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"This boys club world is finally getting to me": Developing our glass consciousness to understand women's experiences in elite architecture firms

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Abstract

In this article, we take inspiration from the evolution of the material use of glass to explore how the metaphorical use of glass could be developed to understand the emerging struggles of women in architecture. Drawing on semi-structured interviews of architects employed in professional service firms, we suggest that the multi-faceted nature of glass helped us to identify and understand the complex experiences of inequality for women in architecture. In so doing, we make three contributions to scholarship on gender, work, and organizations. First, we demonstrate how glass barriers were truly material in their consequences for senior women, as they prevented their rise or initiated their decline. A focus on glass barriers, however, did not fully account for the experiences of younger women in these firms. Surprisingly, and in stark contrast to the "boys club world" that left many senior women in architecture with a fractured sense of self as they struggled to construct self-affirming identities as both women and architects, we found that the exclusive use of new technologies enabled younger women architects to melt some aspects of the traditional identity and turn them into new forms. Our conceptualization of "technologies of glass" draws attention to the social, cultural, and technological resources that younger women deploy

to construct a strong professional identity in the changing world of architecture. We argue that glass can be understood not just as a constraint but as a multifaceted material with limitless possibilities for design. Thus, by highlighting the material-symbolic entanglements of the *use* of glass, we strengthen and refresh the metaphor of glass, to better understand the fluidity of contemporary challenges facing professional women at work.

1 | INTRODUCTION

For our study of women's professional identity in elite architecture firms, glass seemed like the perfect conceptual material to understand their experiences. This is because glass has become a common metaphor in management and organization studies (MOS) that captures the "subtle power processes and outcomes related to social identities like gender and race" in the workplace (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 15). Metaphors such as the glass ceiling, glass slipper, glass cliff, glass borders, and glass escalator have been frequently used to understand the different kinds of challenges women face in the workplace. Importantly, the nature of glass as a transparent material draws attention to the *invisiblized* challenges that women experience. Even workplaces, such as professional service firms (PSFs), which give the impression of a "level playing field" (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008, p. S66), are, in reality, replete with subtle barriers which preclude women's equitable achievement. For instance, women employed in PSFs are most likely to leave their workplaces because of demands for long working hours in a highly competitive environment (Fowler & Wilson, 2004), which conflict with unpaid care work obligations (Wallace, 2009). In these contexts, the conflict between paid and unpaid labor is a glass barrier: subtle, almost invisible, which nevertheless shapes women's careers.

The materiality of glass has always fascinated architects. The transformation of sand into a light and beautiful material offers manifold imaginative possibilities for design. Yet, at the same time, the material was challenging to use because of its fragility. Advancements in engineering have enabled the use of glass in ways that were never thought possible. Nowadays, glass has become a powerful material that can be made opaque or translucent, bullet-proof, shatter-proof, toughened or reinforced, laminated or decorative, thick or thin. As the technologies of manufacturing glass altered, so did the "prevailing social and cultural symbolisms and metaphors associated with glass" (Ishida, 2020, p. 2). Accordingly, architects have been reimagining the use of glass "both materially and metaphysically" (ibid). This reimagining of glass emerges within a context of political, socio-economic, and cultural complexity (Elkadi, 2006). In short, the use of glass architecturally has become increasingly technologically advanced while also evolving in symbolic complexity.

In this article, we take inspiration from the evolving material use of glass to explore how the metaphorical use of glass could be developed to understand the emerging struggles of women in architecture. We focus on the "discursive struggles" of these women to help us "focus attention on the multiple and multi-faceted discursive dialectics" that were part of the constitution of a professional sense of self (Laine & Vaara, 2007, p. 36; Olsson & Walker, 2004). As the extant literature on the glass barriers in the workforce suggests, professional women face ongoing challenges in their careers and struggle to feel self-affirmation even when they meet the traditional markers of "success", such as holding a leadership position (e.g., Bolton & Muzio, 2007). In the medical profession, for instance, research suggests

that high-prestige specialties such as surgery are "described as macho, action-oriented, physical, and technologically sophisticated"; whereas, lower-prestige specialties such as pediatrics and family medicine are described as "passive, less physical, and affective" (Hinze, 1999, p. 218). These studies highlight that even in traditionally high-status professions such as law and medicine, the combination of symbolic and material dimensions affects the ability of women to overcome *intraocccupational* work and identity inequalities.

This article begins by exploring the literature on gender and professional identity in relation to architecture. We then discuss the variety of ways glass has been used to understand the challenges women face in settings like professional service firms. After mapping the current landscape, we turn to glass as an architectural material to expand our conceptual understanding of glass as a metaphor. Grounded in an empirical study of women architects employed in large, multidisciplinary professional service firms in Australia, we suggest that the dramatic increase in the use of digital technology in architectural work offers women novel social and material resources to navigate intraoccupational work and identity inequalities. As Leonardi and Barley (2008) explain, the materiality of new technologies often changes the nature of work itself, offering affordances that challenge extant work practices and social relations such that workers interact with colleagues in new ways. It is of note, however, that new technologies may also allow for the replication of role relationships and power dynamics (Gupta, 2015; Leonardi et al., 2019).

Our empirical study explores the experiences of women in architecture through extant metaphors of glass. By demonstrating how glass barriers are truly material in their consequences, the study highlights the material-symbolic entanglements of the *use* of glass. Specifically, the "boys club" work culture in architecture described by women in senior positions left many feeling the negative connotations of being a "female" architect expressed in accounts such as, "[t]his boys club world is finally getting to me". These findings highlight the naturalized and often subtle and unintentional gendering in organizations (Benschop et al., 2012). In stark contrast, however, we found that the exclusive use of new technologies enabled younger women architects to melt some aspects of their traditional identity and form them into a strong, positive sense of self in the new world of architecture. In light of these surprising findings, we suggest that the rapid uptake of digital technologies in architecture offered women novel social and technological resources to navigate intraoccupational work and identity inequalities. We conceptualize our findings as "technologies of glass" and argue that glass can be understood not just as a constraint, but as a multifaceted material with limitless possibilities for design, thus refreshing the metaphor of glass itself, as we look to better understand the fluidity of contemporary challenges facing women in the workplace.

2 | ARCHITECTURE, GENDER, AND PROFESSIONS

Historically, women were excluded from entry into architecture "for their own good" (Anthony, 2001, 55). While other elite professions such as law and medicine have undergone significant changes in their gender composition (Fowler & Wilson, 2004), women's influence on architectural design, theory, and policy remains significantly constrained when compared with other professions (Roan & Whitehouse, 2014). In a 2018 article, the New York Times exposed a major disparity between architecture graduates (nearly half of all graduates are women) and the number of women who continue to work in the industry (Arieff, 2018). The article highlights that the number of women radically decreases as they progress in their career toward more senior positions and prestigious honors; a classic example of the glass ceiling and glass cliff. Indeed, many of the traditional exclusionary norms in the profession of architecture are perpetuated even as the organizational and professional environments continue to shift. Caven et al. (2012), for instance, suggest that there is an "apathy [in] the wider architectural community when it comes to promoting the inclusion of women" even in these new dynamic and fluid contexts. Architecture, in short, continues to be conceived as "the gentleman's profession" (Cuff, 2014; Heynen, 2012), and women are repeatedly excluded through subtle processes and have their experiences invisibilized (Stead, 2014).

Despite the static gender disparities, architecture as a profession has been anything but stationary. In an increasingly technologically driven, interconnected, and multifaceted context, architectural practice continues to evolve.

The key to these shifts in the social dimensions of architecture has been the dramatic increase in the use of digital technology. In fact, digital design software has become central to architectural work. Architects must now be able to offer clients virtual presentations of design using Computer Generated Images (CGI) and use 3D modeling to more fully design interiors and account for how external forces will affect a building. Recent research mapping these changes underscores that technological advances are changing the distinctive characteristics of PSFs (Susskind & Susskind, 2015) by promoting new practices (Kronblad, 2020) and generating new business models by transforming their competitive contexts (Armour & Sako, 2020). Yet, the impact of changing practices on professional identities remains poorly understood (Ahuja, 2022).

The academic literature on gender and professionalism offers a solid foundation to understand the stubborn gender disparities in architecture. PSFs generally (e.g., accounting, engineering, legal, and architecture firms) have a long history of male domination in which women find it difficult to "identify and negotiate the ephemeral nature of professional demeanor" (Haynes, 2012, p. 502). The informal networking between men based on a taken-for-granted shared narratives (of work, sport, alcohol, cars, sex, and so on) that unite men and exclude women are encapsulated in the metaphor of the "boys club". The significance of the boys club phenomenon in supporting hegemonic masculinity through shared discourses and practices that are dissembled as harmless social interactions has been explored in a range of professional settings, including surgery (Bruce et al., 2015), international policing (Hassan & Hufnagel, 2018), pilots (Foley et al., 2020), and academia (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014). In these contexts, women continue to rely on their own social and cultural capital to navigate the boys club because there are few structural interventions that have actually succeeded in dismantling the boys club culture (Bridges et al., 2022; Tomlinson et al., 2018).

Accordingly, scholars have long maintained that women have difficulty in constructing both a "professional self and being perceived as professional by others in traditionally masculine contexts" (Trethewey, 1999, pp. 425–426) as the "pervasive culture and embodied identity of PFSs … remains inherently masculine" (Haynes, 2012). As Tomlinson et al. (2013, p. 264) highlight, women use a variety of discursive strategies to grapple with gendered organizational practices, such as "assimilation, compromise, playing the game, reforming the system, location/relocation, and withdrawal". In a male-dominated environment, women also use strategies that emphasize their difference (Gupta, 2015; Thomas & Davies, 2005; Watts, 2009). However, despite these variegated discursive strategies, women still frequently feel conflicted about their professional identity and are subject to gender discrimination.

Notably, discursive struggles are intertwined with and reinforced by material struggles and are also unevenly distributed among women. Other dimensions of identity, such as race, disability, or class, further shape the experience of women at work and can compound inequality (Acker, 2009). Together, discursive and material struggles form the workplace practices and cultural norms that underpin workplace gender inequality. Accordingly, scholars have developed a rich variety of ways of conceptualizing how these inequalities are integrated into the workplace. We turn to one of these now. We turn to glass.

3 | GLASS: AN ARCHITECTURAL AND CONCEPTUAL MATERIAL

Glass is an extraordinary substance. Although glass has been used since antiquity, it is through successive technological innovations that glass has become a common material used in everyday life (Rasmussen, 2012). From its humble beginnings, glass is now a multifunctional material that combines limitless design possibilities with high-performance, such as digitally printed safety glass (Wigginton, 2002). The evolving architectural use of glass is intertwined with an evolving symbolic meaning of the material. Armstrong (2008, p. 1) writes that the "gleam and luster of glass surfaces, reflecting and refracting the world", which grew so ubiquitous in Victorian London "created a new glass consciousness and a language of transparency". Although our "glass consciousness" has shifted throughout its history and between cultures (Wigginton, 2002), there has been an enduring symbolic link between glass and transparency, reflection, and utopia (Eskilson, 2018). These meanings, however, have a dual nature. As (Elkadi, 2006, p. 48) explains: "while glass seemingly provides a wider transparency and a social transformation, it actually denies any real interaction". Glass,

then, is a barrier. Our senses—sound, smell, and touch—are obfuscated. Our view of the world is distorted. Our search for a glittering utopia is always just out of reach.

Glass has been an extremely influential metaphor for understanding the challenges women face in their professional careers. Glass entered the MOS language with the concept of "the glass ceiling". The term was coined by Marilyn Loden at a panel over 4 decades ago (Vargas, 2018) and has been widely used in academic discussions of gender, inequality, and work since the late 1980s (Morrison et al., 1987). Loden's use of the glass ceiling aimed to counter the mainstream perception that women's individual self-image (the panel was called Mirror, Mirror on the Wall—a noteworthy variation in our glass consciousness) was primarily to blame for a lack of women in senior and leadership positions. Her use of the term drew on important symbolic meanings of glass: *transparency*, which allows us to feel a connection to the other side, and yet an invisibilised *barrier* between the viewer and that world. Importantly, the glass ceiling emphasizes the symbolic connection between glass and social status, encapsulating the "discrimination against women [which] lingers in a plethora of work practices and cultural norms that only appear unbiased. They are common and mundane—and woven into the fabric of an organization's status quo" (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000, p. 128). This language of misleading transparency allows scholars and practitioners alike to put words to the experience of seeing a career pathway for women but being somehow precluded from advancing. The concept of the glass ceiling is still widely used by academics and industry today and has been used across a wide variety of professional contexts, including management (Powell & Butterfield, 1994), accounting (Cohen et al., 2020), engineering (Cardador, 2017; Faulkner, 2000), academia (Clavero & Galligan, 2021), and law (Ballakrishnan, 2017; Maunganidze & Bonnin, 2021; Tomlinson et al., 2013).

Other glass metaphors offer insight into gender inequality in the workplace. The glass cliff, for instance, describes the phenomenon that women are more likely to be chosen for leadership positions associated with deteriorating performance and thus face greater risks of failure than their male counterparts (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Women are assumed to have "less to lose and more to gain" than men in the same position (Ashby et al., 2007, p. 789). Taking a similar focus on transition to leadership positions, the metaphor of the glass escalator was used by Williams (1992) to refer to the phenomenon whereby men in female-dominated professions progress quickly into managerial positions. As a stark contrast, women in male-dominated professions often ride the escalator to the glass cliff or to yet another glass ceiling. Cardador (2017) suggests that women in engineering ride the glass escalator to managerial roles with negative professional identity consequences, as the "feminine" traits associated with managerial roles are seen as less valuable in that profession. Moreover, glass borders shape how women's careers play out internationally (Kirk, 2019) and the glass mirror continues to be utilized to conceptualize how women supposedly discourage themselves or self-impose barriers on their careers (Cohen et al., 2020). In this way, across the professions and along career paths, our glass consciousness offers nuanced insight into gender inequality in the workplace.

The metaphor of the glass slipper provides a window into gendered occupational differences and the gendered social practices that shape the labor market, not just individual careers. For Ashcraft (2013, p. 7), the glass slipper "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". For example, researchers suggest that actual engineering work is a lot less gendered than common social depictions, which emphasize engineering as highly technical and labor-intensive work (Faulkner, 2000). Accordingly, the gendered identity of engineering work impacts men and women's identification with the profession (Ashcraft, 2013). Like the glass ceiling and the glass cliff, the glass slipper draws attention to the invisibilized social and organizational practices that shape gendered experiences in the workplace. The glass slipper, however, points to the holistic gendering of work rather than as a singular barrier related to career "stages". For Martin (1996, p. 189), people are "gendered through the discursive, relational, and material dynamics and arrangements of organizations". In other words, the "doing of gender" is seen as a gendering activity through which people make strategic assertions about their gender status, identity, characteristics, rights, and privileges (Martin, 1996, p. 190; Kantola, 2008).

Although the metaphors of the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, and the glass escalator provide valuable insight into elements of inequality in the workplace, these metaphors fail to capture the interconnections between various forms

of inequality that are central to the concept of the glass slipper. Joan Acker (2009, p. 4), for instance, has critiqued the metaphor of the glass ceiling, pointing out that the metaphor "implies orderly upward progression that is then rudely obstructed by an invisible barrier". Yet, gender inequality is built into the structure of work itself, and women do not experience the glass barriers as a homogenous group (Acker, 2009). The composition and impact of glass barriers vary *between* women. Common conceptualizations of the glass ceiling focus on the experiences of white, middle-class, cis-women at the expense of gender minorities, women of color, and working-class women (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). In other words, our identities significantly shape our experiences of the workplace as much as the architecture of inequality is itself embedded in professions.

Building on these discussions, we suggest that our focus on glass helps us to "see" more clearly the material-symbolic entanglements, that is, the glitter and allure of glass, both materially and metaphorically, obscure the socially constricted gender roles that underpin career choice. We see this as a "false impression of transparency and inclusiveness" (Elkadi, 2006, p. 49) that glass structures offer. We argue that to understand the experiences of women more deeply, our glass consciousness must expand to account for the ubiquity yet diversity of inequality throughout professional life.

From this basis, we explore the relevance of these differing uses of glass to women architects in a context characterized by technical and cultural flux. We parallel the use of glass in architecture with the use of glass as a conceptual tool to understand the contemporary challenges that women architects face. Accordingly, we offer a new conceptualization of the "technologies of glass" thus evolving our glass consciousness for understanding professional identities differently in rapidly changing organizational/professional contexts.

4 | INSIDE ELITE ARCHITECTURE FIRMS: METHODOLOGY

This study draws on data from 46 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women and 28 men in architecture. The interviews were conducted during a broader ethnographic study of four multidisciplinary professional service firms, over an 18-month period between July 2015 and December 2016, in Sydney, Australia. The first author collected all the data for this study. As an architect, she had relatively easy access to the firms and "the obvious advantage of opportunistic sampling" (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p. 339). To counterbalance the methodological dangers of losing objectivity and "going native", the second researcher represents the "outsider" who does not share the worldview of the subjects. The interviews took place at the interviewee's place of work and ranged in length from 30 to 90 min. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. On average, each interview transcript had a length of 7000–9000 words. The observations allowed us to witness naturally occurring practices rather than relying only on participant accounts via interviews (Galea et al., 2020; Watson, 2008). Our approach included observations of events, such as new employee inductions, leadership training, and gender equity-specific events, on-site observations, and interviews. A wide range of architects with different roles and professional experience were interviewed, including directors (leadership team), project architects, and associates (mid-career architects), as well as junior architects and recent graduates. It is of note, however, that although the project studied the experiences of architects working in PSFs, the experiences of female architects stood out as pivotal. This article focuses on the experiences of women because there were striking differences between experiences of men and women when it came to discursively constructing their professional identity (Olsson & Walker, 2004) and accounts of their career progression.

These marked differences are surprising because all of these firms are considered prestigious workplaces that have an elite identity, attracting ambitious employees (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 190; Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). Although these firms are multidisciplinary—that is, their professional services encompass the disciplines of architecture, urban design, interior design, and landscape architecture—architecture was the dominant profession, generating reputational capital and most of the fee earnings. As a result, architects were positioned as the power center of the firm "with well-established norms, routines, and stronger socialization practices" (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016, p. 23). Three of these firms have been established for over 50 years, winning numerous national and international architecture

awards. One firm is a relative newcomer to the market. Each firm employs around 500 to 900 staff globally. It is of note, however, that across all four firms there remains a dearth of women in senior positions, such that only one firm had a female director at the time of this study.

The interview data presented in this paper covered a spectrum of architects that ranged in professional tenure from 1 to 40 years, all of whom were engaged in large-scale construction projects. The recruitment of research participants was in part through personal recommendations and in part by "snowballing" from existing interviewees. The aim was to account for a range of experiences and views among the architects. All the respondents interviewed volunteered to participate; surprisingly, unexpected numbers responded positively to being interviewed. All respondents were asked to provide accounts of their work as well as their experiences and interpretations of interactions with other members of their organization. This is because, "perceptions and interpretations are key to understanding gendering dynamics" (Jeanes et al., 2011, p. xvi). The open-ended nature of conversations gave these architects opportunities to reflect on how interactions with others affected them and specifically, how they perceived themselves (identity) in a professional context dominated by men.

The interviews were analyzed as "ongoing conversations respondents have with the researcher... in which they are encouraged to tell stories, to describe situations encountered" because "how narrators accomplish their situated stories conveys a great deal about the presentation of the self" (Lalonde & Gilbert, 2016, p. 637). Taking a discursive approach to understanding identity in the workplace (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004; Brown 2017), we focused on the ways in which women negotiated their identity in relation to gender, architecture, and glass. We used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data in which the bulk of the theorizing is tied to the emergent findings (Charmaz, 2006). The first step began with "open coding". For example, the data were broken into discrete incidents, self-views, roles, and/or events and given a name or a "code", for example, "I was lucky to have a mentor" (F2, woman associate, 6 years' experience), "I was told I was a people person" (F1 woman architect, 4 years' experience), "I love 3-D" (F2 woman graduate 3 years' experience). In the second step, the open codes were abstracted into higher level codes, for instance, "positioning success as luck", "uphill battles", "technological mastery", and so on. In the third step, we explored the relationship between the emerging themes and our glass consciousness. The existing glass metaphors in the literature were examined alongside the broader material and symbolic uses of glass. The third step involved attempting to understand the ways in which interactions, or "discursive struggles" (Laine & Vaara, 2007, p. 36), shaped women's professional identity in professional service firms.

5 | GLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND DISCURSIVE STRUGGLES OF WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

In this section, we begin by exploring the participants' accounts of their interactions, work, and identity. Drawing on the various glass metaphors used in MOS, first, we discuss the experiences of gender inequality for senior women. These metaphors give insight into the constraints facing women and the continued challenges for women even when they break through the glass barriers. Notably, our findings demonstrate how glass barriers are truly material in their consequences because, despite being in senior positions in elite PSFs, women struggled with the "boys club" culture to construct self-affirming identities as both women and architects.

We then turn to the "technologies of glass" in order to understand the experiences of younger women, thus highlighting the generational shift in how glass barriers are experienced and how younger women navigate this complex, fluid world. We focus quite literally on the materiality of technology (the use of computational design and CGI) to demonstrate how the evolving social and cultural meanings of the profession of architecture are interconnected with the transformation of the practices and business models. By expanding our glass consciousness through a focus on the "technologies of glass", we account for how inequality is simultaneously embedded and unsettled as the profession of architecture continues to evolve, thus refreshing and strengthening the metaphor of glass.

6 | GLASS BARRIERS IN ARCHITECTURE

Many of the typical glass structures existed for our participants in elite architecture firms. For instance, there were significantly fewer women in senior positions, signaling a glass ceiling. Those that rose to senior positions were frequently invisibilized, sidelined, or pushed off the metaphorical glass cliff. Although some characteristics of the profession seemed to "fit" women, evoking the metaphor of the glass slipper, many aspects of the work favored men. Women consistently felt like outsiders, such that any success was attributed to "luck", akin to looking at a glass mirror. The structures of inequality emerged from common foundations as women gave accounts of—the lack of support and resources, the negative connotations of being a "female" architect, and their difficulties of becoming a part of the long-standing "boys club". Even when women smashed these glass barriers by progressing to senior positions, they continued to face constraints that were experienced as negative identity consequences. Although women did derive a sense of professional satisfaction from their work, the weight of the invisible barriers was constant.

All participants reported a great deal of personal satisfaction from seeing their designs built in comments such as, "Did you see this? … it opened last week, yeah", "hey [this design] won the XX award last month". Being associated with a "highly visible" public projects was perceived as rewarding and frequently cited as the main reason these women chose to work for these high profile PSFs. One architect who specialized in residential projects spoke of how "making a contribution to society" through their projects gave her a great deal of pride: "It's worth all that pain, the heartache… once you see the project completed". Participants talked about feeling privileged to work in prestigious firms that were linked to "excellent designs", "highly visible", and "award winning projects" and saw their employment as an opportunity for creative freedom, a degree of altruism, and proximity to fame.

Although there were manifold positive associations with architecture, women simultaneously referred to themselves as "survivors". Women frequently described their careers as an "uphill battles" in which they were "constantly having to prove [themselves]". One senior architect described her long experience as an "outsider':

> this boys club world is finally getting to me…I am so tired…I've been here [in this firm] nearly 12 years and I still feel very much an outsider (F3, woman director, 35 years' experience).

For these women, the "boys club" work culture in architecture was incongruent with demands of family and social life. Many of our respondents faced a lack of support and resources as they progressed through their careers:

> I just hang out with people from work…well when you're working 10–12 hours a day there just isn't other time (F2, woman architect, 8 years' experience)

For participants, impossibly tight project timelines led to long working hours and constant mental pressure. Many participants spoke at length about how difficult their work was because of the urgent demands of multiple stakeholders, which needed to be resolved immediately:

> The pressure can be insane…we're still designing […] and they're building it's so fast [construction] just keeping one step ahead …is just crazy there no time to think…just do it! is all you can do [laughs] (F4, woman project architect, 15 years' experience)

The fast pace of the work for "crucial" projects proved to be a barrier for many women who were unable to dedicate long hours due to other, usually familial, obligations, which were problematic not just for the women concerned but also their male colleagues:

> It's impossible to keep everything on track when [name, senior associate] only comes in [to office] 3 days a week. Things are moving so fast [on the project] and we're [team] really feeling the heat. I know

> [name, senior associate] struggles with this as well, she has to respond urgently…you know we [team] can deal with RFIs [Requests for Information from contractors or sub-contractors] but changes [to design] need to get her go ahead (F3, male associate, 12 years' experience).

In other words, for women who chose to work part time, the juggle of work and familial duties was a constant "uphill battle". As Galea et al. (2020) have noted there is a continued dominance of a masculine workplace culture that emphasizes long hours and "presenteeism". Many respondents identified a lack of support from men in leadership positions coupled with a lack of women in senior positions resulting in a dearth of mentors.

Perhaps most significantly, these "uphill battles" continued even after women had shattered the glass ceiling and progressed to senior positions. For example, women who had reached senior positions were frequently, negatively positioned as "tough", "aggressive", "difficult", or "divas" or as ruthlessly individualistic "pile drivers", who were so focused on their own career success that there was little time, patience, or interest in mentoring other women. In contrast, men had no difficulty in attributing their success to their "tough" or "aggressive approach". One participant proudly claimed that "it was sheer bull-headedness and hard work on my part that has got me here" (F4, male senior associate, 12 years' experience) and another: "it's very competitive [in this firm] so if you're gonna make it you gotta put in the hard yards… it's the projects you pick, you gotta get noticed" (F1, male associate, 8 years' experience). In contrast, the fear of being attributed the "diva" identity became a constraint for women. One participant, for instance, had their work appropriated by a male counterpart without acknowledgment but she "kinda put up with it… [as she didn't] wanna be known as the she-devil around here!" (F4, male senior associate, 20 years' experience). In other words, there were such negative connotations connected with being a "tough" woman that respondents would forgo their claim to achievements and therefore leadership roles.

The interviews revealed that women in senior positions were judged by different professional standards and were caught in the "too soft" or "too hard" double bind. Holding onto a senior position was often achieved by invisibilizing the gendered dimensions of identity as an architect. As one senior associate carefully articulated:

> I want to be known as a good architect …not a good *female* architect (F2, woman senior associate, 26 years' experience).

Moreover, women in senior positions frequently doubted their abilities because of the way their success was viewed by others. For example, this architect who had recently been promoted to associate, expressed her self-doubt:

> A lot of people [men] have their noses out of joint because I made associate and I've only been here [in the firm] 5 years… others have been here ages [20 years] and not made associate… it's been really difficult navigating that…I feel lucky I guess (F1, woman associate, 8 years' experience).

That term "lucky" came up multiple times as women described their achievements. For instance, another young woman who had likewise recently been made associate stated: "I'm just lucky… I had a really great mentor who helped me promote myself" (F2, woman associate, 6 years' experience). Women faced negative identity consequences if they laid claim to their achievements, but the alternative involved invisibilizing their role in their success. These feelings of inadequacy continued throughout the careers of participants.

In this way, glass barriers were truly material in their consequences for senior women in architecture as they prevented their rise and/or initiated their decline. As Acker (2009) argues, the careers of these women were not rudely interrupted by a barrier, but constantly shaped by a regime of inequality. Here, our focus on glass helps us also to "see" that there is no clear "beyond" the glass ceiling or a profession that neatly "fits" women, just multiple, evolving glass barriers.

7 | TECHNOLOGY AND GLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Glass as a barrier, however, was only part of the complex dialog between women, equality, and professional identity. For younger women entering the PSFs, social and technological resources derived from working with digital technology altered the symbolic and material impacts of glass barriers. Although the glass barriers outlined in the previous section continued to impact women no matter their level of seniority or experience, younger women working with digital technology were simultaneously reforming elements of inequality. In this section, we focus on the voices of those drawing on technology as a major resource to construct their professional identity and build alternative professional pathways.

Computational design teams have become increasingly crucial in the PSFs for translating designs and concepts at various stages of projects into 3D visualizations, which include animations, still renderings, virtual reality solutions, and animated 3D diagrams and illustrations. 3D visualizations are considered vital in the current fast-paced international context of architecture. Importantly, the use of computational design has meant substantial changes to the nature of architectural work and organizational hierarchies. The computational teams involved in the study had an uneven gender mix. While senior positions in these firms remained dominated by men, the computational design teams of 20–30 people typically comprised between 60% and 80% women. Computational design teams worked across all project stages in the office and were crucial in garnering new work for the firm. The teams typically had a strong team orientation as this graduate explains:

> XX [senior associate] is our mentor but not he's really an expert as such, we are all learning 3D [software] together...you know his experience, knowledge is really great but we're all learning stuff all the time...you know working out new plug -ins, renderings... as a team...I feel we are very much a strong team (F3, woman graduate, 2 years' experience).

Although it was clear that computational design was vital to the future of architecture, there remained a deeply embedded cultural attachment to traditional, artistic design. Interestingly, however, drafting technology was divorced from this kind of creative work and often disparaged as a "tedious" and "boring" everyday reality. This participants' way of explaining her daily work with Computer-Aided Design (CAD) technology is illustrative of the discursive struggles:

> It's a joke when students come in [to the firm] and think, "I'm going to design something"! Actually we [graduates] are just CADing things all day, it's all options, options, options...! (F3, woman graduate, 3 years' experience).

For this participant, CAD was seen as a barrier to being a "real" architect. Other women shared similar views when working mainly with CAD, lamenting that: "I haven't done a drawing for over 10 years" (F1, woman senior associate, 18 years' experience).

By contrast, young women (aged 23–36) who worked in computational design teams, derived an intense pride, pleasure, and a positive sense of self as an architect, from engaging with the newer technologies and the collaboration they required. These participants frequently described their work as both parts exciting and challenging in a positive sense. One woman explained: "it's challenging learning all these new technologies...but the thrill of 3-D – I love it" (F2, woman graduate, 3 years' experience). Importantly, women felt confident to express their achievements and expertise:

> Well – I would say I'm the expert on this [software]. The directors can't even open it [the file]. I go client presentations and tell the clients what we've [3-D] modelled and show them around [3D visualizations] (F4, woman graduate, 2 years' experience).

Notably, women drew on technology as a valuable resource to (re)construct their professional identities, recasting their mastery of new technologies as the "highly creative work" core to architecture:

> I've worked, using CAD for ten years, and I picked it up and just never got any training, and this is the first time I've had to use a program that is hard, and it's complex and it causes real problems on the job. It changes the way you resource, it changes the way you program, it's not just another program, it actually changes the whole way a project is run, it's so interesting (F4, woman project architect, 10 years' experience).

It was clear that for many young women, technology facilitated a reimagining of what constituted creative work and therefore the identity of an architect. The lack of resources, boys club, and negative connotations that formed the foundations of the glass structures were repositioned by the young women in the firm. These shifts were not seismic, but there was a strong sense among young female architects that technology was at the heart of their professional work and identity. Indeed, we found that the exclusive use of new technologies enabled younger women architects to melt some aspects of their traditional identity and turn them into new forms. Crucially, the inability to use technology actually creates barriers for (mostly male) senior architects while freeing younger women to create a strong, positive sense of self in the new world of architecture.

8 | DEVELOPING OUR GLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: TECHNOLOGIES OF GLASS

As glass continues to evolve as a material, our glass consciousness must evolve in tandem so that we can find new ways to conceptualize experience through this beautiful, dual-natured material (Elkadi, 2006). We argue that the conceptualization of glass only as a constraint or invisibilised barrier, provides only partial insight into workplace gender inequality. Although our current glass consciousness in MOS is (very) useful, the contemporary uses of glass can spark our imagination as to how else we might conceptualize the similarities and differences in individual experiences of gender inequality in the workplace. Accordingly, we conceptualize "technologies of glass" to explore how glass can be understood not just as a constraint but as a multifaceted material with limitless possibilities for design. Our understanding of the raw materials of glass and control of the production process means that glass can be made thick or thin, transparent or opaque, fragile or bullet-proof, decorative or reinforced for construction (Achilles & Navratil, 2009; Rasmussen, 2012). In parallel, our glass consciousness offers us a much better understanding of how the glass ceiling is thick for some groups of professional women and brittle for others (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). Likewise, our attention to the materiality of glass allows us to see more clearly the presence and rules of the "boys club" that are no longer invisibilised. As the experience of the women in our empirical study demonstrates, the walls of the boys club are dense, opaque, and oh-so-obvious, thus highlighting the interconnections between various forms of inequality.

Here, our empirical study contributes to a more fine-grained understanding of the entanglements between gender and professional identity in organizations in three ways. First, as our analysis highlights, there remain many invisibilised challenges and subtle power processes that continue to shape women's working lives. The unique composition of these barriers in the context of architecture firms is crucial to understanding how gender inequality persists in spite of highly visibilized and touted initiatives such as the Architects Champions of Change, launched in Australia in 2015 (Champions of Change Coalition, 2021; Nimmo, 2015). The lack of support and resources, negative connotations of being a "female" architect, and the "boys club" impacted all women in architecture, even those that had supposedly smashed the glass ceiling. Having shattered the glass ceiling, senior women experienced a fracturing of their sense of sense, finding it difficult to construct self-affirming identities as both architect and woman. Not surprisingly, these experiences take their toll on women, who leave the construction professions much faster than their male counterparts (Galea et al., 2020). Other research likewise confirms that there is a "continuing expectation

of elite professional women to be chameleons" (Ballakrishnan, 2017, p. 326), toeing the line between strong, confident behavior and gendered expectations of women as carers. In our case, all of these PSFs had ticked the appropriate boxes by introducing equal opportunity policies and acknowledging the need for diversity. However, the reality of the situation reveals a context in which change is painfully slow. The "boys club" remained a core construction material through which women in architecture were constantly trying to shape their professional identity. The glass ceiling was brittle for some women, but the glass cliff was made solid by the invisibilized negative connotations of being a "female" architect. For these women, glass barriers were truly material in their consequences as they prevented their rise or initiated their decline. Importantly, glass remained an integral part of their workplace architecture.

Second, our empirical study offers novel insights into how women in architecture were drawing on social, cultural, and technological resources to forge non-hierarchical pathways to new professional identities. For young women, technology offered a sense of empowerment in their work and the ability to challenge deeply embedded ideas of architect as lone (male) creative. The rapid introduction of new technologies into the practice of architecture created a context where cultural and social change was possible, and sometimes even necessary. For the young women, technological mastery offered the ability to confidently claim expertise. Notably, and in direct contrast to other women who repeatedly positioned their success as luck, these women appeared to have successfully negotiated the gendered norms of positioning confident women as "divas". Importantly, their technical expertise unsettled conventional organizational hierarchies. New practices enabled new ways of being an architect, less solitary auteur and more technologically adept international collaborator thus enabling younger women to position themselves as "experts" compared to those in senior roles in certain respects. Moreover, technology offered young women the opportunity to reimagine the relationship between creativity and teamwork and shift the norm of architecture away from the auteur model. Yet, while these findings are significant, they are by no means indicative of some kind of monumental cultural shift.

Conceptually, we see the mastery of new technologies (that we have termed the "technologies of glass") as an inroad to bypassing the glass ceiling, incorporating (female) teams in architects' identities, or altering the glitter of creativity to include technology. In other words, women were drawing on the "technologies of glass", the fine-grained knowledge of the social, cultural, and technological norms of architecture, to navigate inequality and build alternative pathways. As our study has highlighted, although the profession of architecture glittered for new female graduates, the glass slipper felt out of shape for senior women. The barriers facing women in architecture continue to exist and will almost certainly impact these younger women during their professional careers. The point, then, is that our examination of the technologies of glass offers new insights into the material-symbolic entanglements of glass. For the young women in our study, glass was as much a fluid material of possibilities—new identities, new pathways, new resources—as it was a material of limitations. Glass was dual-natured in every respect. Our glass consciousness in MOS, however, has primarily focused on glass as a transparent barrier. This focus underplays glass as a multi-faceted fluid material and the architectural use of glass to transmit light and provide illumination. Alternatively, our conceptualization of the "technologies of glass" draws attention to these latter elements, with a focus on the composition of glass and the fluid possibilities to reform its design and recast light. Thus, we suggest that it is essential to conceptualize glass as more than just a constraint and expand our glass consciousness to include the multi-faceted ways that glass can be used which are innovative and astonishing in equal measure.

9 | CONCLUSION

The core aim of this article was to better understand the experiences of gender inequality for women in architecture. Metaphors of glass provided a solid foundation from which to discuss those experiences. These metaphors have offered extensive insight into the invisibilized power processes in workplaces that act as barriers to gender equality. In applying these concepts to our empirical study, we were able to give visibility to how the boys club and

glass barriers are interconnected and, in fact, material in their consequences. Importantly, by conceptualizing the possibilities emerging from the "technologies of glass", we have drawn attention to the resources that women are deploying to navigate and manipulate the glass that has long structured their workplace experiences.

Unlike traditional metaphors, we have focused on the multi-faceted nature of glass to understand more deeply the constitution of barriers in fluid, rapidly changing contexts (such as architecture) and how women navigate gender inequality to recast their professional work and identities. This expansion of our glass consciousness carries the potential for us to understand the experiences of women more deeply in varying professional contexts and how contemporary, fluid contexts offer the possibility of reforming gender inequality.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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