



# Gendered Constructions of Luck at Work: The Case of Career Narratives of Female and Male Managers

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## Abstract

There is a ubiquitous assumption that luck is a gender-neutral and equally distributed phenomenon. Drawing on 50 interviews with female and male managers, we examine their constructions of luck at work and demonstrate the gendered construction of luck in career narratives. Despite the dearth of attention to luck in the career literature, luck often features in the career narratives of professional workers. In line with the literature, we define the construct of luck as something outside the locus of control of individuals. Yet, we identify that luck is a gendered construct in career narratives. We demonstrate that while female managers define luck as receiving equality of opportunity in the process of their careers, male managers define luck as structures of support that offer them opportunities above and beyond their merit at work, which is a privilege that men appear to enjoy. The perception and interpretation of luck have far-reaching effects on addressing and comprehending gender disparities in career advancement, decision-making, negotiation and organisational leadership. Recognising the gender-specific impact of luck is vital in promoting gender equality and offering equitable chances for the career progression of women and non-privileged employees. It offers a persuasive option to challenge the dominant meritocratic assumptions on equality of chances, structures and the distribution of resources.

**Keywords** Gender · Luck · Career narratives · Female · Discourse analysis · Australia

## Introduction

Many individuals turn to belief in luck when they experience hardship. Luck provides hope and energy at work and in life, and a belief in luck provides a good source of motivation and performance at work (Hannabuss, 2008; Luthans et al., 2004; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Thus, luck is an important yet underexplored construct for organisational behaviour. The ubiquitous nature of luck in everyday

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experiences leads to the assumption that luck is gender-neutral and that women and men have the same definition of luck at work. The extant literature explored luck as a gendered social attribution, we extend this literature and fill the gap on the gendered construction of luck by exploring luck as a gendered personal construct. In this study, we scrutinise the construction of luck through female and male managers' career narratives and investigate the ways in which interviewees use the term 'luck' in their career accounts. Studies of *luck* from a social psychological perspective frame luck as a phenomenon outside an individual's locus of control (Bright et al., 2005, 2009; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014). This framing of luck is not studied along gender lines in career narratives. Our abductive study on gender and careers reveals that women and men have different narratives of luck in their career accounts. We note that the use of luck and its role in individual accounts remains an understudied phenomenon. Therefore, this study contributes to an understanding of how *luck* is used discursively in women's and men's career narratives, what their references to luck can tell us about their career progression, and how they make sense of attributions of luck. Finally, following Anderson's framing of *luck*, we question the interplay of gender and luck in career narratives. Consequently, this study sheds light on the societal and cultural construction of luck and its hidden gendered manifestations, revealing hegemonic masculinity in the construction of luck.

## Literature Review

Luck is a multifaceted concept defined as an individual and an institutional phenomenon. At the individual level, luck is defined as occurrences outside the locus of control of individuals. For institutions, luck is defined as events outside their control (Barney, 1986). Anderson (1999) defines Luck Egalitarianism or Equality of Fortune as the natural inequality in the distribution of luck. However, Anderson argues that this definition fails the most fundamental test that any egalitarian theory must meet, and this is the principle of equal respect or concern for all citizens, because of the exclusion of some citizens to enjoy equal social conditions on spurious grounds that it is their fault that they lose those opportunities. Luck egalitarianism relies on two moral premises: that people should be compensated for undeserved misfortunes and that the compensation should come only from that part of others' good fortune that is undeserved (Anderson, 1999). In this way, Anderson makes a distinction between earned and unearned luck. Based on the principles of egalitarian luck, luck brings distributive justice.

From the luck egalitarians' view, there are variants of luck. Dworkin (2018) distinguished between option and brute luck. Option luck "is a matter of how deliberate and calculated gambles turn out—whether someone gains or loses through accepting an isolated risk he or she should have anticipated and might have declined". Brute luck is "a matter of how risks fall out that are not in that sense deliberate gambles" (Dworkin, 1981, p.73). Dworkin (2018) elaborated further that the winner of that gamble enjoys 'good option luck', and the loser suffers from 'bad option luck'. "Gamble" is a metaphorical term used to describe the role of luck in determining the outcomes of people's careers. According to

Dworkin, there is a distinction between “good option luck”, which benefits the winner and “bad option luck”, which harms the loser. This aligns with the border conversation about luck and how it impacts individuals’ career transitions. Lippert-Rasmussen (2001) claims that differential option luck does not capture equality and egalitarianism. According to Lippert-Rasmussen (2019), *luck* is a mixture of option luck and brute luck, and it depends on “the extent to which one could influence the expected value of the outcome of one’s choice”.

According to Boyer-Kassem and Duchêne (2019, p.13), “a widespread egalitarian theory is resourcist and stresses that justice requires equalising everyone’s resources (rights, liberties, primary goods and but also wealth and opportunities)”. Such luck egalitarian theories argue that what people do with these resources is their own “responsibility” and desert luck (Boyer-Kassem & Duchêne, 2019; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2019). However, a core distinction should be made between what results from bad luck and what results from an agent’s choice (Dworkin, 2018). Depending on the specific distributive principle endorsed, this can yield theories such as luck egalitarianism or luck prioritarianism (Boyer-Kassem & Duchêne, 2019). For instance, luck egalitarianism (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2015b) considers that inequalities only occur when they arise from choices (option luck). Luck egalitarians generally argue that resources (such as career opportunities, education, social responsibilities) should be distributed equally at first but that inequalities may legitimately arise through people’s choices (Boyer-Kassem & Duchêne, 2019).

The view that everything is a matter of responsibility and desert luck obviously flies in the face of our everyday ascriptions of responsibility (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2015a). Therefore, what makes an agent deserving or responsible needs to be scrutinised. Some define it on the basis of the desert to be the value of one’s contribution, while others hold the desert basis to be one’s level of effort (Kagan cited in Lippert-Rasmussen, 2015a). “People who think that justice should neutralise the luck specified by (2) can disagree over these accounts” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2015a, p. 58).

Tessman (2009) stated, “*luck* that is generated by systemic forces such as social, political, and economic has an impact on a certain group of people,” and therefore, it is called *systemic luck* (p.17). Yet this definition lacks the feature of unpredictability, characterising it as *nonsystemic luck*. Similarly, bad luck that has no systemic source tends to be predictable (Tessman, 2009, p.17). Similarly, Kim (2010) discusses how luck and gender interact within social structures. The author argues that the impact of luck is not evenly distributed across genders due to societal norms and expectations, which create a gendered social structure. Kim (2010) suggests that women are more vulnerable to the negative effects of luck due to their disadvantaged position within this structure. The author highlights the importance of understanding the complex interaction between luck and gender in society.

Therefore, if we apply a gender lens to the luck concept, we find that luck interplays with gender and careers as women and men enjoy different forms of systemic advantages and disadvantages, earned and unearned privileges in their career experiences. The differential nature of gendered experiences of careers shapes the luck narratives of women and men in gendered ways.

## Gender and Luck in Careers

Career literature provides some insights into gendered expressions of luck across different groups. Classical work by Deaux and Emswiller (1974) and Swim and Sanna (1996) reveals that while men's success is attributed to skill, women's success is attributed to luck. White et al. (1992) found that when most women talk about career progression, they use expressions such as "being lucky" or "being fortunate" to get the opportunity. This is similar to the definition of Bornat et al. (2011), who explained that luck is "indicative of chance upon opportunity". In the early literature, luck features as a gendered construct that women's high performance is often perceived as luck while the same performance but men is attributed to skill (Sieverding & Koch, 2009). More recently, men's perceptions of luck have been studied. For example, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2001) explore whether CEOs are rewarded for their luck rather than their performance. Hafer and Gresham (2008) and Jasko et al. (2020) suggest that men in the STEM field are more likely to attribute their success to their technical skills and knowledge, while women attribute their success to luck. Their findings lend support to the male constructions of luck as a privilege. In the extant literature, luck is framed as a socially attributed phenomenon, there is a gap in terms of studying luck as a gendered personal construct, i.e., how individuals view their personal luck in gendered ways. We address this gap.

Sauder (2020) suggests that luck could provide an excellent lens through which to study social science constructs. Yet, when luck is studied as a career discourse, there are only a few studies that have discussed the gender dimension of luck as a career discourse. For example, Davidson and Cooper (1992) argue that people tend to attribute career success to *luck* rather than their own skill and ability. However, they do not refer to the gendered construction of the concept. Similarly, Mitchell et al. (1999) and Krumboltz et al. (2013) believe that individuals should seek to utilise chance in their career development, and they called this phenomenon 'planned happenstance theory'. They state that there is a difference between "someone who passively relies on luck to solve problems and someone who is actively searching while remaining open to new and unexpected opportunities" (p. 117). They believe that luck is more likely to result from effective actions (Mitchell et al., 1999). Scholars (Bright et al., 2005, 2009; Hirschi, 2010; Kindsiko & Baruch, 2019) believe that some people are better than others at capitalising upon chance events which might lead a person to attribute their successes to luck rather than their own ability. They have interpreted luck as a consequence of chance event. In a study on sex differences as an explanation for career progression, some other researchers (McMahon et al., 2012; Wood & Lindorff, 2001) found that most female managers reported enthusiasm, having mentors and luck as contributing to their success. Although women and men had similar aspirations to achieve senior positions, women were less likely to expect promotions, explaining that such differences are the result of societal expectations of gender differences. Similarly, a study by Fisman and O'Neill (2009) finds that women are more likely to attribute their success to luck and opportunity rather than solely to their own abilities. The authors argue that these beliefs have implications for women's career choices and aspirations.

Davies and Pham (2023) argue that the gendered dynamics of luck can create non-equitable opportunities for career advancement for men and women academics and researchers. Luck is intimately connected to gender identities, and understanding the interplay between the two can provide insights into the experience of researchers (Davies & Pham, 2023). They conclude that the gendered identities intersect with luck in complex ways, with women and non-binary researchers often experiencing additional barriers and constraints.

Gill and Prowse (2014) examine gender differences in competitive behaviour in career decisions. The authors find that men are more likely to enter competitive environments, while women tend to avoid them. They explain further that luck plays a significant role in determining the outcome of competitions, and this effect is more pronounced for women than men. The authors suggest that interventions aimed at increasing the participation of women in competitive environments should consider the role of luck and aim to reduce its impact on outcomes. In summary, this study provides fresh insights into the reasons behind women's potential reluctance to seek career advancement that is heavily focused on competition.

Other researchers, such as Zhong et al. (2011) and Nzioka (2013), believe that luck has a minor role in career progression. Cimirotić et al. (2017) identified luck as an important factor in career advancement, however, they believe the impact of luck on career progression can be interpreted differently when considering the gender of the individual. According to Cimirotić et al. (2017), women are modest about their career achievements and, therefore, consider luck an expression of modesty. Consequently, they conclude that “highly modest self-presenters were favoured over moderate modest self-presenters when they were female, whereas the opposite holds true for men” (Cimirotić et al., 2017, p.180). In some other studies, women attribute their career success to luck when they were able to overcome gender barriers (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2001; Cho et al., 2019) and “lucky ones” who achieve their career aspirations are those who have been successful in avoiding gender biases (Soklaridis et al., 2017).

Similarly, Diezmann et al. (2019) argue that to a limited extent having luck positively impacted women professors' careers. Professors acknowledged that primarily, hard work and a bit of luck provided opportunities for them to advance their careers, such as being in the right place at the right time or receiving mentorship from influential colleagues.

On the other hand, luck can also have negative effects on women's careers, particularly due to gender bias and discrimination. The authors emphasise the need for a more equitable system that recognises, and rewards merit rather than relying on chance occurrences. Overall, the paper highlights the importance of understanding the interplay between luck and gender in academic career progression (Diezmann et al., 2019).

What we contribute to this discussion of luck in career literature is a comparative view on women's and men's career narratives of luck, with a particular focus on gender differences that emanate from structural conditions and choices that give luck a gendered meaning. One of the main theoretical perspectives that is proposed to explain this phenomenon is Anderson's (1999) Luck Egalitarianism or Equality of Fortune, which accounts for the natural inequality in the distribution

of luck. Therefore, in this study, we take a broader perspective by a tour of Luck Egalitarianism theories to guide our discussions of women's and men's career narratives of luck.

## Methodology

In order to build a framework that helps unravel the gendered construction of luck, this paper draws on a social constructionist approach (Burr, 1995) to luck. Therefore, it focuses on luck as a product of social interaction, as a form of saying and doing (Martin, 2003), based on implicit and explicit cultural norms and rules (Benschop et al., 2013). Our social constructionist approach relates to a Foucauldian analysis of luck as multiple discourses that refer to a dynamic set of meanings, representations, and practices that produce, reproduce, challenge and adjust a particular event. In that sense, discourses define the objects of our knowledge and actions (Foucault, 2019). The gendered construction of luck can be surrounded by a number of discourses. Some of these discourses are more dominant or prevalent than others (Martin, 2003). Therefore, in our study, we analyse the dynamic set of multiple discourses regarding luck and their respective impact on the gendered construction of this concept.

This study draws on 50 semi-structured interviews with female and male senior managers in Australia. In this study, we have focused on senior managers' narratives in order to analyse their career transition to senior roles in which the attribution to luck has been made. Exploring luck in career stories requires a substantial and successful career history. Individuals in managerial positions, therefore, present a robust sample for study. As our study was abductive, we started with the data, identified luck as a curious construct, and then moved between theory and data to arrive at a conceptual saturation. Therefore, our findings are based on an empirical study in which female and male managers constructed different meanings of luck and linked the gendered attributions to this concept. The study was not originally conceived for the purpose of exploring the construction of luck in a career, and it was part of a larger project examining women's underrepresentation in senior roles. The study is based on an abductive paradigm (Hubbard & Lindsay, 2013; Williamson, 2016) rather than an inductive or deductive paradigm, as the abductive process of moving between the data and the theory has led to the discovery of an emergent phenomenon, i.e. gendered construction of luck.

Therefore, we decided to draw on the findings about gendered constructions of luck, in addition to the reflexive diary of the researchers, to explore further the ways in which respondents use the concept of *luck* or similar terms in their career life. Watson (2001) makes a distinction between an "analytic concept", a concept imposed by the researcher to explain an aspect of social reality, a term used by respondents in describing their lifeworld (El-Sawad et al., 2005). Whilst our interest is in the latter, it is nonetheless worth bearing in mind the ways in which concepts like *luck* have been used analytically.

In our analysis, we paid attention to how relationships between career progression and the word *luck* as discursive formations were formed through discursive practices, such as how women attribute their success as *luck* or *accidental* and men

to their own merits and capabilities. In career progression, men interviewees pointed towards their male privilege and the support that they receive from their managers as a matter of *luck* for career progression, however, women attributed their career progression to *fortune*.

Therefore, in this study, we use discourse analysis as frequently employed in organisation studies (Fairclough, 2005, 2013) for analysing “the relations between linguistic/semiotic facets of social structures and social practices, including ‘discourses’” (Fairclough, 2005, p.917). This helped us to approach discourses of luck as part of a broader set of social and discursive practices that challenge male privilege.

Therefore, this paper addresses the following questions: 1) What does the concept of luck mean for women and men? And how do female and male managers narrate luck in their careers? How have the societal and cultural factors influenced the differing perceptions of luck between males and females?

## Findings

We used discursive analytical techniques to analyse all quotes concerning the word *luck*. In this study, men talked about how they had the capacity and the attributes to progress, whereas many women spoke about being “lucky” to get a position. No man commented that it was “luck” or “by accident” that they had progressed. When men commented on luck, it was often in relation to support and sponsorship that they received above and beyond their capabilities.

Women used phrases such as not planned, accidental, and from nowhere as managing careers in senior positions was a particular challenge for most of them, and luck was, therefore, their fortune in overcoming these barriers. Their narratives involved making “choices” at the outset of their career, navigating their way through the high demands of senior jobs, and as a result, making strategic “choices” about further career progression. For women balancing career and family responsibilities was a consideration when planning for their careers (Özkanlı & White, 2008) Women’s “choices” occur in circumstances not of their “choosing” (Lewis & Simpson, 2010, 2015), and the choices faced are limited and come with potentially negative consequences. In contrast, the majority of men do not face these “choices”. Kossek et al. (2017) believed that women’s individual “choices” are shaped by the societal contexts in which they are embedded. In contrast, many of the male participants were unencumbered by much of the caring responsibilities, domestic chores, and gender barriers (Poorhosseinzadeh & Strachan, 2020; Poorhosseinzadeh et al., 2019). Their career narratives were less about barriers and more about self-choices, network support and sponsorship that they received from other men. Men framed luck as events, incidents, and happenings that offered them more than what they were capable of in terms of their education, experience and skills.

According to Niederle and Vesterlund (2007), women not only turn away from competition, while men are attracted to it, but also high-performing women entered their competitive tournament scheme too rarely and low-performing men entered it too often. Women often undervalued their own skills and were described as not as

good at self-promotion as men. Men often referred to their capabilities and that they didn't need luck.

### **Luck as Accidental Career**

Almost all of the women managers interviewed reported having *accidental* management careers because they stated that they generally had not planned—and were not encouraged—to be managers. Women described their career paths as *unplanned* and *accidental*, while in comparison, none of the men described their careers as *accidental*. Most women expressed that they do not have career goals. They often referred to being *lucky* in gaining senior positions and not believing in their capabilities. One of the participants, Sophia, explained how she considers her career progress in relation to luck.

My career has been *not planned*; I have always been *happy* in the current role. I have never had much *ambition* to move forward... I've seemed to be *in the right place at the right time*, and obviously, I have applied for the role and I have been *lucky* to get it. But it was never a career path that I was taking.

Natalie also mentioned that her career was not planned, and that she was lucky:

My first senior position *was out of nowhere*. I didn't think that I could do the job and I didn't want to do that job, but the way that it was put to me after I said no initially, ... I realised that it would be better for me to do it even if I did it wrong.... *I have been very lucky along the way*... Then, I kept sort of leaping up to the next one and [the] next one and [the] next one, so there was no intent to part of my path.

Although one of the women referred to having a specific career goal, she still believes her achievement has been as a result of *being fortunate*, which is again a variation of "luck". Rita said, "I've been quite fortunate actually. I've kind of always set high achievements for myself and I have actually always reached and gotten there". Overall, luck featured quite heavily in women's framing of their careers. They attributed the career outcomes to luck rather than their own choices and chances.

### **Luck as Career Success**

Unlike women, men never talk about an accidental career path. Some of them referred to luck, but luck for them was building the relationship that is required for achieving higher positions. For example, male managers mentioned that they were strategic when planning for career progression. As one of their strategies, they discussed their planning with their senior managers, and with their guidance and support, they were able to achieve a senior position. Jack (DVC) explained:

I think I have always been fortunate [in my career progression]. I've had the opportunities from good previous experiences in diverse settings. I think I've had good role models and mentors to follow. I've had good feedback that has



been very important ... and supervisors that have been effective in giving me feedback and helping me respond to feedback ... sometimes they've been through opportunities created through networking .... I moved from Singapore back to England to a job with someone who hired me from the networking opportunities .... He became a strong mentor to me, he helped me progress to different levels of seniority within my organisation and I think he was very helpful in both mentoring me and creating the opportunity for me to flourish. And giving me a job in the first place and supporting me in my ongoing development.

Most male managers stated that they prepared to express their interest in progression to their managers or supervisors and asked for their advice on further progression. Tony (CFO) reflected:

I am always actively seeking feedback from them [my managers] to make sure that I'm aligned with them.... You should know *what your boss thinks and expects all the time*. So, part of it [career progression] is about not being ignorant to that relationship. You need to manage your boss, as well as manage yourself.

Tony (CFO) mentioned that he was *lucky* to be given opportunity and exposure to big projects, and consequently opportunity for advancement. Luck for most men in the study was something that came in addition and in support of their career plans. Men were able to plan careers and luck was helping them along.

I was offered an opportunity to play a senior role. I [had] never managed that before, but I was *lucky* that I had the senior's complete *support*. It worked out quite well, and they offered me the role .... So, from that, they gave me quick exposure to executives and that was quite a quick transition.

In a similar way, men also talked about *being lucky* to be given big projects to work on which, once again, if they believed they performed well, they would more likely be offered a Joshua observed:

My [previous] manager [was the one] exposed me to different things... He involved me in projects and activities that helped me to develop certain skills... and by doing that I learnt how to plan, how to influence ... *I think I was really fortunate* that I was given that exposure during my career progression. Even here, I'm exposed to things, and I'm empowered to be exposed to things, which I think is a really big thing.

This was, however, not always the case for the women managers. Women were not usually empowered or given the opportunity that leads to advancement in the same organisation. However, when women received the opportunity to take on a temporary role it did not seem to assist them with further career progression. Alison had performed in a senior role (Tier 2) several times but was never promoted to a higher role on a permanent basis. Instead of promoting her to fill the positions, the organisation recruited another general manager. Her narratives involved making

“strategic choices” at the outset of her career, however, this has not been translated into career success.

On the other hand, there have been some exceptions that women had a similar narrative when referring to the “luck” and “sponsorship”. For example, Diana (senior manager) mentioned that:

I am lucky and that I have a very supportive boss so my direct manager within our organization I feel that I am supported and given the right amount of responsibilities and ability to make decisions myself that I know that you support.

Women also mentioned that having family support to take care of their children is a “luck”. Barbara (GM) explained:

I am *very fortunate* in that I have got a supportive family...my parents in law, cause I've got a seven year old son they have allowed me to go back full time when my son was still relatively young which has made a huge difference. It is really hard for a woman to go at the same pace as a man if you don't have the same level of support that I do. Women in my opinion will always be the main, have more of a care factor about what was in the lunch box the weather of the reading gets done or not and not in every case but that's certainly the case in my situation and *I am just so lucky* that my parents in law are retired school teachers I know that the homework get started.

The findings showed an intersectional exception to the gendered construction of luck. William (SM) is from a minority ethnic group, despite his hard work he stayed in a senior management role (Tier 3) for a long time. He is single and totally dedicated to his work. He framed luck as having good access to mentoring, unlike other more privileged men who framed luck about having something more than their merits would afford them. William reflected:

I was lucky to get very good mentors, who were pretty much high up in the industry, within the company...they coached me from the skills point of view, but at the same time, from a leadership point of view, that was beneficial to me.

## Discussion and Conclusion

We know from the literature that women's and men's experiences and measures of success are different (Ng et al., 2005) and that men report luck more than women (Ottsen, 2019). Women suffer more complex barriers at work (Cho et al., 2017; Wei & Cho, 2013). Men support each other more at work (Spurk et al., 2015). The literature on gender and work has revealed many other aspects of the gendering of women's and men's experiences and personal constructs (Bourne & Özbilgin, 2008). Our study extends this literature by exploring luck as a gendered personal construct. Gendered constructions of luck at the individual level reveal how systemic inequalities in opportunity structures lead to women and men having

different perceptions and constructions of luck. Therefore, exploring luck reveals mechanisms, cultural constructs, and rituals that shape opportunity structures in work life and labour markets.

In this study, we have expanded the discussion on the treatment of luck in philosophy, which is twofold: Luck egalitarianism emphasises equality of opportunity. Democratic egalitarianism refers to individuals' chances and choices beyond their opportunities as luck (Anderson, 1999). Drawing on Anderson's Luck Egalitarianism and democratic egalitarianism (1999), we extend both theories of egalitarianism that are often studied in gender-neutral ways by showing their gendered construction. Our study demonstrates that while women draw on luck egalitarianism which views equality of opportunity as luck, men draw on democratic egalitarianism, which considers luck as something above and beyond their earned privileges.

Our study shows that luck is a gendered construct and that women define their luck in terms of their struggles against all odds, whereas the male definition of luck is about structures and institutions that support them above and beyond. Our study further hints at the intersectionality of gendered constructions of luck, as luck appeared also ethnicised and classed. While Roulet and Laker (2022) suggest that sponsorship could enhance luck, we show in this paper that such luck is often afforded to men and remains a male construct. Women in our study, in the absence of sponsorship, refer to luck that they have attained. Luck egalitarianism (Anderson, 1999) refers to luck egalitarianism versus democratic egalitarianism. In the former, individuals frame their chances and choices as luck. When choices and chances that individuals have are attributed to luck, inequalities inherent in gender relations and other hierarchical relationships remain entrenched and unchallenged. Anderson suggests instead that democratic egalitarianism as an alternative philosophy that is founded on the assumption of the fundamental form of equality between individuals that shapes social institutions, processes and outcomes. If luck egalitarianism is upheld, men and women will continue to define luck in separate ways.

The ways in which women and men managers identified themselves as *lucky* in their career advancement differed dramatically. The term luck and its associated phrases were not gender-neutral, and there were visible disparities between women and men in their usage of the term *luck*. Men declared their achievement of senior positions was a result of their hard work and acceptance of responsibilities; they had achieved their positions on their own merits. They considered this as deserved, a concept of justice that has been called Desert Luck (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2015a, 2019). For them, *being lucky* meant having a supportive manager and having the right relationships that offered them opportunities above and beyond their merit at work. For men, achieving senior roles required something "beyond the original set", a structure of support they could enjoy because of their male privilege, and they defined this as *luck*. Men's construction of *luck* reflects Dworkin's definition (2018) of *good option luck*, which results in inequality of opportunity for women as they are not offered similar options. As Melamed (cited in Özbilgin & Healy, 2004, p.360) mentioned, the "macro-societal opportunity structures are more likely to assist men than women".

In stark contrast to men's narratives, the senior women in this study saw their career success as *accidental*. However, in women's cases, there should be an alternative explanation of why desert luck is absent. Here we should consider the absence of distributive justice as a potential reason because women do not receive the same privilege as their male colleagues to demand more than their stake in life. Therefore, we need to consider the interplay between luck and responsibility in the career narratives of women and men from a more critical perspective (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2019).

In this study, we have discussed how societal and political factors have influenced the differing perceptions of luck between males and females. We explained that men enjoy *systemic luck* as they have the required social and political sources, such as relationships and sponsorships, necessary to achieve management positions. According to Tessman (2009, p.17), bad luck with no systemic source tends to be predictable. Therefore, women's bad luck is predictable as they do not have the required resources, i.e. access to support from men's networks of privilege, for their success. So that is the reason when women achieve senior roles, they consider it as *accidental* because they do not predict achieving a higher position.

In summary, the study uncovers the power effects of discourses of luck which have been constructed as a specific manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. By looking at attributions of luck from a gender perspective, this study concludes that this discourse has been affected by societal and cultural norms on gender. Thus we infer that luck is a gendered construct in the context of careers.

We find notable exceptions across intersections of gender, class and race to male and female frames of luck in career narratives. For example, men from working-class or minority ethnic backgrounds and white women from upper-class backgrounds do not have the same experience as most women and men in the study. We also identified these exceptions to our findings and explored their intersectional significance and the complexity of intersectional ways in which luck is gendered, classed and ethnicised. Yet, our study is too modest to capture the full range of intersectional effects. Thus we suggest further research on intersectional constructions of luck in career narratives.

There are a number of limitations to this study. This is an abductive study. Further studies of inductive and deductive nature could survey the interplay of luck, gender and careers in more focused ways and with different populations. The overwhelming majority of senior managers in Australia are white Anglo-Celtic men; consequently, there was little diversity among participants in terms of ethnicity, class and other categories (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018).

Future research could focus on critical incidents that lead to gendered constructions of luck and career. It would also be interesting to explore ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, disability and luck in career narratives, as there is a dearth of literature on diversity and luck in careers in general. In addition, the role of luck in career decision-making has been discussed by researchers to have an impact on an individual self-efficacy (Shin & Lee, 2017) People who perceive luck as an essential factor in their career advancement are more likely to experience a negative on their confidence in making career decisions (Shin & Lee, 2017). As we discussed in this study, the construction of luck is gendered; therefore, it is crucial to investigate

further the role of luck in career development to understand better and reduce gender disparities in career advancement. The practical implication for women includes recognising and addressing the gendered nature of luck and its impact on their career advancement. Individuals need to realise how men translate luck in their careers and understand the impact of luck on their career decision-making and self-efficacy to be prepared to navigate the gender-specific approaches in their career transition. By doing so, women would be able to take control of their career paths and increase the likelihood of career progression. Studies have shown that efforts to enhance internal locus of control and career self-efficacy among students have been identified as potential strategies to address the influence of luck on career aspirations (Al-Bahrani et al., 2021).

On the other hand, HR professionals and organisations are responsible for considering the differential effects of luck on men and women's career prospects and working toward creating equitable opportunities for career advancement. This involves acknowledging and addressing any systemic biases within the organisation and implementing policies and practices that promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Studying gendered constructions of luck reveals systemic inequalities and inequality regimes that shape opportunity structures in gendered lines. Studying constructions of luck. HR professionals may support female or non-privileged employees by eliminating systems and contexts of gender inequality, providing women with resources such as coaching and mentoring to help them navigate gender-specific challenges and negotiate for fair compensation and career opportunities. By doing so, HR professionals can help create a more inclusive and equitable workplace that benefits everyone. Implementing the aforementioned practical recommendations can optimally contribute to a fairer distribution of opportunities, creating a work environment where success is determined by merit rather than chance/luck.

## Appendix

See Table 1

**Table 1** Details of interview participants (all names are pseudonyms in this research)

No	Participant	Gender	Age	Children	Marital Status	Position
1	Richard	M	55	2	Partnered	Deputy Director
2	Mike	M	52	2	Partnered	Head of Dept-Prof
3	Matt	M	57	2	Partnered	Dean-Prof
4	David	M	53	4	Partnered	Dean-Prof
5	Jordan	M	41	1	Partnered	Director
6	Jack	M	59	3	Partnered	DVC
7	Aiden	M	40	2	Partnered	Head of Dept-Prof
8	Jason	M	57	2	Partnered	Head of Dept-Prof

**Table 1** (continued)

No	Participant	Gender	Age	Children	Marital Status	Position
9	Rudolf	M	49	3	Partnered	Dean-Prof
10	Luke	M	47	2	Partnered	Associate Director- Prof
11	Charles	M	67	Not known	Partnered	Associate Director
12	Ryder	M	45	Not known	Partnered	Deputy Head of Dept-Prof
13	Carolina	F	35	1	Partnered	Director
14	Lara	F	38	1	Partnered	A/Director
15	Maria	F	53	0	Partnered	Deputy Director- Prof
16	Clara	F	47	1	Partnered	Head of Dept- Prof
17	Grace	F	51	3	Partnered	Deputy Director
18	Natalie	F	50	2	Single	Director- Prof
19	Hannah	F	58	2	Partnered	DVC
20	Isabella	F	65	3	Partnered	PVC
21	Zoe	F	47	3	Single	PVC
22	Fiona	F	44	2	Partnered	Head- Prof
23	Elena	F	50	1	Partnered	Deputy Head of Dept-Prof
24	Violet	F	44	0	Partnered	Deputy Head of Dept-Prof
25	Jasmine	F	40	1	Partnered	HR Manager
26	Lucy	F	44	0	Single	Deputy Head of Dept-Prof
27	Alison	F	48	2	Single	Senior Manager
28	Rita	F	33	0	Single	Senior Manager
29	Anna	F	31	1	Partnered	Manager
30	Rose	F	38	0	Single	Senior Manager
31	Kevin	M	35	2	Partnered	General Manager
32	Sophia	F	49	2	Single	Manager
33	Erika	F	47	2	Single parent	Manager
34	Flora	F	43	1	Partnered	Senior Manager
35	Daniel	M	47	2	Partnered	General Manager
36	Barbara	F	43	0	Partnered	General Manager
37	Ross	M	41	2	Partnered	General Manager
38	Matthew	M	54	2	Partnered	General Manager
39	Diana	F	35	0	Single	Senior Manager
40	Bradley	M	58	1	Partnered	General Manager
41	Rita	F	38	2	Partnered	Senior manager
42	Julia	F	52	2	Partnered	Senior Manager
43	Sofie	F	55	2	Single	Senior Manager
44	William	M	41	0	Single	Senior Manager
45	Sue	F	36	0	Single	Senior Manager
46	Maggie	F	35	0	Single	Senior Manager
47	Amy	F	45	2	Partnered	Senior Manager
48	Edward	M	38	2	Partnered	Executive
49	Tony	M	47	2	Partnered	Executive
50	Jasper	M	30	0	Partnered	Senior Manager

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