bodies that do not need to take extended leave for childbearing), instead claiming that gender does not matter. The glass slipper thus provides the conceptual tools to expose these gendered workings of organizational practice that otherwise remain invisible and thus unchallenged.

This study responds to Mooney’s (2020) call to expand the theoretical bases on which gender research in hospitality and tourism (and events) is based and is the first to apply the concepts of the glass slipper (Ashcraft, 2013) and the Teflon effect (Simpson & Kumra, 2016) to work in these sectors. As such it marks an initial attempt to adopt a more embodied approach to inequality in work and leadership, but it is based on a limited sample and applied only to men and women in the UK events industry and requires further empirical investigation in this and other contexts. Gender is not the only axis of power that shapes work identities and identities of work. Future research could usefully develop Ashcraft’s (2013) call for more intersectional analysis of embodied workplace inequalities. The glass slipper could be expanded to investigate the ways in which other axes of domination (Collins, 2005), whether they be race, class, age, or disability, also contribute to the glass slipper of success, making it more difficult for certain bodies and identities to be accepted and celebrated within the industry.

Practical Implications

The findings of our study have implications for HR managers, line managers, and those charged with improving organizational diversity. So-called objective measures of success, which are frequently used in recruitment, promotions, and performance reviews, require reassessment to recognize the ways in which recognition of what and who is considered successful is gendered, implicitly advantaging

(white) men and disadvantaging women. Without such a reassessment, gendered differences in both objective and subjective success as identified in this study will remain unexamined and unacknowledged, positioning women as less successful in their careers while failing to identify the underlying causes for that misalignment with the gendered norms of success that make up the glass slipper.

The events industry is often presented as a feminized context that provides a sector in which women have potential to excel in their careers (Minnecci, 2019). The findings from this study suggest that this is not the reality for many female event professionals. This should be a cause for concern for managers and employers as it may contribute to low motivation, low commitment, and poor performance, ultimately affecting retention and leading to the loss of talent from an organization and even a whole industry. Consequently, addressing the gendered success gap that the findings of this study have identified should be a pressing concern for the future of the events industry, particularly as an attractive career option for women.

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