

## **Gender and Leadership: Four Contemporaneous Queens Regnant**

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## **Abstract**

The paper begins by citing recent statistics as to the proportion of female leaders in business and the profession, which indicate while there has been progress a “glass ceiling” remains. To explicate the latter phenomena the paper draws on historical records to examine the leadership qualities of four European Queens who lived contemporaneously: Mary Tudor; Elizabeth Tudor, Mary, Queen of Scots; and Catherine de Medici.

We seek to add a contribution to debates about female leadership and utilise a theoretical framework based on suggestions from the literature of intrinsic female difference, bias and institutional pressures –all or some of which may be factors impairing the progress of women in management.

Our findings indicate, as some researchers suggest, that women generally exhibit superior communication and better inter-personal skills. However, the most salient observation to emerge from the qualitative sample is that institutions being male dominated, whether monarchical or managerial do not respect the uxorious.

Key Words: Gender, Leadership, Institutions, Queens, History, Difference.

## **Gender and Leadership: Management Styles of four Contemporaneous Queens Regnant**

Today, in the USA more than 50% of the new entrants to the accounting profession are women (Mitchell, 2005). By comparison in the UK in 1945, 0.76% of accountants were women (compared with 18% of doctors who were women) and currently based on membership of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants 35% of its UK membership of 50,000 are women (Marlow and Carter, 2004). The UK Equal Opportunities Report (2001) reported in 2001 that while “Women constituted 40% of professional employees (medicine, law, veterinary science, and accountancy) vertical segregation is clearly evident with men commanding control of higher paid, higher status roles” (p.10).

It may be expected from the greater proportion of women entering the Accounting profession and its associated disciplines that women will share a greater leadership role, whether as partners in practice, as CEOs, or as senior academics. But, however, current trends in top appointments do not signify that a greater leadership role for women will be a product of their

increased participation. As recently as 1993 women partners represented only 5% of firm partners in the Big Six public accounting firms in the USA (Telberg, 1993, p.3). This is not significantly different from top “power” positions in other business organisations where, for example women comprise less than 3% of chief executive officers of large corporations (Bash, 1993). Worse, for European women, Van der Boon (2003) points out from her research that: “Admission into the ranks of European senior management and academic life has been much slower than in North America” (p.132).

Kanter (1977) concludes that many women that do advance to upper management are “tokens” and, the drawback of tokenism, is to further bias perceptions because “tokens” by virtue of their limited number have high visibility and are easily stereotyped by the dominant majority. It appears there is what has been called “a glass ceiling” barring women from more than token leadership roles. Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) analyse the phenomenon of the “glass ceiling” as a barrier to leadership by identifying three possible theoretical explanations: natural female difference, structural institutional barriers and simple bias. These three explanations form the basis of this analysis.

To illuminate questions of female difference, institutional barriers and bias the paper draws on the past and, in particular, the leadership styles of four European women: the half-Spanish Mary Tudor; the English Elizabeth Tudor, the French Mary, Queen of Scots; and the Italian Catherine de Medici. These four women, by dynastic accident, held absolute power in the primary male dominated institution of monarchy. They reigned at in the sixteenth century when leadership by women was considered inappropriate if not downright dangerous.

The influential Protestant reformer John Knox, a contemporary of the four Queens denounced their rule by as ungodly and unnatural and prophesied that no good could come from female leadership. Such a denunciation was based chiefly on female difference and Knox identified to his satisfaction various natural female traits that necessarily made them unsuited to

leadership. He published his opinions in the widely disseminated and popular misogynistic treatise, "*The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*". With such prejudice against women rulers being widely held, all four Queens encountered opposition to their rule. As such they courted a more likely risk of overthrow and execution than was normal. Absolute monarchs, as Shakespeare observed, were never without a challenge to their power, "*Uneasy lies the head that wears a Crown*" (Henry IV, Part 2, 1597, Act 3, sc 1). Leaders of modern organisations may be similarly, though less terminally challenged by the threat of overthrow. How these women enacted leadership is instructive in terms of: arguments of gender difference, overcoming bias, and leadership in a male dominated institution.

## **Method**

Our method is to draw on contemporary sources: letters, ambassadorial reports, and recorded statements. Secondary sources are used to supplement the narrative and archival sources. The emphasis for this study is on what these four Queens did and said, and what their (often hostile) contemporaries wrote of their performance. That is their leadership qualities may be derived and assessed from their own utterances and the voices of contemporary observers. The paper is organised to discuss the four Queens in roughly chronological order bearing in mind they lived and ruled contemporaneously. First, the literature with regard to gender difference, bias and institutional barriers to female leadership is reviewed.

## **Theoretical Explanations: Female Difference**

According to Hull and Umansky (1997) the theory of gender difference was advanced to view women as lacking in assertiveness, dominance and problem solving skills necessary for effective leadership. These attributes plus an unwillingness to take risks, it is alleged, are responsible for the different treatment of women in management. Broverman et al (1972), echoing the thoughts of Knox some 400 years earlier, found that males were perceived to be more able to act as leaders, being more dominant, more able to make decisions, less easily

influenced, more aggressive and more independent than females. The apparent inferior quality of female traits was a feature of research findings from the 1950s to 1980s (Johnson and Powell (1994). From 1980, the literature has refuted earlier findings (Birley, 1989; Asburner, 1991) but some research has confirmed differences in verbal, quantitative and visual spatial skills (Varro (1982). A particular female difference relevant to this study is Halpern's (1992) conclusion that females are superior on average at verbal skills, fluency and comprehension. Moreover, some studies (Ginsburg and Miller, 1982; Hudgens and Fatkin, 1985; Levin et al., 1988) confirm women are more cautious with regard to risk taking.

Reed and Krachman (1990), however, researched a mix of male and female accountants and found little difference. Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) also found that men and women in management have similar aspirations and behaviours. But other researchers, argue (Hegelsen, 1990; Hennig and Jardim, 1997; Rosener, 1990, Dobbins and Platz, 1986, Brown, 1979, Rutherford, 2001, and Appelbaum et al, 2002) that women's leadership is different from men's in behaviour and effectiveness. differently. Rosener (1990) maintains female leadership entails more participation, motivation and charisma. Rutherford (2001) argues that because communication skills have become more important, women are more in demand for management positions than ever before. However, as Savage (1992) points out women may be entering management but only in the lower ranks and in areas concerned with customer needs. Whether such different female skills are required by senior management is doubted by Still (1994). Indeed, Cockburn (1991) cites from the Sears Roebuck case pointing out female differences can become a reason for excluding women from management.

According to Loden (1985) female leadership highlights communication and team building by applying such feminine values as empathy, cooperation, communication, emotionality, intimacy, vulnerability, attachment, nurture, and caring. Some researchers suggest that feminine characteristics are an advantage (Hegelsen, 1990) women being superior communicators with better inter-personal skills (Stanford et al., 1995). Moreover such female

attributes are more appropriate for transformational leadership (Hare et al., 1997). The disadvantage for women, as Fineman (1993), Giddens (1992), Kerfoot and Knights (1993) point out is that within institutions the denial of emotion is traditionally seen as a strong masculine characteristic, while sadness vulnerability, tears and emotional display are viewed as unacceptable in the workplace.

Rutherford (2001) in her empirical study of an airline staff cited her respondents as saying that female managers have better people skills, are more relationship oriented, more empathetic, exhibit fewer status concerns, are less political and more flexible. She found that 84% of women employees thought that women managed differently to men while 55% of male employees did. Belief in a difference (77% of both male and female airline staff respondents) was most marked in the Finance division, where senior staff was male with a strong command and control management style who operated a controlling management style that “was hierarchical and authoritarian and had cascaded throughout the division” (p.338). It is salient that the Finance division in this airline study differed from Cabin Services and Human Resources (the other divisions studied) in having the greatest proportion of males as senior managers. Rutherford argues that women put in extra emotional labour to justify their space in the workplace. “Finance is a dry area, requiring analytical skills but not people skills. Neither of the two senior women [in the Finance Division] made any impact on the style of the overall division” (p. 339).

People do get angry and have stand-up rows sometimes. But I would never ever burst into tears. It's a no-no. Similarly, if you are suffering from stress at work you just wouldn't say nor would you discuss your private life (Female MG Finance) p. 339).

Kanter (1977) observes that the masculine approach to problems involves the analytic ability to abstract and plan. To set aside emotional considerations in the interest of getting results with an emphasis on decision making as a means of problem solving. Hines (1992) explains masculinity as featuring impersonal, objective, action oriented goals. Competition, rational analysis and focuses perception are other traits that have been cited (Marshall, 1993),

### **Theoretical Explanations: Bias**

The blame for the “glass ceiling” lies with the prejudices of men who prefer to cling to sex-role stereotypes argues Morrison and Von Glinow (1990). Johnson et al (1993) conducted research involving 120 auditors and found gender bias among accountants. Their results indicate a “glass ceiling” exists for female auditors. On the other hand, should women adopt behaviours that negate perceived sex-role expectations they are regarded negatively (Holter, 1971). Loden (1985) declares that those women managers who adopt male attributes become “Queen Bees”, and in doing so became unfeminine. Grant (1988) supports such a view, arguing that successful women have to ignore their female traits and allow themselves to be turned by their organisations into “she-males”. Thus, Kanter (1977) argues that “the mean and bossy woman boss” is excluded from the definition of feminine.

However, evincing male characteristics can be a disadvantage. Weisel (1991) observes that when a female employee sued Price Waterhouse (the Hopkins case, 490 US. 228 (1989)) for failing to make her a partner, the accountancy firm’s defence was that she was unladylike, macho and unfeminine in the way she walked, talked and behaved. Justice Brennan awarded Hopkins a partnership declaring that women: “Are out of a job if they behave aggressively and out of a job if they do not” (US Supreme Court Reports, 1989, p.288). Hull and Umansky (1997) claim, “While the Hopkins case is probably the most published incident of sex discrimination in public accounting it is not an isolated case” (p. 509).

### **Theoretical Explanations: Institutional Effect**

Institutions such as large corporations, organisations, accounting firms and even monarchies may be viewed as gender neutral because it can be argued that the institution socialises behaviour (Carich and Smircich, 1992). According to structural institution explanations women are disadvantaged because of policies and practices which favour male dominance. Kanter (1977) argues that social conformity is important by junior managers to reach senior

positions and in this manner males reproduce themselves. Women are seen as a risk. Kanter (1977) cites the situation in public accounting firms where a regional partner must nominate a person for partnership. Nominating partners do not want to risk political capital by having a nominee rejected at a higher level.

Others argue (Acker, 1990, Rutherford, 2001), that where men provide the norm (in the form of CEOs, partners and Kings) and women are an exception, males have imposed on institutions their traits by virtue of being more generally in power. The numerical and historical dominance of men in public institutions has produced a frame of reference influencing the behaviour of women in the workplace.

A study by Schein (1973) found that both men and women thought men possessed more of the characteristics of a good manager. In this respect, women are sometimes seen to lack the self confidence, self esteem, aggressiveness, dominance, emotional control and sound judgement that good management implies (Brown, 1979). Brandser (1996) observes that such views conceptualise gender difference according to a formula and create a dogma which obscures differences between individuals. Women become seen as category of risk rather than as individuals.

Brandser's observation is fundamental to this study of four contemporaneous Queens. They were quite different in personality and upbringing and, with one exception, Mary, Queen of Scots, brought up without the expectation of achieving political power. Unprepared and untrained for leadership, dynastic accidents of birth and death brought them to the throne. Their achievements varied enormously but none of their contemporaries, whether supportive or hostile, ever suggested they were "she-males" or anything but women, feminine in identity and behaviour. Nonetheless, it is instructive to witness how these women (though separated from us by 400 years but in evolutionary terms a mere 12 generations ago) subjected to

hostile perceptions of female difference and bias and operating with the primary male institution of monarchy proved themselves in a leadership role.

### **Mary Tudor – the unhappy Queen**

The only daughter of Catherine of Aragon, Mary Tudor ascended the English throne at age thirty-seven, being in build small and slight with reddish hair. She possessed a loud deep voice “almost like a man’s” and was very short sighted (Prescott, 2003, p. 226). Energetic, bustling, confident and fearless but somewhat lacking intellect (Prescott, 2003, p.226) of evenings she would visit poor cottagers and listen to their problems. Transparent to a fault, this religious woman would never lie - simplicity and sincerity were the keys to her character (Prescott, 2003, p. 228). “Loyal to people and things she loved, she was stubborn, because she had little or no imagination, being anxious, honest of intention, and with a great hatred of decisions” (Prescott, 2003, p.228). Religion for Mary was a basic need and, “Reason had in her little to do with it. What she ought to do Mary always knew or thought she knew. Confused and harassed, she struggled on, longing for guidance but unable to trust her natural advisers” (Prescott, 2003, p. 229). She struggled to be effective.

She despised men and could not use them for her ends; she despised them, and yet she was deceived by them, for they took her full measure as quickly as any unruly fourth form takes the measure of an inexperienced or incompetent master (Prescott, p. 229)

Simon Renard, the Imperial Spanish ambassador wrote to Granvelle, “*I know the Queen, so easy to get round, so simple, so little experienced in worldly matters and such a novice in all things ...To tell you between ourselves, what I think of her – I believe that if God does not preserve her, she will be lost*” (Prescott, 2003, p. 229).

Although taking the throne on a wave of popular enthusiasm (Prescott, 2003, p. 237), within months of Mary’s acceding to the throne, there appeared divisions in the populace and among her council. On her accession, “She had ridden into London with people weeping for joy” months later by the time on her coronation such joy had turned to loathing, “There were fears that as she rode through London this time there might be tumult or attack” (Prescott, 2003, p. 247).

As a Queen, Mary would plead with her Council by falling on her knees before them, begging for their help in serving God and her people. To compound their prejudices and so undermine her own authority, she agreed with those on her Council who held that women had no skill in matters of state and needed the help and guidance of men (Prescott, 2003, p. 250). The Council she appointed was too large and bitterly divided but Mary could not bring herself to prune its membership. Her approach to ambassadors and her councillors was far too apologetic like a pupil writing to a tutor as the following note reveals:

*Sir, If it were not too much trouble for you, and if you were to find it convenient to do so without the knowledge of your colleagues, I would willing speak with you this evening* (Prescott, 2003, p. 274).

At times Mary was driven to shouting at her councillors. “When it came to action they [her Council] would often ignore, or evade the Queen’s orders” (Prescott, 2003, p. 332). The Spanish ambassador observed: “*She spent her days in shouting at her Council but all with no result*” (Prescott, 2003, p. 332).

Unfortunately for Mary, she was not good at choosing her advisers and, once saddled with the incompetent or disagreeable seemed unable to terminate appointments. Her choice of husband was equally disastrous. Philip of Spain was the heir to much of Europe and the rich territories of the New World, and destined to become the most powerful ruler in the world until he met his nemesis Elizabeth. Philip by nature was cold and cruel, conscientious in his duties but slow, if not stupid. Like Mary his task was too great for his powers. Their marriage was characterised by long periods of separation. In spite of her husband’s coldness and long absence, Mary was a devoted wife and paraded her devotion for all to witness. Monarchy, as with other management institutions, spouse worship is not likely to earn respect.

The sobriquet “Bloody Mary” refers to her fanatical persistence with the public execution of Protestants. Such sickening spectacles turned even many Catholics against her. She persisted with the killing of “heretics” because she believed she was doing God’s will. Mary, while not self-serving was ineffective. She left her sister a country impoverished, divided at home and a political pawn on the European stage.

### **Elizabeth – “Good Queen Bess”**

In her long reign of over four decades Elizabeth became a cult figure, the first monarch to have her subjects hang her picture in their homes. Elizabeth inherited a Crown which was bankrupt, the people discontented, and the nobles, faction ridden and rebellious. Politically England was of no account, one of many minor kingdoms in a European world stage dominated by France and Spain. By the end of her reign England was the richest, most powerful country in Europe making Elizabeth one of the greatest monarchs ever to reign, “certainly the one who attracts the most superlatives” (Dunn, p. xxx) and “regardless of her weaknesses, confounding every prejudice against women in power” (Dunn, p. xxxiv).

One key to Elizabeth’s character was she never forgot a kindness and set great store by loyalty. Of the reviled Lord Robert she said after she became Queen:

*I only show him favour because of his goodness to me when I was in trouble during the reign of my sister. At that time he never ceased his former kindness and service, but even sold his possessions to provide me with funds* (Dunn, 2003, p. 174).<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, to those that did her an unkindness or who crossed her she was, unlike Mary Tudor, unforgiving: “*God may pardon you, but I never can*” (to the dying Countess of Nottingham, Hume, 1759, Vol 2, Ch 7). The fanatical Scottish preacher John Knox was barred from entering England, his misogynist views upset Elizabeth although they were directed at her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots.

Elizabeth had many weaknesses: vain, sharp tongued, bossy, quick tempered and she exasperated her sister Mary with her proud haughty responses:

*I am very sorry to hear of the Queen's illness; but there is no reason why I should thank her for her intention to give me the crown of this kingdom ...since it is my peculiar and hereditary right" (Dunn, 2003, p. 19).*

In a dangerously religious age, Elizabeth tried to steer a middle course and avoid religious excesses. "*I would not open windows into men's souls*" was the famous remark attributed to her. <sup>ii</sup> Elizabeth's strengths were that she was conscientious, hard working, exceptionally intelligent and possessed the ability to choose good advisers and retain their loyalty. Her popularity with the people grew as the otherwise hostile Catholic, Venetian ambassador gloomily reported:

*The Queen, by frequently showing herself in public, giving audience to all who would wish for it, and using every mark of great graciousness towards everyone, daily gains favour and affection from her people (State Papers Venetian, VII, 6).*

Dunn (2003) notes that the Queen being short sighted, "Had to draw especially close to see those who spoke to her or to accept the gifts she was offered and this added to the sense of attentiveness and intimacy which so charmed the crowds" (p. 34). Her approachability was what marked her as different from other Monarchs, "She was quick witted and could be alternately funny and moving in her ripostes to the crowd... she kept stopping to receive blessings, appeals, and posies of flowers from even the poorest and humblest of her subjects" (Dunn, 2003, p. 34). On assuming office she charged her judges, "*To have a care to my people ... they cannot avenge themselves, nor help themselves. See unto them, for they are my charge. I care not for myself; my life is not dear to me. My care is for my people*" (Sitwell, 1962, p. 46). To Sir William Cecil, her Chief Minister, the young Queen charged, *You will not be corrupted by any manner of gifts ... and if you know anything necessary to be declared unto me of secrecy, you shall show it to myself only*" (Sitwell, 1962, p. 55).

To rebuild the Kingdom's finances and pay off the debts left to her by her sister, Elizabeth kept a very frugal rein on government expenditure. It irritated her that poor people were

persuaded by the clergy to give what coins they had as the Spanish ambassador learned when she told him that, “*She resented the amount of money that flowed out of the country yearly for the Pope’s use and she considered her bishops to be lazy poltroons*” (State Papers Spanish, I, 25).

Executions under Elizabeth followed a proper legal process; she was horrified by the practices of other Monarchs who ordered executions without trial. On listening to the excuses of the French ambassador reporting on the St Bartholomew’s Day massacre, an angry Elizabeth interrupted, “Even if everything happened as the King said, and the conspirators had been rightly punished, she would like to know what blame was attributable to the woman and children who were murdered” (State Papers Spanish, II, 416).

Elizabeth proved to be the sort of leader who could get the best out of people. . Described as the “most feminine of women” (Sitwell, 1962, p. 48), her displeasure was thunderous. Sir John Harrington, her godson declared: “*When she smiled it had a pure sunshine that everyone did choose to bask in if they could; but anon came a sudden gathering of clouds and the thunder fell in a wondrous manner on all* (Sitwell, 1962, p. 48). Not a great beauty but someone vain who took care to appear regal.

The greatest contemporary tribute to her abilities was made by one of her political enemies on the eve of the Armada invasion, when, hoping to encourage the Spanish army, Pope Sixtus V renewing his bull of excommunication, observed of Elizabeth, “*Just look how well she governs! She is only a woman, only mistress of half an island, and yet she makes herself feared by Spain, by France, By the Empire [Germany], by all*” (Dunn, 2003, p. 504).

### **Mary, Queen of Scots**

Unlike Mary Tudor and Elizabeth, Mary Queen of Scots was born into great privilege and luxury. Born of the Guise family as Queen of Scots and raised in the French court, Mary was betrothed as a child at the age of five to five year old Francois the French prince, the son of

Queen Catherine de Medici. Mary had never seen herself as anything but a Queen and may have thought her rights to three thrones incontestable. She unwisely claimed to be Queen of three kingdoms, France, Scotland and England. Her claim to the latter not only irritated Elizabeth but by implication implied Elizabeth was a bastard child and an illegitimate usurper. “Born to all this, it was understandable if such a young Queen had a share of the hubris of those she had grown up amongst”, (Dunn, 2003, p. 32) Mary’s rash disparagement of her cousin Elizabeth was expressed widely beyond the French court and the insults were noted by Elizabeth (Sadler, State Papers I, p. 380). Such remarks were politically naïve and to bring Mary trouble in the future. Compounding her error Mary also insulted her mother-in-law, the powerful French Queen regnant, Catherine. According to Cardinal de Santa Croce, the papal nuncio in France, Mary described the Italian Queen Catherine as “*nothing but the daughter of a merchant*” (Fraser, 1973, p.118). To insult the sensitivities of two powerful women in an age when their thrones were perilously insecure was an extreme ill-judgement.

As a Queen of two countries and a strong claim to a third, Mary was a young woman who had everything: beauty, brains, athletic ability and a beguiling personality. Men died and murdered for her love. Yet her personality was fatally flawed: she managed to bring out the worst in her followers. Upon taking residence in Scotland as its Queen, one contemporary observer, Buchanan wrote, “*She was graced with surpassing loveliness of form*” (Fraser, 1973, p. 219). Such “loveliness” could be dangerous for within six months two Scottish nobles fell in love with her and plotted to abduct her, and a lovesick French poet got into her bed chamber during the day and hid under her bed. One of the nobles and the lovesick poet she had charged with treason and executed (Fraser, 1973, p. 199 & 235). Mary’s charisma did not win her the approval of the influential Scots reformer John Knox, who writing to Cecil accused the nineteen year old Queen of “*joyosity*”, “*fiddling*” (music) and “*flinging*” (dancing). Mary tried to appease this gruff, austere Calvinist reformer with an audience but he reduced her to tears. Mary cried in frustration, “*I have sought your favour by all possible means. I offered unto you my presence and audience whenever it pleased you to admonish*

*me, and yet I cannot be quit of you*” (Sitwell, 1962, p. 180). Knox replied: *“I must sustain your majesty’s tears rather than hurt my conscience”* (Sitwell, 1962, p.180).

Mary relied on her family the Guises in France and an equally unreliable and self-serving band of supporters in Scotland. “Mary, unlike Catherine, was not by nature a talented or adept intriguer. Yet she was to become an enthusiastic one” (Fraser, 1973, p. 120).

Up to this point, Mary had done well, a French speaking stranger in her own realm, she had been energetic in travelling, meeting her subjects and re-establishing her ownership of various royal castles which had fallen under the control of local lords. The general purpose of her tours was to engender goodwill but she showed she could be tough as any prince when necessary. At her castle of Inverness, the custodian, on instructions from a local clan chieftain forbade her entry; she had the man hanged from the battlements the next morning (Fraser, 1973, p. 225).

However, in only a matter of months after their wedding, Mary’s husband joined a plot to usurp her throne. The plot by Protestant nobles was widely rumoured and Mary warned of it by her advisers. She would not listen, dismissing the threat by saying, *“Our country men were well wordy”* (Fraser, 1973, p. 286). Even after the attempted coup, which she escaped by luck and daring, Mary investigations were not thorough enough to reveal her true enemies who, disastrously for her, remained at large. Mary did not know enough about her realm, would not keep an open mind, would not listen to advice and failed to realise how precarious and threatened her position was. Mary rashly embarked on a second marriage saying,

*Unless our authority be assisted and forthset by the fortification of a man who must take upon his person in the execution of justice ... the travail thereof we may no longer sustain in our own person being already wearied and broken* (Fraser, 1973, p.375).

Such a statement in a female leader is tantamount to resignation. Seen as impotent and as an adulteress, within four weeks of her second marriage to Bothwell, Mary was captured by her

nobles and led through jeering soldiery in Edinburgh shouting, “*Burn her, burn the whore, kill her, drown her*” (Fraser, 1973, p.384).

### **Catherine de’ Medici, the Florentine grocer’s daughter**

Catherine was Queen of France for 12 years and regnant Queen Mother to her three sons for another thirty. While she lived she was the most important women in Europe (France was a rich country of some 25 million subject compared to England’s 4 million) and for some historians, “a serpent”, “the most infamous she-devil ever to hold royal power” (Strage, 1976, p. 1). Married well above her station to the King of France’s second son, she advanced closer to the throne, when the Dauphin was poisoned. There is no evidence to show she was involved but she gained from the premature death and many others were to die mysteriously who were in a position to frustrate her ambitions.<sup>iii</sup> Described as squat and ugly, Queen Catherine was ignored by her husband King Henry II as his affections were captured by his mistress Dianne de Poitiers. Yet Catherine could be a persuasive speaker in 1557 when her husband urgently needed funds for his army she addressed Parliament.

The Venetian Giacomo Soranzo records, “*Her Majesty spoke with such earnestness and eloquence that everyone was moved ...The Queen thanked them in so sweet a form of speech that she made well-nigh the whole assembly shed tears of emotion*” (Strage, 1976, p. 89).

Catherine achieved her ambition to rule alone by means of her “*escadron volant*” (flying squadron) a handpicked group of attractive young women to serve as mistresses to ensnare and spy on likely male rivals for power such as Antoine of Navarre. One of Catherine’s ambitions was to marry her attractive daughter Margot into the Spanish royal family. Margot had no say in the match making, she records in her *Memoirs*:

*I had been brought up in such awe of the Queen, my mother, that not only did I not dare to speak to her, but if she only so much as looked at me I trembled with fear lest I had done something to displease her* (Strage, 1976, p.147).

The Spanish ambassador Frances de Alava reported on another occasion that a well-informed source told him that Margot had been called to her mother’s apartment at five in the morning

and beaten senseless after which Margot could not return to her own apartment until the damage to her face could be repaired (Strage, 1976, p. 147).

When Henry II died in a jousting accident in 1559 and Catherine's eldest son, Francis II, died in 1560 age seventeen she was able to declare on behalf of her second son Charles IX age ten, *"I have decided to keep him beside me and to rule the State as a devoted mother must do"* (Strage, 1976, p. 112).

With the failure of the Spanish match (the King's son proved to be mad), Catherine set about cultivating a match between Margot and Henry of Navarre. "Skilled diplomat that she was Catherine did not immediately reveal her principal objective" (Strage, 1976, p.150), which, because the King of Navarre was a leading Huguenot, was to cultivate Huguenot goodwill and so end the disastrous religious wars within her kingdom. She invited Henry of Navarre's mother Jeanne to come to her court. Jeanne replied, *"I cannot imagine why you should find it necessary to see me and my children but not in order to do us harm. Forgive me if I laugh when I read these letters, for you are allaying a fear I have never felt. I have never thought, as some say, that you fed on little children."* (Strage, 1976, p. 151). Jeanne subsequently visited Catherine and arranged the marriage believing as she wrote in a letter to Queen Elizabeth of England, *"Although the Evil One, since my arrival here, raised in many the spirit of dissension and opposition, God has manifested His gracious goodness to the overthrow of their malicious intent and has inspired those animated with benevolence, lovers of concord and repose, to accompany this union"* (Strage, 1976, p. 155). Shopping in Paris for the wedding, Jeanne fell ill and suddenly died many at the time believed her poisoned by Catherine.

The most infamous and risky event organised by Catherine was the St Bartholomew's Day massacre when thousands (estimates vary between four and eight thousand) of Huguenots and other innocents were killed having been invited to attend the wedding of Henry and Margot.

Catherine attended by her ladies grew increasingly animated as strolled among the dead and never expressed the slightest remorse for what had happened. Catherine wrote to King Philip in Spain inviting him to, “*Share our joy at God’s goodness” at getting rid of subjects rebellious to God and herself*” (Strage, 1976, p. 175). Catherine was not wrong in anticipating Catholic approval. Pope Gregory XIII celebrated the news in Rome with a solemn Mass involving fifty-three cardinals. Catherine dispatched a special emissary, La Mothe-Fenelon with an explanation to her “*Dear Sister*” in England, but Elizabeth was furious interrupting the explanation to say that “*A king who had abandoned his own subjects would not hesitate to desert his allies*” (Strage, 1976, p. 176). Henry of Navarre was spared but given the choice die or convert – he converted and Catherine was to said to have laughed out loud before the gathered ambassadors (p. 177). Stripped of his title and powerless, the future King remained a victim of Catherine’s intrigues. Catherine to justify herself argued in a letter to her son that what she did was to preserve his realm from being divided into parts. “*Whatever evil or hatred towards myself this may have occasioned came ... from those whom I prevented from carrying out their own plans*” (p. 235).

Catherine worked hard to prevent a French civil war, she often wrote by hand some twenty letters a day and like Elizabeth in England worked through a network of spies so that she knew everything that went on in France and the other major powers. (p.182). Unlike Elizabeth, saving money or practising austerity was never considered by Catherine (p. 196). She would raise loans from the Court to spend on parties where gentlemen were waited upon by young ladies naked to the waist. (p. 209). The Venetian Cavalli observed that she had an unquenchable passion to rule. Another Venetian noted that:

*She is hated because everybody knows that to keep herself in supreme authority, she has always fomented discords and divisions of party ... and always trying as far as she could to keep her sons, even when they are grown up, far from business and grave thoughts in order that they should put everything in her hands* (Strage, 1976, p. 207).

On another occasion she wrote, “*I would be sweet to all of them, popes, and kings, to win such forces as would enable me to command and not to obey them*” (p. 256). A Venetian

observer wrote, *“The Huguenots say she has deceived them by fine words, and by her air of mendacious kindness, while all the time, she was weaving their destruction”* (Strage, p. 299). Henry of Navarre told her, *“Madam, you grow strong on trouble; if you had peace, you would not know how to live”* (p. 258). On her death a preacher at her funeral oration observed, *“She has done much good and much evil in her day; more evil, I think, than good. I make no doubt of this”* (p. 282).

Whatever her methods, Catherine was hard working, intelligent, patient, calculating and of great personal courage but she was also cruel and divisive. Her children and servants feared her. Shrewd, pragmatic and very superstitious as a ruler she concentrated on means not ends. Her legacy was to build an authoritarian monarchy which cared little for the rights of the individual or for the people at large.

## **Discussion**

The sixteenth century was unique in Europe in that it produced four Queens regnant. For centuries before and after the sixteenth century, the European powers had been or would be ruled by Kings, some of them weak, selfish and incompetent, most were, at best, mediocre. Of the four Queens regnant, two were outstanding in terms of achievement. Elizabeth was arguably the greatest monarch in English History. Elizabeth's last speech as an old lady to her Parliament reflects her attitude to leadership and, more importantly for this discussion, her virtual marriage to the institution of government:

*Though God hath raised me high, yet this I count the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves ... Though you have had many mightier and wiser princes sitting on this seat, yet you never had nor shall have any that will love you better* (Elton, 1977, p. 464).

The French Queen, Catherine de Medici, was also an effective ruler but of a very different kind to Elizabeth. Catherine held France together through a period of civil wars, which could have easily divided the nation. She achieved this by always knowing more than her rivals and working unceasingly and ruthlessly to maintain her position. Pragmatic she could change her

position when she judged outcomes to be inevitable, yet be ruthless in exploiting weaknesses in others.

Two very effective monarchs out of four are better than most samples of European male rulers would average. A sample of four is not sufficient to generate statistical conclusions but is sufficient to allow some theorisation with regards to the literature cited. There is support for the three theoretical explanations offered to account for the phenomenon of the “glass ceiling”. First, the question of natural difference, two of the four Queens, Elizabeth and Catherine, were as leaders hard working, superior communicators, and more flexible with regard to policy than most of their male counterparts. There are very few Kings so fluent in many languages and conscientious with regard to communication as to sit at their desks writing some twenty personal letters a day. Second, the four Queens demonstrate that women in power can be as ruthless as dissembling as men and have no natural ethical superiority. Third, the argument that because natural differences make women unsuited for leadership unless they can become “she-men” is shown in this paper to be unsubstantiated. While all four Queens faced hostile criticism, the imputation they acted like men was never an accusation. Fourth, with regard to risk-taking only Elizabeth was notably cautious, while Catherine (e.g., the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre), Mary Tudor (the invasion of France and loss of Calais) and Mary, Queen of Scots (the murder of her husband) were extravagant risk-takers willing to risk all.

The four Queens achieved power by right of birth – promotion could not be withheld by biased subjects. Once appointed of the four Queens only Mary, Queen of Scots – given the weakness of her hold on power - had to endure overt bias and such prejudiced opinion making hastened her destruction.

What does emerge from this analysis is that female leaders of powerful institutions should take care to keep their partners voiceless and invisible. The reigns of the two unsuccessful Queens in this study were blighted by the behaviour and influence of their husbands. Mary Tudor excessively loyal to her Spanish husband did nothing to deny that her husband was directing her decisions with was behind her policies. While Mary, Queen of Scots, unable to keep her disastrous domestic affairs out of the public eye lost all institutional support for her leadership. With Elizabeth and Catherine it was very apparent, that while they had male friends, they had no close male figure operating as the power behind the throne. An important conclusion to be drawn from this study is that women in power can lose respect by parading their close relationships during the working day. Within an institution it is not a good look for leaders to be uxorious toward their spouses. In more recent times, Margaret Thatcher and Helen Clark have been successful leaders of government who have kept their partners virtually invisible.

Whether, in the future, women can break through the “glass ceiling” in male dominated institutions in sufficient numbers to become a critical force is still doubtful, but if they do, then as this study of four contemporaneous regnant Queens demonstrates they are likely to be no worse and possibly better than men.

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<sup>i</sup> The fanatical Scottish preacher John Knox was barred from entering England, his misogynist views upset Elizabeth although they were directed at her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots.

<sup>ii</sup> The Elizabethan Church of England, however, included much of Roman Catholicism both in doctrine and practices. So much so that Elizabeth was shocked when she discovered that the Archbishop of Canterbury had taken a wife; upon meeting the lady the Queen tartly observed, "*Madam I may not call you; mistress I am ashamed to call you; and so I know not what to call you*" (Harrington, 1653, p. 4).

<sup>iii</sup> Strage (1976) records that guides today at the Chateau of Blois delight in showing Catherine's secret compartment in her study where she kept her poisons (p. 156).