Me, My Abject and I

Phenomenological Intrasexual Competition in Female Leadership

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26.6.2015

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When was somebody himself? When he was as always? As he saw himself? Or as he was when the white hot lava of thoughts and feelings buried all lies, masks, and self-deceptions? Often it was others who complained that somebody was no longer himself. Perhaps this is what it really meant: He's no longer as we would like him to be? So was the whole thing ultimately not much more than a kind of rallying cry against a menacing shake-up of the usual, camouflaged as concern and worry about the alleged welfare of the other?

- from Pascal Mercier's *Nachtzug nach Lisbon* / *Night train to Lisbon*

Management summary

Intrasexual competition is the competitive dynamic between women that is well-known in biological-evolutionary research, but has until now not been linked to its organisational impact. With diversity and female leadership becoming ever more prominent themes on any country or organisation's agenda, discussions on the impact of inter-gender dynamics should be more prevalent. In this research, the experiences of women in leadership roles in the Netherlands has been linked to the presence of intrasexual competition within a conceptual framework of poststructuralist notions of the female body and the role of language, uncanny and the abject. The study shows that intrasexual competition is in fact a consequence of the current day masculine context and that this dominant dynamic with definite impact and should be investigated further.

Main conclusions:

- Intrasexual competition is caused by dominant gender ideologies with their predisposition for the masculine.
- This causes women to internalise aspects of these gender ideologies, which have to be overcome by them in order to accomplish leadership.
- Female leaders are caught in a problematic friction of self, supposed other and abject, which enforces intrasexual dynamics.
- Pragmatic advice for diversity initiatives focuses on creating consciousness and should be linked to the organisation's concrete goals.

Summary of contents

I. Introduction

On Monday, the 29th of September 2014 a survey was published by the Dutch newspaper *Financieel Dagblad*, asking how many people thought it was necessary to actively promote women into the higher echelons of Dutch organisations. A large majority 79% of respondents disagreed with this statement completely. A minority 21% of its responding readers were positive to semi-positive to this suggestion. In March 2015, the Dutch news radio station *BNR* set out the same questionnaire, triggered by a recent governmental decision to introduce a female quota for boards. An even lower percentage of the respondents agreed.

It is surprising how opposed Dutch public opinion is to active initiatives promoting female leadership, considering in many respects the Netherlands is one of the most advanced societies for emancipation. Taking into account that a lot of people voicing their opinion on this issue are women themselves, it is interesting to see how some cannot seem to think beyond notions of 'discrimination' and hiring the 'best person for the job'. There are multiple dimensions to questions of female leadership, that are completely passed by in most public debates and publications on female leadership.

Since I started the business MSc in 2013, I have been drawn to discussions of women in business in leadership roles, particularly the highly limiting attitudes still being practiced, provoked and evident in governance every day in every organisation.[1] I am intrigued by these discussions and feel a responsibility to make a difference in how people perceive female leadership dynamics and point out the bigger context here.

One of the elements within this bigger context is intrasexual competition: a competitive dynamic between people of the same sex, and within this research specifically between women. It is a dynamic widely recognised by women if we look at popular publications and academia (e.g. Hopkins, Groskopf, Smith, Mavin) yet it has never properly researched in relation to female leadership.

Dutch organisations are not really emancipated

The current status quo is illustrated by the autumn 2014 latest Gender Gap Report, published by the World Economic Forum. This report revealed some surprising statistics for the Netherlands. We currently have rank 0.4 (female-to-male ratio to 1) when it comes to female leadership, despite the fact that we generally outrank other countries in general economic participation of women. In other words: we have a huge female workforce, yet only a relatively small share of these women actually make it to positions of leadership.[2] To put this even further in perspective: countries such as Rwanda (0.51), Ukraine (0.66) and France (0.65) rank significantly higher on female leadership. This is not even leadership in the strictest sense, but 'simply' women performing some sort of role that involves leading: from team managers all the way up to CEO's.

After reading the article "No Woman is Like a Man (in Academia): The Masculine Symbolic Order and the Unwanted Female Body" by Marianna Fotaki, I have delved deeper into the dynamics of women in business. I kept reading about women being against a quota for women, heard female

[1] A personal anecdote: male VP's call me out for being "scary" and "bitchy" whereas they would hail my directness if I were the owner of a male reproductive organ. I continually experience male leaders in organisations calling female leaders out for their 'female-ness', which they would never do if they had been men.

[2] The notion of leadership in the Gender Gap Report is even broader than generally used in research on female leadership. Any woman leading anything denotes 'leadership' in this context; so also a manager, teamleader of any kind. Which makes these number even moreso worrying.

colleagues or friends 'argue' that they are above – what they call – positive discrimination, and that we are emancipated more than enough these days.

The central perspective in Fotaki's study is that women have a variety of strategies to cope with the dominant position of men. More so: this male establishment is not even a *dominant* position, but essentially a *default* position. One of these coping strategies is to try to be like them – and to try even harder. I was – and probably still am – one of these women. One tries to race along with them, in the same rat race, without even being aware of the rules of the game that the men have created, set up and continue to govern. And that is where a lot of women crash.

We know diversity improves performance. We know women have completely different brains and offer valuably different skills sets (e.g. Credit Suisse 2012, Commonwealth Secretariat 2013). Those are not up for discussion; what intrigues me more is why – regardless of a plethora of research illustrating this – there is no equal distribution of working women in leadership positions; especially and not even in the Netherlands. Everyone seems to favour diversity these days, yet there seem to be no tools or approaches that actually facilitate a direct increase in female leadership in Dutch organisations. Maybe there is something inherently wrong within the approaches these organisations – even *within* their diversity programmes or female leadership initiatives – that still blocks this?

The role of women themselves in female leadership

Then, one day I came across an interesting study from the field of biology addressing aggression from the perspective of intrasexual competition. This study illustrated how women are more inclined to use indirect aggression towards other women. It was only later, when I read more and more on female leadership and its struggles, that I started to connect the dots. Mainly because I have myself experienced – from both passive as well as active angles – how women de-motivate and degrade other very capable women within business. And I wondered: how can we target women, promote female leadership and strive for a female quota, when all could backfire due to intrasexual dynamics? What if we work hard on programmes and initiatives to enable women to be better leaders from a wrong starting point, with incorrect assumptions? How women interact with other women can provide an essential insight into actually creating pragmatic and realistic solutions to female leadership in organisations.

These considerations and triggers have lead me to the central research question for this thesis. Which is fuelled by the goal to make a contribution to the on-going discussion and enable more people and organisations to realise how essential it is that we do make it to the often quoted critical mass of 35% of women on top and in the lead. And how we actually go about accomplishing that in a sustainable way that will empower women in the long term and lead to organisations benefitting the most from actual organisational diversity. Additionally, I hope it will help in establishing how to best enable organisations to go about empowering women in order to reach ultimate female leadership and remove the current void of attention for the role intrasexual competition may play in this.

Stereotypes in female leadership

There are many stereotyped assumptions at play within female leadership. Here are a few illustrative examples to trigger consciousness to prevalent stereotypes relevant to the field that this research will be operating in. For example: most people will have heard the age old image brought up time after time when discussing gender and leadership, that 'men are simply more dominant', often backed up by supposed collective wisdom that 'men in prehistoric times would be in charge'.[3] A recent study from May this year in *Science* actually undermines this assumption of basic sex inequality in hunter-gatherer societies. The study illustrates quite convincingly that

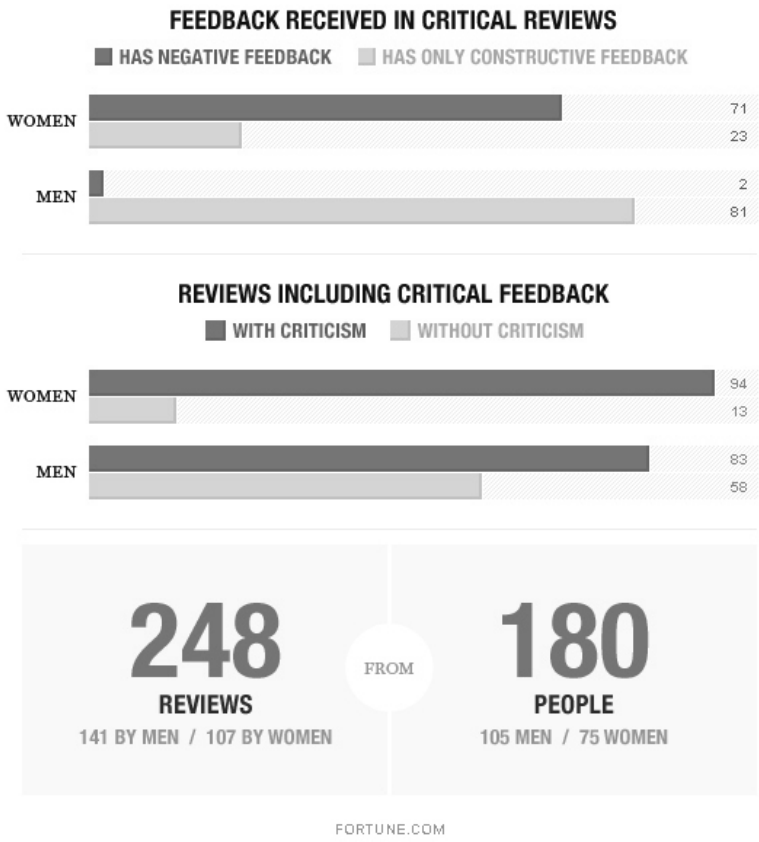
> [...] it was only with the dawn of agriculture, when people were able to accumulate resources for the first time, that an imbalance emerged. "Men can start to have several wives and they can have more children than women," said Dyble. "It pays more for men to start accumulating resources and becomes favourable to form alliances with male kin." (Devlin, par. 13)

This research emphasises the role of culture in gender inequality: linking the imbalance between men and women to systems of agriculture when power started to be more and more commoditised, as our current day society revolves around a large variety of 'powers'. Our culture, language and ideology is what determines so-called 'inherent gender roles', a realisation that is also essential to the backdrop of evolutionary research into intrasexual competition.

Another interesting example where we see stereotyping at play is the existence of a big discourse on female leadership with the focus that women should work on themselves and try and be better (female) leaders within the male-dominated career context. Ergo: women should make themselves more like men. One example is the current 2015 online course "Women in Leadership: Inspiring Positive Change" on *Coursera*, revolving around a lot of do-it-yourself self-improvement for female leaders. This is an approach that actually stems from the early 1970s, in which it became the fad to focus on "being more assertive", following research in behavioural sciences that illustrated women were less assertive then men (Crawford, 49). It is interesting that this approach, with the inherent focus on 'making' or 're-making oneself' still permeates in many discussions and discourses on female leadership.

Another interesting review that focuses more on the inherent bias in language and the usage of language within gender was published in 2014 in *Fortune*. This exploration illustrates that wording in reviews of men's and women's performances differ greatly (Snyder, par. 2). 248 reviews were collected and the results were baffling: words such as "bossy" and "aggressive" were used multiple times per review in order to describe female leader behaviours words - and women were called "emotional" when they would object or be critical). The illustration below shows very clearly that essentially any feedback on women was double more likely to include negatively tainted feedback. Especially in regard to the perceived "aggression" and "bossy-ness" of women, which was included at least twice in each review of a female.

[3] Just one example from a 2013 article on how *Women hate women succeeding*: "[m]aybe it was written into our DNA when the human species was evolving and women were left behind while the men went out hunter-gathering. Women had a primeval need to stick together and follow strict codes of behaviour - those who struck out alone imperilled the group." (Hopkins, par. 14).



Schematic overview of the results from the Fortune review.

These are some of countless examples to provide a small impression of the nature of the many assumptions and stereotypes that are at play within female leadership in contemporary culture and organisations. To explore more of this broader context, this research aims to combine the evolutionary-biological concept of intrasexual competition as a tool to explore experiences of female leaders, in order to uncover the role intrasexual competition may play for women in positions of leadership. Hopefully, the research into intrasexual dynamics will improve knowledge and insight into improving female leadership circumstances and contexts with a view to accomplishing true diversity and enriched organisations with both masculine as well as feminine perspectives.

In order to properly research the issue of intrasexual competition, this research will focus on the actual experiences of female leaders in their working life paths and explore whether their experiences illustrate intrasexual dynamics and the impact of these competitive interactions. Subsequently, its aim will be to offer up constructive and pragmatic suggestions for improving experiences of female leadership.

Research question

What role does intrasexual competition play in experiences of female leadership in Dutch organisations?

Keywords: women at the top, women's advancement, gender, female leadership, intrasexual competition.

II. Literature

Intrasexual competition is a concept coined by modernistic research in evolutionary studies in biology that denotes a specific type of aggression between females. This research will reposition intrasexual competition as a biological concept and place it in a broader organisational context. Thereby its aim is to make intrasexual competition as a notion more relevant as well as useful for studies in a business and organisational studies framework.

This chapter explores a variety of concepts: female notions of competition, aggression and female leadership. Subsequently, it will look at the broader psychoanalytical and poststructuralist notions on the female, the feminine body, the other and the impact of the masculine on these notions. This chapter on literature will aim to provide a broad context for the notions of intrasexual competition and female-female interactions that will also function as a basis for the analysis in the later stage of this research.

The goal of this chapter is to relocate the modernist evolutionary-biological notion of intrasexual competition within a feminist psychoanalytic and poststructuralist framework. The conceptual framework that will evolve from this will then be used as a starting point and a context to explore the experiences of female leaders within organisations and within that, (re)position the notion of intrasexual competition.

The phenomenon of intrasexual competition

We are, however, here concerned only with that kind of selection, which I have called sexual selection. This depends on the advantage which certain individuals have over other individuals of the same sex and species, in exclusive relation to reproduction.

- Darwin, 245[4]

In the original Darwinian phrasing of the term, intrasexual competition revolves around gaining the best access to prime mates in order to reproduce as successfully as possible. In its contemporary context however, intrasexual competition has taken on multiple additional meanings. It is about more than primal reproductive instincts and has evolved – among others – within our strange office jungle surroundings; what Buunk et al. call its "behavioural adaptations" (41). Campbell also explicitly notes the implications for general dominance hierarchies; where females are less likely to compete and if they do, they do so indirectly and intrasexually (203). Organisations and any business-oriented contexts are a prime example of a different type of dominance hierarchy; where mostly arbitrary signifiers denote someone's place in the hierarchy.

Björkqvist's classical study contradicts some still dominant misconceptions regarding aggression in females; namely that "women are so seldom aggressive that female aggression is not worth the trouble to study" (177). This curious assumption is essentially problematic due to the limiting and limited definition of aggression used. Björkqvist argues that aggression is not a synonym for physical violence and that aggression exists in many different shapes and forms. Björkqvist distinguishes between physical, verbal and indirect aggression. His main conclusion is that women are essentially just as aggressive as men yet – due to their generally different physique – they adopt different (mainly indirect) tactics of manifesting this aggression. The most intense of aggression from females is targeted at other females (179). The type of indirect aggression is described as a "manipulative" kind of aggression, "in order to cover [up] one's harmful intentions from the target person" (183).

Human females have an inherent tendency to resort to forms of indirect aggression, typically directed at other females, as Vaillancourt's study (2011) points out. This indirect aggression is noted as an effective strategy in order to compete intrasexually: between women. This competition revolves over an important resource – originally a mate – but in an organisational context it could revolve around any kind of power or authority. Women engage in this by actively reducing a rival's ability and chances for acquiring such resources and by engaging in self-promotion. A manifold amount of research conducted, illustrates the usage of intrasexual competition manifested as indirect types of aggression. One of these examples is the negative bias towards attractive females – no more than reducing a rival's ability. Females are also noted to have punished other females for "seem[ing] to make sex too readily available" (3).

Vaillancourt and Sharma's also conducted an empirical study proving the intolerance of women towards other women who were dressed and dolled up in a "sexy" manner. Their results illustrate intrasexual competition and its link to sexuality. The attractive women in the research were reacted to in a negative manner and the female subjects did not express any willingness to introduce these women to their boyfriend, for example (569). These basic predispositions return in many assumptions on the difficulty within intrasexual collaboration and female leaders.

[4] According to Jones and Ratterman, Darwin's working definition of sexual selection is identical to most scientists studying sexual selection, where ''sexual selection arises from differences in reproductive success caused by competition for access to mates'' (10001).

Buunk et al. also argue that to our evolutionary histories, "women […] are more likely to see other females as competitors" (43). Therefore, they contend *that most competition going on in organisations is in fact intrasexual* (44). Buunk et al. argue this within a paradigm in which females and their sexuality is seen as a scarce commodity (42). Additionally, Buunk et al. mention Linehan's research that links a lack of female leaders to women suffering from a lack of role models and research that argues that the more successful a woman becomes, the more women tend to compare themselves to men.[5]

Research by Jandeska shows that female leaders in male-dominated organisations are less inclined to engage in role-modelling behaviours. Exactly this is problematic and possibly caused by the eagerness to comply with the chauvinistic dominant people in power and thereby not wanting to make too much of a point of "femininity", "feminism" and actively working on an increase in diversity. Buunk et al. subsequently mention forms of indirect aggression as typical female tools, where envy is also directed much more at same sex rivals (45).

A study from 2006, conducted in the Netherlands and Canada, has illustrated that women often reject female candidates when they are attractive, also something illustrated by other empirical research. Buunk et al. comment on the assumption that females would be less competitive, by stating the opposite (58). Most examples of intrasexual competition and aggression have to do with physical attractiveness of a female. Intrasexual competition and aggression among women is very group-oriented with coalitions being formed and at the base of their power (Rucas et al.,42). Buunk et al. mention this strange bias and as it is generally explained "by the stereotype of attractive women as more feminine and nurturing and as less assertive and self-confident" (60). Proof is found in Heilman and Stopeck, who found that when starting out as a women in an organisation being good-looking is positive, but as soon as a woman wants to rise to leadership positions, the bias flips and one needs to be unattractive. They also point out the important role that group dynamics play in intrasexual competition/ aggression among women. The female is supposedly "communally oriented" (61). This creates a difficult limbo for ambitious women, with group peer pressure on the one side, where they are kept down and on the other side the career women who have already 'made it', but who do not assist the ambitious women. Two-sided difficulties, from women "keeping them down" and on the other hand female leaders "pressing from the top", which is the queen bee syndrome: "a bitch who stings other women if her power is threatened" (Mavin, 61).[6]

Campbell directly links the classical evolutionary framework of female intrasexual competition with its impact on and consequences for dominance hierarchies, such as organisations. Due to the risks associated with hierarchy formatting and play, females tend to interact within the context of hierarchy play differently: they "do not carry the same implications for status […] but are chiefly connected with the acquisition and defence of scarce resources" (203).

Except for the fact that status and power are in themselves also scarce resources and women do per se *not* desire power, this emphasises that women simply interact differently within a generally male-dominated concept of power in organisations. Campbell goes on to stress that under patriarchal rule "men have held the power to propagate images and attributions which are favourable for the continuance of their control" (203). She additionally makes a point of the problematic view of female aggression as being something unnatural, a cruel consequence of the patriarchal framework. One striking example Campbell mentions is how in the British justice system a woman facing any charges

[5] I would actually argue that this simply has to do with the mere lack of comparable women in most of these situations – so one can question whether they may actually be a chicken vs. egg context.

[6] One can wonder whether she is really a bitch, though, or whether this is just conceived as such by others due to the fact that she is *a woman*? Do men not also sting, but are they simply not being regarded as "bitches"? The inherent bias in language towards women at play.

of violence is twice (!) as likely as a man to be punished by psychiatric incarceration (212). In other words: a violent man has been bad, a violent woman must be crazy. It is worth considering that nowadays the only force leading women to compete indirectly and regretfully aggressively – and thereby showing different signs of organisational competitiveness – may not merely be evolutionary origins. The importance of culture is the dimensions Campbell adds to the discussion; with a language and metaphors of the organisation that have been created almost exclusively by men, leading to a lack of space for a woman of leadership and competitive attitude.

In summary: intrasexual competition is a dynamic between females in which they utilise indirect kinds of aggression targeted at decreasing competition from other females. Intrasexual competition is an originally evolutionary notion, based on increasing one's chances at a mate. This notion is very much alive and relevant within contemporary cultural and organisational contexts.

Gender in organisations

What we designate as 'feminine', far from being a primeval essence [is the] 'other' without a name.

- Kristeva 1982 (in: Höpfl, 98)

Gender is a complex notion that has been researched from different points of view related to organisations and leadership. The position of the female and the feminine within organisations and its importance is essential to a relevant exploration of intrasexual competition in a broader context.

The role of gender in organisations in itself is highly relevant, with social representations, metaphors and language contributing to the way we see and experience gender. We do not merely use language, we are also being used by language. The word 'leader' in itself calls to mind an image that will mostly correlate with visions of men. It is only when we explicitly refer to leadership as 'female'- like in the title and headers of this research – that we specifically think of and refer to female leaders. The notion of 'female leadership' itself illustrates how exclusion can happen by inclusion – there is no such thing as 'male leadership'. Leadership without the word 'female' in front of it thereby clearly denotes that it is inherently male. The concept, word and stereotype of leader in its default position is still the male. As Ellemers et al. say: "the prevailing image of a successful leader or manager is closer to the male than the female stereotype" (2004). These frameworks result in biased views that distort assessments of skill, but also actual achievements.

It has been convincingly argued that organisational discourses "perpetuate gender discrimination and gendered inequalities" (e.g. Threthewey, 423). There are real and material consequences following from this, in the way women understand, position and discipline their own and other (professional) bodies. In essence: women are taught to discipline their bodies in very specific ("feminine") ways, which causes an inherently objectified body and female self-consciousness. As Bartky puts it: "women internalize the panoptical gaze of the male connoisseur; women live their bodies as 'seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal other" (in Threthewey, 425).

When we map this onto organisational contexts, the kind of discipline and submissiveness is even greater for the female body. The masculine mind is the starting point and central dogma of most organisations, with the feminine body as the literal opposite. This is exactly the double bind, or catch-22, that professional women are still caught up in.

Trethewey points out that more contemporary studies focus on the inherent gendered discourses and structures within organisations, where the consciousness of the inherent masculine identity of the organisation plays a big role (426). It is this presence of the masculine that continuously frames and reframes any acts of identity (re)shaping and emphasises the literal impossibility of fitting in. How can you ever fit in a framework that was never designed for you (women) in the first place? Trethewey subsequently illustrates with her empirical study that sexuality is a dominant theme in any context of the female body, that has a "tendency to overflow" (437).

Heather Höpfl links gender in organisations to the work of Julia Kristeva's conceptual critique involving the female body and the other. In Kristeva's case, she mapped the literal organisation and women on the act of writing. This context of writing is one we can use as an analogy for organising in a bigger sense of the word; namely the organisation as an institute. Kristeva appropriately characterises the on-going clash between the anxiety of confrontation versus the primal repression as "the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat […] because of maternal anguish, unable to be satiated within the encompassing symbolic (Kristeva 1982, in: Höpfl, 100). This is also the paradox of the female in the midst of the phallogocentric all. In which the basic binary choice a woman has, amounts to what Moi describes as living her life "hyper-abstractly" or "different", either join them or beat them (1986, in: Höpfl, 100). And perhaps is thereby the woman

looking beyond the black and white binary divide not engaged in a quintessential impossible Othering of herself, her own fantasy and caught in ultimate *Unheimlichkeit*.

When linking this explicitly to how this could manifest itself in and for female leaders – who may take up a more masculine positioning within organisations where the male is the norm – we get an even more complex position. The woman, as an inherent other, is looking at herself and other women through a distorted 'phallogocentrised' perspective, whilst remaining the physical woman.

Suppressions of female sexuality from a historical perspective

Baumeister and Twenge contribute to the broader context of female sexuality and its possible impact on female leadership and intrasexual competition. They do this through a modernist exploration of a conceptual and historic placement of the sexual suppression of female sexuality. Their research offers up a convincing argument that women themselves have 'worked together' in order to suppress female sexuality. This is an interesting view when aligned with the conceptual framework proposed for this current research into intrasexual competition.

The central notion of the double standard of sexual morality that plays a role in society is at the core of Baumeister and Twenge's research and its aim is to uncover the origins of the suppression of female sexuality. They propose two main contradictory hypotheses that respectively focus on the role and power of men and that of women on the suppression of female sexuality (166). The role of social processes within this suppression is subsequently at the heart of their argument. Their hypotheses involve a large amount of people working together, which they redefine as some kind of unaware, unconscious participatory act: "people may have come to participate in these processes without full awareness of what they were doing, simply because situational forces and salient self-interest impelled them to act in ways that contributed to bringing female sexuality under restrictive control" (166).

More interesting is that Baumeister and Twenge point to the contemporary popularity of evolutionary and biological theories, versus the importance of culture and socialisation. A similar theoretical frame – that of biological and evolutionary theories – surrounds intrasexual competition, which in itself is closely tied to sexuality and female sexuality specifically. The socio-cultural theories are – as Baumeister and Twenge critique – deemed "simple" (167). As their subsequent criticism, they develop their paper in order to illustrate how and where culture has in fact shaped female sexuality. Following their endeavour, we can propose that the suppression of female sexuality – and the role of culture and society, far beyond that of standard biological-evolutionary approaches – can be seen as analogous to position of intrasexual competition as a concept.

The two main hypotheses offered up by Baumeister and Twenge are the male control theory and the female control theory, with the following definition of suppression of female sexuality: "a pattern of cultural influence by which girls and women are induced to avoid feeling sexual desire and to refrain from sexual behaviour" (167). The double standard in sexual morality is seen as a sign of this suppression. The subsequent focus of their paper lies on the argument of the female control theory, in which the theory of social exchange plays a vital role. Social exchange theory analyses human behaviour in terms of costs and rewards, in which interactions count as exchanges of these costs and rewards. In the social exchange theory sex is a "resource that men want, but is under female control" (172). From this perspective, it is in every woman's best interest to keep the sexual commodity to be sold for premium prices; thereby suppressing female sexuality itself. Sex should not be sold cheaply, as it negative effects all females.

A similar dynamic could explain intrasexual competition in organisations, with the specific type of intrasexual exchanges as a sign of the female control theory. Sex as the core commodity would partially be replaced by a notion of a collective femininity. Yet why would women wish to suppress other women? This is a seemingly "self-destructive" way of going about things (170). In order to obtain power in the workplace, women have to offer up other desired resources, if we follow the social exchange theory logic.

When framing it in the broader context of female sexuality, the price of sex needs to be as high as possible. Women subsequently reap the benefits from restricting the flow of sex by exacting better treatment and by reducing risk of losing lovers (171). Sex hereby becomes a full-on commodity, with

similar economic principles applying to the exchange of sex: "when there are too many cheap products available, the purveyors of quality products feel pressure to give discounts as well" (171). The promiscuous woman becomes – literally – a cheap woman.

Following this, there are three implications defined with the first one being of particular interest to this research: female punishment. Second and third are the fear of substitutes (which explains historical feminine resistance to pornography) and the commons dilemma (which problematises the individual vs. the collective). From a more feminist perspective: "the less money (and other resources) women have, the lower the price they will accept for sex" (172). In other words: that is why men are motivated to keep women as low as possible, since rich and powerful women could not easily be manipulated into accepting sex for low prices.

Baumeister and Twenge's research concludes very simply that essentially all influences on females when growing up comes from other females and it is women themselves who perpetuate the double standard in sexuality (188). Ergo: the female control theory sounds viable, with women much more pre-occupied with sexuality from a social exchange perspective. They illustrate a type of intrasexual competition by pointing out that it is extremely likely that the female sex itself is and has been responsible for the on-going suppression of female sexuality. This is due to the complex positioning of the female gender and the role sexuality has played – and still plays – for females. Their basic premise is that females hold and exercise control over the (dominant) male sex through their female sexuality.

If we subsequently view intrasexual competition in organisations along the lines of Baumeister and Twenge's socio-cultural approach, there seems to be some sort of social exchange theory at play, with female punishment essentially as the intrasexual competitive aggression in action and thereby as its concrete manifestation. Female control is in this case exercised through intrasexual competition: where "female rather than male agents have been the primary proximal forces operating to suppress female sexuality" (197). Both viewpoints are predominantly modernist and the following sections of this chapter will aim to place these modernist notions in a more poststructuralist and feminist framework.

Female misogyny

A different notion that is related to gender in organisations, but one that can be deemed highly problematic, is that of the 'queen bee'. Sharon Mavin labels it as a notion that "blames individual women for not supporting other women", the queen bee is the woman who is labelled a bitch for not helping other women (75). Men are never blamed for not supporting or motivating women, there is no 'king baboon' label. Mavin rightfully questions the underlying assumptions that are at the core of the queen bee by means of a conceptual critique of solidarity behaviour and the queen bee-label; the experiences of women in management. The relationship(s) between this what Mavin deems the queen bee and the research into experiences and dynamics of intrasexual competition are highly interesting to explore.

The gender binary divide, the gendered context and thereby the cultural association of power and authority with masculinity are very problematic for women as this clashes with their gender identity (Mavin, 76). This is something very clearly illustrated by the concept of "heroic masculinity", which Mavin defines at the quintessential identity of the "solitary hero engaged in unending trials of endurance" (76). That concept is ever-present and dominant in board rooms and as the dominant story motif it may explain why female leaders feel inclined to adopt and adapt. They may even believe in the story.[7] This is the price of membership, of being a member without having a member. What it essentially amounts to a big catch-22: one "cannot join as a woman and, once they behave like a man, they cannot be a 'proper' woman" (Maddock in Mavin, 76).

The queen bee as a word and concept is the epitomous illustration of this impossible paradox: a woman in power will be damned if she does, damned if she does not. This is an essential framework to take into account when attempting to look at intrasexual competition and this relates to and possibly influences female leadership. Mavin mentions Ellemers et al. who argue that "it seems that men are not the main culprit for the occurrence of gender stereotypical views […] by contrast it turns out that female faculty members are most inclined to hold stereotypical view" (in: Mavin, 81).[8] But why do women hold these views? It is not likely that these stances are created by the impossible gendered context (these) women have to manoeuvre themselves through? As Mavin herself says: "examining relationships *between* women is a fascinating area for new research" (83).

In Mavin's 2006 article she quotes Hite who questions something along the lines of 'why are men good at things and women not', applied to women in organisations and their supposed lack of working together with and forming allies with other women:

> […] men also have mixed feelings and don't see 'all other men' as equals, but they form successful alliances, corporate boards and sports teams. In fact, *men are encouraged by all kinds of unspoken social signals to work together*, to do business, conduct government etc […] why do men create loyalty systems that work whereas women do not? (In: Mavin, 351, emphasis mine.)

[7] Although not elaborately researched myself, media portrayals of gender identities play a role here too and strengthen the heroic masculinity motif. Lonesome men living for their jobs galore in series and movies (e.g. *Dirty Harry*, *The Guardian*, every spin-off of *Law & Order*, *Wallander*, etc, etc.), whereas most solitary women as main protagonist are rare and if they exist, they are somehow "broken" and need to be fixed by a man (e.g. *Cold Case* or *Body of Proof*). The female solitary figure always exists in relation to a male counterpart. A refreshingly different kind of movie was recently released, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) with a female protagonist who was for once not defined through or by masculinity or the male gaze.

[8] Interesting: blaming women for internalising the dominant attitude of patriarchality and themselving reaffirming stereotypes that they are pressured into.

Here Hite inadvertently touches upon a very important point: women are and have been raised in such a way by their surroundings, society as well as their biology to work *against* other women. The systems in which women have to operate have been built and thought out by men, so it is no wonder women find it inherently as working against the grain. And, as many researchers have pointed out, women cannot win at both being a leader in an organisation and simultaneously retaining their femininity (Powell and Butterfield 2003, Maddock 1999, Wacjman 1998 in: Mavin 2006).

Mavin's 2006 study explores the presence of something she calls "female misogyny" and points out there has not been a lot of research conducted into the *intrasexual* behaviour and attitudes between women (344). Due to the gendered context forced upon women (working in organisations), Starr even goes as far to suggest: "that at times women may read each other's sexed bodies through men's eyes in sexual competition" (in: Mavin, 345).

What Mavin does in her empirical research is reframe narrative data from female leaders within a context of gendered systems and one of her central conclusions is that "the women's narrative highlight[s] how 'doing senior management' is grounded in 'doing gender'" (346). Mavin's research emphasises the important relevance of the framework of the gendered context at work/ play. Especially when one wants to gain knowledge into the impact women have and can have on other women, both in a positive as well as a negative light. Mavin suggests the organisational interventions in the form of raising practical consciousness on these gendered contexts in question and the far-reaching consequences this can have on intrasexual work relations.

The sexuated structure of language and the female body

The core of the conceptual framework that will be used to analyse the interview narratives is largely based on Marianna Fotaki's theory that combines both Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva's work on the sexuated structure of language and the female body in the masculine symbolic order. Fotaki uses this framework to study the experiences of women in academia, whilst focussing on how the male norm is experienced and lived by the women studied and how "circulating discourses are re-enacted through affect and the body as inherent aspects of organisational life" (1253). Fotaki's approach is of a type that she herself calls "unveiling the unspoken norms and assumptions about gender differences in organisation studies literature" (1254). The two central notions she addresses by adopting Irigaray and Kristeva's work dealing with body, language and affect through a psychoanalytic framework; which the current methodology also regards as essential notions for framing female experiences within organisations. As in its primeval evolutionary state, intrasexual competition is linked directly to sexuality. Many research conducted into female leadership and the lack of women in leadership roles has come across issues of sexuality and the female body.

Fotaki's framework is directed at creating a theory that explains the continued marginalisation of women – in her specific research within academia – with a theory that does so through the disembodied symbolic order. This theoretical framework, combined with the notion of intrasexual competition can assist in explaining and placing intrasexual dynamics within organisations and within organisation theory. Beyond that of merely pointing out that 'women do not like to/ work well with other women', but approaching the intrasexual evolutionary exchanges from within the determining broader context of how women are seen, created and marginalised within organisations an such. Intrasexual competition does not happen within a vacuum. The context for this non-vacuum will largely be based on Fotaki's theoretical framework.

The starting point for Fotaki is the urgency that "women's continuing marginalisation has profound implications", on how knowledge is created (in her specific focus on academia), but also on how we do business and decide on what actually counts, whose reality matters.[9] As long as there is an overbearing majority of men in power of any field, this will perpetuate. Breaking through this on-going vicious circle illustrates the importance of fully understanding the dynamics of intrasexual competition. Otherwise we could inadvertently be facilitating the on-going perpetuation of intrasexual dynamics.

Fotaki – following classical critiques on the female experience – directly suggests that gender stereotypes are "ideological and prescriptive" (1254). She bases her theoretical framework almost exclusively on the writings of Irigaray and Kristeva and uses their complex theories to explore how the structure of the masculine influences female responses and experiences (1253). Additionally, she focuses on how these are subsequently perceived, lived and re-enacted by the women themselves. Following and exploring this framework, this research will locate the intrasexual dynamic within the structure of the masculine and its language. As most poststructuralist feminist re-readings of organisational contexts generally all point to the dominant position of the masculine, whether it be a gaze, the body or a more general concept. Thretheway's exploration of the Foulcauldian perspective adds to this by linking it to the disciplining power of the male on the female body.

Feminist approaches and perspectives to considering language and the body are useful for exploring gender in organisations. Irigaray's work is compartmentalised by Fotaki as focussing on language and sexual difference, and Kristeva summarised as the maternal signification and the body. Although Irigaray and Kristeva's work is clearly much more complex and multi-faceted, they "crucially […]

[9] A tragic and striking anecdote of a woman who had previously been a man when she recounted the first time she had actually felt like a woman: when she was part of a meeting and her input was completely ignored. Five minutes later a man in that meeting suggested exactly the same and it was heralded and accepted.

both critique masculine language as a means of excluding women from an active subject position" (1256). The importance of the masculine as determining and defining both the female through language as well as their gaze (objectifying the body).

Irigaray's core argument revolves around the fact that women are largely and almost exclusively represented through male discourse (1256). This is the concept of what she calls the "absent woman", who essentially does not exist in language, its concepts and symbols – as there are no adequate for women specifically to describe, denote and position themselves. It is "male identity formation [with] female identity […] defined as its corollary, thus reinforcing sexual and political domination over women" (Irigaray in Fotaki, 1256). With at the core of it all, the male phallogocentric discourse which is assumed as a universal default. As Irigaray herself puts it in her central work *This Sex Which Is Not One*: "her lot is that of 'lack', 'atrophy' […] and 'penis envy', the penis being the only sexual organ of recognised value" (23). The sexuality of the woman has been "conceptualised on the basis of male parameters" (23).

> Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will 'take' her as his 'object' when he seeks his own pleasure. (Irigaray, 25)

As Irigaray points out, woman is mainly there to be seen and not part of the powerful gaze, the power of looking and enjoying through watching: "[w]oman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and there entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation" (26).[10] She emphasises here that the body of the woman, here, doubles as a "exhibition" as well as a "chaste retreat", with a literal "nothing to see" that is her sexual organ (26).

Kristeva additionally builds on the notion of a dominant patriarchal symbolic and focuses on the role of language. The abjected maternal body is at the core of her critique. This rejection and simultaneous projection applies to all women, whether they may be actual mothers or not. "This precluded women from self-definition in terms other than that of the repressed body which acquires the quality of the object for the male subject to define himself against while it is simultaneously idolized and rejected" (Fotaki, 1257). The ultimate problematic of the body and the feminine, which cannot be hidden or renegotiated, thereby always positioning the female body as an impossible other.

In summary, Irigaray's absent woman as she is defined in relation to man and how history is articulated in terms of male discourse in which the woman is the other. Kristeva's notion is one in which the woman is exterior to the self through the discourse of motherhood and how through this exteriority language is rendered unstable and thereby always 'part of' the masculine. The implications for

[10] An interesting illustration is found in film, where – according to feminist theorists such as Laura Mulvey - women are portrayed as objects of our desire – they are the delectable Red Riding Hood to the male Big Bad Wolf who directs the angle of the camera. Mulvey takes the tool of psychoanalysis to show us how film is being dominated by the restrictive forces of the patriarchal gaze. In other words, how film illustrates our gender depiction and its division within society. Essentially, Mulvey studies the characteristics of the male gaze as it is projected onto the female spectacle in film. She regards the scopophilic practice active in film, where the pleasure of watching someone as erotic object is dominant. Cinema makes the woman as a spectacle into an attraction (literally) by being and creating the gaze in itself. To her, "the camera's look is disavowed in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with versimilitude" (844). The look of the audience is, according to Mulvey, denied any force. The film's (scopophilic) gaze directs our gaze, fixates the spectator.

intrasexual competition research are manifold, with the most dominant context the superseding presence of the male and the masculine and its effect on female-on-female dynamics.

Going beyond Fotaki's theoretical framework and building upon the notions brought forward by both Kristeva and Irigaray, the physical experience of the feminine is key. Simone de Beauvoir was one of the earliest thinkers to comment on the phenomenological dimension of being a woman, where the bodily existence is linked to a sense of consciousness and how this experience differs between men and women; how the feminine is lived differently. This was once her central starting point to the female experience and is still a very valuable conceptual key. De Beauvoir also stresses the importance of the story, language, the metaphor and the myth and thereby also the ideological influences in and to gender. Being woman revolves around the lived experiences of the body, how it is being objectified and how the female internalises the other's gaze and subsequently producing their bodies for others. According to Grosz "women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, *more* natural than men (14). Women or the female are often described in such terms, which creates an easy analogy with the general notion of the other and othering, where that which differs from our default is being experienced so much differently.

Language, gender and power

It was Robin Lakoff's 1972 article that argued, notably for the first time, that there are inherent differences in communication between men and women. She elaborated that these differences reflect and also themselves produce a subordinate position for women in society. Lakoff argued that what she calls women's language "renders women's speech tentative, powerless and trivial; and as such, it disqualifies them from positions of power and authority" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1). The particularly interesting facet in Lakoff's argument is that she also specifically sees language itself as a tool of oppression.[11] It is this perspective that had never really been considered before and has been highly influential in language and gender studies and came to be known as the dominance approach. As Lakoff puts it: "[o]ur use of language embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings" (Lakoff, 1).

All the major "serious concerns" expressed in and by language, Lakoff states, "are pre-empted by men" (Lakoff, 1). The implication of this is that not only on a physical level within society differences between men and women are being fostered, but it is also our continuous usage of language and that power that comes from language that is a prescriptive tool for how we look at and interact with women. Dale Spender, another classical influence on language and gender discussions calls it "*man*-made language" (italics mine and pun intended) and stresses how deeply embedded the patriarchal influences are and links it to language.

> Each day we construct the world we live in according to these man made rules. We select, pattern and interpret the flux of events in the attempt to make life meaningful and few of us suspect how deeply entrenched, and arbitrary, these rules are. We impose them on the world so that what we see conforms to what we have been led to see. And one of the crucial factors in our construction of this reality is *language.* (Spender, 3)

That language not only is a tool, but also the wielder of the axe itself is illustrated by how "expressions referring to women commonly undergo semantic derogation and sexuali[s]ation" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 3). One of the wonderfully enlightening examples of this that Lakoff offers up in her seminal article are the differences between words such as *master* and *mistress*. The female version had within itself originally the same denotation of power, with both master and mistress being an individual having power over someone or something else. These days a mistress has nothing to do with a woman in power (except for perhaps a sexual kind of power), whereas a master is still a skilled person in a general non-sexual sense (Lakoff, 63). Additionally, in order to be a mistress, a woman has to somehow belong to someone else: be someone's mistress – it is actually a passive role. Women are very often defined in language - and reality - in relation to men and in relation to their sexuality. These examples clarify the inherent bias embedded in language that favours men and continually downplays women.

The rules of language and how denotations and connotations continuously shift, follow from a human-created framework of reference, which creates notions and concepts that in themselves are also "becoming self-validating and self-perpetuating" (Spender, 12).[12] The positive and pragmatic implication of this is that if we ever want to make a change in reality, it will have to have an effect on language. Or, even better: if we want to make a change in reality, we can start doing so by being

[11] A lot of research had and has been done since and mainly focusses on reporting actual speech differences between men and women (see e.g. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet). That men and women communicate differently is one thing, yet Lakoff was the first to actually look at language as a tool of oppression itself instead of simply being a tool without any idealogical content.

[12] Language is ideology. One striking illustration is found in Susan Ehrlich's 2001 research in which she studied court cases in Canada dealing with sexual assault. Through the language the defendant avoided agency and used passivitiy as well as what Ehrlich called "the language of love" (Ehrlich, 42). Through the language used in this context, masculine stereotypes of the male sexual drive and the woman's "provocativeness" were perpetuated as well as actively reestablished (Ehrlich, 44).

conscious of our bias in our language and change that. Simply making people and organisations aware of the fact that language is not just a tool and show how language creates and performs our every day realities and that language can be seen as a literal "embodiment of societal attitudes" is valuable (Spender, 12). Language is continually constructed, performed and created within its practice of our daily lives.

Although Lakoff did not simply assume that the solution to the issue of differences in speaking within men and women could and would be solves by women simply adopting a masculine style of communication; she acknowledged the double-bind or catch-22 that applies to some many of the dynamics at play within female leadership (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 159). Women are 'punished' by using women's language, but are also prevented from going beyond the women's language without also being penalised (for being too bossy, to masculine, etc.). This double-bind is reminiscent of similar dilemma's experienced by women in relation to other facets of their 'feminity'.

The perspective on language and its determining power is all-encompassing when studying gender-related themes, as it is not only a metaphor that applies to all other perspectives on gender and power, yet also a very concrete and directly influential dimension. Within language and its differences, there is an inherent consciousness of self and other at play between the masculine and the feminine. The other is a notion central to postcolonial studies, where "in general terms the 'other' is anyone who is separate from one's self" (Ashcroft et al., 169). As follows from this, that what constitutes the other is determined by that what is the normal. The notion of the other stems from a binary divide of the self and the other; the normal and the deviant. Although the notion of the other and the self revolves mainly around the Sartre-esque self-awareness, this context combines valuably with the more Lacanian interpretation where the other is entangled in subjectivity and its discourse (Ashcroft et al., 170). The sense of the other and self, default and deviant is also at play when thinking of and practicing gender. Spivak's performative interpretation of othering where it becomes a act, a created discourse that performs the creation of others: "othering describes the various ways in which […] discourse produces its subjects", thereby stressing its dialectical process, that produces subjects (Spivak 24 and Ashcroft et al., 171).

This perspective and discourse provides an overlapping context for the research intro intrasexual competition experiences in female leadership experiences, with the role of language always and continuously playing a major part in performing, forcing and criticising gender and power.

Self, other and female

She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other.

- de Beauvoir, xxii

Simone de Beauvoir offers a phenomenological approach to theorising male domination in relation to women that has become classic. Woman, in her framing, has the status of the immanent Other (xxii).[13] The male in the basis is the subject, whereas the woman is object: a basic dichotomy of gender which is reflected in the gender ideology so influential in organisations. Whereas the self and other opposition is also present in language, this problematic dichotomy is also interesting to regard from a wider point of view. Within psychoanalysis, there is a constant subverted play between the other and the self at work, through means of suppression and repression. Since the other is alien to the conscious part of the self, its dialogue is always somehow problematic. The implications that accompany the self-other (same-difference) dichotomy is similarly intricate. The other is different from the self in terms of its alien characteristics. However – and not only in psychoanalysis – the other, is in a way close to the self. These issues are inextricably linked to the experiences of gender, in which we become alienated from ourselves – reminded of our inner otherness. We repress that within ourselves that scares (or brings shame upon) us and project it unto the other, whom we then subsequently fear (or: whom disgusts us), for this exact uncanny experience that his being brings about. Because we recognise ourselves in the other, we 'other' him – a classical case of the uncanny.

Das Unheimliche means 'the uncanny' and expresses a certain type of feeling, something "strange, difficult to explain", "beyond the ordinary or normal; extraordinary" or "uncomfortably strange".[14] Freud's definition of the uncanny is "a class of the frightening that leads us back to what was known and familiar" (133). Subsequently, Freud distinguishes two approaches of dealing with the uncanny, the first being tracing its semantics and the other to research what it is that evokes the feeling of the uncanny in people. The initial meaning of heimlich consists of "referring to the house, friendly, familiar, intimate, secure", its second meaning being "concealed, hidden, private" (130). However, at the same time it is possible for something which is familiar (heimlich) to one (an 'insider', someone who is 'at home') to be simultaneously highly unfamiliar (unheimlich) and secretive to the 'outsider' – the stranger. The meaning of the word unheimlich is initially defined as a negation of heimlich: "unhomey, unfamiliar, uncomfortable", but also as "no longer concealed, revealed" – that which was meant to remain hidden, but inadvertently became to be unhidden, public (131).

[13] There are many different theoretical interpretations of the other, the Other or the act of othering. To honour de Beauvoir's typology and to minimise confusion, I have copied the capital. All other mentions in this document will use 'other' in smallcaps.

[14] "uncanny." Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition. HarperCollins Publishers. 10 Jun. 2015. <Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/uncanny>.

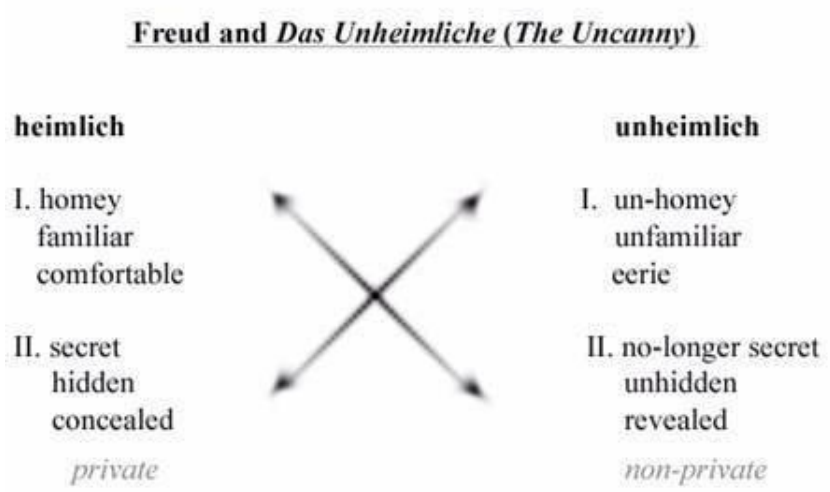


Illustration of Freud's definition of Das Unheimliche

Strangely enough, the antithetical adjective heimlich means something related to what is unheimlich. Heimlich belong to two types of ideas of which "one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden" (132). Something what is hidden can be associated with un-homey and the same goes with something familiar and the revelation of something. The great difference is that the heimlich is private and the unheimlich is not private (anymore). Freud mentions Schelling who explains this duality by arguing that the term "unheimlich [is applicable] to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open" (132). What follows is that das Unheimliche (the uncanny) is the revelation of that what is private and concealed (hidden); hidden not only from others, but also from the self. This notion of hidden 'parts' of the self is important to Freud, his theorising focuses on this aspect of the uncanny – that the feeling of unheimlichkeit arises because of an inner memory that was long forgotten. Feeling uncanny is therefore the mark of the return of the repressed. According to Freud it is the unconscious within our selves is that with disturbs the feeling of feeling at home (*heimlich*) and thus makes us experience the alienating *Unheimlichkeit* (132).

Kristeva repositions the notion of the uncanny within a postcolonial context and states that "Freud does not speak of foreigners: he teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves. That is perhaps the only way not to hound it outside of us" (1991, 192). She broadens the notion of the uncanny's historical framework – which has often been explained as embodying the Enlightenment, of which the uncanny is an antithetical response – by regarding it as a counterpart to the disintegration of religious entities and the subsequent formation of nation-states. The absence of foreigners in *Das Unheimliche* is deemed "itself uncanny" by Kristeva (1991, 191). Similar as to where 'foreigners' inhabit the nation-state, the uncanny inhabits the each individual psyche, giving the lie to the notion of an undivided, selfsame subject: "[t]he foreigner is within us" (1991, 191). Freud's concept of the uncanny, is a how-to when it comes to living with 'others', since we all share the same uncanniness, the indeterminable strangeness. To her, "[p]sychoanalysis is then experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable" (1991, 182). The *unheimliche* brings about a recognition of one's own strangeness, it is an "immanence of the strange within the familiar" (1991, 183). More importantly, she argues that with the Freudian notion of the uncanny, the otherness becomes an inherent concept to sameness (1991, 181).

Another concept Kristeva uses is that of the abject, a notion often linked to the uncanny. Abject literally denotes being cast off, or a level of degraded-ness. Following Kristeva, our first experience of abjection is when we are separated from our mother, the moment where the distinction of me vs. (m)other happens. Whereas this starting point is based on Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective of some

sort of primal repression, Kristeva identifies the abject as something we both fear, as well as identify with. The abject is "radically excluded" and "draws me to where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982, 2). In her exploration *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva in fact uses the corpse as her main metaphor for illustrating the abject, which she calls an ultimate example of "death inflecting life" (1982, 4). The abject show a similar friction of otherness within the self as found within the uncanny: "[t]here is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (Kristeva 1982, 5). The uncanny can in fact elicit an experience of abjection, yet they are not replacements of the other.[15] It is "[t]he abject body [that] repeatedly violates its own borders, and disrupts the wish for physical self-control and social propriety" (Caslav Covino, 17). The abject is a concept that floats within and around identity, positioning between the subject and the object. Kristeva in fact explicitly links the abject to misogyny, using abjection as a tool to highlight the implicit misogyny in her analyses.

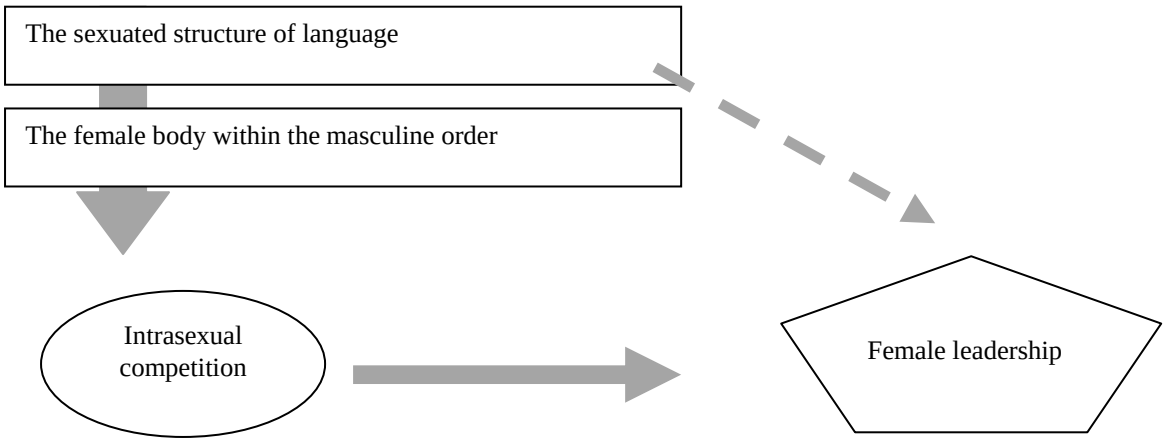
> For Kristeva, the pregnant woman—as opposed to the figure of immaculate conception, the erasure of women's sex—is a figure of the doubling of self into other, and the eventual splitting of the self into the other, a figure that bespeaks both the identification of the self with the other, and the negation of self in the other that makes the recognition of the other possible. (Caslav Covino, 22)

Rizq's points out that abjection is fact has a direct place within organisational studies and organisational dynamics as a whole, linking it to Fotaki's earlier studies on gender and the workplace and even Kenny's 2010 Butler-influenced study in which she argues that "we adopt roles, identities and discourses in order to avoid the catastrophic consequences of abjection" (1281). In her conclusion, Rizq states "the presence of the abject serves as a perpetual if unconscious reminder of the existence of the 'monstrous' other within the self, and offers a view of the divided individual as perpetually engaged in the struggle to demarcate his or her subjectivity" (1293).

These theoretical conceptions of haunting uncanniness and feared and desired abjection are valuable to framing experiences of gender and identity, as they give meaning to the ongoing friction between, within and beyond ourselves.

[15] "Essentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory." (Kristeva 1982, 5)

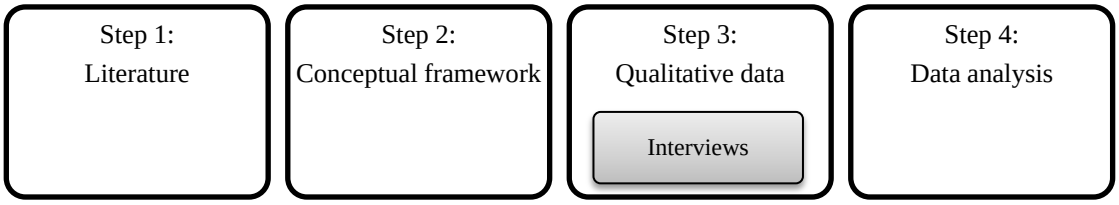
Conceptual framework



A schematic interpretation from the chapter of literature is visualised in the conceptual framework above. This conceptual framework combines many of the theoretical concepts and perspectives mentioned in the previous chapters by creating two high-level dimensions. The schema distils a variety of concepts on the female experience into two basic strings, namely that of language and the body. These concepts do not exist or happen within a vacuum, but are central pillars that will function as a guiding framework for the analysis of the narrative interviews.

The sexuated structure of language and the female body within the masculine order are two conceptual notions that provide the backdrop for looking at intrasexual competition within the experiences of female leadership. Language as well as the female body within the context of masculinity are locations where other – more theoretical – concepts may find each other; language and body being the both essential manifestations that we cannot categorically deny. Our interviewees are female leaders and the interviews will possibly offer up anecdotes or stories that illustrate intrasexual competition.

III. Research methodology



The concept of intrasexual competition has been researched exclusively from a biological-evolutionary perspective. By linking it to female leadership in organisations it can actually contribute to knowledge on gender in organisations. A thorough deductive exploration of the concept of intrasexual competition, as currently brought forward by most biological and psychological research, has been part of the first section of literary explorations. The literature has provided a theoretical backdrop created from poststructuralist perspectives and a feminist approaches in order to reposition the modernist notion of intrasexual competition within a context that will enable researching its affects and effects in organisations.

The next step (2) will be to the positioning of the feminine and female experience within the research into intrasexual competition. The goal of this research is to capture the experiences and perceptions of female leaders and what it means to be a female leader and (possibly, if applicable) their experiences of intrasexual competition. As this research is about exploring what the impact may be of intrasexual competition on female leadership, there is no inherent assumption of the role and importance of this dynamic in itself. Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) psychosocial approach is highly useful for this goal. The used psychosocial approach, also largely based on Fotaki's methodology, assumes that one's attitudes towards reality are mainly shaped by their personal (biographical) history. Central to the methodology for this research is its epistemological focus on the lived experiences, and subsequently the interpretations of these experiences by the researcher. Thereby it does not claim *sec* objectivity, yet a meaningful and credible exploration of the female leaders' experiences – a viable source for further research. It is within the interplay of interviewee and interviewer that "the subject's inner world is revealed in a relational space created through an interaction with another" (Fotaki, 1258).
The

The next step (3) encompasses all data gathering, for which this research utilises an exclusively qualitative approach. Considering the content and goal of the data will focus on human experiences, their meaning giving and potential consequences of interactions, a quantitative approach would not be able to grasp the complexities this research will attempt to touch upon. The specific method of the qualitative data gathering was interviews on working life stories that were conducted.[16]

Epistemology

Abduction is the research strategy within this methodology, which combines both deductive as well as inductive analyses. Abduction creates theory "from observations and lived experiences and invokes iterative movements between data and theory" in which theory is used to understand data but also helps to further develop theory (1258). Alvesson and Sköldberg emphasise the inherent 'messiness' of

[16] Ideally, this research would have also included an experiment and observations in order to provide a more full-bodied methodological exploration. This was not possible due to time constraints and the limited space available within this specific research. An experiment could have illustrated experiences and motifs that the interviews would have brought to the surface: testing experiences of exclusively female, mixed female and male and exclusively male environments and assessing the differences in experienced interactions as perceived by the participants. Whereas observations could have been an additional dimension to the interviews.

qualitative research and regard abduction thereby as a good approach as it combines both theory and empirical perspectives within a qualitative approach. It essentially embraces any questioning of the chicken-and-egg kind and instead uses both to enrich the generation of data.

Working life interviews

The goal of the working life interviews was eliciting authentic narratives in which the subjects talked freely about their work life. The content of these interviews were subsequently written as narrative work life stories. These kinds of stories allow for suitable explorations of the subject's internationalisation and what Fotaki calls "re-enactment" within the structures and contexts in which they are lived and experienced (1258). The transcription of the actual interviews was conducted as life story ethnographic transcripts of the interviews, thereby focussing on the narrative, plot and themes within and behind the stories that the subjects recounted, supplemented by literal quotations.

Which female leaders were interviewed was based on a method of snowball sampling, with an open-minded semi-structured approach to the definition of female leaders. Women in relative positions of leadership (management of teams, departments, managing partners/ directors, CEO's) or women who had been in these positions and/ or showed particular outstanding performances in their field were approached. The subsequent working life interviews lasted 1 to 3 hours and were where possible conducted in person or through Skype of Facetime with video. This research approach has consciously excluded the male sex, as the goal of the interviews was to capture the female experience.
Of the 17 interviews in total, 2 were conducted via Skype and 1 via Facetime. All other interviews were conducted at the place of work of the women in question (12), at their home (1) or at a neutral place of work (1).

Initially, the methodology focussed on conducting three free format trial interviews in order to attain a realistic feeling for what kind of stories and lives would be proposed by the female leaders – in order to assess what potential framework would be needed to acquire adequate data. These three interviews were so rich which information that subsequently it was unnecessary to draw up specific questionnaires with themes. This way, the methodology allowed for all participants to tell their life stories exactly how they wanted, without pushing them towards themes or specific answers. This way, the working life stories written out in this research are as authentic and valid as possible.

At the beginning of every meeting, I gave the women a brief explanation of my research, how I was interested into their personal experiences and what had motivated and blocked them in their career life. I aimed at as much of a personal, chat-like atmosphere as possible. I informed all interviewees that the data was purely narrative-oriented and would be anonymously written into stories. I did not record the interviews, but made notes in my binder as the methodology was oriented on the narrative that was created between interviewee and interviewer. All interviews started with the same question: "what did the ten year-old *xx* want to be?" This was a initial question used in the trial interviews that elicited such great stories, that I chose to utilise it for all, as it immediately takes any possible serious edge off and made everyone think back to their initial passions, plans and desires. In most cases, this question resulted in a full-blown work life story where the ladies themselves started recounting. It was also very interesting to see what kind of ambitions these women had for themselves as young girls, very illuminating.

Positioning of modernist and social constructionist paradigms

The approach to the social constructionist paradigm in this research is that content-wise the research will be based in this perspective, enriched with feminist and poststructuralist theoretical concepts on the female body and her experience. Additionally, its aim is to translate the results from this paradigm into modernist-appealing management summaries and conclusions, thereby aiming at paradigm-diverse framing of this research. Especially considering that the main concept of intrasexual competition (mainly a biological concept) is at heart a modernist notion. Being able to create relevance for a social constructionist experience-based and searching for meaning-oriented research within a modernistic frame of mind, is a useful and essential accomplishment. If we consider the large of research is done and only accepted within modernism and its frame of mind – and we look at the major tension at play between different paradigms. Then, how amazing it would it we would be able to transfer knowledge and research from one paradigm into another. Especially in business studies and change management, where the research results could be so beneficial to many, many organisations.

Personal targets

Apart from the actual body of the research, there are some personal goals that contribute to the direct and personal enrichment of the researcher as a non-researcher. I want to engage in interviews with inspirational women from a variety of sectors that I find interesting and gain access to likeminded female leaders with positions that can contribute to the discussions and development of female leadership. Secondly, I would like this research to make it to conventional wisdom and lead to realisations or discussions, for example by an opinion snippet in an edition of the FD, some speaking occasions within platforms or organisations on diversity and female leadership. Ideally, this research would be a good start for further research into intrasexual competition and other potential moderators on female leadership and organisational diversity in general. Preferably, that would be my own research.

Methodological diary

To keep up with all of the methodological choices whilst progressing and to actually capture my own experiences within this experience-oriented research, I have included an appendix with a methodological diary. Some of the more detailed and personal experiences before, during and after conducting the interviews are included in this section.

IV. Data analysis

General framework of female leadership in Dutch organisations

The interviews consisted of sessions with seventeen female leaders working in Dutch organisations and were in the form of working life stories. Beyond the direct and indirect anecdotes and storylines related to our theme of intrasexual competition, all interviewees told their own work life stories. Additional information was also brought forward by the interviews, and provides insight into how these female leaders experience and view themselves. As this is an insightful context for the results on intrasexual competition, this information will also be briefly summarised in a generalised methodology. Some reoccurring themes that play a role for the interviewees female leaders and that emerge from the data paint an interesting picture.

'Our' quintessential female leader, as based on the seventeen interviews

Our female leader is in favour of promoting female leadership and explicitly expresses the wish to facilitate other women more. She is a great storyteller and a direct and clear communicator and she is willing and able to acknowledge her own skills. She is conscious and aware of making decisions within a well-balanced work-life situation. She is motivated by proving herself and wants to be good at what she does. She has had strong matriarchal influences, either from her family or from female mentorship. Our female leader focuses on those things that she can change and influence and thrives in a masculine environment. She also prefers to work with men.

There is also an inherent stance of self-depreciating humbleness present in many of the stories, even when the same women express the conscious knowledge that women should stop being humble and speak up and out about their own skills and abilities. Nine who has "simply grown up through the ranks" (which she herself calls a more female way of getting ahead) or Maria who was "simply the right person at the right place and the right time".

Most of the interviewees mentioned wanting to be the best and were very much driven by the need to prove oneself. This is an expression of the double-bind most career-oriented women find themselves in, where they do have to prove themselves much more than their male counterparts, simply to show that they are capable. Our interviewees – motivated and highly accomplished female leaders – were able to overcome this double challenge due to the fact that they were intrinsically motivated by challenges and 'showing the world'.

Work life interviews analysis

Seventeen interviews were conducted and all written into narrative work life stories as described in the chapter on methodology (see the appendix for the complete narratives). Some actions were taken in order to provide the information in an anonymous way, by lending all interviewees pseudonyms and making no mention of concrete organisations or specific individuals. The focus of the research is meaningful stories, motifs and anecdotes. These types of narratives are suitable for enabling an analysis on a thematic level. As the approach of analysis is largely based on the psychosocial attitude also referred to in the chapter on methodology and the sampling was not a significantly large group, the meaningful links and themes had to be written out for each and every work life story. A large portion of the interpretation itself happened within the writing of these stories. This subjective interpretation of empirical material is inherent to the psychosocial research approach. The stages of analysis that can be defined – and are largely based on Fotaki's methodology – are as follows:

0. Writing out of work life narratives (starting point, in appendices);
1. Rereading and immersion of all stories and noting all key story lines;
2. Identifying the emergent common themes;
3. Finding the dominant overarching dimensions.

In order to analyse the multitude of data, the methodology adopted is similar to Fotaki's approach, where step-by-step the higher levels of conceptuality where distilled from the data. This is a valuable methodology, yet is simultaneously leaves out a lot of the data. That is why, throughout the analysis, I will add meaningful quotations or specific experiences recounted by some of the women. The value of this research is within the qualitative and therefore the analysis will attempt to remain as close to the original data as possible, whilst also enabling a higher level of abstraction in order to link the data to the conceptual framework. Below a schematic overview of the different stages of the analysis and all women their summarised story lines from the perspective of intrasexual competition. The references to the interviewees are by means of their pseudonyms.

Excel Overview Analyse

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Disappointed in women who do not reach; you make it happen with your choices: Maria's story	A claim for female solidarity from other women.	Mirroring of expectations of others and projected unto self and other females.
Women should manifest themselves more and take that place at the table: Ine's story		
Women should stop complaining and make a change, a shame when women stop working: Laura's story		
Disgranted of success by other females and gradually growing up through the ranks: Nine's story	Disrespect by other females in regards to success.	
Experiencing women not granting other women their choices and negative projecting of a female stereotype: Karen's story		
Women expressing disrespect and not accepting her power, she remains direct: Wendy's story		
Struggling with and against the female stereotype in the office and the school yard with inherent strength: Claire's story	The friction of motherhood and leadership choices.	
A shame when women get too hung up on their motherhood and society tells her how to live her life: Faye's story		
Motherhood battles in the village and at school, re-entry for women who chose differently not that easy: Eline's story		
Leadership is a rough life that a lot of women do not choose or want: Annette's story	The work-life balance choice problematic.	
Why choosing either career or kids and how women think there is just one place for a female: Ana's story		
Feminisation leading to devaluation and career and family go together: Ada's story		
Being within and outside of the power counteracting as and beyond the stereotype: Anne's story	Battling against expectations from a female stereotype.	The othering gaze on the female body.
Open about career goals and dressing against the female stereotype: Mette's story		
Steering clear of masculine networking without enjoying working with women: Anna's story		
Being too direct as a woman and focus on a concrete output: Katherine's story		
The surprise of the female stereotype and its impact on work life: Carla's story		

In order to properly signify the themes coming forward from the secondary and tertiary level of analysis, the core keywords utilised within the second stage of analysis will be briefly elaborated upon with some brief illustrative examples from the original data. The deeper analysis will be conducted based on the highest level theoretical motifs from stage 3.

Basic motifs in the interviews

Female disrespect

The motif of female disrespect revolves around situations and experiences in which females have expressed explicit disrespect to another female within a work or career context. This type of disrespect is also a kind of dis-granting of success from one professional female to another. The theme as such is a very direct and explicit expression of intrasexual competition, where women show indirect aggression towards another woman through words or actions. An example of female disrespect was found in the story of Anne, who had grown to outshine her initial female mentor, a woman she had had a very close relationship with. As soon as she was being asked to lead projects in stead of her mentor, the relationship fell apart. Her mentor even went as far as to advice negatively when she was up for a different position.

Motherhood

The theme of motherhood is one that takes place at the crossroads between career and personal life choices, where other women – mostly – in the personal sphere somehow question the life choices of the working mother, often in comparison with their own relationships and attitudes towards their own children. This theme is one where we find a lot of emotion and friction of expectations of others and self-oriented independence. Examples include mothers at the schoolyard calling out the working mother, in the story of Claire, or more subtle and subversive requests aimed at the mother only (and not the father) to come and help at school on a Tuesday morning in Faye's story. Motherhood may also play the role in a more direct or indirect prescriptive way: literally blocking the career path for women or women themselves preselecting a career based on the fact that they may at some point become pregnant.

The female stereotype

The female stereotype is a theme that is as broad as it is strange in its implications. The female stereotype is at play when expectations of others towards a woman's career choices influence and impact their attitudes or responses towards the woman in question's actions. It is a theme that can come up in a multitude of different situations and is essentially present in all of our interviews, as intrasexual competition in itself stems from an inherent female-on-female expectation and thereby is also stereotype. Examples of the female stereotype in action is when Anna went out of her way to not engage in traditionally 'masculine' networking, when Mette chose to wear more masculine clothing or when Katherine decided to remain as direct as she is regardless of the opposition and surprise in regards of her female gender. All of their actions are conscious subversions against what is actually expected of them and these expectations are continuously experienced by female leaders. It is this friction against the expectation of the female stereotype that is collected in the theme of the female stereotype.

Female solidarity

The theme of female solidarity is a motif that plays a role when and where women express the thought, desire or expectation that other women should be more like them: work (hard). By not doing so, is at the core of this theme, they disadvantage other career-oriented women and make it more difficult for female leaders in general. This a theme expressed actively by the female leaders that were interviewed. An example is Ine's story, who explicitly mentions she is disappointed by women who do not manifest themselves physically as well as from a leadership position within organisations. She finds these women also at fault for holding other women back: giving an example that reflects badly on all other

women 'who do want it', since as a woman you already have to work at least twice as hard just to prove *that* you want and deserve it

Work-life balance

The work-life balance theme is a notion that revolves around making decisions that create a work-life balance that works for the female leader in question. Some aspects of the work-life theme have to do with overcoming a female stereotype, in which one can only have either (career or children, which is the most problematic dichotomy within the sphere of work-life balancing) not multiple possible choices. The work-life theme is a concept that is both experienced by the female leaders as experienced indirectly through others attempting to create this balance. Ada's story recounts that in her life, it was never a question *if* she would be going back to work after having her first child, but about *when*. Or Annette, who mentions that living the life of a vice president is not that 'fun' or 'nice' and that in order to give up a lot of other things in life, one has to be very willing and able to choose that.

At the end of the second stage of analysis the following common themes were comprised of five central common themes. These five themes can be mapped under two overarching theoretical dimensions. See the schematic overview in in de Excel included for the proper attribution.

Stage 2: common themes

- A claim for female solidarity from other women.
- Disrespect by other females in regards to success.
- The friction of motherhood and leadership choices.
- Battling against expectations from a female stereotype.
- The work-life balance problematic.

Stage 3: overarching theoretical dimensions

I. Mirroring of expectations of others and projected unto self and other females.
II. The othering gaze on the female body.

Both theoretical dimensions already overlap in the sense of the dominant presence of the notion of the/ a(n) other; where the other in this sense becomes both self as well as other. An internalised alterity that partially reminds us of Levinas philosophical attempt-at-grasping otherness, where it becomes some sort of dialectical opposition to being, without becoming death itself: "transcendence is passing over to being's other, otherwise than being" (Levinas, 3). In other words: I am both self as I am other. What I deem other – or the other – to be, is at least partially myself. This is an expression of the inherent subverted play within even the concept of the other, but here explicitly in the domain of female experiences. As 'gender' and 'the other' are, among others, to be considered as performative, fluid notions that are being created by all of us as we make ourselves and our realities up as we go along.

The main goal is to get to the underlying assumptions behind acts and dynamics of intrasexual competition, to place them within the gendered contexts at play and thereby understand and signify these acts. The rest of the findings will be presented as follows: the overarching theoretical dimensions are summarised first, and subsequently illustrated by the various common themes that are encompassed by these overarching theoretical dimensions.

Theoretical dimension I:
The mirroring of expectations of others and projected unto self and other females

A common theme that emerges continuously across interviews is the intricate theoretical context of presupposed expectations from 'others' that women internalise, project unto themselves and unto other women. This dynamic is present in four of the five common themes and thereby a major theoretical dimension. Most of the interviewees were confronted with expectations from others, but also themselves hold expectations of other women. What is both difficult as well as enlightening is that the most (assumed) critical spectators or others, are in fact other women.

The internalised expectations in women stem from systems created and pre-dated by these women's entrance to the workforce. The context that consists of these dominant thoughts and approaches was, is determined by men – who in almost all cases – still call the shots. This context leads to intrasexual competitive acts and acts of female punishment. This was most visible in direct actions of disrespect from one woman to another, or anecdotes that clearly indicated the assumed 'way of living' that our female leader were not conforming to. The interviewees never seemed to be aware of the encompassing context of the masculine, their focus in their stories is of the women that they had difficult interactions with. Also: these are women who have found their means of coping and made it to positions of enviable leadership.

Women at all times will have to go with or against other's expectations, thereby – at the point of diverting – shifting from the woman as other to the woman as abject. Within the self, this creates an internalised abjection, a disgust of oneself, the female self-degradation: "[i]t is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva, 1982, 19). Expectations of self and other, whenever they break and crack, leading to an abjection, projected unto themselves as well as other women. The inherent otherness of self within abject: "[t]here is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (Kristeva 1982, 5).

A claim for female solidarity from other women

The central notion behind the claim for female solidarity lies in expectations along the lines of 'if I had to work hard, you should not undermine my efforts', wherein lies an assumed female collective. Some of the women in the interviews expressed that they – or women after them – would be or felt disadvantaged by women perpetuating the female stereotype, the exact stereotype that these – and other women – work so hard against (Ine, Karen, Laura). The theme of female solidarity is a dynamic that can be interpreted as a more negative notion of female misogyny along the lines of Mavin's queen bee concept. In the interviews, this dynamic was brought up in a more positive way: women in positions of leadership expected other women to make choices that will help and assist other working women. In many accounts offered up during the interviews, the female leaders expressed finding certain women's choices 'a shame', 'a waste' or 'not helping other women who do want it'. They expressed that they found other women's choices negatively impact their own opportunities, either within their own organisation or within the greater scheme of things. Here we find a clear desire and expectation of women towards other women's help or facilitation.

Somehow women seem to find that it is more difficult for women to assert themselves in relation to the dominant structure of the masculine and the presupposed female stereotype. It is this stereotype that the female leaders are trying to subvert. Due to the fact that woman/ female is defined in relation to the male/ masculine, there does not seem that much space for a variety of interpretations of what/ how one is (allowed) to be a woman. The flexibility and autonomy seems to be exclusive to the dominant male. Women appeal to some sense of fairness; some of them consider it 'a shame' or 'a waste' when other women throw away their potential influence.

As Ine says: "[t]hose kinds of women make it extra difficult for those women who are there to make something. Out of themselves. Out of organisations". Ine recounted stories of her female colleagues who in direct interaction with men in the organisation suddenly positioning themselves as innocent girls who were all in awe of the big boss. Such responses, especially from high-educated and assertive women she found and experienced as problematic.

Karen's story mentions: "[w]omen, if they do not ask, they do not get it. They should not blame circumstances or other external forces, but go and fix it. Literally: young women are not taking their physical place at the table, but hiding themselves in the back". She experienced professional ambitious women during board meetings very physically hiding themselves in the back of the room, thereby very explicitly expressing their own doubts of their presence in that context.

"Cleaning the house with a PhD, if that is what makes you happy: great. Maybe they cannot handle the working life," Laura remarks. She stresses: "[e]veryone should make their own choices, if you want to have kids and not work anymore that is up to you. But these days men are just as capable of taking care of the kids and it is a shame if so many high-educated women end up staying at home because they think they have to. If they want to, then that is completely up to them. But there are enough options to create a proper balance between work and kids".

The claim for solidarity can be linked to Baumeister and Twenge where the central hypothesis revolves a control theory and where we can replace the concept of female sexuality with a participation of women in the leadership workforce. Female leadership arguably, cancels out a dimension of female sexuality, some kind of female attractiveness. The 'resource' in this sense is either leadership or a sense of sexual appeal, female prowess. Keeping the price as high as possible is the key goal in the historical context as sketched by Baumeister and Twenge, yet from interview data it seems that the women are not set on a consensus regarding which commodity it is they wish to 'sell' themselves as: mothers/ wives or leaders - if we continue to adopt the metaphor of buying, selling and product. The female control theory and the assumption that women are the leading force behind keeping other women is down is interesting from the perspective that more female solidarity is needed; in order to create a shift (regardless of perhaps male or female control theories): it is the women who feel to need to make this change collectively.

The problematics of female leaders' gender identity were already mentioned by Mavin and are clearly illustrated by the interview data: caught between a female attempt at what we can see as the heroic masculinity. Yet these women are expecting and being expected to support other women. Some of the women express the motif of positive female solidarity and state other women should be more 'like them', take up their place.[17] Yet this issue is also inherently problematic as it has to do with individual choices. Here we quickly get caught up in the 'opting out' discussion in female leadership, where women are blamed for not taking part (enough) and themselves opting out of the opportunities they might have - a discussion already started in Friedan's 1976 *The Feminine Mystique*.

Nevertheless, there is ample proof that our current day culture has raised and created women to interact in organisations as they do and for example how they compete intrasexually (e.g. Hite, Vaillancourt). Potentially, the desire expressed by the female leaders in the interviews marks a shift in progress from a more negative to a positive frame of expectancy, even though it might be a reversed benevolent end of sexism. With more members being members, without those other kinds of 'members'. No one expect this kind of solidarity of men. This kind of solidarity being expected of women as such marks another inherent difference between assumptions based purely on gender. No woman commented on, or suggested that men should play a bigger role in facilitating or stimulating women. As a matter of fact: all women pointed exclusively to women, other women, as the only ones in charge/ as the agents in the driver's seat of making a change in the context of female leadership. Empowerment and self-blaming seem to go hand in hand with issues of female leadership.

Finally, all the interviewed women are against a quota. They literally say it is offensive, would be degrading and unfair to the women who did get there on their own. Maria: "a quota is offensive to women in power". All interviewees expressed opinions that they want to see more females in leadership positions and thought it essential to facilitate women more through various means. Yet a formal tool, such as a quota, is something bluntly abhorred by most. This discrepancy is an expression of direct and explicit intrasexual competition: they are voicing opinions from a context where women were somehow raised and taught not to 'make it too easy' for other women: leading to an unfair-ness bias.

[17] This in fact an expression of hostile vs. benevolent sexism, as Glick and Fiske coined these terms within the general ambivalence within sexism towards women; here in action with intrasexual competitive contexts: the benevolent type expecting something from women which is subjectively supposed improvement "subjectively positive" (491). Glick and Fiske argue that this benevolent type is more dangerous, since it is not perceived as a (negative) sexist expression.

Disrespect by other females in regards to success

When a woman goes up in an organisation or within her career in general, this is something often found difficult to accept and respect from other women. Various interviewees mention their experiences regarding female aggression – indirectly or more directly – related to their career advancement, more so than from males within the organisation. This motif is obviously a very direct expression of what was defined as intrasexual competition in the literature chapter. Although not all women mention explicit acts of disrespect from other women, the stories that were in fact told, resonated with other women in other dimensions (e.g. disrespect related to their life choices or motherhood). The explicit examples the interviewees mentioned are classic textbook intrasexual competition dynamics: indirect types of aggression by which the agent herself attempted to bring the other female down and make herself look better; or at least: less bad. These interactions "are chiefly connected with the acquisition and defence of scarce resources" (Campbell, 203) or even "manipulative" (Björkvist, 183).

Two of the stories (Wendy's and Anne's) told by the interviewees mention initial positive and fruitful mentor-mentee relationships that in both cases were destroyed as soon as the power dynamic started to change and the mentee outgrew the role of the submissive. In both stories, the relationships were never reconstructed or rebuilt. These stories are clear examples of the dynamic in which women are not allowing and begrudging other women success. Based on the previously mentioned contexts, it is not likely to consider this a biological-innately female thing. In such a context, the mentor herself is confronted not just by her mentee's ('other') accomplishments, but is actually looking awry at her own lost possibilities through a distorted mirror. As both of them are women, there are no easy-going excuses (vs. if it were a man), thereby adding to the competitive drive. Somehow, it feels like there was just that one shot for a woman – and she did not take it. The woman taking up the role of the mentor has internalised a personal framework of her own expectations, which was a difficult mace of gender-conformity/ non-gender conformity within a patriarchal context of dominance. Her definition was/ is in relation to the male leadership and subverting a female stereotype. By making it that far, becoming one of the guys and one of the leaders, the mentor did not lose all of her female-ness. She somehow perceives her betrusted mentee overshadowing her as a negative competition; not as something she helped her accomplish.

Is this a consequence of cultural and organisational marginalisation that has taught women in leadership there is only a place for one female leader? Here we can also recognise the theme of the female control theory once more. The competition is for career resources, for power and authority. Reducing the rival's ability and increasing self-promotion. The masculine environment as illustrated by Jandeska's research, filled with its testosterone, in which female leaders are less inclined to facilitate women due to these influencing context. Women in this context are eager to comply with and follow the dominant rules of the environment.

Nine says: "I climbed up throughout the organisation. Which can be difficult, because that also means you were someone's colleague and suddenly you are their boss." Men are the first to accept such a situation, with junior women also being fine with it - they can see it as an inspiration – but the women who are more similar to you get very jealous. "Women basically do not grant each other anything".

Wendy mentions a couple of anecdotes where he felt some sort of friction between her and other women. After she finished her part-time MBA, "[t]hat was when I started seeing more and more things that could be improved; it made me more critical." During that time, Wendy had a friendly relationship with a female manager in the company that she looked up to. After her newly acquired knowledge and skills, Wendy started noticing that this woman was "playing tricks" and distinguishing patterns. "She basically fell off her pedestal and thereby our friendship was immediately gone. She apparently needed people to look up to her." Wendy also remembers an argument with a secretary who was not able to her job in the way that Wendy had asked of her. When she told the secretary off, she

later found out she had “bitched” about her behind her back. “I do not think that would have happened if I had been a man”.

Anne also experienced one very clear example of female friction, with her previous manager and inspirator. A professor who taught her a great deal. “In the final year, that was when it went wrong.” Anne started getting asked for projects instead of the professor. And then when Anne was asked to takeover the chief IT role, her previous inspirational mentor advised against her – and she found out through other means. She was shocked and saddened by the realisation that there was some sort of competitive thing going on, even though she had had such a good and meaningful relationship with her. “Women awarding and not begrudging other women things – that is a major thing.” “And I am sure, it would not have been an issue, had I been a man.” Anne tried to talk to her old mentor about it, but has learned to let it go. “I want to resolve everything, but I have learned that you cannot always do that. And there are a lot of things that you cannot control”.

The friction of motherhood and leadership choices

Motherhood, pregnancy and children are an intensely emotional and personal dimension to female leadership, yet one that comes up continuously in the stories told by the interviewees. As briefly mentioned before, due to the biological wiring of women and their physical "overflowing" nature, everyone seems to assume and be opinionated regarding the usage of women's biological characteristics (Trethewey, 437).

Motherhood, the epitome of the physical manifestation of the female body, is a promise as well as a curse, an assumption always looming over women in their career. It is a notion that is closely tied to expectations inherently linked to the female gender, the motif of presupposed motherhood and fertility. What we see illustrated in this theme is the ever-present friction between what Kristeva calls the "Other / Mother / Feminine" (in: Höpfl, 100). The assumption that seems to rise to surface in the interviewees' stories is the fact that women (feel like they) cannot/ should not have both a career as well as being mothers. The expressions for these instances stem not exclusively from career or work contexts, but mostly from informal, personal experiences. The stories illustrate Kristeva's maternal signification of the body and emphasise the impossible paradox that a woman is caught in, as she is continuously divided by both herself as well as an assumed other, or multiple others. The disciplining power on and over the female body – objectifying it – not just as a male gaze. The "exclusion of active subject position" (Fotaki, 1256).

Women in leadership are somehow expected to have completely internalised the role of masculinity, thereby cancelling out the option of motherhood. When this does happen, it creates a clash and misunderstanding. The woman's body, in this connect, literally lived as seen by others, others expressing supposed claims on the woman's body. This is gender discrimination at its fullest, as perpetuated by the inherent inequalities between the different genders. The way in which women internalise the expressed stances and assumptions regarding motherhood illustrate the on-going problematic relationship between leadership and gender. The female body is cast by the male gaze, who subsequently cannot accept both roles of a female as masculine leader and as a fertile, sexual mother. This dichotomous view than once more expresses a double-bind for working women, creates a dominant context that they then themselves internalise as some sort of coping mechanism. The classic paradox of the female within the phallogocentric, following Kristeva. The internalised bias leads to considerations such as 'if I can only get either children, or a career, then other women who have done it differently, well, that is not fair': an unfair-ness bias, forced unto these women by the dominant masculine. Here we can also apply the female control theory dynamic in the sense of keeping the prices of the goods as high as possible. Women being 'employed' as both leaders as well as mothers decreases the stock value of the female, which subsequently leads to female punishment.

So, yes: men are to blame. Not individual men – well, not at all times – but the male patriarchal system that has since agricultural and industrial times built, formed, shaped and dominated organisational connects has created something better than a work ethic; a leadership mould. A colloquial 'how-we-do-things' and one that becomes problematic when women internalise such systems created (subconsciously, partly consciously) to actually keep them down.

Claire recounts: "[i]t is ridiculous how negative people are about women working properly. Mothers at the school where my kids are at literally say 'you can tell whose kids have mothers who are at home'".

Faye's says that "[a] lot of women remain hung up on their man or children. Such a shame." Faye has always worked fulltime. And felt no guilt, which she learned in Denmark where almost everyone works fulltime after having kids. "My freedom was important for me." In the Netherlands circumstances are a bit different. "There are those frustrating small requests that imply you should be at home with your kids; like cleaning at school on a Tuesday at eleven. I mean: who the hell is not at work by then? They would never ask a man to come and do that." Faye has old girlfriends whom she is not in touch with anymore, as they have chosen different lifestyles that make their lives separated from each other. "Such a shame. Their lives completely revolve around their kids. I don't have that much with them anymore".

When Eline kept working after she had had her first child, the local mothers in the village were she lives literally told her that they were convinced of having a better relationship with their children. Because Eline would not be there to see her child take its first steps. “It did not matter to me, I saw the other first steps”. But it was a hurtful thing to say. Eline refers to these women as the grumpy stay-at-home mothers who eventually get so bored and unhappy with their life choices that they try to get back into the job market. And mostly around the time when it is really too late. “They want to re-enter, but somehow I do not think it is fair.” The years Eline has made her sacrifices, these women were nowhere to be seen. They have generated such a big disadvantage due to not participating for so many years, that it is not easily amended.

Mette says outright: “I am very critical on women who stop working, or work significantly less than their spouses, even when they are both working on the same level.” Mette dislikes this assumption that a lot of women in her experience still perpetuate; that they will work less after having children. She finds a lot of women – consciously and subconsciously – calculate this in in their career, which then negatively effects their ambitions. “Women who came up to me and literally told me they did not want to become a manager or director, because by then they would probably be in their thirties and thinking of having children.”

The work-life balance problematic

Choices and how one wants to shape their working life, are another essential concepts that came up in the interviews. It is a motif that is closely related to motherhood and its possible implications, but has a broader focus on career and leadership choices. Some of the interviewees and their stories suggested that women may live their lives differently and make different, potentially more thoroughly considered decisions – and make their choices differently. Certain kinds of choices related to the work-life balance motif were explicitly expected of our interviewees, very much connected to female stereotyping.

A work-life balance is a notion all interviewed women were very preoccupied with[18], whereas they expressed doubts regarding their male counterparts to making (career) decisions in a well-considered way. Men were said to go for things more mindlessly and only realising they had (potentially) wasted their prime years on working, or bashing head first into a burn-out. In other words: maybe the female focus on a – for them – healthy work-life balance is not so 'soft', yet insightful and valuable. Perhaps such an approach would be beneficial to many organisations and male leaders.

Friedan wrote a classic book in 1963 on the *Feminine Mystique*, tackling some then – and currently still – urgent issues surrounding the absence of women in so many aspects of life. One of then still dominant assumptions Friedan tackles was that "truly feminine women do not want careers", nor an an education or the right to vote, even (16). Her exploration deals with a different time, but also speaks of the opting out discussion: women making different choices in regards to their work life balance. Making choices without before-the-fact exclusions is important to the interviewed female leaders. Just making the choice to actually become/ take the job a VP, CEO or director was also not one always easily accepted by the women's personal or professional environment.

Annette sees things changing, with more accessibility to senior roles for women. The wish of access, not. "Female senior leaders have better focus on their work an life balance. Because let's be honest: the life of a senior leader sucks. And women tend to choose less for this kind of life."

After a few years in the Netherlands, Ada and her husband had children. "I never hesitated in regards of the work vs. children choice. My mom had five kids and worked full-time." "I worked very, very hard." Ada loved her job and due to her passion, had a high threshold for working hard. "You just do what you want to do because you want to do it."

Carla's story: "[t]hen I got pregnant and I started worrying: oh, my, my career?" Turned out that she had assumed her husband would cut down on work, whereas he assumed it would be her. "I got a lot of tips from other working women." After some serious chats and his realisation that even men work part-time these days, they both cut down on work hours and balanced our their mother and father leave after the baby's arrival. "Men are a bit more relaxed, where women are very goal-oriented and want to be the best."

Eline remembers one anecdote specifically when she did not get a job at one at her previous employers', literally because: "you are a woman and therefore you will at one point have a child."

Anne lives in a small village where all mothers stay at home and where she is the only exception. The choice she made to both have children as well as a high-level job is one that a lot of people find difficult to accept. "My mother even says you do not have kids to dump them with other people."

[18] This was not a consideration exclusively related to motherhood.

Theoretical dimension II:
The othering gaze on the female body

The second theoretical dimension that came up in the interviews is one that is linked to one of the common themes, but also one of the biggest themes, encompassing a large variety of storylines and anecdotes, namely that of battling against the female stereotype. The previously mentioned motifs are in different ways linked to the female stereotype. How others look at and perceive the female and how this effects interactions of female leadership and intrasexual competition.

Both of the overarching theoretical dimensions are closely linked to expectations and perceptions and are related to 'otherness' in multiple ways. The othering gaze of the other in relation to the female body leads to a problematic tension, one that is additionally more problematic within the context of the organisation and female leadership. What actually happens, as the stories illustrate, is that, gaze of the other projected unto the self, internalised and subsequently once more projected on other women.

Foucauldian feminist theories of the female body and the gaze "prescribed, rationalised and taught in manuals of advance, etiquette and manners and enjoined by sanctions as well as seduction" (Rose in Threthewey, 424). Following Foucault's original contribution of power to the gaze, as set out in *Discipline and Punish*; "[w]omen's professional selves or gendered identities, then, are are always already positioned by organisational discourses" (following Foucault, Trethewey, 426). As King also points out that "[w]oman's historical association with the body has resulted in her being judged by and valued for her appearance more than man, often above all else, and has also engendered the fear and dread of otherness" (King, 36). Women are objects, (be)watched and judged through gazes of others, as spectacles.

Battling against the female stereotype

Essentially, all the motifs touch upon the major issue of female stereotypes and how our interviewees had to deal with this or found their own coping mechanisms. Everything the interviewed female leaders have done (un)consciously in order to become more masculine or even emphasise their femininity in order to create an edge. There are continuous ways, styles and approaches assumed of women. Whether it is the very bland assumption that the only woman in the room must be the coffee lady and not the director; as experienced by the director herself. Such an incident does not stand on its own and illustrates that we still expect women to be unequal to men.[19]

The female stereotype is where the dominant assumptions come together and morph into one big, dangerous and generalised image of what is expected of woman.[20] And even though we have a few more women doing more work, we are nowhere near equality or properly shifting the balance, especially when it comes to positions of actual influence, power and leadership. The motif of female stereotyping and female leaders' coping mechanisms with them are manifold.

Female leaders have to deal with the female stereotype, whether they will conform to it, or go against it. As soon as they divert from the female stereotype – in other words: that kind of behaviour that is expected of them – the woman who is essentially other becomes abject: a distortion and break with the system of assumption. The abject is not the dominant subject, the dominated object but the thrown off, the disturbing force (Kristeva 1982, 5).

As she grew up in a non-corporate setting, Eline never experienced the typical corporate politics. One anecdote she specifically remembers was when she did not get a job at one at her previous employers', literally because: "you are a woman and therefore you will at one point have a child." "It is getting pregnant. It complicates the general career track."

For a long time, Katherine explicitly steered clear of any kind of leadership or management roles. She always 'just' wanted to do a job of some kind where she would be doing something she is good at. "I am too direct and hard for any kind of diplomacy." So Katherine assumed she could thereby never fulfil a leadership function. Then at one point, she did get a call and was asked to start managing a team. The fact that she got asked and everyone – who had been working with her extensively – seemed to think she would be the right person for the job, stimulated her.

Mette: "I am used to a masculine contexts. I started out on actual building sites where the men thought I was the coffee lady." Most of all of Mette's colleagues were men, except for the personal assistants or coffee ladies. "I have also found that I almost fall into the same trap, assuming that the only woman present must be the personal assistant."

Mette admits she always wears a suit, never a skirt or a dress. But as of late, she had permitted herself to wear her hair not tied together in a business-like knot. "I once witnessed a few men commenting on a woman's legs while she was wearing a skirt and I swore to myself that would never happen to me. I do not want to be judged on anything like that." So Mette has always emphasised the masculine and business-like in her attire.

Maria had never really experienced explicit instances of walking into glass doors or ceilings due to her gender, except for one very specific story. "It was in Bangkok and after the mandatory wining and dining for a brainstorm event, the men started to whisper. Well, in Bangkok you know what that means. Me and two other women were literally told off to 'go back to the hotel'. I was so frustrated that I called them out on it. One of the men literally said I was not going to get ahead

[19] Just consider for a moment: how many men get asked the question "so, what does your wife do" at a fancy cocktail party.

[20] The female stereotype is wanting and having children. The female stereotype is thinking you have to be more subtle because you are a woman. The female stereotype is falling into the masculine context trap, really becoming one of the boys and utilising the female stereotype yourself. The female stereotype is literally being left out: women do not talk sex. The female stereotype is wearing more masculine clothing, covering up the female body.

anyway, and the men were." The next day Maria made an issue out of it and for the first time really felt like she would be blocked merely by the fact that she was a woman.

Maria finds it essential how you manifest as a woman within a context with many men. She has many years of experience and finds you do not have to be less of a woman. "I am one of the guys, but I still paint my nails and do not allow anyone to treat me any differently." Being a woman can also be a tool. A tool Maria enjoys using. "Forget that you are a woman."

This seems like some sort of mediated othering of the self: projection of what you think someone else thinks you are or should be and mirroring that unto a projection of yourself and subsequently projecting that unto other women; without a doubt the main underlying and most influential dynamic both leading to intrasexual interactions as to most friction stories recounted by the interviewees.

V. Conclusion

What role does intrasexual competition play in experiences of female leadership in Dutch organisations?

The aim of this research was to find out whether female leaders in Dutch organisations had experienced intrasexual competition and in what way that might influence female leadership in itself. To subsequently relocate intrasexual competition to an organisational studies context and connect this biological notion to poststructuralist concepts of experiences in gender. The data has illustrated that intrasexual competition has a definite status in the current day and age. The interviewed female leaders have experienced intrasexual competition related to their leadership, both within and outside of the workplace.

In the stage of data analysis the data led to two high-level concepts, namely:

I. Mirroring of expectations of others and projected unto self and other females.
II. The othering gaze on the female body.

Many interviewees recounted stories and anecdotes of other women, or themselves, positioning or altering their life choices related to other people's expectations or directly expressed opinions. Almost all of these encounters took place between women, intrasexually. Motherhood, for example, is a theme that leads women to voice their opinions in regards to other individual women's choices. A great amount of storylines as recounted by the interviewees' working lives revolves around relating themselves – either hyper-abstractly, or differently – towards or against the female stereotype. For example: female leaders who consciously expressed themselves in a more masculine way, or chose to be extra exotic and positioned themselves outside of the majority of normality.

Intrasexual competition and gender ideology

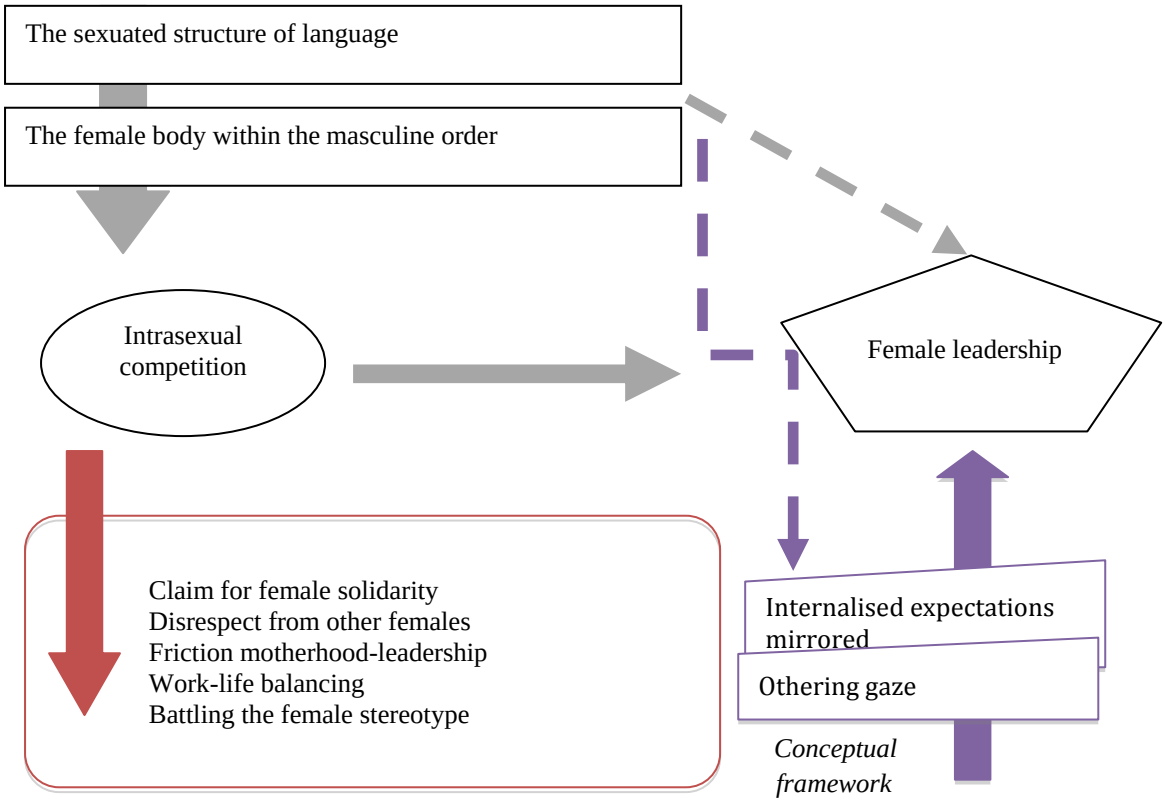
The sexuated structure of language and the shaping of societal stereotypes that lie beyond the expectations of others is connected to the core of the gender ideology. This context, this ideology essentially causes intrasexual competition. Women struggle with making the right decisions: with being a good worker, a good friend, a good mother, a good wife, etc. – to mention just a few and stereotypical examples, yet in in no way limiting. They struggle with other people's and society's expectations and even if they do disregard female stereotypes, they are either aware of the stereotypes that exist (and explicitly redefine themselves outside of them) or they are sooner or later confronted by others with these prescriptive ideals. This illustrates literally how gender stereotypes are literally and actually "ideological and prescriptive" (Fotaki, 1254).

Intrasexual competition is an expression of the broader gender ideology in which being a woman is still more limiting than being a man. The female gender is one where one deems to expect 'things' from, that follow from or are deemed to follow from biological 'facts'. Which is a core problematic to the female gender: the assumption(s) of some sort of 'truth' following from the fact that someone happens to be a biological woman. These assumptions lead others (structures, organisations, societies) to suppose, expect, claim, begrudge and claim aspects of the female. Not merely the male others: also and especially other women, as the data illustrates. These visible, clear-cut biological features make it

impossible for a woman to un-acknowledge her own female-ness[21]: it is the principle of the "tendency to overflow (Threthewey, 437).

Theoretical context

When looking back at the initial conceptual framework, we revisit the contexts of (1) the sexuated structure of language and (2) the female body within the masculine order. These contexts provided the theoretical backdrop for studying the notion of intrasexual competition and its role within female leadership. After the data analysis, the storylines (see red) are added as expressions of intrasexual competition and the high level motifs follow as conceptual themes (see purple), embellishing the original conceptual framework to show how the data relates to the conceptual starting point.



including data analysis

Whereas the contexts of sexuated language and the masculine influence female leadership in itself, the data illustrates that they cause expressions of intrasexual competition. These expressions themselves subsequently also have an effect on female leadership. The concrete effect can also be intrasexual competition itself, thereby leading to an ongoing vicious circle. Ergo: women are made into their own enemies by an *Umfeld* that is geared to and developed by men.

Both of these high-level concepts are related to the notions of the other and the self. They remind of Kristeva's notion of the abject. This situation is an ultimate expression of abjection, in which the masculine causes the feminine to position herself as something literally different, differing. By creating this othering position for the female, she internalises this abject position of and for herself. Her entire

[21] I purposely do not use the word "femininity" as this word has too many connotations that in themselves illustrate once more the problematic position of the female and language.

identity becomes abject, discarded and belittled by both (her)self and (her)other: "[t]he abject is me that is not me" (Kristeva, 1982, 5).

Intrasexual competition of the other

Within the storylines and anecdotes recounting intrasexual competition, there looms the presence of the other. Intrasexual encounters are expressions of ongoing tensions within the self and the (supposed) other, leading to experiences of uncanniness or an abjection of body and/ or mind. Women see other women accomplishing more or less, leading to both recognition as well as alienation in regards to the differing circumstances: they are looking in a distorted mirror, painted with a coating of ideology. They 'degrade' both the other woman as themselves, through intrasexual interactions, which complicates female-female contact.

Expectations of others play a major role here, both in direct communication as well as indirect responses. Female leaders, even when they have accomplished many great things, for example, discard their self-agency. Other female leaders make themselves exotic: place themselves outside of normality. These examples illustrate tension within the self and other and the abject woman. All revolves around various tension within the self and its other, an abject of body and mind, where both the female physical body as well as her mind are tense. Intrasexual competition is a consequence of gender ideology and in a way can be seen as an ultimate expression of the uncanny and female abject in action.

As de Beauvoir's, Kristeva's and Irigaray's theoretical frameworks - and many theorists with them - have argued, woman is always in a position of 'otherness' or exclusion. This is Irigaray's absent woman and Kristeva's abjected (maternal) body. They both emphasise the dominance of the male discourse or the "male parameters", of which its dominance has been clearly illustrated (Irigaray, 23). Within experiences of female leadership and intrasexual interactions, there are more conceptual dimensions to self and otherness that are of great value.

Woman already starts off as an inherent other; positioned always in relation to man. Then she is lived through experiences of self, simultaneously mediated by herself, as well as others through mirrors of gender ideologies. Whilst woman also within herself she experiences the psychoanalytical self-other friction, with her inner foreigner, her inner other. Within herself woman is at times confronted with the uncanny experience of both recognition as well as difference. She experiences the friction between the familiar idea of what her identity is and its uncomfortable strangeness when it diverts. Woman is triggered especially by other women, as they are so familiar. Yet when their lives or accomplishments are bigger and eerier than their own, woman experiences the uncanny. Hidden desires, hidden from the self, urge woman to compete intrasexually, to diminish the 'un' in 'unheim'. When woman is confronted with the stereotype of what she is supposed to be, by either diverting or conforming, she finds both exclusion as well as degradation. Woman plays roles in order to avoid abjection, yet by doing so, awakening an even bigger monstrous other in her self.

Intrasexual competition and its biological evolution

This research started out with an exploration into intrasexual competition as a biological-evolutionary notion. The data has illustrated that intrasexual competition in fact is more part of an expression of our current day manifestations within groups, teams and other power-oriented collections of humans: an expression of our contemporary culture.

Firstly, the interviewees recounted expressions of intrasexual competition at play within bigger contexts than merely with or related to men. Some of the recounted interactions were exclusively female. It has also been illustrated that contemporary and corporate intrasexual competition is about power and a fear of losing it, or enhancing one's odds at power. Thirdly, intrasexual expressions are more geared at life choices, expectancies and other subjective judgments.

Vaillancourt's original terminology called intrasexual competition as "typically directed at other females, especially attractive and sexually available females, in the context of intrasexual competition for mates. Indirect aggression is an effective intrasexual competition strategy" (2013, 1). The way in which we have utilised and relocated intrasexual competition as more than a biological-evolutionary concept has been supported by and strengthened by the data. Intrasexual competition in female leadership does not revolve around mates, mating or sexual themes. It is an expression, a consequence, of the friction within women that function within an archetypical masculine environment.

And then some

More contemporary public opinion has started to point out that issues of female leadership are consequences of a bigger and more powerful context, pointing to the masculine environment of organisations, such as the very recent – and not yet officially published research – that debunks the queen bee myth (see Moore).

Intrasexual competition is a dynamic that this research has proven to be at play within and around organisations and is in fact experienced by female leaders. It is a consequence as well as a perpetuation of the gender ideologies that support misogyny. Female leaders recounted stories that illustrate uncanny and abject experiences, that illustrate this misogyny, also intrasexually. The more concrete impact of intrasexual competition may be measured when also looking at the stories of female non-leaders.

Women are looking awry[22] at the desire of what they themselves are, what they want to be and what they think they are expected to be or should be. They experience moments of uncanniness when they are confronted with women who have accomplished more than they have, confronted with their own other-selves, feeling abjected by their own lack. What we have seen very clearly illustrated from the stories and motifs emerging from the interviews, is "that at times women may read each other's sexed bodies through men's eyes in sexual competition" (in: Mavin, 345).

22 Žižek defines the Lacanian *objet a* as "the object cause of desire, an object which is, in a way, posited by the desire itself" (34). According to Žižek, this *objet a* is always perceived in a distorted (looking awry) way – since it is inherently begotten with desire. This object is nothing without desire – "[i]n the movement of desire, 'something comes from nothing'" (34).

Management implications

This research has highlighted organisational intrasexual competition as a consequence of the gender ideological context in which it occurs. And even though intrasexual competition in itself may not 'simply' originate within women towards women, it does provide an interesting starting point for more pragmatic suggestions. With its main goal to improve experiences of females in organisations and in female leadership, thereby contributing to a positive effect on female leadership as a whole.

One very important note: diversity initiatives should be aimed at all and everyone. Diversity is about inclusion and about creating valuable and inspirational synergies between and within difference. By creating groups or initiatives that include one group, yet exclude another, they completely forego the entire point of diversity. Considering that most of the literature collected in this research, also emphasises that gender is a fluid act that is part of our every day performance, diversity is clearly not something to tackle in a vacuum (e.g. Dreher). It should also be linked concretely to the organisation's own specific and concrete goals, such as increasing innovative power or appealing to a larger potential work force (Jane and Dipboye, 412).

An initiative should not – and could not – be as conceptual and theoretical as notions of the uncanny or the abject female within organisations. So, in which way can this theoretical and conceptual knowledge on female leadership and the raw data contribute to organisations and diversity management on a pragmatic level?

1. Dominance of gender ideology

Any improvement of diversity should start with consciousness of the dominant ideologies that influence our every day lives. As long as someone is not aware of this impact, any initiative or programme will always remain just the means of and end never reached. Through studying and discussing concrete examples of interactions between people and genders – and perhaps intrasexual interactions specifically – organisations can open the eyes of their employees. Make them see and experience how much gender ideology is part of every (speech) act and every assumption. This consciousness will lead to an awareness within organisational interactions, especially when lived and experienced by everyone. In order to keep such initiatives aligned with the organisation's goals and speak more easily to its work force, this should be linked to concrete targets and organisations own contexts.

2. Language

It is also essential to focus on the ongoing bias as expressed in language and permeated by language, as everything in language is "pre-empted by men" (Lakoff, 1). The fact that we ourselves, through our daily usage of language, are ourselves keeping gender bias and stereotype alive should receive a specific focus and could lead to is highly valuable insights. This is an approach that revolves around personal and collective consciousness, but an organisation could additionally redraft its communication policy, or use specific inter-organisational terminology to create a neutral and collective starting point in language and focus on "the strategic initiative of communication" (Jane and Dipboye, 412).

3. Unfairness bias/ just world hypothesis

The interviewed female leaders expressed an inherent – what we called – 'unfairness bias' and what can be linked to the bigger cognitive bias of the "just world hypothesis" (Lerner). The just world bias essentially means that people will want to assume that good people will eventually be rewarded for their goodness and evil will be punished (Lerner, 22). This is one specific theme that would be valuable to look into from the dedicated perspective of intrasexual dynamics. This bias in our specific case revolves around the idea that there is only place for one woman within a specific top or high-level

context, a bias that is a major block within any initiatives into female leadership. This bias stems from the current situation in which there are not that many women in positions of power, which influences (sub)conscious intrasexual dynamics the more.

Positive discrimination through the means of a quota therefore also does not seem to be the solution to improving female leadership, especially considering the intrasexual implications it may have. As the interviewees all expressed: women will disrespect each other more, the ‘old’ crowd of women who ‘got there on their own’ will not be happy with the ‘new’ crowd of women who benefitted from the quota.

VI. Limitations and implications for future research

This research has had a very demarcated focus and therefore there are multiple interesting points for discussion that point out the limitations of the conducted research. As previously mentioned, this research would methodologically ideally have included multiple research methods in order to triangulate the results, thereby creating a higher degree of validity and reliability. Initially the ultimate conception of the methodology consisted not merely of interviews, but also an actual experiment and observations within multiple organisational environments. Due to the limited scope of this research, these two additional methods of data gathering where not included.

Another major point of discussion is the impact of culture, politics and language. Ideally, this research would have been conducted in multiple countries, among which also Sweden – a country with a completely different societal stance towards female leadership by facilitating pregnancy leave in a different and more gender equal way. The role that society, politics and culture play on intrasexual dynamics may be huge. The Netherlands is in that respect relatively traditional, with a – as the date illustrates – a multitude of women expecting other women to remain at home and take care of their children, whereas – according to one of our female leaders – in Denmark it is to be expected of women to bring their children to day care and no one suffers from any 'guilt tripping'. This politics of pregnancy may be a major influential force strengthening intrasexual expressions.

Thirdly, the methodology for this research focussed on female leaders and charting their experiences. It may be very possible that by specifically focussing on this type of females, the research excluded all ranks and levels preceding this and by this, a potentially information-rich subgroup. This exclusion was done consciously, but may have far-reaching consequences that were initially not taken into account. It would have been valuable to also look at the levels below the female leaders, as that may very well be the figurative cesspool where all real female aggression and competition is built up – as these women have not (yet) made it as far as the female leaders this research interviewed.

An explicitly not taken into account group of people – namely men – is also a limitation. As this specific research aimed at capturing female experiences it can be justified, but delving deeper into intrasexual competition in organisational interactions, men could have played a valuable role in gathering more data.

This research approach chose a paradigm in which the dichotomy of male and female was enhanced and studied as if this were a strict and actual dichotomous relationship. Of course gender is a much more fluid concept and it would be more valuable as well as interesting to look at masculine and feminine traits, intersexual genders and all how these facets are experienced within organisations. In other words: there are many opportunities for this research to contribute to even more knowledge on female leadership.

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VIII. Appendices

1) **Methodological diary**

2) **Narrative working life stories of all interviews conducted**

Methodological diary

December, 2014

After writing my complete research proposal and an initial meeting with my coach, I feel well-oriented to embark on my journey of research. I am wondering whether I may see some intrasexual competition in action during the process of my research, as I am a woman who will attempt to engage female leaders to work with and for me, essentially. That is why I have chosen to also keep up with a periodical methodological diary, in which I will document my specific choices and possible changes in methodological approaches and specific experiences. I am possibly most insecure about combining conceptual research with actual, concrete research data – which is something I have little experience with. Yet, I maybe too comfortable with purely literary and conceptual pieces of research. That in itself will be my biggest challenge.

Early February, 2015

Initially I wanted to draw up a conceptual framework based on an extensive literary exploration on female leadership, intrasexual competition and related concepts. This lead to an enthusiastic preliminary chapter on literature, with basically a chaotic collection of concepts that I all found interesting. Too many concepts, not enough direction. During a much-needed feedback session with my coach, she came up with the suggestion to just get starting with interviews as a trial, that could lead to a more specified choice of concepts. Additionally, it would give me a better feeling for what actually would be a useful direction of the research. This lead me to create and send out some invitations for interviews through a varied means of channels, targeting at some high-profile female leaders. I have a strict schedule to adhere by, as I will be in China from July onwards on summer schools to learn Chinese.

22nd February 2015

I have started to conduct my first interviews as trials and have immediately realised that anyone I interview is going to present themselves as better or at least 'the best they can be', instead of immediately admitting all of their deepest and most hidden personal experiences. Not that I am actually looking for anything like that, but a woman interviewing a woman (potential intrasexual competition at work?) may not immediately bring out some more personal experience-oriented stories. For example, that they have been held back by bitchy colleagues or nasty managers. This in itself, connected to the theme I am focussing on in my interviews may be a potential pickle.

This second interview showed me that the best way to have a good interview, is to have a good conversation. To listen, to absorb and not to try and control too much of the conversation. To also let go of a framework, questions or themes, but to let the other person speak. Silence is the interviewer's best weapon, basically. The woman I interviewed for this second interview was also someone I got on with very, very well and saw a lot of myself mirrored in her personality. Interestingly enough, she herself also found it very insightful to talk about her own career life story in such a way, thereby realising all of the things she has and had actually accomplished.

28th February 2015

After three trial interviews I have found my modus as an interviewer, authentically enjoying the information and life stories that three very different but all inspirational women have shared with me. I am positively surprised by everyone's openness and willingness to share themselves with me and I am happy that I chose interviews as my methodological approach. From the perspective of the kind of data that I am gathering as well as my personal goal of having insightful conversations with female leaders. I recognise a lot of motifs, drives and experiences from their stories and feel that the more interviews I will conduct, the better I will be able to distinguish general themes. I had a general set-up questionnaire

with some themes, but have experienced I do not need it and will get the same amount of information if I let the women speak freely. Sometimes strengthened with a few questions subtly directing from my end.

14th March

With a methodology of snowball sampling, conducting interviews takes me to places I would normally never be. From sky-high rooftops on the Zuidas to cosy living rooms where I was able to take the most authentic of peeks into powerful women's lives. It is very fascinating and insightful to see on the one hand how different the people, their lives and their organisations are, whereas simultaneously, I see so many things these women all seem to have in common.

End of March

By now I have gathered a good list and arranged meetings with a fair amount of ladies. It is wonderful to see how open and enthusiastic most of them are and how willing to contribute their time and stories to this small research. It is a great motivator for me to realise that basically you have to be cheeky and just make people want to help you. Most of the time they will, you just have to ask for it and keep asking. Not just a good lesson within this research, but one valuable one for life and work in general.

Early April

The more and more interviews I conduct, the more passionate I get about these women and their stories. Conducting interviews and being offered such an open view into someone's story is a wonderful experience and such a rich way of gathering data. Some of the women I have talked to, I have experienced such a fascinating click with, that I am very, very happy and enthusiastic about choosing this way of researching. Not only am I gathering useful data, it is also a wonderful and enriching experience for myself.

Mid April

I am getting near the end of my interviews and have said a couple of times that even without doing this research, I would love to keep conducting similar interviews/ meetings with female leaders and keep gathering information and insight – even if it may be personal only – into their choices, motivators, blocks and their ways of dealing with that. It might make a great article. Soon I will have finished most interviews and I will start with the phase of analysis.

May

Time for the data from the interviews to be distilled into conceptual levels and notions so that I connect them to the conceptual framework and the theoretical notions brought forward in the chapter on literature. It makes me realise there is a lot of knowledge floating around in my head, in between the interview data and my own mental link between the concepts and this data. By sketching, writing and literally drawing connections from the one to the other, I am trying to do this as concretely as possible without letting any of the valuable information and realisation(s) get lost.

I have also written the interview with myself, to make sure none of the more personal realisations and opinions that may lead to additional insights to be lost or forgotten somehow.

Working life story narratives

Interview # 1

Anna – currently Director

When she was ten years old, Anna wanted to be a ballerina. When she was later told that she had gotten too big and clumsy for a life as a ballerina, she set her sights on different ambitions. Medicine. Or something really clever. She was quite insecure as a girl and wanted to be good at something, prove that she could be good at something.

After finishing high school, Anna started studying electro technology in Delft, driven by the desire to want to prove herself, show how she could do something most people would not expect. Unfortunately, it turned out it was not the right match for her and she switched over to theoretical mathematics. Due to personal circumstances, she had to drop out during her third year.

This led Anna to apply for a job at a company, where she ended up in the high potentials programme. She held many different positions, got the chance to learn a lot, really quickly and try out many different fields and functions. One manager, whom she had worked for in one specific project, asked her along to help him for a couple of other projects. Anna ended up fulfilling management positions relatively quickly. Via her telecom background, she worked at various foreign telco companies for a couple of years.

"I have never felt like I was getting lesser opportunities than anyone else. Maybe it is because I am just a director and not really competing in the board room. For something like that, it has to be in one's network."

Sometimes she gets underestimated as a woman. Due to her elaborate background in technology and mathematical thinking, people – mostly men – are surprised when she heads a project and manifests the ability to understand and manage themes with a certain technological depth.

"I do not feel like there is any difference between being a woman or a man. It is about the character of the person you are working with."

Feedback – both giving and receiving – is the core of Anna's personal drive and development. She thinks women are a lot better at giving feedback, as they are more communicative somehow and will give feedback (positive or negative) more quickly than their male peers.

"Giving feedback getting things done with a team is something that I am good at. And I like to be good at something."

Anna enjoys working with mixed teams more than anything. Teams consisting of merely women turn into chaotic hen houses, whereas male-only teams tend to remain on their respective island(s). When combining both in a mixed team, you get the best of both worlds with the women facilitating actual engagement and the men balancing the women with some business focus.

"Men work together, women together is just a lot of fuss."

She has not experienced any untoward behaviour in her career. Then again, by the time she joined her company as a director, the weekly golf events did not happen anymore. And the weekends or sleepover events that she attended, she made it very clear: in bed before eleven p.m. She steered clear of any situation that could have potentially led to any insinuation.

"I want to get ahead on my skills alone, not in regard to other things."

As long as she sets a realistic goal, she can accomplish it. These concrete goals themselves are the drivers behind her career.

Interview # 2

Wendy – currently a Managing Director

As a child, Wendy enjoyed playing outdoors more than anything. Pretending to be an Indian and playing with her brothers, she regarded herself as a right tomboy. She also passionately danced ballet for more than ten years; it was one of her main creative passions.

Her home life was complicated, with a family dynamic in which she never felt particularly desired and safe. This made her a creative woman with a survivor instinct from a very early age on. Her independence was also combined with an innate drive and desire to accomplish as much as she could and control as much in her life as she could.

"I though I'd show them."

Wendy was eighteen when she moved out and started living together with her then – and still current – boyfriend. She had various jobs at different companies. When she was twenty-two, she had her first child. She had three children in total. Her children would lead to her first real entrepreneurial exploration, as she wanted to keep working.

"In those days you did not really have any day care possibilities. So we started one ourselves."

It began with a personal ad in the newspaper and a bunch of volunteers and grew into a successful child day-care business. At the same time, Wendy made some clothes for her children because she did not like the standard colourless clothes you could get in the stores. More and more people kept asking here where she had bought the clothes and in 1986 she registered her own business at the Dutch Chamber of Commerce. Until 2001 she successfully ran her own child clothing business.

"Building up one's own business is a great way to learn so much. Basically everything, from USP's and strategic positioning: you are involved in the entire business model from top to bottom."

By then, a few companies were starting to roll out the first cable internet infrastructures in the Netherlands and Wendy was asked to join in.

"I was very interested in the technological background of this new technology. We really were the early adopters."

Wendy would join in on the business development side of things and stay in the telecom scene for more than five years. At a certain point she got to her own top and she started with an MBA in management, which she finished with honours.

"That was when I started seeing more and more things that could be improved; it made me more critical."

During that time, Wendy had a friendly relationship with a female manager in the company that she looked up to. After her newly acquired knowledge and skills, Wendy started noticing that this woman was "playing tricks" and distinguishing patterns.

"She basically fell off her pedestal and thereby our friendship was immediately gone. She apparently needed people to look up to her."

Wendy also remembers an argument with a secretary who was not able to her job in the way that Wendy had asked of her. When she told the secretary off, she later found out she had "bitched" about her behind her back.

"I do not think that would have happened if I had been a man."

Wendy moved on to a new job after a few years, as soon as she felt that the stretch of a challenge was gone. After every so many years, she would get restless and in need of a new adventure.

“If I do not enjoy doing something anymore, I stop doing it. That would be a waste of my time.”

She enjoys working with men and their direct approach in confrontations, which aligns with the way Wendy prefers to interact. As long as Wendy has enough freedom and flexibility and is driven by output, she enjoys any new adventure or challenge.

“I have a very clear drive; I love a challenge and have an inherent need to assert myself.”

Wendy enjoys (re)structuring projects or organisations, creating order in the midst of chaos.

“The more shit there is, the more I like it.”

Interview # 3

Annette – currently a global Vice President

As a young girl, Annette always wanted to be an astronaut. From an early age on, she harboured far-reaching ambitions of a non-girlish nature, leading to many discussions with her brothers.

Yet when the Challenger exploded, Annette let her dream of being an astronaut go. As she had continuously followed the story of the first woman on the Challenger, she felt connected to her story. When she saw her and the rest of the space shuttle blow up, that had a major impact on Annette's career ambitions.

Astronomy was Annette's new career goal and she got a degree in Physics and a PhD in astrophysics, being well on her way to realise these ambitions.

"I wanted to become the next big astronomer. The next Jodie Forrester."

A couple of things happened, though, that made Annette rethink this ambition. She started volunteering for Amnesty International an travelling all around the world. Seeing other places, peoples and cultures, she realised that was more to life than academia. All these intensely different environments made her want to pursue travel in itself as a goal. The real world won from academia and the only thing she needed was a way to make some money in order to keep travelling.

Due to her background in physics, it was not difficult to get into IT and digital, as those fields providing the easiest access to a paid job. Means to an end: to travel. This means to an end slowly grew into a real career, in which Annette also wanted to be the best.

"Wanting to be the best is a major strength, as well as a formidable weakness."

Annette started recognising some patterns related to females in more senior roles. She found women are more critical on themselves, which is a weakness that causes them to be actually less resilient, when they do fail. Because they expect themselves to always be the best.

"I was never the best at everything, but after university I started experiencing the exhilaration of exceeding expectations."

That turned into something of a drug – something of which one starts wanting and needing. More and more of. It becomes a personal necessity.

Annette was always used to male-dominated contexts, from studying physics (300 men and 7 women) up to the field of IT.

"I never experienced it as a threat, more as a challenge."

A challenge she also took on together with other women, which lead to some tight-knit friendships.

"Being a woman was not the biggest challenge for me. Being me was."

Annette had always been a strong introvert and that was one of the bigger challenges she had to face in her rise to a female leader. There definitely were moments where she realised how unique she was, whenever top 100 leaders of her field or company gathered at international summits and when she was she was one of the few women.

"Or budget meetings where you are the only woman and everyone in the room realises the strangeness of it."

Annette sees things changing, with more accessibility to senior roles for women. The wish of access, not.

“Female senior leaders have better focus on their work an life balance. Because let’s be honest: the life of a senior leader sucks. And women tend to choose less for this kind of life. “

The most difficult team and organisational dynamics Annette sees in women interacting with women. Naturally, women and men interact better, also in situations where the woman is the boss.

“I interact better with men and I am very aware of that.”

Annette finds more commonalities with men, their inherent character necessity to shine, which makes it difficult for other people to keep up. Women are more aggressive or defensive than men; and more difficult to manage. Women want to prove themselves better than others and manifest some sort of hyper-concern. Which means one has to balance making a point with not demotivating women too much. Whereas this is not an issue when managing men.

“I cannot recall people actively trying to diminish me.”

Annette has experienced other people outshining her. She is an idealist who believes that people are intrinsically good. Sometimes contexts and reasons differ and that leads to different perspectives. She recognises a natural bias, a means of passive exclusion.

“People tend to trust people they know.”

Women are less gregarious and less inclined to form business-related circles of trust. Breaking the established circles and networks of trust is complex. Annette has met few women who have actively wanted to break this pattern; they need to invest time and energy. The existence of the pattern she does not see as a malicious pattern.

“Whenever I have broken this pattern, I was always welcomed.”

Annette owes her success and skills to a handful of leaders she looked up to. They were all men.

“I find positive discrimination insulting.”

Interview # 4

Ine – Ex-managing director, current senior consultant

When Ine was a young girl, her life revolved around having fun and enjoying herself. She played tennis, went out a lot. She grew up in a family where she was the third generation of working women. Her mother and grandmother had always worked and therefore she grew up with the expectation that a woman works. Her grandmother worked in the auction trade, the only woman amidst thousands of men. Her father had his own business.

"I grew up with the notion that everything was possible as a woman."

It was the seventies, with the general notion that one's own choices were all-powerful and everything was make-able.

Ine had a girlish rivalry with a pretty neighbour girl who lived across the road, who always managed to dress smartly. One day, Ine went up to her and asked how she managed so dress so well. Her answer was that she went to the national window dressing school.

"That decided it for me. I was going to go to that school."

The appeal of the big city and the fact that the school was the only one in its kind in the entire country made it easily decided. The school and its programme had been initiated by the big in order to create well-educated window dressers.

"Turned out, I was really good at it."

Ine was confident at school, where 80% of the students were men and the rest women. The programme was very business-oriented with strict and firm constraints and targets, not like most educational approaches at that time.

"The business-like attitude was something that immediately resonated with me."

After graduating, Ine started working for one of the best window dressers in the Netherlands. She replied to his advertisement in the paper.

"When I rang him I told him I was calling for the job opening he had advertised. 'Has my wife posted an ad, then?' he replied."

He did not want to hire a woman. Ine was appalled with how she was being treated, but did manage to get an interview with her direct and talk-back attitude. Eventually – after a constructive argument – she got hired and they worked together for three years.

After three years Ine started her own business and was at the top of the Dutch window dressing scene. She quickly lost the sense of a challenge and felt the superficiality of the area of fashion was not the right thing for her to choose as her lifelong career.

"I had never had the idea that I was not going to get there because I was a woman."

So she chose the social academy for a different educational path, and studied social cultural work. She went on to become a project manager at a consultancy firm, where she lead socially relevant projects. That was how she ended up in day care. Ine was heading large day care organisations from '86 and onwards – when the biggest change imaginable was starting to take place: from public to fully privatised organisations.

"I have definitely experienced difficult things."

The biggest challenge Ine experienced was the dynamic with the board of the organisation she was managing.

“They were all high level professionals who were only doing it because they had been asked. Not because they had any affinity with day care at all.”

The board consisted of 5 members, 4 men and 1 woman.

“What bothered me most was when we were discussing my results like I was not even there. The fifth woman in the board did not even count.”

In the end, Ine realised that the board was playing some sort of game. She engaged a professor as a coach and through an in-depth analysis of the dynamics in their meetings, she found how to counter the system.

“It was basically about how men ‘do it’, how they perform their own unconscious kind of play. In that play, I was always going to be the opponent, the woman.”

That was a realisation that did not align with Ine’s mentality: that when you perform well, you should be treated as such. She continually outperformed and reached all targets, but they still seemed set on treating her like a silly woman.

“It is essential women take up some actual space, manifest themselves.”

Ine dislikes women who are overly compliant, who ‘know their place’ and who have somehow been raised or taught to be submissive towards men.

“Those kinds of women make it extra difficult for those women who are there to make something. Out of themselves. Out of organisations.”

Ine is currently a senior consultant at a small consultancy firm.

“There are a lot of men with a very classic mentality, I call them ‘popes’.”

Influencing these kinds of men is about cancelling out the alpha man dynamic. That is the difficulty of interacting with (such) men as a woman: that alone generally activates major alpha male behaviour. Which in itself again leads to passivity in women or overt non-productive bitching.

“Men just want to have fun at work. Make it fun.”

Ine has developed her own tactic for deactivating the alpha male dynamic, by deregulating their fixed system or relaxing them in a typical ‘old boys network’-way.

“That does not work with women though. There, there is always an inherent rivalry that as a woman oneself you can never really turn off.”

Women look beyond the content of any discussion or project. There is always something about how something was said.

“Women don’t just go for the ball, they also go for the game.”

Ine has two daughters and does not see much improved for them.

“I am disappointed. I would have thought we would have been a lot further by now.”

Interview # 5

Eline – owner of executive recruitment firm

When Eline was a young girl, she wanted to become a war reporter, living life adventurously. She loved to write and wanted to get into journalism. That life was a kind of life she later perceived as pretty lonely and she opted for a study of the Dutch language in its place.

Through jobs after graduating university, Eline ended up in the recruitment business. That was were she learned that through her bigger-than-average endurance level and high motivation, she was able to work very competitively. All driven by the fact that she really wanted to be the best at the job she enjoyed.

"The competitive edge is something that has always been a part of me."

She used her endurance and motivation to work her way up through the echelons of her first jobs, but soon realised that it was a lot of doing the same thing. She loved her job, but came to see that recruitment was actually a relatively flat business. That was when she switched to bigger and specific corporate organisations as a in-house executive recruiter.

"I grew up with my network and came to work for the more high-up organisations and more high-level candidates."

As a woman, Eline feels she regularly benefits from being one of the few women working in the top of the Dutch executive recruitment, as she is more often approached for vacancies that require a more diversity-oriented approach.

As she grew up in a non-corporate setting, Eline never experienced the typical corporate politics. One anecdote she specifically remembers was when she did not get a job at one at her previous employers', literally because: "you are a woman and therefore you will at one point have a child."

Most of Eline's client organisations do not care whether she recruits men or women for the specific roles. Some of them, however, do say outright that they do not want a woman.

"It is getting pregnant. It complicates the general career track."

As Eline is one of the few women in the higher echelons of executive recruitment, her direct counterparts are almost all male. It is only in the lower pond of HR professionals, that you find a pool of almost exclusively women.

"I find expectations of women from female surroundings play a role."

Most women that are denoted as female leaders, are the ultimate top. Eline finds that the layer below that, which is a lot bigger and filled with more high-educated semi-leaders, should generate more focus. It is there were the interesting things happen and where women should and could make a real difference.

"I work because I love to work. And I love the freedom it gives me."

"You do make sacrifices as a woman."

When Eline kept working after she had had her first child, the local mothers in the village were she lives literally told her that they were convinced of having a better relationship with their children. Because Eline would not be there to see her child take its first steps.

"It did not matter to me, I saw the other first steps."

But it was a hurtful thing to say. Eline refers to these women as the grumpy stay-at-home mothers who eventually get so bored and unhappy with their life choices that they try to get back into the job market. And mostly around the time when it is really too late.

“They want to re-enter, but somehow I do not think it is fair.”

The years Eline has made her sacrifices, these women were nowhere to be seen. They have generated such a big disadvantage due to not participating for so many years, that it is not easily amended.

“As a child, I always wanted to be a boy. Because that way, I could do everything I liked without anyone saying anything about it.”

Happiness is acknowledgement. Doing something you are good at and simultaneously getting acknowledged for: that is the magic recipe.

Interview # 6

Ana – Director

As a young girl, Ana wanted to become a stewardess. She grew up in the midst of three different countries, speaking four languages and with parents that travelled around a lot. When one of her family friends pointed out that being a stewardess was actually nothing more than a "waitress in the clouds", she quickly let this ambition go. Ana was very self-conscious and wanted more for herself than a waitress-like job.

Becoming a pilot was not something she wanted (it meant going to a specific school and not going to university), and also something highly unusual for a woman to get into in Italy. Ana was a good student and went to university. She had a strong female presence in her family, with her mother being a mathematician. In a similar strain, Ana started studying physics. Realising she was not good at that, was not a fun experience.

She then chose what she loved and was innately good at: foreign languages and philology. After finishing her degrees, staying on at the university was something she was considering. Then one of her professors suggested Ana apply for a MBA. After that point, in the midst of initial pink quotas, Ana become very popular. With an MBA, four languages and her rare femaleness, she got a great many calls.

"My career went very quickly. I was also very determined and committed."

Ana started as a product manager at an big, international company and lived in Rome with her then boyfriend. She never expected her career to take off that quickly.

"I think that makes the difference: that drive."

"Women do have to work twice as hard, just to show that they can."

Ana worked in a male-dominated work field where she generally was the only non-assistant female in the room or any meeting.

"I was very exotic at the time: the Italian woman with a smile."

Due to her international background and gender, Ana was very visible in the organisation, which has an explicit focus on diversity.

What followed was a busy, dynamic, international career. Working 150%, 7 days a week, servicing and travelling to and through all different time zones.

Then, after a move to Switzerland and a job she did not specifically love, Ana decided to have a child on her own.

"In Switzerland you basically give birth in the office."

After her pregnancy leave, Ana was being let go by the company. Which surprised her, as she considered herself one of the best. But since she was not enjoying that job thoroughly anyway, she was okay with leaving.

That was when she decided to use her new-found time wisely and focussed more on conscious leadership through coaching.

"I started to realise more consciously that the glass ceiling is basically politics. And women do politics differently. They don't have that locker room feeling. And when they try, it does not work."

Managing those different styles was something that Ana became focussed on, especially considering the importance for herself by then. The higher up you come, the more important the network becomes.

“Us Italians, we do Machiavelli very well.”

Ana worked in Germany for a couple of years for a pharmaceutical company. Germany’s conservative stance did not agree with Ana too much.

“Various women would approach me for mentoring; as Germany is incredibly conservative. As a woman you choose either a career or a child. Not both. Look at Angela Merkel.”

“Women tend to be more competitive with each other, they feel like there is just one seat at the table for one of them.”

“I had one female boss who was actually competitive with me.”

“Insecurity becomes competitiveness.”

These days, Ana has developed more female interactions, either through coaching or friendships. It is a closeness that is important and useful for insights. Humbleness as a quality is wonderful, but you need to be conscious of the male boasting skills and how you can balance that out.

“Maternity is not a disease.”

“A lot of great CEOs are amazing storytellers.”

Women do not need to choose one or the other. They should make their own decisions based on what they want.

Interview # 7

Ada – university professor

Ana was always the professor, being good at learning and most things she would set her mind to. She loved learning and essentially never left school. Somehow Ada always knew she was going to go into academia, but she also tried some different things. After secondary school Ada thought she might try studying medicine – which was a good option for an ambitious and clever woman – but quickly realised that was not her thing.

Coming from Ireland and being raised in a family where everyone somehow or other got into public service, and with a great many of them being teachers, it was somehow to be expected that Ada went into academia.

After acquiring different degrees in languages, Ada went to Canada for her PhD. She managed multiple international migrations and moves and ended up in Amsterdam. She was lucky with her appointments and jobs, never really being without one of having to look for something long.

"I was lucky. When I got to the Netherlands, the University of Amsterdam called me within an hour."

After a few years in the Netherlands, Ada and her husband had children.

"I never hesitated in regards of the work vs. children choice. My mom had five kids and worked full-time."

"I worked very, very hard."

Ada loved her job and due to her passion, had a high threshold for working hard.

"You just do what you want to do because you want to do it."

Ada experienced her foreignness as something that set her apart from the rest of the academic staff. Especially her cultural British-Irish background, which she finds a completely different style of interacting and communicating than the Dutch one.

"I was used to doing things differently. Inherently, the British style of communicating is much closer to the female style of speaking. Indirect, somehow."

"I came up through the ranks."

Ada worked her way up to the position of a professor, proved herself throughout her career. Nowadays, more and more people come in directly on a higher level. When Ada first became a professor, the system was totally being dominated by men.

As a professor, she suddenly became overwhelmed by the request and inquiries for her to join a committee or other. Turned out in most cases they just wanted a women, to fill out the numbers.

"I never really engaged with these discussions, I did not want to be seen as an 'excuustruus'."

Ada wanted to be gender blind, but came to see

"I see the urgency more now."

"The feminisation of the Research Master generally means a loss of power and authority."

The disparity between students, PhDs and professors.

There is a concrete impact of the increase of female leaders.

“I do not like purely female groups, as people communicate differently and diversity is better.”

A mix of genders creates a greater chance at a varied range of knowledge and styles of interactions.

“There are men with a female gaze in academia.”

There is a shift in progress from an academic system in which academic authority is at the base and top of decision-making to a more hybrid and semi-corporate system. The principle of a moral and intellectual autonomy is thereby being questioned.

Interview # 8

Katherine – team manager

When Katherine was a young girl, she wanted to become a stewardess or a nurse. At sixteen, it turned out Katherine had a innate skill for exact sciences. When she turned eighteen, Katherine rebelliously chose to study Dutch.

Quickly enough, she ended up in the scene of squatters, where she started doing volunteer work that was part of the scene.

She had stopped her academic study and chose to follow a teacher training education in Dutch and Math, bringing both her personal preference and her skills together.

"Oh, shit, now I have to actually go and find a job."

After finishing her education, Katherine wondered what working life was going to be. Katherine enjoyed teaching for a few years. She enjoyed this new phase in her life, with a continued lack of stress and the relative increase of her income, without having too many responsibilities. Teaching as a job, though, did give her a lot of responsibilities. And she quickly felt like she wanted a kind of job for a while, that did not give her such elaborate responsibilities as teaching children and adolescents; something where she could simply close the close behind her and be done with it.

That decision led her to start working at an insurance company, where she initially worked in a back office job where she ended up in because of her math skills.

"You know how it goes, you start getting more and more responsibilities – and before you know it you are actually making a career for yourself."

Katherine realised that she was more commercially-minded than someone suited for the public sector, so enjoyed staying in the insurance business. She continued to fulfill different jobs within the insurance field.

"It had more spunk than the educational sector."

For a long time, she explicitly steered clear of any kind of leadership or management roles. She always 'just' wanted to do a job of some kind where she would be doing something she is good at.

"I am too direct and hard for any kind of diplomacy."

So Katherine assumed she could thereby never fulfil a leadership function. Then at one point, she did get a call and was asked to start managing a team. The fact that she got asked and everyone – who had been working with her extensively – seemed to think she would be the right person for the job, stimulated her.

"I always thought I would have to be able to balance a hidden agenda."

Katherine has been managing a team of product manager for four years now and loves doing it.

Before that, she had replaced one of the managers previously, where she had also done an extensive assessment of her suitability. Katherine herself had always remained doubtful about her 'coaching' skills, how she would work with the team as a leader.

"A point of worry, in that assessment, were my social skills. I do not really think that was very representative of my actual skills, but it was always a thing."

Katherine enjoys her current job very much, which also enables her to travel to work less and enjoy her free time.

“Now I am one of the people who determine the strategy, what we are going to do and why.”

Katherine enjoys determining the priorities, having control over high-level company decisions and actually taking on projects and themes that she believes in and wants to do with her team.

Katherine’s managers and direct leaders she had to report to, have always been women.

“I am someone who is very concretely output-driven. If someone focuses on output, we get along perfectly.”

Katherine finds results the most important target and meaningful means of measurement. Especially because it gives everyone involved the flexibility to accomplish their goals in their own way, stimulating creativity and one’s own responsibility.

“Women are scared when they are in high-ranking positions, afraid of failing. That is why they want to control most things.”

Within the insurance business, Katherine noticed specific jobs or departments are where women are. The predominantly female fields are mostly operational and support-focussed departments.

“Men are generally still there where most decisions are being made.”

Katherine however explicitly mentions that she has had never thought of or experienced female-specific interactions – within the general organisations or direct encounters.

“I do not think it is a question of being a man or a woman, but being the person that I am.”

What Katherine has done and accomplished is because I am this human being, and not someone else. It is about the individuals, not any gender or sex related issues.

“I do not know what would have happened if I was not Katherine.”

Katherine does the job she has because she needs to work, not because she is explicitly passionate about the job she does.

“Everything I have accomplished, just happened to me.”

Interview # 9

Carla – head of department

"I wanted to be a carpenter."

When Carla was a young girl, she wanted to be the boss of her father's car business - or a carpenter. The latter even led Sinterklaas to tell her off she could not be a carpenter ('je kan geen timmerman zijn, maar wel een timmervrouw'), after which he gifted her with a doll and her brother got an actual set of carpentry tools.

Carla enjoyed going to high school and wanted to be the best at everything. This pressure she had put on herself eventually led to a small stress break-down, after which she still accomplished good grades and finished high school beautifully.

Carla wanted to study something successful, but also something that suited her. Creative study topics were themes she enjoyed, but felt like where not the right directions for actually 'accomplishing' something.

Carla decided to go abroad for a year and went to Brighton and Nice, to improve her English and French. She was by then seventeen years old and after dealing with her homesick-ness and the inherent tension of being abroad on her own, she found some sense of peacefulness.

"That was some sort of a new beginning."

That was were Carla could start all over, reinvent herself and explore the deeper meaning of life.

"I was somehow searching for something, and found the confidence to trust (on) myself."

After her year abroad, Carla started studying business administration in Rotterdam.

"Rotterdam was big and exciting, and not something I had known. So I obviously had to study there."

Carla joined a student society in Rotterdam and quickly learned how to let go her previous result-oriented focus. She was involved in a lot of initiatives and quickly ended up various committees and being asked to join the board.

"There were a lot of strong women there, and I sometimes wondered 'look at me here between these people'?"

Being part of the student society taught Carla lots of different responsibilities, a small-scale variety of a business.

Carla did an internship at a consultancy firm, where she was confronted with her own inexperience. That was where she was triggered to connect her knowledge to actual, real-world organisational contexts.

She chose change management as her final major, a field that she was particularly interested in and Carla conducted her final research at a large corporate company.

"That was pretty awesome."

She could have stayed there after graduating, but consciously to leave the organisation.

"I found it too cold and hierarchical."

After and extensive job search process where she thought about what she wanted explicitly and had many different interviews, Carla ended up in in a big airline's management traineeship.

"I initially thought I wanted to go into consultancy, as I wanted to learn so much more and experience different organisations and subjects."

It was a partner at a top consultancy firm that stressed that her socials skills and analytical mind made her an interesting candidate for management traineeships.

"When I did the intake at that company, it just felt like everything made sense."

Carla got to work on many different projects within her traineeship and had one specific desire.

"I wanted to manage an operational team. Something my fellow trainees said was not a clever move, but I wanted to."

Carla went on to manage a cargo floor crew – big and strong men with big mouths – worked evening and night shifts and thought it was the coolest.

At that time Carla also had a coach, with whom she had formulated her personal goal to 'get what she wanted'.

"I literally went out and starting chatting with the right people and told them what I wanted."

That was how Carla acquired a long and impressive line of jobs that she fulfilled.

"It is important that you choose yourself, especially in such big organisations. Nobody is going to give you anything."

"Then I got pregnant and I started worrying: oh, my, my career?"

Turned out that she had assumed her husband would cut down on work, whereas he assumed it would be her.

"I got a lot of tips from other working women."

After some serious chats and his realisation that even men work part-time these days, they both cut down on work hours and balanced our their mother and father leave after the baby's arrival.

"Men are a bit more relaxed, where women are very goal-oriented and want to be the best."

During her entire career, Carla has had a lot of experiences with female leadership.

"One of my mentors always said: stop complaining and make a change. Just do it."

From that adagio she and some friend-colleagues started a female network at which was initially low-key and a via-via kind of club, has now slowly grown into a semi-professional club.

Carla has currently found a new challenge in the transformational team that is going to think, implement and support the new organisation.

"I always need triggers and have luckily generally gotten what I wanted."

Interview # 10

Mette – head of departments

When Mette was a young girl, she wanted to become an architect. Her father was a electro technical advisor who worked closely with architects, and she became intrigued with designing houses and buildings.

She kept that goal for a long time and went on to go to a high school for engineering, whilst she also attended a special night school with an engineering academy. After a while, Mette realised that the complete creation of buildings was not her thing, whereas she loved restructuring existing structures or buildings. The technique behind it fascinated her, but the design not so much.

So, she started studying management of engineering and real estate management, which turned out to be a perfect match.

"I have never had to apply for a job in my life."

One of her professors during her graduation project was part of a

"He basically created a job for me."

"I am very clear and open about my desires when I want to start making a career step."

"I particularly love new, to-be-created jobs and projects that I can make my own."

Mette enjoys shaping new teams or projects, something where she can concretely provide an answer or a solution to a significant problem. Seeing and creating bigger structures, improving existing structures; that is what gets her going.

"I am used to a masculine contexts. I started out on actual building sites where the men thought I was the coffee lady."

Most of all of Mette's colleagues were men, except for the personal assistants or coffee ladies.

"I have also found that I almost fall into the same trap, assuming that the only woman present must be the personal assistant."

Simultaneously, due to these experiences Mette finds she has become extra sensitive to these kinds of gender-sensitive contexts.

"The more important you get, the more flexibility you can allow yourself."

Mette admits she always wears a suit, never a skirt or a dress. But as of late, she had permitted herself to wear her hair not tied together in a business-like knot.

"I once witnessed a few men commenting on a woman's legs while she was wearing a skirt and I swore to myself that would never happen to me. I do not want to be judged on anything like that."

So Mette has always emphasised the masculine and business-like in her attire.

"I am very critical on women who stop working, or work significantly less than their spouses, even when they are both working on the same level."

Mette dislikes this assumption that a lot of women in her experience still perpetuate; that they will work less after having children. She finds a lot of women – consciously and subconsciously – calculate this in in their career, which then negatively effects their ambitions.

“Women who came up to me and literally told me they did not want to become a manager or director, because by then they would probably be in their thirties and thinking of having children.”

Mette interacts differently with women and acknowledges women generally tend to be more open about their weaknesses or insecurities than men.

“I like to see women accomplishing more and more in the banking and real estate business.”

Mette believes in the power of the old boy’s network and the importance of somehow breaking through this dynamic. Diversity us what makes the best boards and leads to the best performance.

“I do hope I will never suffer from a quota, with the chance of people thinking that I am just where I am because of a quota.”

Interview # 11

Maria – general manager

As a child, Maria knew she wanted to be a general manager of a hotel.

"I was probably three years old when I knew what I wanted to be."

Maria's grandparents worked in the gastronomy business, she was raised within the hospitality environment. To Maria, hotels were mightily interesting.

Her education was subsequently very straightforward and focussed on her ambition of becoming a general manager.

"I always said I wanted to have my first general manager job by 35. I made that."

Maria went to the hotel school and subsequently moved to the United States for a first internship and stayed for ten years. She worked in many different big cities and managed to get ahead in her career with every step she took.

"I was the right person, in the right place and at the right moment."

Maria wanted to go to Asia, which is a continent with a lot of opportunities for the hotel business. She worked in Singapore as the second-in-command at that hotel. In Tokyo she then became a general manager for the first time.

Tokyo was not easy, especially considering the specific cultural differences and the inherent masculinity of the hotel business in some areas – and specifically when you work on a certain level and in the luxury segment.

"I profile myself differently, I manage differently."

Maria stresses that being a woman can also work in one's advantage. People look at her differently, find her interesting and she is sometimes even treated as a local celebrity.

"People approach me differently, they find me something exotic."

Maria had never really experienced explicit instances of walking into glass doors or ceilings due to her gender, except for one very specific story.

"It was in Bangkok and after the mandatory wining and dining for a brainstorm event, the men started to whisper. Well, in Bangkok you know what that means. Me and two other women were literally told off to 'go back to the hotel'. I was so frustrated that I called them out on it. One of the men literally said I was not going to get ahead anyway, and the men were."

The next day Maria made an issue out of it and for the first time really felt like she would be blocked merely by the fact that she was a woman.

Thankfully, she moved away from that location not too long afterwards.

"I am firmly against a quota. I would never want anyone to even be led to assume I would have accomplished something based on something as ridiculous as that. It is and should be about your capabilities. Nothing else."

Maria experienced some environmental misunderstanding and jealousy from women and friends who did not understand her career-focus. Women she is not connected to anymore.

“I guess that was some sort of jealousy because of my success.”

That was a thing in her thirties.

These days, Maria is one of the most senior women within the organisation where she works – even though she is in her early forties – and likes to take up the role of mentoring and stimulating other women within the organisation.

“It is odd that I should be the most senior woman, when I am relatively young. But I would like to see that changed.”

Maria is still driven by challenging tasks and has ambitions, also after reaching her childhood dream goal. She wants to keep growing and getting ahead.

“To be, work is about business. If you cannot live with that, that is not my problem.”

Jobs and gender are no issues to Maria. She stresses it is not about being in a kindergarten playground, but it is serious business with serious goals and targets. She does and chooses those things and people that she thinks are the best for business.

“And I do think that most people of our generation have realised and internalised that diversity is a good thing. Maybe that is naïve, but I believe so.”

And to Maria it would be offensive to all those powerful women who have gotten to where they are today, if there would be ever something institutionalised as a strict quota.

“They got there without those kinds of positive discrimination, why not others?”

Maria finds it essential how you manifest as a woman within a context with many men. She has many years old experience and finds you do not have to be less of a woman.

“I am one of the guys, but I still paint my nails and do not allow anyone to treat me any differently.”

Being a woman can also be a tool. A tool Maria enjoys using.

“Forget that you are a woman.”

Is her essential advice: just be the person that you are and do what you want to be doing. Without reflecting (too much) on your gender. That is part of who you are.

Interview # 12

Faye – owner/ independent

When Faye was a young girl, she remembers wanting to be a paediatrician.

"But I was no beta and I could not stand the sight of blood."

She actually never had a very clear idea of what she wanted to be, or what direction her life was going to take. What was important to her, was being and having her independence and making money.

"I was a clever girl."

When she was eighteen, her parents got divorced, which cost Faye a lot of energy.

After high school she went to university. Faye regrets not thinking in-depth about the choice of her education. She messed about a bit, yet did want to be the best at what she was doing.

"I just started with law, just because."

She decided to quit law and actually find something that was the right choice for her. She chose an education in human resources.

"That was it. There was the fire and the power to want to be the best at all of it."

Faye worked next to studies and engaged in some interesting internships. One of the jobs she had was outbound sales, where she discovered how easily sales came to her and how much she enjoyed it.

"I was so much better at it than any of my other – well-educated – colleagues."

So Faye chose a commercial traineeship at a bank after graduating.

"I joined during the lavish good times, I experienced a lot of luxury."

She enjoyed the good times and the possibilities and engaged in a variety of different jobs at the bank. Both commercially, as well as human resource-focussed.

"I am not that political. I want to be too sharp, want to make my own point."

Faye worked at the corporate head quarters, managed teams and learned a lot from the different departments at the bank.

"There were a lot of job opportunities, but it was also a golden cage."

Working at a bank, and being 'career raised' in such a context could lead to limiting perspectives. Although Faye enjoyed her work, there was something gnawing at the back of her mind.

"I always had this feeling that I had to do something for me. For myself. Maybe I am a late bloomer."

When Faye has her second child, her husband got a job offer to work in Denmark.

"That was an amazing opportunity, a challenging adventure. For me as well: the chance to escape the bank."

Faye quit her job and felt liberated. Her second pregnancy had been very stressful and medically challenging, so she was glad for the chance to go abroad.

“I started telling people ‘hey, I am here in Denmark, let me know if I can help you’.”

That was when Faye came to realise and experience that her success was not inherently linked to the bank where she had been working. It was herself that caused the success.

“Fixing and connecting people made it click for me: recruitment.”

Faye’s impressive and valuable network contributed to this, which Faye was one of the few in those days to link to the new online possibilities.

“Recruitment via Twitter, I was one of the first.”

Faye managed hereby to create her own thing and something to use her creativity for.

After a few years, she was asked to work in-house for a variety of big corporate companies.

“I loved doing my own thing, but it was basically me sitting in the attic in my fleece trousers.”

In those years Faye explored and improved any human resource related projects, which challenged her.

When her husband got another offer to work abroad in China, that offer was such opportunity that the family decided to move. Faye is currently in China.

“And also here, I am doing the same: start building that network again.”

It is both a trigger and a block for her: to start all over again in a different country and a different culture.

“If I decide I want to do something, I know I am going to make it happen.”

“I am more aware of the factor of time. Building something always takes time. And I am more conscious of how a choice like that impacts the time you have and how you want to spend it.”

“I absolutely do not want to be a supportive, submissive wife. I am here to also earn my own keep and do my own thing.”

“If you do not ask for it, you will not get it.”

Faye says she wishes someone had told her that earlier on her life, even though she considers herself an assertive enough woman.

Faye is very clear and not shy about her own skills and USP; she can claim which has helped her a lot in her career.

“It is important to have a good manager or coach. Someone who backs you up through it all.”

“Focus on improving the things you are good at, so that you can be amazing at that. Don’t focus on the stuff you are not good at anyway.”

Working hard and doing good things, those are the goals in Faye’s career.

“I enjoy working with men more. No bullshit, it is easier.”

“A lot of women remain hung up on their man or children. Such a shame.”

Faye has always worked fulltime. And felt no guilt, which she learned in Denmark where almost everyone works fulltime after having kids.

“My freedom was important for me.”

In the Netherlands circumstances are a bit different.

“There are those frustrating small requests that imply you should be at home with your kids; like cleaning at school on a Tuesday at eleven. I mean: who the hell is not at work by then? They would never ask a man to come and do that.”

Faye has old girlfriends whom she is not in touch with anymore, as they have chosen different lifestyles that make their lives separated from each other.

“Such a shame. Their lives completely revolve around their kids. I don’t have that much with them anymore.”

Interview # 13

Karen – international VP

When Karen was young, she had no idea what she wanted to be. For her, it was a process of elimination. She liked travel and international stuff, so she chose business studies and marketing.

"I did like it."

Karen grew up in an environment with older brothers and sisters and because of that she was used to in-depth discussions on her career. Her family was education-oriented with a mother who was the head of a school.

"They sent me on international exchanges, which was great and useful exposure to languages and cultures."

Karen had strong women with clear goals and visions in her family.

She was also always practically oriented, financing her studies and trips by working in local and international organisations.

She started out with a German-based telecom company, where she quickly took on management and leadership roles.

"I was good at networking. That worked."

Karen had a clear drive with only one direction to go: forward.

"It is important we use our own qualities and talents."

The main drive behind Karen's career is her concrete and performance-driven focus.

"You need to be a bit cheeky, try your luck. Do not take no for an answer."

VP/ mentor, that was where Karen's career really started taking off.

"Having someone like that is hugely important, for advice, to help with your network."

'Making it happen through the network, that is what has always worked for me."

"I come from a culture where it is not about if you go back to work, but when."

Karen has seen the force of societal pressures at work that push women out of work, especially related to motherhood.

She was confident enough about jumping into an abyss, leaving the company where Karen was working at. She is set on making the best out of every situation, which she finds very important.

Thinking about what you want out of your life and deciding what is important to you.

Karen has absolutely no problem with working with men. Functioning as a female boss can be problematic, depends on the country one is in. Karen experienced it to be more difficult in Germany and Russia.

"I never found I was disadvantaged."

“They do say things like ‘she is pushy’, which they would never say about a man. But that makes me wonder more about how the personal relationships that these men have with women are like.”

Female leadership is also largely a cultural thing, which differs a lot from country and cultural background.

Women, if they do not ask, they do not get it. They should not blame circumstances or other external forces, but go and fix it.

Literally: young women not taking their physical place at the table, but are hiding themselves in the back.

Karen has also experienced situations that made her uneasy, in which her own accomplishments and position triggered something with other women.

“They are not happy with their choices and my life somehow confronts them with that. They will say ‘you are lucky to be working’ – and I think: you can do that too.”

“Women saying things like ‘you cannot have it all’ thereby set limiting parameters for themselves and impose them on others. You make your own limits and opportunities.”

Karen recalls one specific remark when she moved into her current neighbourhood, when their female neighbour told her ‘all the moms work part-time here’.

In that respect, her mother was a very clear role model to her, who was a boss to a lot of men back in the times when it was even less common than these days. Her wisdom and experience helped Karen a lot.

“Men someone seem to feel threatened by women.”

That manifests in many different ways, anything from political schemes, disrespecting to outright aggression. To Karen – who also has a degree in psychology – this dynamic is also a source of learning and a challenge.

Karen is avidly against positive discrimination of a quota of any kind.

“It should be about one’s skills and capabilities. Otherwise you would be diluting the quality of your people.”

The right candidate for the job should be the only and essential requirement, even though Karen values diversity in teams.

“You get as far as you push as a woman.”

Women should also help each other more, facilitate more of the networking.

In the end your life is all about your own choices and how you seize opportunities.

“Never take no for an answer.”

Interview # 14

Laura – high-level MT

When Laura was a young girl, she wanted to be a photographer. She actually went on to pursue this career goal, during high school and tried to go to the academy for photography after that. She was not accepted.

"I actually was not that good at it."

She did stay focussed on the photography business by working at a local photography store. At a certain point she realised however that she did not want to be doing something she would never be really, really good at.

"It was either keep doing this thing in the margins, or go and find an actual serious job and career."

She had focussed on the creative side until that point, but wanted to show more of herself and prove herself.

"It was purely by accident that I ended up at the bank."

Laura started out at a local office and worked the desk – and still works for the same bank until this day. She got a lot of opportunities and chances at the bank. Her first job there was listed in the newspaper and she simply responded and applied, as it sounded like a nice job.

"I was not as ambitious then as I am now."

After working as a customer advisor for five years, she was done with that job. She went into a different direction and became a team leader for business teams. That was Laura's first role where she managed other people.

"I remember saying to my old boss, if you ever leave, don't worry, I'll take over from you. And that was basically how that happened."

After that, Laura got asked for a proper management role, where she was tasked with disbanding an administrative department.

"It is wonderful when other people see things in you that you yourself would never have seen."

"It was not easy managing a team I had previously been part of myself."

"It is all about the results, the concrete targets and the output."

Within the bank, there have been some initiatives into diversity.

"I do not really believe in those women-only complain groups. Stop complaining and make something out of it yourself."

Men are better at bluffing, they approach job openings from a more positive angle, where women are more doubtful of 'whether they can actually do it', or 'have the right experience'.

"Cleaning the house with a PhD, if that is what makes you happy: great. (Maybe they cannot handle the working life.)"

Everyone should make their own choices, if you want to have kids and not work anymore that is up to you. But these days men are just as capable of taking care of the kids and it is a shame if so many high-

educated women end up staying at home because they think they have to. If they want to, then that is completely up to them. But there are enough options to create a proper balance between work and kids.

"All these female ailments; I have also had them, and had to deal with them."

Laura learned how to deal with them, how to let her own doubts and insecurities not backfire. When she managed a team, one of the guys in that team had a problem with having her – a woman – as a manager. He left.

You have to help each other as women. Especially as women are not as inclined to do that as much as men do. You do need each other.

"There are a lot of women at the bank, but it is remarkable to see they are mostly working in the lower levels of the organisation."

Someone needs to give you a shot, a chance, at some point to start doing something else for the first time. Laura finds challenges and motivators in changing environments and doing something she is good at.

"To me, it is about being clear and direct. I differentiate not – nor see differences – between men or women, but between people and situations."

Laura is firmly against a quota for women, but is happy with the attention female leadership as a topic is getting. Talent development from a female perspective should get more focus within companies, and to work on it from a positive angle.

"It should be about the best person for the job, nothing else. It would embarrassing to be somewhere purely due to the fact that you are a women."

Women should stand up and speak up for themselves.

Interview # 15

Anne – Chief of department

When Anne was a young girl, she knew exactly what she wanted to be: a gas pump attendant. Her father worked with cars and she was often found in the car factory. Anne loved playing around with the cars and her biggest dream would be to work with them all day, at a gas station.

"I was always part of the group, but never really in it."

When Anne went to school, she quickly realised that she wanted to reach higher than working at a gas station.

"I was an observer. I came home as a little girl with remarks like 'I do not think that boy is very happy'."

She had to work hard in school, as she was not very good at math and economics. Anne failed her final exams three times and finally went to a special executive-style school where she did pass her exams.

"I was focussed on the things that I was not good at. So I decided to study economics."

Which turned out to be a good choice: at university Anne turned out to be very good at economics. She started creating and fulfilling her own plan. She started working at a FMCG company and got her first full-time job in consultancy. Since Anne was good as observing and thereby structuring, this was a good match. Anne was able to grow up through the ranks.

"My skills of observation worked, I realised there. My self confidence grew."

"I like being good at something and subsequently helping others with that."

Anne got an offer to work for a financial organisation, which was a challenge as she was not that much of a number-person. Yet she had a great click with the company's CFO and the job offer was a leadership role that sounded very interesting.

"I chose to remain the person that I was and to benefit from my own complementary role. I was different, but that can also be a very valuable and good thing."

Anne came in to work with a team that she needed to restructure. In that team she had a couple of fifty-year-old men and made a project out of them. Two years it took her, through working together with them and creating a proper bond.

"In the end it all comes down to a culture change, observing well and building a real relationship."

Then, Anne got another offer to become the chief of a operative it-department.

"I remember thinking: why ask me for that? I cannot even turn my computer on and off without any help."

It was a difficult project and a great challenge, a lot of anger and frustration but Anne got carte blanche to restructure the entire departments. She shuffled the entire department and managed to go from a 5 to 7.5 in employment satisfaction a few years after the change.

"I know and dare to say that I can do it."

“Not immediately trusting in yourself and doubting your own abilities; that is also one of those women things.”

Anne is currently on the management board, together with two other women. She was

“Being a woman can also be an advantage. I use it to place myself outside of the predominant context.”

You do have to fight and work harder. Especially for people in lower positions, they find it difficult when there is a female leader. Surprising people positively works in that context.

“It would be a nightmare to work only with women.”

Women are inclined to think a lot about things that are not being said, which costs a lot of time and energy.

Anne experienced one very clear example of female friction, with her previous manager and inspirator. A professor who taught her a great deal.

“In the final year, that was when it went wrong.”

Anne started getting asked for projects in stead of the professor. And then when Anne was asked for the chief it role, her previous inspirational mentor advised against her – and she found out through other means. She was shocked and saddened by the realisation that there was some sort of competitive thing going on, even though she had had such a good and meaningful relationship with her.

“Women awarding and not begrudging other women things – that is a major thing.”

“And I am sure, it would not have been an issue, had I been a man.”

Anne tried to talk to her old mentor about it, but has learned to let it go.

“I want to resolve everything, but I have learned that you cannot always do that. And there are a lot of things that you cannot control.”

Anne lives in a small village where all mothers stay at home and where she is the only exception. The choice she made to both have children as well as a high-level job is one that a lot of people find difficult to accept.

“My mother even says you do not have kids to dump them with other people.”

Anne is a fan of choosing the best person for the job; as a woman you do not always have to choose another woman. And she finds there are actually not that many women who really do it, can do it and want to do it. A top position is also a lot of hard work.

Women’s initiatives focussed on women-only and the so-called soft-side of female leadership are ideas that Anne detests.

“It should not be about all of those female characteristics, but a diversity of people and possibilities.”

Interview # 16

Claire – Director

When Claire was a young girl, she wanted to be all sorts of things. She had no clear vision of what she wanted to do. Due to living in England, she was relatively young when she entered high school. It was then when she discovered her passion for arts and crafts and decided she wanted to be an arts teacher. Claire applied for the Rietveld academy.

"It was super scary, with all those punkers. That was nothing for me as a young girl."

Claire got accepted, but decided not to go. She then hastily applied to the hotel school, which she thought of as "pretty nice, too". She enjoyed studying there for two years, with a lot of party-oriented activities.

"That was where I got to know economics and marketing for the first time. That triggered me into going back to school and getting my vwo diploma so that I could enter university."

Claire had decided she wanted to go into communication research, a field that was not very well-known and established by then in an academic context. She studied qualitative and quantitative research and went on to work as a researcher for different companies.

"I loved my field, that was my main motivator."

After a few years, she became a team manager within a banking organisation and was recruited into a talent programme.

"Being different, being a minority, does not have to be a negative thing."

She was at the core of huge transitions, where research data became more and more essential.

Claire has two children.

"Me and my husband, we are very balanced. Every so many years or so, we give each other the chance to focus more on our respective careers."

"I like the challenge of being one of the few women. But it needs to change and it should be more balanced."

"Women focus more on building real relationships."

"I can be a pusher. I do not have to act like a stereotype of femininity. But you do need to remain yourself."

"It is ridiculous how negative people are about women working properly. Mothers at the school where my kids are at literally say 'you can tell whose kids have mothers who are at home.'"

Some of Claire's friends' husbands or boyfriends have a problem with Claire's career dominance at times, they think she is too masculine-powerful compared to the women they are used to.

"That is quite awkward."

Claire had emancipated and strong women in her family, with a grandmother who was thoroughly modern and who had her own store and worked her entire life. Claire's mothers made a different

choice. But she feels that the importance of choosing yourself and making your own choices is essential.

“Being involved and motivated is key.”

Claire finds it is a lot about making conscious choices. Highly educated women find that difficult: not being able to do everything.

“When I just started at the current company, one of my fellow directors thought I was just an assistant. That strange assumption that the woman in the room is something less than the men, that is very telling.”

Claire finds that being ambitious and having a passion for your field – and a lot of hard work – is what gets you there.

“I do not like when diversity projects create more polarisation than actual collaborative diversity.”

The choices and development of women themselves should be leading, not a formalised system that denotes what diversity or female leadership should be like.

“As a woman, you can use that to your advantage, use charm and vulnerability to enable things that would normally have been more difficult.”

Claire is not sure about a quota.

“One the one hand it is great for challenging the male dominated structures, but on the other hand I am a firm believer in getting there, if you are good and driven enough.”

Interview # 17

Nine – Director

As a young girl, Nine enjoyed horseback riding and she was involved in riding championships.

"I wanted to be the next Ankie van Grunsven."

Nine was still young when she started thinking about a career, whilst being in high school. Her choice of study after high school was a clear-cut decision: corporate communication at the university. Studying something with both pragmatic as well as academic benefits was important to her.

"I am a planner."

Fun and enjoyment was also important to Nine. She studied in Barcelona and also learned the Spanish language. The balance between work and a enjoyable life has always been a red thread in Nine's life.

"I am good at doing a lot of things simultaneously, and especially in that context it is of extra importance to keep an eye on that balance."

Nine had an Italian boyfriend by then who lived in Rome. She got an interesting job offer in the Netherlands and chose to go back. It was a telecom-oriented start-up where she learned a lot and do a lot of different projects.

"It gave me a lot of chances, everything was possible."

From that situation, she got acquainted with a lot of interesting people in many different organisations. One of them asked her to join his company, an large organisation in energy.

"I like building things."

Nine stayed with that company for a long time and worked in many different roles. Her new roles came up, along the way.

"I climbed up throughout the organisation. Which can be difficult, because that also means you were someone's colleague and suddenly you are their boss."

Nine tells that men are the first to accept such a situation, with junior women also being fine with it (they can see it as an inspiration), but the women who are more similar to you get very jealous.

"Women basically do not grant each other anything."

"Men are more opportunistic. They bluff and progress through a company more quickly; women – like me – tend to grow up through the ranks."

Nine has a husband and two children.

"When I got asked to become a commercial director, I doubted. Can I do this? Do I want to do this?"

Nine tells she – and she finds many women with her – is a perfectionist and she wants to do everything perfectly. She did take the job and enjoyed its challenges for almost a year. It was taking its toll on her work-life balance when she got asked to work for a different company, in a different role. It was a bit of a step back, but a conscious choice she made.

"That role had more of a focus on the field itself, more of a content-wise challenge that I had missed as a commercial director."

"You can do it with less and still be very good."

According to Nine, women feel the need to be everywhere, do everything well and be a part of everything. You can still be very good at your job and work the 100% instead of the 140%.

“Networking and putting myself on the map externally, that is still not my thing.”

Men are naturally so much better at that. It comes to them, intrinsically, whereas I have to put a lot of effort into it. Knowing that doing so is good for me. Nine is also part of the diversity project team for the corporate organisation of which her current company is a part of.

“Diversity projects should focus on integrated and pragmatic solutions. Not high-level initiatives that just make it more of a laughing stock internally.”