Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

GENDER STEREOTYPES AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

A Comparative Study Between The Netherlands and Bulgaria

Siya Ivaylova Ilieva

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master Program Public Administration (specialization: Public Management and Leadership), Leiden University

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Sandra Groeneveld

Second reader: Elena Bondarouk

June 2019

Acknowledgements

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this Master Thesis to all women in leadership positions in public bureaucracies who are faced with stereotyping. With this Thesis, I wish to emphasize on their personal struggle as well as on the organizational outcomes of gender stereotypes in the higher echelons of the public sector.

Declaration of originality

I hereby declare that this Master Thesis was entirely my own work and that any additional sources of information have been duly cited.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, this Thesis does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any property rights.

I declare that this Thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

Abstract

Stereotypes are powerful constructs embedded in people's minds that are constantly being reproduced by the society. They confront female leaders in public organizations with a challenge to overcome. Therefore, existing stereotypical expectations regarding the role and behavior of women translate into concrete realities, such as stereotype threat, that affect females' professional experience. This Master Thesis departs from the assumption that gender stereotypes influence female leaders' professional experience and studies the mechanisms through which this relationship is executed. Additionally, it explores variation across cultural contexts by situating the analysis in two countries, i.e. The Netherlands and Bulgaria. To this end, females in the positions of director or director-general in public bureaucracies have been interviewed to understand their views on the topic and perceptions of reality. Afterwards, the transcripts of the interviews have been coded and an explanation of the mechanisms through which gender stereotypes influence female leaders has been provided. The results of the analysis illustrate the similarities and the differences between The Netherlands and Bulgaria. While in both countries women in leadership are confronted with gender stereotypes, the extent to which they perceive them as a threat is different. Furthermore, Dutch female leaders have to cope primarily with implicit stereotypes, while Bulgarian female leaders need to cope with explicit stereotypes. This Thesis offers interesting insights about the topic as well as practical points for practitioners that could be used to improve organizational performance in the public sector.

Table of Contents:

List of Figures:

List of Tables:

1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background of the problem

A female Minister walks in a conference room accompanied by her male spokesperson. The diplomats present at the meeting ignore the lady and start welcoming the man, thinking that he is the official delegate. Although it sounds as an anecdote, this is a real-life personal situation experienced by Jet Bussemaker, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science (2012-2017), which I heard in a seminar dedicated to gender diversity at the workplace. Furthermore, this is an account representing the powerful nature of gender stereotypes and the continuous struggle of women to be accepted as equal to men especially in fields like politics that are considered as a possession of males. Zarkov (2017) and Connell (2006) acknowledge that despite feminists' efforts to establish gender equality, the top leadership positions in the political sphere are still reserved for men. Nevertheless, women in different countries have proved to be successful leaders in their roles as experts in distinct ministries or agencies (Zarkov, 2007). Hence, it is interesting to research whether stereotypes regarding gender and leadership imprison or empower women.

1.2. Added value of the research

Regardless of the extensive amount of literature on the topic, there are still certain gaps that need to be fulfilled. In the 21st century, the academic interest and the public attention in women as leaders have grown remarkably. Yet, the challenges that female leaders deal with nowadays are under-researched. Furthermore, as Eagly and Heilman (2016) point in the introduction to the special issue on gender and leadership of The Leadership Quarterly Journal, the manners in which gender stereotypes affect female leaders are not completely known. The majority of the scholars agree that discrimination in the form of gender stereotypes is the main obstacle that women face in becoming leaders (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Additionally, they focus on the challenges that females face in the process of climbing the organizational ladder, but fail to dedicate attention to the difficulties with which women, who have already reached a top-level leadership position, are confronted. Consequently, this Master Thesis shifts the focus and places the emphasis on females working at the higher levels of the organizational hierarchy and the stereotypes that they are confronted with.

Furthermore, most of the scholars research primarily the private sector (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) and use quantitative data for their analysis and the method of surveys to collect it (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012; Şandor, Macarie, & Creţa, 2011). In order to add new insights

and provide deeper contextual explanations regarding the mechanisms through which gender stereotypes influence females in leadership positions in the public sector, this Thesis employs qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, such as face-to-face and online interviews with women leaders in fully public institutions.

Moreover, the existing scholarship focuses mostly on the Western world and explores differences between racial groups in society, but fails to account for the variations across distinct countries and cultural contexts (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016). Therefore, the research in this Thesis is situated in two countries and compares and contrasts the Western with the Eastern context to analyze cross national variation. The chosen countries are The Netherlands and Bulgaria. They are selected due to several reasons. Firstly, the former is located in the Western context, while the latter is situated in the Eastern context. Secondly, both represent interesting cases since the Dutch society is considered as gender-equal, but the number of females in leadership positions is quite low which makes women leaders a minority in public organizations, while Bulgarians are believed to possess more traditional patriarchal cultural views, but the percentage of women leaders is significantly high and females form the majority of civil servants especially in public administration. Hence, The Netherlands and Bulgaria are peculiar cases in the sense that the number of female leaders is against expectations based on traditional cultural beliefs among society. Last, but not least, the two countries are chosen due to practical reasons since the researcher is a native Bulgarian who lives and studies in The Netherlands. In the second chapter of the Thesis, similarities and differences between the two countries are further explored.

1.3. Research question, goal and relevance of the research

Consequently, the purpose of this Master Thesis is to investigate the work issues female leaders need to cope with, particularly stereotyping, and explore variation across cultural contexts in different organizations in two nation states. Thus, the employed research question is:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

The Thesis chooses an interdisciplinary approach, combining theories both from the public administration and the public management literature as well as from the sociological and the physiological literature streams to explain the experience of female public professionals in leadership positions with gender stereotypes. The goal of the research is explanatory since it intends to identify the causal mechanisms through which the causal effect of gender stereotypes

on women's professional experience is produced. The proximal objective is to answer the research question, while the ultimate aim is to produce knowledge that promotes gender equality in society and improves the functioning of public organizations.

The importance of the research is tightly related to theories which emphasize the added value of human capital and its relevance for improving organizational performance. For instance, the Harvard model of human resources management or the soft-model, as it is known, regards social capital as a unique resource that is able to generate values from other resources, which in turn will result in organizational success (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015). Hence, being able to identify the obstacles female leaders face and how these affect them is essential for improving women's well-being at the workplace and organizational performance outcomes. Subsequently, the added value of this research is twofold. The practical relevance is to bring recommendations for dealing with stereotypes at the workplace for other female leaders, inspired by the experience of the ones interviewed in this Thesis, and eventually to advance public organizations' performance. The scientific relevance is to advance the current state of the art by adding new insights into two different streams of academic literature and to contribute for the enrichment of the Public Administration as an area of knowledge by applying existing theories to an unexplored context. On the one hand, the Thesis enhances the existing public administration and management literature by adding the potential influence of the cultural context and the gender component in the study of leadership and organizational performance. On the other, it enriches the sociological and the psychological literature by explaining the consequences of gender stereotypes on a particular group of people working at the top levels of the public organizational hierarchy, namely women in leadership positions.

To the end of realizing its ambitions, the Master Thesis is focused on the public sector and on proven female leaders, rather than on those women trying to climb the organizational ladder. Furthermore, it uses qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviews, instead of surveys, to compare and contrast two countries from the European Union (one from the Western context and one from the Eastern context, which has been under-researched) and to acquire a deep knowledge about the similarities and the differences between the cases. The sample includes six current Dutch female leaders and seven current Bulgarian female leaders. The respondents are senior civil servants employed as directors or directors-general in public institutions, mostly ministries, in the two countries. The representatives are selected not only because they are illustrative and fulfill the requirements of being a woman leader, but also

because they possess certain similarities, including a rich political biography and relatively close policy domains, which make comparison plausible.

1.4. Outline of the remaining chapters

With the aim to answer the research question and to reach meaningful conclusions, this Master Thesis is divided into the following sections. Chapter One, "Introduction", presents the problem at hand, the research question, its academic and societal relevance, the method of data collection and provides a brief outline of the content.

In Chapter Two, "Country Comparison", more information about the differences and the similarities in the top level of the bureaucratic landscapes in The Netherlands and Bulgaria as well as in the people's attitudes with regards to gender roles and female leaders is presented using statistical data from the European Institute for Gender Equality, the World Values Survey and other reputable sources. The first aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with background information about the number of female leaders at the top level in public organizations and the extent to which stereotypes differ in the two countries. The other aim of the chapter is to explain why it is important to carry out the research in two contexts that are both similar as being member states of the European Union and dissimilar as having different cultures.

Chapter Three, "Literature Review and Theoretical Framework", consists of a literature review of classical and recent authors, such as Alice Eagly, who write about feminism, leadership and prejudices. The Thesis combines insights both from the public administration and the public management literature as well as from the sociological and the physiological literature streams to explain the mechanisms through which gender stereotypes affect female leaders and to draw expectations regarding the relationship between gender stereotypes and women's experience at the workplace. The theoretical framework culminates in a conceptual framework, including all the relevant concepts together with the potential causal relationships between these, which is later used in the analysis of the case studies.

Chapter Four, "Methodology", provides a justification of the research design and method, i.e. an explanation of the criteria for case selection, the choice for semi-structured interviews with female leaders and the coding of the interview transcripts. In addition, the chapter offers an explanation of the measurement of the concepts from the theoretical framework and a reflection on the validity of the research.

Chapter Five, "Analysis and Discussion", is dedicated to the report of the empirical findings, the application of the theoretical framework to the research topic and the explanation of the phenomenon under study. Firstly, the data gathered during the interviews with the female leaders is presented in a precise, objective, verifiable and systematic manner. Secondly, the responses to the questions are analyzed and the results are discussed referring back to the theoretical expectations.

Finally, Chapter Six, "Conclusion", summarizes the main elements of the Thesis and the most important findings, answers the research question, reflects on the strengths and the limitations of the current research and provides suggestions for further research as well as some policy recommendations aiming at improving female leaders' experience at the workplace.

The Thesis ends with a reference list, which contains a complete list of all the sources that are cited directly, and an appendix, which includes the interview guide that is used during the data collection process.

2. Chapter Two: Country Comparison

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the issue under review and the research question, being:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

Furthermore, it briefly explained the reasons for which the research is situated in a country from the Western context and a country from the Eastern context, i.e. The Netherlands and Bulgaria.

Subsequently, this chapter focuses on the chosen countries and presents background information both on the parameters of interest, i.e. women in leadership, and the country-context, i.e. the existence and strength of gender stereotypes. The aim of the chapter is to discover similarities and differences between the two countries and to justify their selection as case studies in this Master Thesis. To this end, the chapter is structured into the following sections. Firstly, statistical data regarding the representation of women in the higher echelon of the public sector is presented. Secondly, information about the societal attitudes towards females in leadership and some historical and cultural background that explains the prevalent stereotypical beliefs in The Netherlands and Bulgaria are discussed.

2.2. Statistics on the number of women in leadership

This section presents the percentage of females employed at the top of the public administration and shows how it has differed over the years.
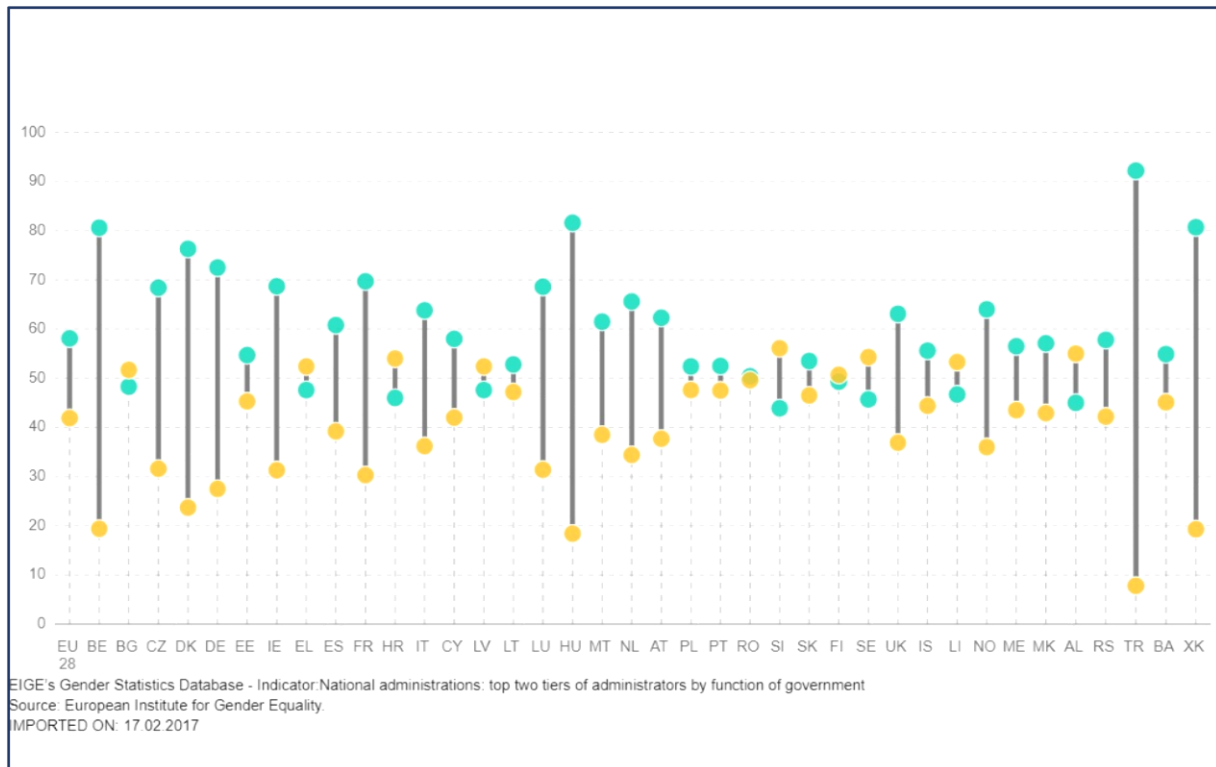
Figure 1: National administrations: top two tiers of administrators by function of government in EU-28, 2018, percent of total

To begin with, the general patterns of the current situation are discussed. The most recent available data from the European Institute for Gender Equality, which will be referred to as "EIGE" from now on, is used. Figure 1 illustrates the last year's percentage of females employed at the higher tier of national administrations in all the 28 countries that are members of the European Union (EIGE, 2017). Overall, the number of males and females in leadership in the European Union as a whole is almost balanced, with women's representation amounting to 40% (Ibid.). For instance, Romania (49,6% women; 50,4% men) and Finland (50,7% women; 49,3% men) are examples of countries with established gender equality in the public administration, while Belgium (19,4% women; 90,6% men) and Hungary (18,4% women; 81,6% men) are examples of countries with apparent gender inequality (Ibid.).

The Netherlands (34,4% women; 65,6% men) shows similar numbers to the numbers in the EU-28 (Ibid.). The country aims at achieving gender equality, but the percentage of females in leadership is still considerably lower than the percentage of males at the top of the public administration. In contrast, Bulgaria (51,7% women; 48,3% men) counts for approximately equal numbers between women and men in leadership, with females slightly surpassing males (Ibid.). The current situation in Bulgaria could be explained by the historical background and the communist heritage, which is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Following, the Thesis provides information about the role of females in the labor market in Bulgaria and The Netherlands, especially in the higher echelon of the public sector, over the last two decades. The last available data from the National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria regarding the labor market in the country shows that the employment coefficient of the population between the age of 15 and 64 years has been steadily rising. In 2003, it was 52,5% (56,0% males; 49,0% females) (National Statistical Institute, 2018). Additionally, in that year 35,9% females and 64,10% males occupied the top two tiers of the national administration (EIGE, 2017). Five years later, in 2008, the employment coefficient increased with more than 10%, amounting to 64,0% (68,5% males; 59,5% females) (National Statistical Institute, 2018). Moreover, the percentage of women in the top two tiers of the national administration raised as well with slightly less than 20%, reaching 52,4% and surpassing the percentage of men, which was 47,6% (EIGE, 2017). Later, in 2013, the employment coefficient in Bulgaria slightly decreased to 59,5% (62,1% males; 56,8% females) (National Statistical Institute, 2018). A possible explanation is the effect of the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008 and its consequences in the labor market. In that year, 719,3 thousand people (300,0 thousand males; 419,3 thousand females) were employed in the public sector (Ibid.). More specifically, 228,6 thousand Bulgarians (124,7 thousand males; 103,9 thousand females) worked in the public administration, of whom 194,1 thousand (123,3 thousand males; 70,80 thousand females) occupied leadership positions (Ibid.). According to the data from the EIGE (2017), 51,1% females and 48,9% males were employed in the top two tiers of the national administration. In the year 2017, from which is the most recently available data from the National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria, the situation in the country improved and the employment coefficient of the population between the age of 15 and 64 years reached 66,9% (70,6% males; 63,1% females) (National Statistical Institute, 2018). However, the number of people employed in the public sector slightly decreased to 673,6 thousand (274,2 thousand males; 399,4 thousand females) (Ibid.). 219,0 thousand people (114,3 thousand males; 104,7 thousand females) worked in the public administration and 181,4 thousand Bulgarians (110,3 thousand males; 71,1 thousand females) had the position of a leader (Ibid.). In addition, the gender gap in the top two tiers of the national administration almost disappeared, since 49,8% females and 50,2% males were employed in the sector (EIGE, 2017).

In The Netherland, the labor force participation rate within the group of people between the age of 15 and 64 years was 74,7% (82,8% males; 66,3% females) in 2003 and 78,3% (84,8% males; 71,7% females) in 2008 (OECD.Stat, 2019c). The number of females in the top two tiers of the

national administration in 2003 was 15,6% (compared to 84,4% males) and in 2008 it was 25,5% (compared to 74,5% males) (EIGE, 2017). In 2013 and 2017 the labor force participation rate within the group of people between the age of 15 and 64 years remained the same, namely 79,7% (OECD.Stat, 2019c). Nonetheless, there were small differences between the two genders. For example, in 2013 84,7% were males and 74,6% were females, while in 2017 84,2% were males and 75,2% were females (Ibid.). In 2010, the share of central government employment, consisting of 13 ministries, filled by women in the country was 39,5%, among whom 15,7% females were employed in the senior management and 23,1% women were working as middle managers (OECD.Stat, 2019a). In 2013, 27,4% females and 72,6% males worked in the top two tiers of the national administration and in 2017 the percentages amounted to 33,6% females and 66,4% males (EIGE, 2017). In 2015, the year from which is the most recent available data from the OECD, 44,24 thousand women were working in the public administration sector, among whom 28 thousand females were employed in the senior management and 33 thousand women were having the position of a middle manager (OECD.Stat, 2019b).

Year/Country	EU-28	Bulgaria	The Netherlands
2003	26,4	35,9	15,6
2004	23,3	47,9	13,8
2005	22,0	39,0	15,9
2006	22,9	40,7	17,6
2007	33,1	51,5	17,6
2008	33,1	52,4	25,5
2009	31,8	51,1	22,0
2010	34,4	48,0	25,7
2011	37,3	46,0	26,1
2012	35,7	51,7	26,3

2013	37,0	51,1	27,4
2014	38,1	51,3	29,7
2015	39,2	52,4	30,8
2016	40,4	50,8	31,7
2017	41,7	49,8	33,6
2018	41,9	51,7	34,4

Table 1: National administration: women in the top two tiers of administration by function of government in the EU-28, Bulgaria and The Netherlands, 2003-2018, percent of total

Conclusively, Table 1 illustrates how the percentage of women in the top two tiers of administration by function of government in Bulgaria and The Netherlands has fluctuated over the last two decades. In addition, it shows the figures for the EU-28 as a starting point for comparison. Overall, the amount of women employed at the top of the public sector in Bulgaria is very close to the amount of men occupying leadership positions. Additionally, after 2007 the former has been exceeding the latter with few exceptions in 2010, 2011 and 2017. The number of females in leadership in The Netherlands has been steadily rising as well. Nonetheless, it is still significantly lower compared to the percentage of males in the higher echelons of the public administration. Generally, in The Netherlands, the employment rate both among males and females over the last years is higher. However, the number of females working in the public sector, more specifically as senior civil servants, in The Netherlands is significantly smaller than the one in Bulgaria.

2.3. Statistics on the existence and strength of gender stereotypes

This section focuses on the attitudes towards female leaders in The Netherlands and Bulgaria, i.e. gender equality and gender stereotyping. Moreover, it provides information about the cultural and the societal setting within which women in leadership are embedded by discussing briefly the historical background of the countries and the current media representation of females at the top.

2.3.1.   Societal attitudes and gender stereotyping

In addition to the difference in the percentage of women in leadership positions in the public administration in Bulgaria and The Netherlands, substantial dissimilarities become visible, when societal attitudes with regard to gender roles and female leaders in the two countries are compared. With the aim to compare and contrast the ideas, beliefs, preferences, attitudes, values and opinions of citizens in The Netherlands and Bulgaria, the results from the penultimate wave of the World Values Survey (2005-2009) and the latest wave of the European Values Study (2017) are discussed. 1001 Bulgarians (481 males; 520 females) and 1050 Dutch (513 males; 537 females) participated in the fifth wave (2005-2009) of the World Values Survey in 2006 (Inglehart et al., 2014). Even though there is a more recent wave from the period 2010-2014, it is not taken into consideration because Bulgaria does not participate in it. Hence, the data is missing. However, the dataset from the European Values Study, in which 1524 respondents from Bulgaria and 683 participants from The Netherlands gave their opinion regarding the same topics, provides a more up-to-date information and accounts for the mentioned limitation (European Values Study, 2018).

Year/Country	Bulgaria		The Netherlands	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree
2006		23,2		12,2
2017	11,5	16,1	1,0	5,0

Table 2: "When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.", percent of total

In general, 54,1% (56,3% male; 52,0% female) of Bulgarians and 58,6% (60,3% male; 56,9% female) of Dutch think that women having the same rights as men is an essential characteristic of democracy (Inglehart et al., 2014). Nonetheless, differences appear when respondent are asked about their views on particular issues. While, in 2006, 23,2% (30,8% male; 16,0% female) of the Bulgarian participants agreed with the statement: "When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women", the percentage among the Dutch population was approximately two times smaller (12,2% in total; 13,5% male; 10,9% female) (Ibid.). In 2017, the results were slightly different. 176 Bulgarians (11,5%) agreed strongly and 246 (16,1%) agreed with the statement, while in The Netherlands the percentages were 1,0% (7 people) and

5,0% (34 people), correspondingly (European Values Study, 2018). Hence, drawing from people's perspectives, a stronger trend towards moving to a more equal society is observed in The Netherlands.

Year/Country	Bulgaria		The Netherlands	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree
2006	12,9	31,6	3,1	13,1
2017	12,7	30,0	1,6	11,6

Table 3: "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.", percent of total

Additionally, in 2006, in Bulgaria 12,9% (18,4% male; 7,8% female) agreed strongly and 31,6% (39,1% male; 24,7% female) agreed with the sentence: "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do", whereas in The Netherlands, the percentages were 3,1% (3,9% male; 2,4% female) and 13,1% (15,0% male; 11,4% female), respectively (Inglehart et al., 2014). Eleven years later, in 2017, there was not much difference regarding this particular statement. 12,7% (181 people) of the Bulgarian participants agreed strongly and 30,0% (429 people) agreed with the claim, while 1,6% (11 people) of the Dutch respondents agreed strongly and 11,6% (78 people) agreed with it (European Values Study, 2018).

Year/Country	Bulgaria		The Netherlands	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree
2006	6,3		2,6	
2017	8,0	27,7	0,7	10,9

Table 4: "On the whole, men make better executives than women do.", percent of total

Moreover, in 2006, 2,6% (4,2% male; 1,1% female) of the Dutch population expressed a strong agreement with the statement: "On the whole, men make better executives than women do", while the percentage in Bulgaria was 6,3% (10,2% male; 2,7% female) (Inglehart et al., 2014). In 2017, 5 people (0,7%) agreed strongly with the statement and 74 people (10,9%) agreed with it in The Netherlands, while in Bulgaria 112 people (8,0%) agreed strongly and 387 people (27,7%) agreed (European Values Study, 2018). Subsequently, the data does not illustrate a

major differences over time, but shows substantive discrepancies, on the one hand, between nationalities, and on the other, between genders.

In a nutshell, the opinion of Bulgarian women and Dutch women is almost the same with minor differences in percentages, but male views in the two countries differ extensively leading to considerable discrepancies in the attitudes regarding gender roles and female leaders. While the Dutch population believes that women and men are equally good at being leaders, the Bulgarian population shares the opinion that the latter are much more successful than the former (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). This is an interesting observation, especially considering that the number of Bulgarian females in leadership positions in the public administration is higher. Therefore, the unexpected number of female leaders based on the results from the World Values Survey and the European Values Study in both countries is explained by emphasizing the role of history and media's power.

2.3.2. Culture and historical background in The Netherlands

The Netherlands is described as individualistic, feminine, low power-distance country and as such is characterized by less traditional gender-role values (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2009; Williams & Best, 1990, cited in Endendijk et al., 2013, p.586). Additionally, it is viewed as one of the most gender-equal countries all over the world because of factors, such as the growing working force participation of females and the growing participation of males in household tasks and in childcare (Daalmans, Kleemans, & Sadza, 2017; Van der Lee & Ellemers, 2015).

Nevertheless, gender inequality based on gender stereotypes exists among the society. For instance, women generally have part-time jobs and earn less compared to men (Daalmans, Kleemans, & Sadza, 2017; OECD, 2012). Furthermore, the percentage of females in senior executive positions is significantly lower than the percentage of males, as illustrated by the statistical data presented in the previous section (Daalmans, Kleemans, & Sadza, 2017). Leadership in The Netherlands is stereotyped as a masculine endeavor and subsequently, associated with men rather than with women (Van der Lee & Ellemers, 2015; Willemsen, 2002). A study among 143 (74 men; 69 women) Dutch students from a management program in Tilburg University reveals that masculine characteristics are regarded as more suitable for successful managers than feminine characteristics (Willemsen, 2002). In addition, both mothers and fathers, meaning females and males, have gender stereotypes, but the former have stronger implicit gender stereotypes, while the latter have stronger explicit gender stereotypes (Endendijk et al., 2013). This proves the claim that women themselves have the gender

stereotypes embedded in their minds and have to overcome them to succeed in leadership positions. Interestingly, there is not a difference between younger boys and girls in The Netherlands on the strength of their implicit gender stereotypes (Ibid.). Hence, gender differences in attitudes about gender develop at a later age and are influenced by external factors, such as media and cultural beliefs within the society. Media, indeed, plays a crucial role in the creation and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. For instance, women are underrepresented and portrayed in traditional roles in male-targeted TV channels, while a more equal image of gender is shown in female-targeted TV channels (Daalmans, Kleemans, & Sadza, 2017; NUFFIC, n.d.). Moreover, Dutch males possess "fairly traditional opinions concerning women's careers" (Willemsen, 2002, p.389). Conclusively, the recognition of and the respect towards females is lacking in domains targeted or typical for males, such as TV channels, male policy areas and leadership positions.

Attitudes regarding gender equality in The Netherlands have their historical explanation. In the past male and female roles in the society were firmly divided along traditional gender lines, with men as heads of the family and women as housewives (NUFFIC, n.d.). Until 1959, women automatically lost their jobs when they got married (Ibid.). Hence, married women were not able to have a career outside the home domain. After the 1960s and especially from 1974 onwards, females' subordinate position changed and the Dutch government started to promote gender equality and equal opportunities for both men and women (Ibid.). The culmination of these efforts was the 1994 General Equal Treatment Act (*Algemene Wet op Gelijke Behandeling*), which forbade gender discrimination and favoritism based on personal characteristics at the workplace (Ibid.). Nonetheless, traditional cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes are persistent and difficult to be changed. This claim is reflected in the fact that the majority of girls choose to follow an education in the soft (social) sciences, while the majority of boys opt for the more technical and hard (natural) sciences (Ibid.). The educational choice of younger boys and girls affect their career preference at a later stage. Thus, it reinforces the glass ceiling and the glass cliff phenomena, which are discussed in the third chapter of the Thesis.

Overall, The Netherlands in general is considered as gender-equal country. However, implicit and explicit gender stereotypes are prevalent within the society. Men in particular value traditional feminine characteristics more than women. Nevertheless, females as well have implicit gender stereotypes. Subsequently, female leaders might be affected by the exiting

gender stereotypes within the society and the implicit gender bias that they have embedded in their minds due to the reproduction of traditional cultural beliefs.

2.3.3. Culture and historical background in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a peculiar case caught between the east and the west, i.e. having social and cultural similarities both to countries like Turkey and countries like Austria (Ibroscheva, 2007). On the whole, Bulgaria is placed within the more patriarchal tradition (Ibid.). In general, men hold more conservative attitudes and wish to maintain the traditional gender roles, while women have more modern attitudes and strive for gender equality (Ådnanes, 2001). Additionally, females in Bulgaria highly value the importance of having a professional career (Ibid.). This trend is similar to the socio-cultural situation in The Netherlands in which males express more traditional values than females.

Again, media, especially TV advertisements and newspaper articles, is the means through which gender stereotypes are legitimatized and reinforced. Thus, the results of two studies, one examining TV advertisements and the other investigating how the Bulgarian press portrays female politicians, are discussed here. Ibroscheva (2007) reviews 127 advertisements from the three most watched channels during the period of two weeks and concludes that "the content was highly stereotyped, portraying women in depending roles and in sexually suggestive appearance" (p.409). Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover (2009) analyse articles from the two biggest newspapers in Bulgaria and find out that the press refers to female politicians as "the girls of parliament" (p.324), undervaluing their professional qualities and expertise. The emphasis is placed on the physical appearance and the clothes of female political leaders rather than on their skills and knowledge, e.g. their educational and professional preparation. In addition, more feminine and less threatening female politicians are preferred by journalists over more aggressive female politicians (Ibid.). Familiarizing language, such as first names instead of last names, and derogatory nicknames, such as *klasnata* (used to refer to rigid, communist teachers) are used to describe the latter (Ibid.). At the same time success of female politicians is given to their ability to exhibit masculine qualities (Ibid.). Therefore, on the one hand, female politicians with masculine qualities are called with derogatory terms, but on the other, these qualities are deemed necessary to be successful in the political area. This double standard confronts women leaders in Bulgaria with a challenge to overcome.

The current gender stereotypes and females' roles in Bulgaria are influenced by three traditions: the Oriental, the patriarchal Eastern Orthodox and the totalitarian-socialist (Ibroscheva, 2007). This is grounded in the historical background of the country. There are three important periods

in the recent Bulgarian history related to the issue of gender equality: the communist period, the post-communist period of transition and the period after the Bulgarian accession in the European Union. The communist state emphasized gender equality and offered security in terms of welfare privileges and full employment (Ådnanes, 2001). In 1944, the Bulgarian Assembly issued a special bill, officially proclaiming equal opportunities regardless of the sex (Ibroscheva & Raicheva-Stover, 2009). Furthermore, the communist ideology "considered social and economic activity as a necessary underpinning of women's equal status with men" (Ådnanes, 2001, p.26). Hence, before 1989, women were present in all spheres of society and were regarded as the same to men at the workplace. Nevertheless, they were mainly employed in lower positions and received lower wages (Lobodzinska, 1996, cited in Ådnanes, 2001, p.26). Moreover, a problematic aspect of the communist ideology is that gender equality was promoted in the public sphere, while a strict division of roles according to gender was maintained in the private family sphere (Ådnanes, 2001). Therefore, the argument that the communist state promoted gender equality might be disputed. Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover (2009) talk about "an oppressive model of pseudo-emancipation where participation of women in the political and social spheres was mainly symbolic or perfunctory at best" (p.313). This confronted women with a double burden since they had to pursue a professional career and care for the family at the same time. The end of the communist period in 1989 led to the introduction of more liberal ideas and the decrease of the percentage of female representation in the Parliament. The number of females in the first post-communist elections was twice less than the number of females in the last elections before 1989 (Birch, 1999, cited in Ådnanes, 2001, p.27; Ibroscheva & Raicheva-Stover, 2009). Nonetheless, the majority of women wished to work outside the home domain, even if they could afford to be just housewives (Ådnanes, 2001). The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union in 2007 and the requirement to meet the Union's conditionality led to the redefinition of gender equality in the country (Chiva, 2009). The European Union found evidence that laws in favor of women were not always applied in practice (Ibid.). Hence, during the preparation period for the entry in the European Union Bulgaria had to improve its legislation on gender equality and to reconsider the existence of gender stereotypes. Consequently, in 2004, the Law on Protection against Discrimination was incorporated in the Bulgarian legislation (Ibid.).

Summarizing, Bulgaria is an interesting case because it is placed on the crossroad between the east and the west. Thus, while the dominant culture is more in line with the patriarchal tradition which regards females primarily as mothers and keepers of the home domain, the high number

of women in leadership, shown in the previous section, questions the strength of the existing beliefs and gender stereotypes. Generally, the history and the culture in Bulgaria influenced the contemporary women in such a way that they see themselves both as mothers and workers (Ibroscheva, 2007). Additionally, they are used to the male dominance and do not regard stereotypes as such (Ibid.). Subsequently, explicit stereotypes are prevalent over implicit stereotypes. Nevertheless, female leaders tend to ignore them and concentrate on pursuing their aspirations for professional development.

2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter of the Thesis discussed Bulgaria and The Netherlands more specifically. It presented information about the number of women in leadership, the societal attitudes regarding gender and how history and media have influenced cultural beliefs. Interestingly, both countries under review are peculiar cases because the percentage of female leaders does not correspond to the traditional cultural expectations regarding the role of women in the society. Gender stereotyping is widespread in Bulgaria. Nonetheless, the number of women in leadership is considerably higher compared to the percentage of Dutch females at the top of the public administration. Similarly, the situation in The Netherlands is also against expectations since the number of female leaders is significantly low, while attitudes of gender equality are widespread in the society. Therefore, it is motivating to further explore how these differences in attitudes turn into concrete realities and how they affect female leaders in the public sector.

The following chapter reviews the existing literature on the topic and offers some expectations with regard to the possible influence of gender stereotypes on women in leadership and the effect of the organizational and the specific country-context.

3. Chapter Three: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

The research question, which this Thesis aims to answer, asks:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

Therefore, the central concepts of the research are stereotypes and female leaders' experience at the workplace. The purpose of this chapter is to review the existing body of socio-psychological and managerial literature, to classify the central concepts, to explain the phenomenon under study and to offer some expectations regarding the possible influence of stereotypes on women in leadership positions. Furthermore, the chapter tries to disentangle the relationship between the named concepts by incorporating the effect of the context, both organizational and country-context.

To this end, the chapter is divided in the following sections. Firstly, it defines the concept of stereotypes and describes its possible influence on female leaders. On the one hand, gender stereotypes and their presence at the workplace are introduced. On the other, managerial stereotypes are presented. Finally, the combination between gender stereotypes and managerial stereotypes in the face of female leaders and the role stereotypes might play in their professional experience are discussed. Secondly, the chapter delves deeper in the mechanisms explaining how stereotypes affect female leaders, who are placed in an exceptional role, and how they feel and react in return, meaning what are the consequences for them. In this section, the concept of stereotype threat and the queen bee phenomenon are essential to the discussion. Thirdly, the chapter focuses on the influence of the context. Both the organizational and country-context are perceived as important factors that might have an effect on the relationship between stereotypes and female leaders' experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria.

3.2. Stereotypes

This section focuses on the concept of stereotypes. It argues that stereotypes are a result of cultural beliefs and limited cognitive abilities of individuals. Furthermore, the section claims that stereotypes cause an implicit bias towards other people and lead to unequal experience of the world of work by males and females.

3.2.1. Stereotypes: background information

Stereotypes are a product of traditional cultural beliefs that are perceived as the irrefutable truth. These cultural beliefs, in turn, are embedded in people's mind since childhood and constantly being reinforced by the collective. An example of this phenomenon is Haines, Deaux and Lofaro's (2016) comparative study, which illustrates the durability of stereotypes particularly about how women and men are perceived to be different. The authors compare data collected in the early 1980s to data collected in 2014 and conclude that despite the increased female representation in nontraditional domains, people continue to perceive strong differences between males and females on stereotype components nowadays, as they did in the past (Ibid.). In spite of the differences in samples and in time periods, the authors do not find difference in the extent to which men and women are differentiated based on stereotypical beliefs about their inherent traits and social roles (Ibid.). The consistency in the reported results from the two time periods illustrates the persistence and the powerful nature of stereotypes in general and gender stereotypes in particular.

Additionally, stereotypes result also from the limited cognitive abilities of individuals (Heilman, 1995). Hence, due to these limited cognitive abilities people consciously form expectations regarding other people by exaggerating differences between social groups and by minimizing dissimilarities within them (Ibid.). Therefore, stereotypes generalize traits and categorize people into social groups. Heilman (1995) explains that, on the one hand, this could be useful since it simplifies reality and makes it easier for humans to make sense of the surrounding world. Nonetheless, on the other, generalized expectations and a failure to consider individual uniqueness could lead to biased judgements and discrimination against individuals not because of themselves or their actions, but because of the group into which they have been categorized (Heilman, 1995; Ridgeway, 2001). Subsequently, prejudices, attitudes and stereotypes affect humans' understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner causing an implicit bias towards other people based on particular characteristics, such as sex, ethnicity or age (Ridgeway, 2001). Sex, for instance, is an obvious difference between people and is often used as a basis for categorization, leading to sex stereotypes (Heilman, 1995).

3.2.2. Gender stereotypes

Cultural beliefs and consensual perceptions about males and females explain both how they are and how they should be, forming and reinforcing gender stereotypes (Ridgeway, 2001). Thus, gender stereotypes are referred to as "the genetic code of the gender system" (Ibid., p.637) because they represent cultural schemas by which people accept and legitimize difference and inequality. More specifically, gender stereotypes are generalized notions that have descriptive and prescriptive aspects (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Heilman, 1995; Heilman, 2001; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Ridgeway, 2001; Şandor, Macarie, & Creţa, 2011). Descriptive stereotypes are beliefs about what traits males and females possess, while prescriptive stereotypes are guidelines about what is the appropriate type of behavior that men and women should show (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Heilman, 2001; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Şandor, Macarie, & Creţa, 2011). Therefore, gender stereotypes are not only implicit notions, but also concrete realities that translate themselves into the everyday life of people and constrain their behavior to a certain extent. Consequently, they function simultaneously as labels and as constrains. Moreover, gender stereotypes associate external features with a particular societal role and penalize individuals in case they do not follow the expectations linked to that role.

The descriptive aspect of gender stereotypes associates certain characteristics and qualities with females and other with males. While men are described as "aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive", women are characterized as "kind, helpful, sympathetic, and concerned about others" (Heilman, 2001, p.658). Furthermore, females are expected to be passive and emotional and males are supposed to be aggressive and rational (Heilman, 1995). Additionally, "women take care and men take charge" (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p.388). Moreover, females are viewed as possessing service-oriented (communal) qualities, while males are associated with achievement-oriented (agentic) qualities (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). In addition to being different, perceptions about men and women are oppositional (Heilman, 2001). Also, they are mutually exclusive, meaning that members of one sex are lacking characteristics typical for members of the other sex (Ibid.). Behavior of men and women is positively evaluated if it adheres to the norm, i.e. women who display womanly traits and men who show manly characteristics are preferred over those who do not (Heilman, 1995). Consequently, it could be expected that people who adopt traits that are not stereotypical for their gender would be judged and negatively evaluated.

3.2.3.   Gender stereotypes at the workplace

Gender stereotypes inevitably translate themselves at the workplace in terms of wage disparities, occupational sex segregation and gender differences in authority leading to unequal experience of the world of work by males and females (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). Furthermore, cultural beliefs are regarded as the base of discrimination against female professionals in organizations (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Heilman, 2001). Additionally, gender stereotypes and gender bias are considered as the fundamental cause of discriminatory treatment against women at the workplace and as the main obstruction for their upward mobility in the organizational ladder (Heilman, 2001). Descriptive stereotypes result in discrimination when characteristics allied with the stereotype are conflicting with the characteristics required for the position or the task (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). For instance, females in leadership positions suffer from descriptive stereotyping because usually their gender is not associated with the role of a leader (Heilman, 2001). This phenomenon is analyzed deeper in the subsection of stereotypes and female leaders. Prescriptive stereotypes generate hostile reactions when an improper behavior according to the gender notion is shown (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). For instance, women leaders are often disfavored for not complying with the expected standards.

Gender stereotypes addressed towards females in institutions result primarily in four phenomena: the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, the gender stereotype threat and the queen bee phenomenon. While the first two are a direct result from the implicit bias that women are inferior compared to men and do not possess the needed characteristics and qualities to develop a professional career, the second two are related more to the experiences of women, who have already entered the professional world. Hence, the latter two phenomena are perceived more as mechanisms and consequences of the influence of gender stereotypes on female leaders' professional experience and are further explained in the following sections. This subsection, in turn, is focused on the former two phenomena, namely glass ceiling and glass cliff.

Glass ceiling is the "barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from higher level leadership positions" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p.573; Heilman, 1995; Heilman, 2001). The first part of the concept, i.e. glass, refers to the known and transparent boundary around the upper management that impedes females to enter this world (Heilman, 1995). The second part of this idea, indicates the impenetrability of the fence around leadership positions (Ibid.). This occurrence is problematic because discrimination against females based on traditional stereotypes and prejudices leads to an unequal access to top-level positions; hence underuse of

women's potential (Connell, 2006). Provided that the glass ceiling phenomenon concerns primarily females at the lower-levels of the organizational hierarchy, who aim to reach top-level positions, and that the focus of the Thesis is placed at women in leadership positions, the glass ceiling theory falls outside the scope of the analysis and is not further discussed.

Glass cliff theory claims that women are more likely to be appointed to positions which face a higher risk of failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, & Atkins, 2007; Ryan, Haslam, Morgenroth, Rink, Stoker, & Peters, 2016; Smith & Monaghan, 2013). This phenomenon could be explained mainly by four reasons. Firstly, female traits, such as "being understanding, helpful, sophisticated, aware of the feelings of others, intuitive, creative, and cheerful" are particularly helpful in times of crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2007, p.553; Ryan et al., 2016). Hence, females are promoted to risky positions because they possess soft skills to lower the pressure and smooth the relations between the people working in the particular policy domain. Secondly, women might be appointed to risky positions, which include both high complexity of tasks and high visibility, because if the organization fails, it would be women to blame, rather than men (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Smith & Monaghan, 2013). This happens because as Ryan and Haslam (2007) acknowledge, women "have greater potential as scapegoats who can be shouldered with blame should things go wrong" (p.559). Thirdly, the glass cliff phenomenon might be a result of strategic managerial efforts to show to the society a willingness to move towards gender equality and to present the organization under scrutiny as progressive (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Ryan et al., 2016; Smith & Monaghan, 2013). Fourthly, women themselves might choose precarious leadership positions on purpose to prove themselves and their qualities (Ryan et al., 2016). Therefore, the glass cliff phenomenon offers both a challenge and an opportunity to show-off. Nonetheless, it is important to say that the empirical evidence for this phenomenon is limited. Smith and Monaghan (2013) conduct a study examining the distribution of women in leadership positions among 118 US federal regulatory organizations and find only a partial support for the hypothesis that risk is positively associated with women holding top-level leadership positions. The authors conclude that the percentage of females in leadership position indeed raises with the complexity of the task, but only in low visibility domains (Ibid.). Thus, the evidence of the glass cliff phenomenon in real life is not unequivocal.

3.2.4. Managerial stereotypes

Managerial stereotypes are broadly divided into two categories: "think manager-think male" and "think manager-think masculine" (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012). The two

types of stereotypes are closely connected, but not the same. The first one refers to the descriptive aspect of stereotypes and associates being a manager with being a man, while the second one relates to the prescriptive nature of stereotypes and implies that masculinity regardless of sex correlates with leadership (Ibid.). The fact that the majority of managers are men leads to the perception that the managerial job is masculine in nature and requires managers to express masculine qualities (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002).

Additionally, scholars distinguish between masculine or agentic leadership which is task-oriented and feminine or communal leadership which is people-oriented (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012). Agentic leadership and the qualities linked to it are considered more attractive by the society (Ibid.). Furthermore, Powell, Butterfield, and Parent's (2002) study, which compares results from a 1999 sample, a 1984-1985 sample and a 1976-1977 sample, suggests that a good manager is described to have predominantly masculine characteristics both by men and women, regardless of their age, education and work experience. Therefore, feminine traits are disliked and male leaders are preferred in top-level positions in organizations (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012).

These managerial stereotypes have a direct effect on women in leadership positions. Since gender stereotypes ascribed to females are not the same as managerial stereotypes assigned to leaders, women are perceived to be incongruent with the role of leaders. In the following subsection, the congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders and the lack-of-fit model of bias at the workplace are discussed with the aim to connect gender stereotypes and managerial stereotypes to the exceptional position of female leaders.

3.2.5. Stereotypes and female leaders

Attributes that characterize a successful manager are not present among the list of traits typically ascribed to women. Furthermore, qualities usually used to describe successful leaders are stereotypically male (Heilman, 1995; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Therefore, men are regarded as a more suitable fit with leadership and females are perceived as incompatible with having the role of a leader (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). This results in a perceived incongruence or lack-of-fit between females and a leader's role, which in turn obstructs women to climb the organizational ladder and confronts those who manage to do it with prejudices and stereotypes, which have negative effects on female leaders' experience at the workplace.

For instance, the congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders proposes that there is a perceived incompatibility between female gender and leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002;

Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012). This incongruity has two manifestations. Firstly, women are regarded as less likely to occupy leadership roles because they are thought to be deficient in characteristics necessary to fulfill such positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Secondly, the behavior of female leaders is evaluated less favorably even when it follows the norms prescribed by managerial stereotypes (Ibid.). Consequently, the discrepancy between stereotypical female characteristics and stereotypical managerial characteristics and the perceived incongruence between the two roles cause disadvantage for women in leadership positions (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012). This happens because women are expected to exhibit communal characteristics, while leaders are required to display agentic qualities (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Furthermore, women in leadership positions, i.e. women working in traditionally male-dominated occupations, are more vulnerable to gender discrimination (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Heilman, 2001). This could also be explained by the expectation states theory, which claims that social hierarchies are grounded in status beliefs (Ridgeway, 2001). Subsequently, the inferior status associated with the female gender, on the one hand, can deprive women from the possibility to reach positions of authority, leadership, and power, and on the other, can be psychologically burdensome for those who succeed in achieving them (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Ridgeway, 2001).

The congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders is comparable to the lack-of-fit model of bias at the workplace. The model suggests that an individual suffers from perceived lack-of-fit to his/her professional role when the qualities required for doing it are inconsistent with the characteristics attributed to the individual (Heilman, 1983, cited in Eagly & Karau, 2002, p.579). Moreover, the model further explains the consequences of the perceived lack-of-fit on performance. In case the perceived fit between the individual's skills and abilities and the job requirements is good, success is expected (Heilman, 2001). In the opposite case, i.e. when the perceived fit is poor, failure is expected (Ibid.). Since there is a perceived misfit between female inherited characteristics and the qualities necessary for a successful leader, women in leadership positions are confronted with a greater challenge to overcome the existing stereotypes and prejudices and to prove themselves at the workplace.

3.3. Mechanisms and consequences of stereotypes on female leaders

This section focuses on the mechanisms, which explain the relationship between stereotypes and female leaders' experience at the workplace and on the consequences of stereotypes on women in leadership positions. Some of the main mechanisms at play include devaluating of

female performance, denying credit to women for their success and penalizing them for being competent by showing dislike and personally derogating them (Ibid.). Some of the main consequences, in turn, comprise feelings of vulnerability, decreased sense of belonging to a field, less motivation to continue working and pursue success and ultimately disengagement from the work (Heilman, 2001; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Additionally, two important results of gender stereotypes at the workplace, which directly affect female leaders are gender stereotype threat and queen bee phenomenon.

3.3.1. Mechanisms

The mechanisms through which stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience are numerous and complex. Additionally, they are facilitated by public sector and country-specific characteristics, which are presented in the following section. Nonetheless, before discussing the mechanisms themselves, it is important to explain the reasons why women in leadership positions encounter discriminatory attitudes at the workplace.

Bobbitt-Zeher (2011) lists three reasons explaining the rationale behind discriminating against females at the workplace. Firstly, females are punished, often even fired, for violating the norms of physical attractiveness, e.g. when they get pregnant (Ibid.). Secondly, they are penalized when they show "unladylike" behavior, such as aggressive attitudes or inappropriate language (Ibid., p.774). Additionally, a double standard is used to evaluate behavior of male and female leaders. For instance, the same critical remark is considered to be biting when a woman makes it and incisive when a man does (Heilman, 1995). Thirdly, women are punished when they represent a threat (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). In addition to these, Hoyt and Murphy (2016) underline that stereotypes are usually activated by the numerical minority of women in leadership positions. Subsequently, women's status as a minority at top-level positions, which are not considered as typical for females, activate gender stereotypes. Hence, increasing the number of females in leadership positions seems to be an effective manner to deactivate and overcome existing gender stereotypes and managerial stereotypes (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2011). Nevertheless, "increased presence of women may increase harassment, and specific forms of it, as men interpret women's increased presence as a threat to their power" (Chamberlain et al., 2008, cited in Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011, p.767). This illustrates the little influence of quotas in promoting gender equality at the workplace. Numbers are not powerful enough to alter cultural beliefs and prejudices. Consequently, simply appointing more females to leadership positions is not solving the issue of discrimination against women at the workplace. Instead, it might have the opposite effect and further exacerbate negative attitudes

towards females at higher positions in the organizational hierarchy. A successful woman manager should be able to disprove the notion that the female gender is incompatible with a leader's role (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012). However, Heilman (1995) argues that once stereotypes have taken prevalence, other information is considered irrelevant or simply not taken into consideration. Hence, successful female leaders are often regarded as exceptions and their achievements are attributed to luck or temporary elements of the situation (Heilman, 1995; Heilman, 2001).

Subsequently, a major reason for the activation of stereotypes is the fact that women in leadership positions occupy a non-typical role and show an unexpected behavior for their gender, i.e. disobey the prescriptive aspect of the gender stereotypes. Furthermore, paradoxically both the underrepresentation of women in leadership position and the increased presence of females might activate stereotypes because in the first case women are regarded as a vulnerable minority that can be isolated easily and in the second case they are perceived as a threat to men's power.

Once stereotypes are activated they influence women in leadership positions through several mechanisms. These are: visibility, which creates performance pressures, polarization or exaggeration of differences, which leads to isolation, and assimilation, which results in role entrapment (Kanter, 1997; Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2012). When females represent a minority at the workplace, they are discriminated simply by being ignored and excluded from the informal networks for socialization (Kanter, 1977). Another manner to show prejudices against females is by assigning them a particular role, as the mother, the seductress, the pet or the iron maiden (Ibid., pp.982-984).

Furthermore, creation of performance pressures plus devaluation of performance and denial of credit to female leaders for their success are other mechanisms through which stereotypes influence female leaders' professional experience and which apply particularly to the group of women in leadership positions (Heilman, 1995; Heilman, 2001). These are related to the visibility and the exceptionality of women in leadership positions. Female leaders' achievements are regarded as inferior compared to the accomplishments of their male colleagues, especially when they exhibit autocratic leadership style (Heilman, 1995; Ridgeway, 2001). This observation is consistent with the stereotype that expects women leaders to fail because they are deficient in the qualities necessary for being a successful manager (Heilman, 1995).

In addition, paradoxically women in leadership positions are penalized for being competent and doing their jobs well (Heilman, 1995; Heilman, 2001). If they adhere to the traditional managerial stereotypes and show more agentic qualities, they are being disliked because they do not comply with the prescriptive aspect of gender stereotypes. Therefore, women in leadership positions who display male- and leader-stereotypical, agentic characteristics and fail to manifest female-stereotypical, communal attributes are perceived to violate norms and subsequently are disliked and unfavorably evaluated (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001).

Overall, the mechanisms through which stereotypes influence female leaders' professional experience are: exaggeration of differences and isolation or assimilation and role entrapment, creation of performance pressures, devaluation of performance, denial of credit to women for their success and penalization of females for being competent. It is important to underline that this list might not be thorough. Nevertheless, these are the main mechanisms identified in the academic literature and it is interesting to investigate which of them apply to the specific case of women leaders in The Netherlands and Bulgaria and how the mechanisms are influenced by public sector characteristics and country-specific characteristics.

3.3.2. Consequences

In general, discrimination narratives at the workplace involve: expulsion, sexual and other types of harassment and unequal working conditions, such as cases of blocked mobility (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). Nonetheless, this Thesis is particularly interested in the effects of stereotypes on female leaders' professional experience, not in discriminatory consequences on the whole. Therefore, it focuses on the direct consequences of the congruity theory and lack-of-fit model.

3.3.2.1. Consequences of the congruity theory and lack-of-fit model

There are two straightforward consequences based on the role congruity theory's rationale for female leaders. On the one hand, females experience greater difficulties in reaching leadership positions and being professionally successful because they are viewed to lack the necessary attributes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). On the other, women leaders are confronted with more negative attitudes than male managers because showing characteristics typical for a leader's behavior is considered less desirable for their gender (Ibid.). Consequently, as Eagly and Karau (2002) acknowledge, female leaders are "constrained by threats from two directions: Conforming to their gender role would produce a failure to meet the requirements of their leader role, and conforming to their leader role would produce a failure to meet the requirements of their gender role" (p.576). Thus, both females' potential for becoming leaders and their

leadership style are evaluated less positive in comparison to their male colleagues. This Master Thesis is focused on the second consequence, i.e. the negative attitudes towards female leaders and their effects on women.

The perceived lack-of-fit between females and leadership roles creates decreased performance expectations, increased expectations of failure and decreased expectation of success, which eventually result in lower self-evaluation and evaluation by others (Heilman, 1983, cited in Eagly & Karau, 2002, p.579). Furthermore, female leaders are perceived primarily by their gender, instead of their professional role, suggesting that their roles outside the organization which are incompatible with their professional duties make them less reliable workers (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). Thus, to disprove this stereotypical notions and to prove themselves as professionals, women leaders exert more efforts, which often result in overachievement (Kanter, 1977). Moreover, the perceived lack of necessary characteristics to occupy leadership roles causes women to be regarded as receivers of help by those in power (Heilman, 2001). Hence, female success is not attributed to women's personal qualities. Instead, it is seen as a consequence of other factors. This, in turn, leads to personal derogation and labelling of successful women as "ice queens", for example (Ibid., p.668). Interestingly, in contrast to competent men, who are simply regarded as non-communal, competent women are seen as counter-communal (Ibid.). This difference results into women been considered cold and expressing unfeminine traits.

Additionally, the negative effects of gender stereotypes in general and gender stereotype threat in particular result in disengagement from the work, decreased motivation to continue working and pursue success, decreased sense of belonging to a field and decreased leadership aspirations (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Female leaders who are continuously confronted with stereotypes at their workplace have less self-confidence, less positive attitudes towards their job position and more willingness to quit (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Steele, 1997).

In summary, devaluating females' performance and denying credit to their success result in overachievement or decreased sense of belonging to a field and less motivation to continue working and pursue success. Ultimately, the major consequences for women in leadership positions are feelings of vulnerability and disengagement from the work.

3.3.2.2. Gender stereotype threat

Stereotype threat is "the concrete, real-time threat of being judged and treated poorly in setting where a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p.388). The

concept comes from the psychological literature and is defined as a social-psychological threat, a situational pressure that arises when a person is placed in a position for which a negative stereotype about his/her group applies (Steele, 1997; Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002). Moreover, it is not exclusive for any stigmatized group and anyone can experience it regardless of whether he/she believes in the stereotype (Steele, 1997). Thus, when employed to feminism and leadership, gender stereotype threat is interpreted as a form of prejudice towards female leaders which results in concrete negative consequences for them. The term is important because it generates wide-ranging and meaningful effects, e.g. psychological stress and performance decrease in those targeted by negative stereotypes (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002). Furthermore, it is also relevant for the topic of the Master Thesis since it is directly related to performance; thus, the practical relevance of the study.

Overall, the gender stereotype threat occurs in a situation when other people, but also a person himself/herself, in this case a woman, applies the perceived lack-of-fit to her own performance downgrading her potential in roles that her category is not expected to perform well. For women in particular this is a challenge to overcome because they have to overcome not only the external judgements and personal reduction to a negative stereotype by others, but also their own perception of misfit.

3.3.2.3. Queen bee phenomenon

Queen bee phenomenon, similarly to stereotype threat, is a concept derived from the socio-psychological literature that has been applied by the managerial literature. The concept of a queen bee refers to "women who pursue individual success in male-dominated work settings (organizations in which men hold most executive positions) by adjusting to the masculine culture and by distancing themselves from other women" (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016, p.457). Furthermore, female leaders can receive this derogatory label by engaging in three types of behavior. These are: adopting male qualities and behavior, physically and psychologically distancing themselves from other females and legitimizing the existing gender hierarchy in the organization (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016; Faniko, Ellemers, Derks, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017). It is important to underline that the queen bee phenomenon is a situational occurrence. Hence, it is not triggered by women's personality or inherited traits, but by the organizational setting and the social identity threat that female leaders might experience in a context in which they are devaluated and negatively stereotyped (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016). The social identity threat is experienced by women in male-dominated organizations or in organizations

in which females in leadership are a minority (Ibid.). Since women are not expected to be successful in leadership positions because they are perceived to lack agentic qualities, which are considered as necessary for managers, they try to fit in. On the one hand, women try to become insiders by presenting themselves as similar to men and as having male characteristics, which are associated with success. Nonetheless, this is a risky strategy because it might lead to the penalization of these women who fail to follow the prescriptive aspect of the gender stereotypes. On the other, they distance themselves from their gender identity and other females, especially from women at lower-level positions. These behaviors result not only in the personal derogation of women in leadership positions by labelling them as queen bees, but also in the legitimatization of the gender hierarchy and the gender inequality at the workplace.

Although there are numerous academic works studying the queen bee phenomenon, the empirical proof that it actually occurs at the workplace is not unequivocal, similarly to the glass cliff phenomenon. For example, Kaiser and Spalding (2015) conduct two studies with the aim to find out whether female leaders favor men over women (queen bee phenomenon) or vice versa (role models) in a context in which their gender group is underrepresented. The authors conclude that women who has managed to reach a top-level position tend to impede the advancement of other women by giving preferential treatment to men, which provides certain proof for the real existence of the queen bee phenomenon (Ibid.). However, Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat (2018) claim that the queen bee phenomenon might be a myth. They investigate the effect of female leadership on gender differences in public and private organizations in Brazil and determine that the queen bee phenomenon is either small or non-existent (Ibid.). Subsequently, the queen bee phenomenon is a questionable phenomenon.

Generally, factors, such as numerical minority, for example, highlight the incongruity between women and leadership roles and activate gender stereotypes. Then, mechanisms, such as exaggeration of differences and isolation or assimilation and role entrapment, creation of performance pressures, devaluation of performance, denial of credit to women for their success and penalization of females for being competent, cause overachievement, acceptance of stereotyped roles, feelings of vulnerability and reactance, decreased sense of belonging to a field and motivation to continue working and pursuing success. This, in turn, results in disengagement from the work. Furthermore, two of the direct outcomes of the activation of gender stereotypes are stereotype threat and queen bee phenomenon. These are situational occurrences that happen in context in which female leaders are underrepresented and negatively stereotyped. While the gender stereotype threat is a feeling of prejudices addressed to women

in leadership positions that causes psychological stress and performance decrease, the queen bee phenomenon is the response of female leaders to the social identity threat that results in them adopting masculine behavior, distancing themselves from other women and eventually receiving the derogatory label of a queen bee. Importantly, the empirical evidence for the latter phenomenon is not unequivocal. Hence, gender stereotypes are activated in particular contexts and the consequences for female leaders are relevant only within the boundaries of these contexts, i.e. the organization in which they are employed.

3.4. Contextual characteristics

This section emphasizes the role of contextual factors in the relationship between stereotypes and female leaders' experience at the workplace. The hierarchical organizational structure, practices and culture in public institutions are argued to be relevant factors that could affect women, either positively or negatively. In addition, the type of culture within which female leaders have to operate is also considered to be an important factor that could have a positive or a negative influence over women in leadership.

3.4.1.   Public sector characteristics

On the one hand, public sector organizational characteristics might affect positively female leaders' experience. First and foremost, public sector organizational culture and public sector values and goals, i.e. the provision of goods and services for the benefit of the society, are more in line with the nurturing and caring qualities typical for women. Therefore, more females are expected to choose to develop professionally in the public sector, instead of the private sector. As gender stereotypes are more powerful in organizations with relatively few women in leadership positions, female leaders in private organization are confronted with a culture that reinforces stereotypes more than female leaders in public organization because the percentage of the latter is significantly higher than the percentage of the former (Stoker, Van der Velde, & Lammers, 2011). Hence, female leaders might be positively affected by the culture to bring benefit and care for the society that is prevalent in the public sector. In addition, the lack of competitive organizational culture in the public sector might contribute to female leaders' well-being and feeling of belonging. In contrast, in the private sector female leaders might feel the pressure to prove that they possess innate characteristics that are associated with success due to the competitive organizational culture. The organizational culture in the private sector renders success to inherited personal qualities and skills and might be threatening to women due to the perceived incongruity between female gender and leadership and women's perceived lack of necessary qualities to be successful managers (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

On the other hand, public sector organizational characteristics might affect negatively women in leadership. Firstly, the hierarchical structure in public organizations might confront female leaders with more obstacles to overcome in comparison to the flat structure in private organizations. Public organization are often described as bureaucratic, hierarchical structures with strict line of authority. Connell (2006) argues that organizations themselves create and reproduce gender divisions of labor by defining some positions, e.g. the position of the manager, as masculine, while other, e.g. the position of the secretary or the "office lady", as feminine (p.838). This observation corresponds to a certain extent with the glass cliff theory and the assumption that women are appointed primarily into feminine domains or domains that contain high risk of failure. Moreover, the decision-making power in classic bureaucracies is well-defined within the hierarchy (Ibid.). Connell (2006) states that "classic bureaucracies are also markedly gendered, with top levels occupied by men, and women present only (if at all) in relatively powerless subordinate positions" (p.842). This claim is an illustration of the glass ceiling phenomenon. Nevertheless, the strictly defined hierarchical structure of public organization is not only an obstruction to women who aspire to climb the organizational ladder, but also for females at top-management positions because it is related to power of decision-making. Thus, the gendered hierarchy in public organizations affect female leaders negatively since it deprives them of the right to make decision on their own without having to consult their superior bosses, which might lead to feelings of vulnerability and decreased motivation to continue working and pursuing success. Secondly, Heilman (1995; 2001) argues that the ambiguity of the evaluation criteria might affect negatively female leaders in male-dominated tasks. Stumpf and London (1981, cited in Heilman, 2001, p.663) claim that the criteria for evaluating effective performance in top-level positions in the organizational hierarchy tends to be subjective and vague. Therefore, the non-specificity of the evaluation criteria, next to the fact that values and goals in public organizations are multifaceted and competing, maintains and reinforces stereotypes, "casting women as unsuccessful in their accomplishments regardless of their actual performance quality" (Heilman, 2001, p.663). Hence, the ambiguous performance standards in public organizations activate gender stereotypes and provide women in leadership positions with another challenge to overcome. Furthermore, due to the fact that there is not a structured process of evaluating and promoting senior managers, the chance for occurrence of gender bias in public organizations is higher, which eventually leads to the reinforcement of the perception that female leaders are less successful than male leaders because of the lack of congruity between the female gender and leadership. Thirdly, organizational practices, such as affirmative action programs, mentoring programs and special

work arrangements, that try to promote diversity and gender equality in the public sector could lead to the denial of credit to female leaders' success. For example, mentoring programs and working in groups arrangements tend to attribute the credit for the successful accomplishment of a task to the group as a whole, not to the mentor in charge (Ibid.). Subsequently, female leaders are not seen as responsible for the success and it is not seen as a result of their personal qualities and competences (Ibid.).

Subsequently, contextual characteristics typical for the public sector might influence the relationship between stereotypes and female leaders' professional experience, either positively or negatively. For example, the hierarchical structure of public institutions, organizational practices and the ambiguous evaluation process influence negatively the experience of women in leadership positions by devaluating female leaders' performance. Additionally, the gendered organizational culture that labels certain positions as masculine and others as feminine also reinforces stereotypes and affects negatively female leaders. However, the lack of competitive culture in public organizations and the higher percentage of women in top-level positions compared to the percentage in the private sector affect positively women in leadership positions.

3.4.2. Country-specific characteristics

Next to the organizational setting, female leaders might be affected, again either positively or negatively, by the cultural and the societal setting within which they are embedded. The gender perspective in a society is affected by the cultural norms, i.e. the beliefs related to the roles of men and women that generate gender stereotypes and that affect women in leadership (Carrasco, Francoeur, Labelle, Laffarga, & Ruiz-Barbadillo, 2015). Therefore, this section bases itself on the Hofstede model of six dimensions of national cultures and discusses country-level contextual factors that may affect female leaders' experience.

The first dimension concerns the basic issue with inequality. Countries with small power distance are characterized by equality between genders and generations and hierarchy which means inequality of roles established for convenience (Hofstede, 2011). For countries with large power distance hierarchy means existential inequality (Ibid.). Also, superiors expect to be respected and subordinates expect to be told what to do in large power distance cultures (Ibid.). Subsequently, a culture of small power distance is expected to affect female leaders positively, while a culture of large power distance is supposed to influence women in leadership in a negative way because they are assumed to lack the necessary qualities to be at the top of the hierarchy. Carrasco et al. (2015) analyze the degree of female representation on boards of directors in more than 7000 publicly traded companies in 32 countries and find that countries

with large power distance have less female representation at the top due to the tolerance of the "old boys club" (p.432).

Countries with weak uncertainty avoidance tolerate different people and ideas and accept ambiguity, while countries with strong uncertainty avoidance strive for clarity and structure (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore, female leaders in countries with weak uncertainty avoidance might experience an advantage because they are not regarded as typical leaders and might be tolerated because they are different. In contrast, women in leadership positions in countries with strong uncertainty avoidance might be treated as dangerous because they are different leaders and might be confronted with an obstacle to overcome.

In individualistic countries everyone looks primarily after him/herself, while in collectivistic countries the "we"-consciousness is prevalent (Ibid.). Consequently, collectivistic countries are expected to promote female representation at the top of the public sector, while individualistic countries are supposed to create more difficulties for female leaders because female characteristics are not in line with individualistic characteristics.

Feminine cultures do not differentiate emotionally or socially between genders, put an emphasis on the balance between family and work and have many women in leadership positions (Ibid.). In contrast, masculine cultures view men and women as different, claim that fathers deal with facts, while mothers deal with feelings and have few women in leadership positions (Ibid.). Thus, gender stereotypes are prevalent in masculine cultures. Furthermore, stronger stereotypes lead to less market participation of women which in turn result in people being less used to female leaders (Carrasco et al., 2015). Subsequently, women in leadership might be affected positively by a feminine culture and negatively by a masculine culture. That is because masculine cultures are achievement-oriented and competitive which is in contrast to the inherited female characteristics that are nurturing-oriented and caring (Van den Bos et al., 2010). Hence, on the one hand, female leaders embedded in masculine cultures might face stronger gender stereotypes and might experience difficulties to voice their opinions (Ibid.). On the other hand, female leaders embedded in feminine cultures might feel empowered and might experience less obstacles to express their views about decisions to be made (Ibid.).

Traditions in countries with short-term orientation are regarded as too important and valuable to be interfered with, while traditions in countries with long-term orientation are flexible and adaptable according to the changing circumstances (Hofstede, 2011). Hence, if a country is inherently patriarchal and with short-term orientation, female leaders might be affected negatively by the persistence of the traditional cultural beliefs. However, if a country is long-

term oriented and predisposed to change its traditions, women might be positively affected by the change since it might open new doors for them.

A culture of indulgence focuses on the personal life control and the importance of freedom of speech, while a culture of restraint incorporates a perception of helplessness and does not consider freedom of speech as essential (Ibid.). Moreover the former is more spread in America and Western Europe, while the latter is prevalent in Eastern Europe, Asia and the Muslim world (Ibid.). Consequently, female leaders in indulgence cultures are expected to be proactive and to take control of their professional life despite the possible existence of stereotypes. Women in leadership in restrained cultures might experience more difficulties to overcome the existing stereotypes due to the fact that the perception of personal life control is lacking in this type of culture.

Drawing on the cultural dimensions discussed above, The Netherlands could be characterized as an individualistic, feminine country with small power distance, weak uncertainty avoidance, medium-term orientation and indulgence. In addition, Bulgaria could be labeled as a collectivist, masculine country with large power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, short-term orientation and restraint. Consequently, Dutch female leaders are expected to be affected more positively by the culture within which they are embedded than Bulgarian women in leadership.

3.5. Conclusion and expectations

The purpose of this chapter was to review the existing body of socio-psychological and managerial literature, to classify the central concepts, to explain the phenomenon under study and to offer some expectations regarding the possible influence of stereotypes on women in leadership positions. Furthermore, the chapter tried to disentangle the relationship between the named concepts by incorporating the effect of the context, both organizational and country-specific context. The ultimate aim was to select and present theories, which culminate in a conceptual framework, which in turn is used to analyze the case studies and to answer the following research question:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

Stereotypes are descriptive and prescriptive notions reinforced by the existing cultural beliefs and daily practices within a society that influence individual behavior and experience both inside and outside the workplace. Gender stereotypes, which dictate that women take care and

men take charge, result in phenomena, such as the glass ceiling and the glass cliff, and legitimize inequality at the workplace. Managerial stereotypes that associate the role of the leader both with males and male qualities reinforce the perceived lack-of-fit between the female gender and leadership. Theories, such as the congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders, the expectation states theory and the lack-of-fit model explain the minority status of females in leadership positions and phenomena, such as the gender stereotype threat and queen bee.

Next to the cultural beliefs and stereotypes, public sector-specific characteristics affect female leaders, either positively or negatively. For instance, the ambiguity of the evaluation criteria in public organizations might lead to devaluation of performance and denial of credit to female leaders, which in turn result in overachievement or decreased sense of belonging to a field and less motivation to continue working and pursue success. Furthermore, the hierarchical structure and the visible position of the few female leaders in an organization might lead to performance pressures, feelings of vulnerability and disengagement from the work.

In addition, the dominant culture in a particular country reinforced by the media, for example, and its historical background might affect women in leadership positions. Feminine cultures with small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance are advantageous for female leaders, while masculine cultures with large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance confront women in leadership with more difficulties to overcome.

Subsequently, several expectations are formulated. Firstly, both gender stereotypes and managerial stereotypes enforce attitudes that are less positive towards female than male leaders. Secondly, gender stereotype threat decreases female leaders' sense of belonging to a field and motivation to continue their careers by personally derogating and penalizing women for being competent and violating the prescriptions of gender stereotypes. In addition, the perceived threat leads to feelings of vulnerability and reactance or overachievement. Thirdly, public sector characteristics, such as the strict hierarchy and the ambiguity of the evaluation process, influence negatively female leaders, while public sector characteristics, such as the lack of competitive environment, affect positively women in leadership. Fourthly, country-specific characteristics also play a role in the reinforcement of existing stereotypes. Cultural beliefs and existing stereotypes in The Netherland and in Bulgaria influence female leaders' professional experience. While in the former country women in leadership are expected to face less negativity due to the prevalent feminine culture with small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance, in the latter country female leaders are supposed to be treated with more negativity

based on the dominant masculine culture with large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance.

The following chapter explains the methodology of the research, i.e. the research design and the method of data collection and analysis. The chapter includes a justification of the choices with regard to the research method and an explanation of the measurement of the concepts from the theoretical section.

4. Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the existing literature on the topic of stereotypes and females in leadership positions. Consequently, the main theories and the relevant concepts for the Master Thesis were introduced and several expectations were formulated.

Subsequently, this chapter presents the research design and method that are used to investigate whether the expectations drawn from the theory hold in real life and eventually to answer the following research question:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

The purpose of the chapter is to justify the choices made concerning the research design and method and to explain the measurement of the concepts from the theoretical framework that are used in the analysis. To this end, the chapter is divided into the following sections. Firstly, it explains the research design, i.e. the research approach, the type of research and the case selection. Secondly, it describes the method of data collection and analysis. And lastly, it provides a reflection on validity and reliability.

4.2. Research design

This section focuses on the research design. Using the research question as a driving force and departing from the assumption that there is an association between gender stereotypes and female leaders' experience, which has been established in the literature, the research aims at adding substance. Thus, the chosen approach is theory-driven, deductive, explanatory and empirical. Furthermore, the type of research is cross-sectional and comparative. The Netherlands and Bulgaria, which represent two deviant cases, are chosen to search for similarities, differences and patterns among the groups of female leaders in both countries that can facilitate the understanding of the mechanisms through which stereotypes affect women in leadership.

4.2.1. Research approach and type of research

The research approach in this Master Thesis is deductive, explanatory and empirical. Furthermore, the type of research is a non-experimental research based on qualitative methods which compares two cases to acquire deep knowledge about the similarities and the differences

between them. Therefore, the research aims to explore and explain the relationship between a concept and empirical facts and to answer a 'how?' question. It refers to a real-life phenomenon and intends to identify the causal mechanisms behind it. In addition, the research is positive, not normative, because it deals with what is, instead of what ought to be. Furthermore, it is focused on the experiences of the respondents. Hence, their views and perceptions are the main object of interest and they are by definition subjective. Moreover, the research is cross-sectional because it analyzes cross-sectional data. That is data from a subset of the population taken at a specific point in time, in contrast to longitudinal data which is gathered over short or long periods of time.

4.2.2. Case selection

Next to being deductive, explanatory, empirical, qualitative, positive and cross-sectional the research is comparative. Subsequently, it focuses on two cases, i.e. two countries. Both The Netherlands and Bulgaria could be labelled as deviant cases because they are outliers and present a theoretical anomaly in a sense. For instance, as illustrated by the statistical data in the second chapter of the Master Thesis, the percentage of female leaders in public organization in The Netherlands is quite low, while the results from the World Values Survey show that gender equality is appreciated according to the societal attitudes regarding the role of women within the society. In contrast, in Bulgaria the number of women in leadership is considerably high despite the cultural beliefs that do not regard females as good managers as males. This observation is important because it is against expectations. Thus, cultural beliefs and societal attitudes, i.e. the system of ideas or principles that intend to explain the social order, cannot account for the number of females in both countries, making the chosen countries exceptional cases that can provide the researcher with a better insight regarding the mechanisms through which stereotypes influence female leaders. Summarizing, the countries are deviant cases. Moreover, such type of cases is preferred to develop a richer, more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and to lend credibility to the research (Toshkov, 2016). The selection of outliers provides both a possibility to investigate whether the theoretical expectations hold in non-typical cases that apparently contradict them and to delve into the mechanisms behind the relationship between stereotypes and the experience of women in leadership (Ibid.).

Furthermore, the research is a small-n research and compares few countries because it is interested in qualitatively investigating the mechanisms behind the relationship between the variables of interest, rather than in quantitatively making generalizations about the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Additionally, comparing few countries

possesses several strengths that facilitate the answering of the research question. These are, for example, the provision of thick description and the avoidance of conceptual stretching (Landman, 2003). For instance, considering the role of the contextual factors, i.e. public sector-specific characteristics and country-specific characteristics, adds essential insights to the phenomenon under study and helps answering the research question in a more rigorous manner. In addition, since the Thesis relies on the specific knowledge of a few cases, it avoids the unintentional misuse of the concepts of interest by claiming that they have universal values.

At this point, it is important to underline that until now the word case has been used to refer either to The Netherlands or to Bulgaria. Nonetheless, in the following section it is used to refer to the unit of analysis, which consists of the cases of Dutch and Bulgarian female leaders.

Furthermore, the unit of analysis and the cases in it represent matched pairs of the same professional groups, i.e. female leaders in public organizations. Analyzing the views and perceptions of women in positions at the same hierarchical level and within relatively close policy domains is essential not only because it makes comparison plausible, but also because it offers a possibility to delve deeper into the organizational culture and to assess the potential differences between feminine and masculine policy domains. Seven current directors of directorates in three Bulgarian ministries are compared to five current directors and one current director-general in five Dutch ministries. The Bulgarian ministries are: The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The Ministry of Education and Science. The Dutch Ministries are: The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, The Ministry of Justice and Security, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The National Ombudsman. Although the policy areas of which the female leaders are in charge could not be named due to reasons of anonymity of the respondents, they are quite similar and corresponding to each other to make the analysis feasible. Moreover, the organizational structure of ministries in the both countries is the same. Directors in a particular ministry are in charge of a particular directorate, which operates under a directorate-general, which in turn has its own director-general. Consequently, the structure is vertical and hierarchical and power is strictly divided.

Conclusively, in the light of the nature of the research question introduced in the first chapter of the Master Thesis, the research design outlined in this section is chosen as the most appropriate. An explanatory and qualitative research does not only answer the research question, but also generates in-depth knowledge regarding the effect of stereotypes on women leaders' professional experience, which might be useful to promote gender equality in society

and to improve the functioning of public organization by enhancing the relationship between the human capital and performance. In addition, the comparative aspect of the research is beneficial since the Eastern context has been under-researched and it is useful to study it in comparison to the Western.

4.3. Research method

The aim of the research at hand is to explain and understand a phenomenon by connecting theoretical concepts to empirical evidence. Additionally, the research is particularly interested in the experience of women in leadership positions. Therefore, the most appropriate manner to gain insights on the topic is to conduct interviews and to analyze the information collected from them. Thus, this section provides more information on the method of data collection and the sampling process and the method of data analysis and the measurement of the concepts of interest.

4.3.1.   Method of data collection

The selected method of data collection is interviewing because the research is interested in discovering the experiences, understandings and opinions of a particular group of people, i.e. women in leadership. Hence, this subsection reports the sample frame, i.e. the number of interviews, the number obtained, the number declined and the nature of the interview, e.g. the type of questions asked, how long the interview lasts and whether it is on or off the record.

The sample includes six Dutch female leaders and seven Bulgarian female leaders and is drawn from a targeted population of cases, consisting of women in leadership positions in both countries, which is different from the total population of cases, comprising female leaders in general. The number of participants in the research is considered to be enough for reaching meaningful conclusions because after the interviews with the first four respondents from each country the point of data saturation was reached. Therefore, the following interviewees confirmed the previously collected information, instead of providing the researcher with any new insights. Hence, the intensive study of small number of units, i.e. 13 females in total, aims at understanding a larger class of units, i.e. the targeted population of cases. Emails, i.e. cover letters, comprising information about the researcher and a form of informed consent, are sent to 121 Dutch female leaders and 67 Bulgarian female leaders. The form of informed consent includes: reason for contacting, purpose of the study, procedure, use of data and issues of privacy, potential risks and benefits. Also, a statement that participation is voluntary and unpaid and that there is a possibility to withdraw anytime is added. With the aim to locate the possible

Dutch participants and their contact details, the website of The General Administrative Service (*De Algemene Bestuursdienst*) is used. This Service comprises the top officials of the Dutch government and includes managers at the level of directors and higher from all ministries. Hence, an email is sent to every female leader whose contact details are provided in the website. Unfortunately, such a bureau does not exist in Bulgaria. Thus, the finding of contact details is much more challenging. This is visible by the twice smaller number of possible participants. 33,06% (40 women) from the Dutch female leaders returned an answer to the email and 66,94% (81 women) did not, probably because they did not see the invitation for participation in the research or because they were not interested. From the 40 females, who answered, seven (17,5%) were willing to participate in the research and 33 (82,5%) declined the invitation due to highly busy agenda and other priorities. Nonetheless, one of the respondents cancelled the scheduled interview at a later stage, which resulted in a final sample of six Dutch female leaders employed in public organizations. 19,40% (13 women) from the Bulgarian female leaders responded to the sent invitation for participation in the research, while 80,60% (54 women) did not, supposedly due to the same reasons mentioned for the Dutch women in leadership. From the 13 females, who contacted back the researcher, seven (53,85%) gave a positive answer and were willing to schedule an interview and six (46,15%) answered in a negative manner, refusing to participate in the research, which resulted in a final sample of seven Bulgarian female leaders working in public institutions in the country. Table 5 shows the number of respondents, their country and organization and date of the interview. It is essential to underline that the participants in the study are selected not only because they are representative and fulfill the requirements of being a woman leader, but also because they possess certain similarities, including a rich biography in the public sector, interest in policy issues and relatively close domains of expertise, which makes comparison plausible. In addition, this provides the researcher with the opportunity to compare and contrast not only countries, but also policy domains and to include the possible influence of contextual factors, such as organizational culture, into the analysis. Nonetheless, the selective sample includes potential threats to the validity of the research. For instance, the low number of women who responded positively to the invitation suggests that the researcher might be confronted with a possible nonresponse bias. Hence, for the non-respondents perhaps the issue is not salient or too sensitive. Although the participants were ensured that any information given would be treated confidentially, some of them might be unwilling to participate because of the sensitive topic. Moreover, the recruited respondents might have specific experiences and for that reason want to talk about these experiences. Hence, the findings might be affected in the sense that only the perceptions of the

interviewees, which might be different from the views of the other female leaders, are transmitted. Nonetheless, since the Thesis is not aiming at statistical generalization, but at a theoretical, this is not considered as a major threat to the validity of the research.

Respondent number	Country	Organization	Date of interview
1	The Netherlands	National Ombudsman	March 29th, 2019
2	The Netherlands	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	April 2nd, 2019
3	The Netherlands	Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management	April 12th, 2019
4	The Netherlands	Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations	April 24th, 2019
5	The Netherlands	Ministry of Justice and Security	April 29th, 2019
6	The Netherlands	Ministry of Justice and Security	May 2nd, 2019
7	Bulgaria	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	April 2nd, 2019
8	Bulgaria	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	April 4th, 2019
9	Bulgaria	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	April 5th, 2019
10	Bulgaria	Ministry of Education and Science	April 5th, 2019
11	Bulgaria	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	April 10th, 2019

12	Bulgaria	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	April 15th, 2019
13	Bulgaria	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	April 16th, 2019

Table 5: Final sample: number of respondents, country of origin, organization and date of interview

The data is collected through face-to-face (with the exception of two interviews that were conducted online due to practical reasons), semi-structured interviews that last between 31:13 and 57:11 minutes. The interviews start by personal questions about the respondent and her position as a director/director-general in a public organization and after that move to the main questions that are directly linked to stereotypes and women's professional experience. The interviews with the Dutch respondents are conducted in English since the researcher does not know Dutch, while the interviews with the Bulgarian participants are conducted in Bulgarian because this is the mother language not only of the respondents, but of the researcher as well. All the interviews are recorded by a voice recorder and transcribed, i.e. written up in a Word file afterwards. In addition, observational notes are taken by hand during the interviews and they are written up in a Word file as well within no more than an hour after each interview. Subsequently, both the transcripts and the observational notes are used in the analysis of the findings.

4.3.2.   Method of data analysis and measurement of the main variables

After the data collection, i.e. conducting and transcribing the interviews, the data analysis takes place. In order to be able to arrange the findings according to the key elements in the research question, the main variables have to be operationalized and measured. There are two types of measurement used in this Master Thesis. The first one is the interview guide which is prepared prior to the conduction of the interviews. The interview guide is rather general to have the possibility to include new topics and dimensions that have not been distinguished before. The second one is the coding scheme which resulted as an outcome after the transcription and coding of the interviews.

The coding process is executed in three steps. Firstly, open coding, i.e. coding each phrase that is relevant to the research question, is executed (Saldaña, 2013). After that second cycle of coding is performed to reorganize and categorize the codes, i.e. putting labels to the codes

referring to the same phenomenon (Ibid.). Lastly, axial coding, i.e. linking the codes to the conceptual framework, is done (Ibid.).

The independent variable, i.e. stereotypes, is defined as descriptive and prescriptive notions regarding male, female and managerial characteristics and the appropriate behavior of men, women and managers (see chapter three for further information). However, the research is not interested in the objective existence of stereotypes, but in their dimensions that influence women in leadership. Therefore, female leaders' perception of visibility and stereotype threat is measured through the interview guide and the coding scheme. They should be distinguished from the perception of the stereotype itself. The indicators of both dimensions are presented in Table 6.

The dependent variable, i.e. female leaders' experience, is defined as the views and perceptions of women in leadership regarding the manners through which stereotypes influence their professional experience. Similarly to the independent variable, it has two dimensions: positive and negative, the indicators of which are outlined in Table 6.

The contextual variables, i.e. organizational and country characteristics, are operationalized by selecting diverse policy domains in two countries with different dominant cultures. The specific institutional environment within which the respondents are embedded, i.e. type of policy domain, organizational culture, organizational structure, organizational practices, the number of females in leadership positions and in the administration of the particular organization in general, is measured through the interview guide by asking the respondents about the organization which they represent. The traditional cultural beliefs within which female leaders have to operate, i.e. the strength of gender stereotypes, are measured through the interview guide by asking questions about the participants' opinions and perceptions about the possible influence of the country-specific context in which they are embedded. The dimensions and the indicators of the contextual variables are shown in Table 6.

Subsequently, the final coding scheme is the following. It consists of the main concepts related to the topic, the dimensions through which they are expressed in the respondents' answers and the indicators used to locate them in the coded transcripts.

Main concepts	Dimensions	Indicators

Gender stereotypes	Visibility	• Being in an exceptional role • Being part of the minority • Being judged and treated poorly
	Stereotype threat	• Being aware of gender stereotypes • Having low self-confidence • Showing behavior in line with gender expectations or managerial expectations
Female leaders' experience	Positive perceptions/opinions	• Being able to promote an idea • Having a voice in meetings • Personal derogation • Isolation
	Negative perceptions/opinions	
Organizational characteristics	Type of organization	• Public sector values and goals • Number of male and female colleagues • Practices supporting/obstructing female leaders
	Organizational environment	
	Organizational culture	
	Policy domain	
Cultural characteristics	Traditional beliefs	• Facing prejudices • Dealing with implicit stereotypes
	Prevalent gender norms	

Table 6: Coding scheme: main concepts, dimensions and indicators

4.4. Reflection on validity and reliability

Similarly to every other research, the research in this Master Thesis faces common threats to inference. It addresses them by thick description, i.e. emphasizing the context. The research design and method at hand are considered to be the most appropriate for answering the research question. However, there are certain weaknesses that should be discussed. For example, while the internal validity is high, the external validity is low. Hence, the representativeness is low, but the accuracy of measurement is high.

Furthermore, with regards to the research method and the interview data, problems that reflect on the reliability of the study, such as the representativeness of the sample and the accuracy of reporting, might occur (Bleich & Pekkanen, 2013). The research addresses the issue with the representativeness of the sample by using a systematic, rather than a random sampling and reporting the sample frame (Ibid.). Moreover, the accuracy of reporting could be improved by posting full interview transcripts (Ibid.). Nevertheless, this is not done due to the anonymity promised prior to the taking of the informed consent and due to the ethical principles of respect for persons and beneficence, i.e. minimizing social, psychological and physical harms (Fujii, 2012). Hence, while possible problems with validity are managed to be solved at least to a certain extent, issues with reliability are still present and represent the major limitation of the chosen research design and method.

4.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this chapter was to explain and justify the research design and method that are chosen to be used to investigate whether the expectations drawn from the theory hold in real life and eventually to answer the following research question:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

In general, the research design is deductive, explanatory and empirical, while the type of research is comparative. The case selection incorporates two deviant cases, i.e. The Netherlands and Bulgaria. The unit of analysis, i.e. the major entity that is being analyzed in the Master Thesis, includes 13 female leaders in total (six women from The Netherlands and seven women from Bulgaria).

Furthermore, the research method is qualitative and is based on face-to-face and online, semi-structured interviews. Moreover, the analysis is grounded on the coded information according

to the main concepts from the theoretical framework that was collected during the interviews and on the observational notes that were taken during the interviews.

Overall, the small-n research design and the qualitative method of data collection ensure the high internal validity of the research. Nonetheless, the selected research design and method possess certain weaknesses, such as less secure inferences and issues with reliability. The strengths and the limitations of the study and the manners taken to address the latter are further discussed in the final chapter of the Master Thesis.

The following chapter presents the empirical findings and analyzes them with the aim to compare and contrast Bulgaria and The Netherlands and to answer the research question.

5. Chapter Five: Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report the empirical findings, i.e. the results from the interviews with female leaders in The Netherlands and Bulgaria, in a precise and systematic manner. Additionally, the chapter aims at applying the theoretical framework to the research topic, analyzing the transcripts which are coded according to the central concepts of the research and answering the following research question:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

To this end, the chapter is divided into the following sections. Firstly, the countries are discussed separately. Secondly, a comparison between them is made. Importantly, the arguments in the chapter are based on the perceptions of the interviewed female leaders in The Netherlands and Bulgaria and the observational notes taken during the interviews.

5.2. The Netherlands

Gender stereotypes have two manifestations in the professional world of Dutch female leaders: visibility and stereotype threat. Visibility consists of being one of the few women in leadership in public organizations in The Netherlands. Moreover, it confronts female leaders with both opportunities and challenges in their professional role. Being one of the few females at the top provides women in leadership with the chance to promote their views, as explained by this respondent.

> Being the only female in the room makes it easier for me to be heard than being
> just one of the guys. (respondent 6)

However, it places women in leadership in the spotlight, which in turn makes them feel uncomfortable, vulnerable and not belonging. For instance, one of the participants tells a story in which she felt uncomfortable because it was very hot in the room, but she could not take off her jacket because she was wearing a dress without sleeves and she felt strange to undress in front of her male colleagues. These observations, with the exception of the advantage of being in a visible position, correspond to the formulated theoretical expectations. According to the literature, visibility indeed is one of the mechanisms through which gender stereotypes influence female leaders. Nonetheless, scholars emphasize on the negative consequences of

visibility, such as creation of performance pressure, and fail to acknowledge the opportunity that it offers to women in leadership.

Stereotype threat, i.e. "the concrete, real-time threat of being judged and treated poorly in setting where a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p.388) entails being aware of gender stereotypes and as a result having low self-confidence and showing a behavior that is in line with gender expectations. The interviewed female leaders report that they feel judged based on their gender in several occasions due to the perception that they are employed in a male domain. Dutch women in leadership experience a stereotype threat, which along with their implicit stereotypes affects their self-confidence and behavior, when they openly say that they do not know something, when they are emotional and when they do not comply with the expected behavior from a leader. This relates to the role congruity theory and the lack-of-fit model. Two of the respondents remember an occasion in which their colleagues warned them that they are the director and that they cannot say that they are insecure or made a mistake because they have to gain authority. Another one, explains that she is often experiencing problems when she tries to use more female style of leadership, i.e. when she focuses on working together and caring more for her employees, instead of focusing on the power play and the prestige. Interestingly, the usage of a more male type of leadership also seems to be an issue since one of the respondents faced a lot of complains and negative feedback from her employees when she employed more aggressive tactics than usual to motivate them. Therefore, the double standard that is used to judge female leaders brings them confusion regarding the expectations of their employees and colleagues. Moreover, showing emotions is perceived as an issue by some of the respondents. One of them says that she often gets emotional because she is connected to the things she does, but this often has negative consequences for her. Once in a job interview she was asked to explain what being a director means for her and she described the perfect leaders as one showing real emotions. She did not get the job and she thinks that it is because of her answer to that particular question. As the theory suggested, female leaders carry a double burden since they are expected to conform simultaneously to their gender and leader role, which by default are incompatible. Hence, the perceived gender stereotype threat confronts women in leadership with negative experience and feeling of vulnerability.

Consequently, female leaders in The Netherlands possess both positive and negative perceptions about their professional experience. Their exceptional role in a setting where negative stereotypes about their gender apply provides them with the opportunity to voice their

opinion and to promote their ideas, but also confronts them with personal derogation and isolation. Women in leadership in The Netherlands recall several occasions in which they felt personally derogated. For example, one of the participants remembers the following instance. Few years ago she worked as a director in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and as such she had to make an opening speech in an event where all the directors and directors-general were invited. When she entered the room and started greeting the people, one of her older male colleagues said to her that it was nice that she had come to take notes that day. The respondent explains that she did not reply in any way, but the fact that her colleague assumed that she is a note-taker, instead of senior civil servant left a bad taste in her mouth. In addition, Dutch female leaders feel lonely and isolated. For instance, one of the respondents admits that she experiences difficulties to fit in and to take part in the conversations between her male colleagues. Hence, she feels isolated because the men are talking to each other and ignoring her. However, this relates primarily to the daily social conversations before and after the meetings, not to the professional discussions during the meetings. Thus, she does not feel isolated or threated as inferior in her professional encounters with males.

Furthermore, as suggested by the theoretical expectations, the organizational context plays an essential role in the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and Dutch female leaders' experience. Primarily the type of organization and the organizational culture are identified to have an influence over women in leadership in The Netherlands. In general, the majority of females admit that they feel better in public organizations with female characteristics. The interviewed women in leadership mostly prefer the public sector because it is less concerned with the drive to earn money and more focused on bringing good for the society, which is in line with their work motivation. For example, one of them admits that she was earning a lot more money when she was a consultant in a private company, but she was not triggered by it and she was not feeling engaged in the work; hence, she started looking for a job in the public sector. Additionally, they feel that they have an advantage in the public sector because lately the Dutch government has been emphasizing on the need of more women in leadership and promoting the female type of leadership which is primarily concerned with caring for people and working together to achieve the goal. One of the participants will change jobs in June and believes that being a female helped her to gain her new position as a director in another ministry because when she went for an interview with the director-general, he told her that he wanted a woman for the position. Nonetheless, female leaders perceive the hierarchical structure of the public sector as a disadvantage, "a useless burden", as one of the respondents says, because it obstructs

them from getting closer to and having a better connection with their employees which they would like to do (respondent 6). Moreover, female organizational culture affect women in leadership positively, while male organizational culture makes them feel uncomfortable, not belonging and less motivated. For example, one of the respondents shares that it is much easier for her to adapt to her current position which is in a female kind of organization than her previous job which was in a male, more business-like kind of organization. Another says that she was particularly searching for a job in a female type of organization because she would not be happy otherwise.

> It's [Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations] not a masculine type of organization, but some other ministries are and I wouldn't be happy in a masculine type of organization. That's something that I asked about when I applied for the job because I wouldn't want that. (respondent 4)

However, some of the respondents prefer organizations with male culture because they perceive the relations in this organizations to be clearer. This could be explained by looking at the background of these respondents. Both of the participants who said that they feel more at place in a male type of organizations graduated in technical universities which are usually described as male domains. Therefore, the observation that public sector values and practices affect female leaders positively, while the hierarchical structure influence them negatively corresponds to the theoretical expectations. Nevertheless, the findings regarding the organizational culture are more nuanced. Thus, women in leadership are affected by the organizational culture but the manner depends to a large extent on their background and personal preferences, i.e. female organizational culture does not necessary have a positive influence on female leaders.

Traditional cultural beliefs in The Netherlands do not have a direct influence on female leaders, contrary to the theoretical expectations. Nevertheless, implicit stereotypes affect them to a large extent, as acknowledged by this respondent.

> I'm my own enemy and it's not the society that holds me back. (respondent 4)

A more general observation is that the majority of the interviewed women in leadership admit that they feel pressured by their own stereotypes related to their role in the society and to their abilities. Firstly, the stereotype that women have to become mothers and raise their children provided women with remorse after they became directors and had to dedicate more time to their work than to the family. Secondly, several of the female leaders thought that they cannot

manage the position of a director when it was first offered to them and needed reassurance. Furthermore, they add that they continue to experience a lack of self-confidence because they realize that they are not in a typical role for females. Lastly, some women recognize that their leadership style is influenced by implicit notions how they as females have to behave. One of the respondents says that she is always trying to be kind and smile because she remembers that her mother used to tell it to her when she was a girl.

Overall, gender stereotypes influence Dutch female leaders through several manners. Firstly, the notion that leadership is a male domain and the low number of women in leadership provides the interviewed directors with an opportunity to be heard, but also with the feeling that they do not belong to the field. Secondly, female leaders experience instances of personal derogation and stereotype threat. However, they do not mention to be penalized for being competent and violating the prescription of gender stereotypes. This finding does not correspond with the theoretical expectations. A possible explanation is the prevalent feminine culture with small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance in The Netherlands which promotes equality between genders and tolerates non-typical leaders. Thirdly, public sector values and governmental policies help women in leadership in the public sector to feel an advantage, while the strict hierarchy obstructs them to show their potential. Furthermore, depending on its type the organizational culture has both positive and negative influence on female leaders, while the societal culture and traditional beliefs do not affect Dutch female leaders with the exception of implicit stereotypes which are one of the biggest challenges that women in leadership in The Netherlands have to overcome.

5.3. Bulgaria

Similarly to the situation in The Netherlands, gender stereotypes in Bulgaria have two manifestations in the professional world of female leaders: visibility and stereotype threat. Visibility among Bulgarian female leaders consists of being in an exceptional role and having the chance to be involved in large governmental projects that aim at the improvement of the public space and well-being of the society. Hence, women in leadership perceive the visibility of their position as an advantage. For instance, one of the respondents explains that her motivation to apply for the position of a director in the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works is from a professional point of view since this decision gives her the opportunity to participate in investment projects that are significant for Bulgaria and that have a direct influence on the well-being of the citizens. Moreover, another participant from the same ministry says the following.

> For me, it's important for a project to happen, to be successful. Seeing that the lifestyle of people in different regions has improved is a chance given to me because of the profession I have. That's why I consider the role of a director in The Ministry as an opportunity. (respondent 9)

Another respondent tells that for her the role of a director is an opportunity as well since she is able to promote policies that can bring innovation in the educational system. None of the respondents reports that the uniqueness and visibility of their professional role affect them negatively by increasing performance pressures or decreasing their sense of belonging, which is different from the perceptions of the Dutch female leaders. Furthermore, this observation does not correspond to the theoretical expectations which emphasize on the challenges related to visibility. This might be explained by the fact that the number of female leaders in Bulgaria is significantly higher than the number of women in leadership in The Netherlands and slightly higher than the number of male leaders in Bulgaria. Therefore, Bulgarian female leaders are visible not because they are part of a minority, but simply because they occupy positions in the higher echelons in the public sector. Moreover, the lack of negative consequences of the dimension of visibility is also related to the lack of perception of stereotype threat.

A more general observation among the majority of the interviewed women in leadership in Bulgaria is that they do not experience any stereotype threat. This might be explained by two observations. Firstly, women themselves believe that they possess the required knowledge and abilities to lead a team. Secondly, the numbers show that the majority of directors and directors-general, especially at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and the Ministry of Education and Science, are females. Thus, being part of the majority empowers female leaders in Bulgaria and provides them with a feeling of safety. One of the respondents laughs about the fact that during the weekly meetings of the Board of Directors the male directors are the minority and usually complain that their female colleagues ignore them. Only two occasions of perceptions of stereotype threat are identified in the responses of the Bulgarian female leaders. Thus, two of the interviewed female directors acknowledge that their self-confidence and well-being are affected negatively due to prevalent beliefs that female qualities are not congruent with leadership. One of the respondents admits that she often feels judged because of her emotionality since her employees do not expect from a leader to take emotional decisions. The other one explains that she encounters negative feedback from her employees because they expect her to be more interested in their well-being than professional results. She even shares that she heard her employees commenting that she was so cold, as if she was not a woman. In

the first case the female leader is judged because she overshows her feminine communal qualities, while in the second the woman in leadership is treated poorly because she employs more male agentic qualities. Therefore, there is once again a double standard which brings confusion to female leaders. Moreover, this observation corresponds to the theoretical expectations which suggest that the perception of stereotype threat influences female leaders' self-esteem and behavior because they feel personally derogated or penalized for violating the prescriptions of gender stereotypes.

Generally, Bulgarian female leaders, as suggested by the theoretical expectations and similarly to the Dutch female leaders, prefer the public sphere because they believe that their values and qualities are more in line with public organizations' values and goals. Several of them admit that they are not interested in the money, but prefer to have a stable job and the public administration provides them with this security. Additionally, the fact that there are many women in the public administration attracts female directors because they feel that in the public sector they are appreciated, empowered and supported by the government. Nonetheless, there are some characteristics of the public administration that affect female leaders in a negative way by exacerbating gender stereotypes. As predicted based on the theoretical expectations, Bulgarian women in leadership perceive the hierarchical structure of public organizations as a limit for them to develop their potential as leaders. One of the respondents blames the fact that she was judged and labeled as cold and non-caring on the bureaucratic, hierarchical structure and the ambiguity of the evaluation process in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She explains that the strict hierarchy limits her powers and disables her to stimulate her employees with financial bonuses. Another two admit that sometimes they feel demotivated because of the lack of structure in the evaluation process. One of them further explains that she perceives the appraisal interview at the end of the year as formality and she says that she does not receive credit for the achievements of her directorate. Therefore, public sector characteristics have both positive and negative influence on female leaders. This observation is in line with the theoretical expectations.

In addition, contrary to the theoretical expectations the culture in Bulgaria do not necessary influence female leaders in a more negative manner compared to their Dutch colleagues. None of them reports to be faced with direct prejudices based on gender. The majority assure that they do not feel treated in an unequal or inferior manner because it is expected from them to work equally to men. Nevertheless, the stereotype that women are more suitable for lower than for leading positions is still an obstruction to female leaders to a certain extent. One of the

respondents remembers that when she became a director it took her long time to prove herself and to show that she is now part of the management, not the executive team; hence, she cannot be treated as a secretary. Furthermore, the cultural expectation that the Bulgarian woman has to be a working mother confronts female leaders with a difficulty to overcome. For example, three of the respondents acknowledge that people around them expect from them to be the best leader and the best mother simultaneously and that they do not receive understanding from their colleagues when they need to take a day-off because of their families. Another one shares that the biggest challenge in front of her is to be able to dedicate enough time on her professional tasks and on her child without the help of a babysitter. This finding could be explained by the communist heritage and the cultural traditions in the country. The principle of gender equality in the professional world promoted during the communist period in Bulgaria influences women in such a way that they themselves and the society as a whole perceive their role as working mothers as absolutely normal. Hence, people are used to see females at the workplace. Subsequently, traditional beliefs and cultural norms do not affect female leaders in a sense that they are confronted with more negativity, as predicted by the theoretical expectations, but in a sense that women in leadership experience difficulties balancing between the professional role of a leader and the private role of a mother.

Summarizing, gender stereotypes, which are a result of the communist tradition and regard females both as mothers and workers, affect Bulgarian women in leadership through several manners. Firstly, they confront women in leadership with a challenge to find the balance between the two roles. Secondly, because of them the percentage of women in the higher echelon of the public sector is considerably high which in turn empowers female leaders. Therefore, contrary to the theoretical expectations women in leadership in Bulgaria with few exceptions do not experience instances of isolation, personal derogation or stereotype threat. Additionally, they do not feel penalized for being competent and violating the prescription of gender stereotypes. Thirdly, cultural beliefs do not affect female leaders more negatively as expected based on the theory. Nonetheless, this observation is not claiming that the theoretical expectations are incorrect. A possible explanation might be that the theoretical expectations regard the type of dominant culture, but fail to consider other relevant factors, such as implicit stereotypes or the lack thereof. Subsequently, Bulgarian female leaders might be treated negatively due to the dominant masculine culture with large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance, but the lack of strong implicit stereotypes might prevent them from feeling a negative effect. Fourthly, in line with the theoretical expectations public sector values

and goals attract female leaders and provide them with the perception of belongingness and security, while the hierarchical organizational structure and the ambiguity of the evaluation criteria provide an opportunity for gender stereotypes to be used to influence women in leadership negatively by labelling them as cold and non-caring.

5.4. Comparative analysis

Overall, both similarities and differences are identified between the two countries of interest. Generally, gender stereotypes affect Dutch and Bulgarian female leaders, but to a different extent and in different manners due to the different country-context and the different nature of the dominant gender stereotypes.

Firstly, visibility, which is considered as a dimension of gender stereotypes, affects Dutch women in leadership both positively by offering them the possibility to outstand and promote their opinion and negatively by making them feel less belonging to the field, while the effect on Bulgarian women in leadership is primarily positive since they consider their role as an opportunity to make a change and they feel empowered. This observation is explained by the cultural context, but also by the different nature of the dominant gender stereotypes in each of the countries. Although The Netherlands is described as feminine country with small power distance which is supposed to support different leaders, i.e. female leaders, the dominant stereotype that leadership is more congruent with male characteristics confronts women leaders with challenges to overcome. Similarly, despite the masculine culture with large power distance in Bulgaria, gender stereotypes dating from the communist period expect females to be both mothers and workers. Hence, women in leadership experience less difficulties to prove themselves as suitable for the leadership position. However, they are confronted with the difficulty to balance between their professional and private roles.

Secondly, contrary to the theoretical expectations related to the country-context Dutch women in leadership experience more instances of stereotype threat and personal derogation than Bulgarian female leaders. This could be explained by the lower number of women in the higher echelon of the public sector in The Netherlands and the lack of strong implicit stereotypes among female leaders in Bulgaria. Hence, on the one hand, the minority status of Dutch female leaders makes them vulnerable. On the other, the majority status of Bulgarian female leaders provides them with self-confidence and security. Thus, they tend to ignore instances of stereotype thread or personal derogation. Moreover, no one from the interviewed women in leadership neither in The Netherlands, nor in Bulgaria feels penalized for being competent and violating the prescription of gender stereotypes.

In addition and correspondingly to the theoretical expectations, public sector characteristics have a dual effect on women in leadership. For instance, the goal of public organizations, i.e. the provision of goods and services for the benefit of the society, attracts and affects positively female directors in both countries because they identify themselves with the organizational values in the ministries in which they work. However, the hierarchical structure and the ambiguity of the evaluation criteria have a negative effect over women in leadership in The Netherlands and Bulgaria because they activate and exacerbate gender stereotypes which results in feelings of powerlessness and demotivation.

Subsequently, while the main similarity is related to the influence of public sector characteristics, the core difference between The Netherlands and Bulgaria is female leaders' perception of the effect of gender stereotypes and stereotype threat. Therefore, both Dutch and Bulgarian female leaders are affected by gender stereotypes. Moreover, the country-context in both countries play a role in the reinforcement of the dominant cultural beliefs. However, its effect is contrary to the theoretical expectations, i.e. women in leadership in The Netherlands do not necessary face less negativity due to the prevalent feminine culture than their Bulgarian colleagues who are embedded in a masculine culture. A possible explanation of this finding is the number of females in the higher echelons of the public sector. Thus, the minority status of Dutch female leaders makes them vulnerable and decreases their sense of belonging to the domain of leadership, while the majority status of Bulgarian female leaders empowers them and provides them with the feeling of safety.

5.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented and analyzed the empirical findings with the aim to answer the following research question:

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

Indeed, gender stereotypes have both a positive and a negative effect on both Dutch and Bulgarian female leaders. Nonetheless, the mechanisms in the two countries differ due to the different nature of gender stereotypes and the different culture in which female leaders are embedded. Despite the feminine culture and because of the dominant belief that female characteristics are incongruent with leadership Dutch women in the higher echelons of the public sector experience more instances of stereotype threat and personal derogation, which results in a decreased sense of belonging and lower self-confidence. Regardless of the

masculine culture, the high number of female leaders and the expectation that women in Bulgaria have to work equally to men empowers Bulgarian female leaders, but confronts them with a challenge to find a balance between their professional and private life. Hence, cultural beliefs do have an influence, but to a limited extent. Other factors, such as dominant explicit and implicit stereotypes and the number of female leaders, are important as well. Additionally, public sector characteristics also play a role, as expected from the theory. While public values and practices that encourage females influence women in leadership positively, the strict hierarchy and the ambiguity of the evaluation criteria exacerbate gender stereotypes and influence them negatively.

The following chapter summarizes the most important insights of the research, outlines the strengths and the limitations of the Thesis and provides suggestions for further research as well as some practical recommendations.

6. Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1. Summary of the findings and answer to the research question

Conclusively, this Thesis focused on the topic of gender stereotypes and the way they affect female leaders. The research was based on the assumption that stereotypes influence women in leadership both in positive and negative manners depending on the organizational and cultural context in which they are embedded. With the aim to add substance and explain the mechanisms two case studies were analysed. Additionally, 13 female leaders from Bulgaria and The Netherlands were interviewed to understand their perceptions and points of view. On the one hand, the analysis provided an answer to the following research question.

How do gender stereotypes affect female leaders' professional experience in public organizations in The Netherlands and Bulgaria?

Furthermore, it enriched two streams of literature: the public administration and management literature and the sociological and psychological literature. The research explained the influence of gender stereotypes on a particular group of people employed at the top levels in public organizations and added the potential influence of the organizational and cultural context. On the other, it offered points for practitioners which could be used to improve the experience of female leaders; consequently, to increase organizational performance. These practical recommendations are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Summarizing, the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of gender and managerial stereotypes associate women with certain characteristics and behavior which are regarded incongruent with leadership. Thus, stereotypes translate themselves at the workplace as discriminatory treatment against women and perception of stereotype threat, which in turn lead to lower self-confidence, feelings of vulnerability and decreased sense of belonging among female leaders. Overall, the stereotype that leadership is a male domain affects Dutch female leaders by offering them the opportunity to outstand and be heard, but also by confronting them with instances of personal derogation and stereotype threat, which further exacerbates their implicit stereotypes and results in feelings of vulnerability and decreased sense of belonging. The stereotype that Bulgarian women have to be realized both as mothers and workers provides female leaders in the country with less negative attitudes because people are used to female directors, but confronts them with a challenge to balance between the two roles. Furthermore, the power of stereotypes might be fostered by the type of dominant culture. Therefore, women in masculine countries with large power distance are expected to face more negative attitudes than their colleagues in

feminine countries with small power distance. Nonetheless, this theoretical expectation was not observed in The Netherlands and Bulgaria. Subsequently, next to the possible influence of the cultural context, other factors, such as the strength of implicit stereotypes, the historical background and the number of females in the higher echelons of the public sector, need to be considered to fully understand the dynamics of the phenomenon under review. Moreover, the influence of public sector characteristic was taken into consideration. As expected from the theory public organizations attract female leaders in both countries and provide them with a sense of belonging and meaningfulness because public values are in line with women's values and at the same time confront them with a sense of powerlessness due to the strict hierarchical structure. Therefore, the main similarity between Bulgaria and The Netherlands is related to the effect of the organizational characteristics, while the major difference is grounded in the distinct nature of the prevalent stereotypes, which leads to different perceptions and experiences of stereotype threat by female leaders.

6.2. Strengths and limitations

The chosen research design and method are considered to be the most appropriate for answering the research question in a valid and reliable manner because of the following strengths. Firstly, the small-n, comparative design offers the researcher the opportunity to qualitatively investigate the mechanisms rather than to quantitatively make generalizations about the effect and to emphasize on the role of contextual factors by avoiding conceptual stretching, i.e. the unintentional misuse of concepts by claiming that they have universal values. Subsequently, the comparative nature of the analysis and the inclusion of the country-context enrich the state of the literature by adding insights to the theories used. For example, the finding that incongruence between the female gender and the leader's role is stronger in The Netherlands than in Bulgaria because of the historical background illustrates that the role congruity theory should not be accepted as universal. Secondly, the selection of deviant cases provides the researcher with control and chance to develop a richer, more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and the research with credibility. Furthermore, the comparison of these deviant cases shows that not only the dominant culture, but also the whole country and organizational context, consisting of historical background, implicit stereotypes and number of female leaders in the public sector, may have an impact on how gender stereotypes influence women's experience in leadership roles. This finding contributes to the theories used since the majority of the studies are being done within the field of social psychology and to not take these kind of variance into account. Thirdly, the method of interviewing female leaders possessing rich

biography in the public sector and relatively close domains of expertise makes comparison plausible and facilitates the discovery of the experiences and understandings of women in leadership. This ensures the accuracy of measurement and the high internal validity of the research. In addition, the findings provide the perspective of female leaders which is important since these people are employed as leaders in public domains, such as education, infrastructure, justice, security, domestic and foreign policy, and are responsible for policies which concern the well-being of the whole society.

Nevertheless, the research possesses several limitations. Firstly, comparing few cases leads to less secure inferences, low external validity and limited generalizability. The research addresses this weakness by focusing on thick description of the context, i.e. showing statistical data and providing information about the historical background and the dominant gender stereotypes in Bulgaria and The Netherland. Additionally, the research does not aim at universal conclusions, but at emphasizing on particularities and discussing the possible influence of contextual factors. Secondly, the chosen research method and the selective sample represent a potential threat to the reliability and the validity of the research. On the one hand, a bias in the collected data might be expected because of the low number of women who were willing to participate. To account for this weakness, the researcher uses systematic sampling and reports the sample frame and the nature of the interview. On the other, not posting interview transcripts due to the promised anonymity and ethical principles might reflect on the accuracy of reporting and the reliability of the research. However, the principle of respect for persons and beneficence is preferred over increasing the reliability of the research. Hence, the researcher acknowledges this weakness, but does not solve it and it remains the major limitation of the research.

6.3. Suggestions for further research and points for practitioners

The existing literature on the topic about the effect of gender stereotypes on women at the workplace focuses primarily on females employed at the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. Moreover, the literature discusses mainly the experience of women in Western organizations and companies. Therefore, the literature fails to consider the experience of females engaged in the higher echelons of the public sector and the possible influence of contextual factors. Subsequently, this Thesis attempted to account for these limitations by researching the experience of female leaders and choosing a comparative research design that compares and contrasts the Western with the Eastern context. Nonetheless, the topic has not been exhaustive. Consequently, further research is needed to provide more insights and to answer the remaining questions. Firstly, female leaders' experiences and understandings

70

regarding the influence of gender stereotypes could be researched in comparison to male leaders' perceptions and points of view to fully understand the mechanisms through which gender stereotypes affect employees. This would offer the opportunity to design policies and to use strategic human resource management practices to improve the well-being of both men and women in leadership and to increase organizational performance. Secondly, the public sector could be compared to the private sector to gain more insights on the influence of the contextual factors. The Thesis illustrated that some of the characteristics of the public sector influence female leaders positively, while others affect them negatively. Nonetheless, researching similarities and differences between the public and the private sector would provide women with the possibility to choose a sector that suits them best and a domain in which they could bring the most benefit for the society, the organization and themselves. Additionally, this would outline a number of characteristics in both sectors that could be adapted according to the needs and preferences of the employees to increase their personal and organizational performance.

Based on the analysis of Dutch and Bulgarian female leaders' experience in public organizations the Thesis offers several points for practitioners that could be used to improve women's working experience and organizational performance. The major struggle for women in leadership in The Netherlands is to deal with implicit stereotypes. Subsequently, Dutch female leaders could be empowered to overcome their inner struggles by offering them courses for empowerment, consisting of seminars with life-coaches and role models, i.e. other successful women. By receiving practical suggestions and hearing about the experience of other successful women, female leaders would be motivated and equipped with the necessary tools to combat their implicit stereotypes. The main challenge with which Bulgarian women in leadership are confronted is to find a balance between their role of mothers and directors. Hence, to help them overcome this challenge flexible working hours and space could be introduced in public organizations, i.e. female leaders could be allowed to work from home one or two days per week. Furthermore, women in leadership who have children could be given one extra day-off per month to assist them into balancing between their private and professional life.

7. Reference List

Arends-Tóth, J., & Van de Vijver, F. (2009). Cultural differences in family, marital, and gender-role values among immigrants and majority members in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Psychology, 44(3)*, 161-169.

Arvate, P., Galilea, G., & Todescat, I. (2018). The queen bee: A myth? The effect of top-level female leadership on subordinate females. *The Leadership Quarterly, 29*, 533-548.

Ådnanes, M. (2001). Youth and gender in post-communist Bulgaria. *Journal of Youth Studies, 4(1)*, 25-40.

Beer, M., Boselie, P., & Brewster, C. (2015). Back to the future: Implications for the field of HRM of the multistakeholder perspective proposed 30 years ago. *Human Resource Management, 54(3)*, 427-438.

Bleich, E., & Pekkanen, R. (2013). How to report interview data. In L. Mosley (Ed.), *Interview research in political science* (pp. 84-107). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bobbitt-Zeher, D. (2011). Gender discrimination at work: Connecting gender stereotypes, institutional policies, and gender composition of workplace. *Gender and Society, 25(6)*, 764-786.

Carrasco, A., Francoeur, C., Labelle, R., Laffarga, J., & Ruiz-Barbadillo, E. (2015). Appointing women to boards: Is there a cultural bias? *Journal of Business Ethics, 129*, 429-444.

Chiva, C. (2009). The limits of Europeanisation: EU accession and gender equality in Bulgaria and Romania. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 10(2)*, 195-209.

Connell, R. (2006). Glass ceilings or gendered institutions? Mapping the gender regimes of public sector worksites. *Public Administration Review, 66(6)*, 837-849.

Daalmans, S., Kleemans, M., & Sadza, A. (2017). Gender representation on gender-targeted television channels: A comparison of female- and male-targeted TV channels in the Netherlands. *Sex Roles, 77*, 366-378.

Davies, P., Spencer, S., Quinn, D., & Gerhardstein, R. (2002). Consuming images: How television commercials that elicit stereotype threat can restrain women academically and professionally. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28(12)*, 1615-1628.

Derks, B., Van Laar, C., Ellemers, N. (2016). The queen bee phenomenon: Why women leaders distance themselves from junior women. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27*, 456-469.

Eagly, A., & Heilman, M. (2016). Gender and leadership: An introduction to the special issue. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27(3)*, 349-353.

Eagly, A., & Karau, S. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review, 109(3)*, 573-598.

Endendijk, J., Groeneveld, M., Van Berkel, S., Hallers-Haalboom, E., Mesman, J., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. (2013). Gender stereotypes in the family context: Mothers, fathers, and siblings. *Sex Roles, 68*, 577-590.

European Institute for Gender Equality. (2017). National administrations: Top two tiers of administrators by function of government [Gender Statistics Database]. Retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_adm_nat__wmid_natadmin/bar

European Values Study. (2018). *European Values Study 2017* [Integrated Dataset]. Retrieved from https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/SDesc2.asp?ll=10&notabs=&af=&nf=&search=&search2=&db=E&no=7500. Cologne: GESIS Data Archive.

Faniko, K., Ellemers, N., Derks, B., & Lorenzi-Cioldi, F. (2017). Nothing changes, really: Why women who break through the glass ceiling end up reinforcing it. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 43(5)*, 638-651.

Fujii, L. (2012). Research ethics 101: Dilemmas and responsibilities. *American Political Science Association, 45(4)*, 717-723.

Haines, E., Deaux, K., & Lofaro, N. (2016). The times they are a-changing…or are they not? A comparison of gender stereotypes, 1983-2014. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 40(3)*, 353-363.

Heilman, M. (1995). Sex stereotypes and their effects in the workplace: What we know and what we don't know. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 10(4)*, 3-26.

———. (2001). Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues, 57(4)*, 657-674.

Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: the Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2(1)*, 1-26.

Hoyt, C., & Murphy, S. (2016). Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat, women, and leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27(3)*, 387-399.

Ibroscheva, E. (2007). Caught between east and west? Portrayals of gender in Bulgarian television advertisements. *Sex Roles, 57*, 409-418.

Ibroscheva, E., & Raicheva-Stover, M. (2009). MPs with skirts: Or how the popular press in Bulgaria portrays women politicians. *Observatorio Journal, 8*, 311-335.

Inglehart, R., Haerpfer, C., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano, J.,…, Puranen, B. (2014). *World Values Survey: Round Five – Country-Pooled Datafile Version*. [Data file]. Retrieved from www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV5.jsp. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.

Kaiser, C., & Spalding, K. (2015). Do women who succeed in male-dominated domains help other women? The moderating role of gender identification. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 45*, 599-608.

Kanter, R. (1977). Some effects of proportions on group life: Skewed sex ratios and responses to token women. *American Journal of Sociology, 82(5)*, 965-990.

Landman, T. (2003). Part 1: Why, how, and problems of comparison. In T. Landman (Ed.), *Issues and methods in comparative politics: An introduction* (pp. 1-95). London: Routledge.

National Statistical Institute. (2018). *Employed persons and employment rates – National level; Statistical regions; Areas* [Integrated Dataset]. Retrieved from http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/4009/заети-лица-и-коефициенти-на-заетост-национално-ниво-статистически-райони-области

NUFFIC. (n.d.). Gender equality in the Netherlands. Retrieved from https://www.hollandalumni.nl/medias/editor/files/gender-equality-in-the-netherlands.pdf

OECD. (2012). Gender publication—Closing the gender gap: Act now: The Netherlands. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/gender/Closing%20the%20Gender%20Gap%20-%20Netherlands%20FINAL.pdf

OECD.Stat. (2019a). *Government at a glance – 2013 edition: Women in government* [Data file]. Retrieved from https://stats.oecd.org/#

———. (2019b). *Government at a glance – 2017 edition: Public employment and pay* [Data file]. Retrieved from https://stats.oecd.org/#

———. (2019c). *Labour force statistics by sex and age – Indicators* [Dataset Level Metadata]. Retrieved from https://stats.oecd.org/#

Powell, G., Butterfield, D., & Parent, J. (2002). Gender and managerial stereotypes: Have the times changed? *Journal of Management, 28(2)*, 177-193.

Ridgeway, C. (2001). Gender, status, and leadership. *Journal of Social Issues, 57(4)*, 637-655.

Rosette, A., Koval, C., Ma, A., & Livingston, R. (2016). Race matters for women leaders: Intersectional effects on agentic deficiencies and penalties. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27(3)*, 429-445.

Ryan, M., & Haslam, S. (2005). The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of Management, 16*, 81-90.

———. (2007). The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions. *The Academy of Management Review, 32(2)*, 549-572.

Ryan, M., Haslam, S., Hersby, M., Kulich, C., & Atkins, C. (2007). Opting out or pushed off the edge? The glass cliff and the precariousness of women's leadership positions. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 1(1)*, 266-279.

Ryan, M., Haslam, S., Morgenroth, T., Rink, F., Stoker, J., Peters, K. (2016). Getting on top of the glass cliff: Reviewing a decade of evidence, explanations, and impact. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27*, 446-455.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: SAGE.

Smith, A., & Monaghan, K. (2013). Some ceilings have more cracks: Representative bureaucracy in federal regulatory agencies. *The American Review of Public Administration, 43(1)*, 50-71.

Steel, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist, 52(6)*, 613-629.

Stoker, J., Van der Velde, M., & Lammers, J. (2012). Factors relating to managerial stereotypes: The role of gender of the employee and the manager and management gender ratio. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 27*, 31-42.

Șandor, S., Macarie, F., & Creța, S. (2011). Gender equality in the Romanian local public institutions. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, 34*, 217-228.

Toshkov, D. (2016). *Research Design in Political Science*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

Van den Bos, K., Stein, J., Van Yperen, N., Brockner, J., Steiner, D., Dekker, D. (2010). The psychology of voice and performance capabilities in masculine and feminine cultures and contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 99(4)*, 638-448.

Van der Lee, R., & Ellemers, N. (2015). Gender contributes to personal research funding success in The Netherlands. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 112(40)*, 12349-12353.

Willemsen, T. (2002). Gender typing of the successful manager—A stereotype reconsidered. *Sex Roles, 46*, 385-391.

Zarkov, D. (2017). Women, feminism and politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 24(1)*, 3-6.

8. Appendix

Interview guide

1. Firstly, I am interested in your professional background. Can you tell me a little bit about your current position and the most important steps you have taken to reach it?

    a. What kind of advantages and disadvantages do you experience at your workplace?

    b. What are the challenges you are experiencing in your current position?

    c. How do these disadvantages/challenges make you feel? Do they make you feel less motivated to continue working and pursue success or exactly the opposite, do they motivate you to put more effort and prove yourself? If the former, how have you managed to continue pursuing your aspirations for professional development?

2. How would you describe yourself as a leader and your leadership style?

    a. How do you think your employees and colleagues perceive you as a leader and your leadership style?

    b. What kind of feedback do you receive from your employees and colleagues?

    c. What kind of comments addressed to you and your leadership style have you heard after you had managed to successfully accomplish a task? Were your employees and colleagues congratulating you for your success or devaluating your performance and denying credit to you for your success? How did their reaction make you feel and what was your reaction in return?

    d. Would you like to change something in your leadership style and/or in the way you think it is perceived by your employees and colleagues?

3. In your opinion, what characteristics and qualities a leader in the public sector should possess in order to be successful in this position?

    a. Why do you believe that these characteristics and qualities are the most important?

    b. Which and which not do you possess?

    c. Do you think that there is a difference between male and female leaders? If yes, in what aspect? If not, why?

4. What structural and cultural characteristics of public organizations in (country) may, in your opinion, favor men or women in achieving leadership positions?

a. To what extent and how have you been affected, either positively or negatively, by the organizational and societal setting within which you are embedded?