Interpreting gender equality initiatives: a discourse analytic study in higher education institutions

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines women's continued underrepresentation in leadership roles in higher education institutions by exploring leaders' constructions of gender equality initiatives. The thesis highlights how leaders contribute to the creation and maintenance of existing organizational culture. The study specifically combines critically-oriented approaches to discourse analysis with the identification of dominant interpretative repertoires to theorize the relationship between leaders' text and talk and women's underrepresentation. Through 40 in-depth qualitative interviews with leaders and stakeholders, it contributes to existing literature by identifying conflicting accounts of the values that underpin equality initiatives and by identifying how leaders use pre-existing discourses to legitimize unmeritocratic practices. This demonstrates complex connections embedded within gender (in)equality, discourse, and institutional leadership. When taken together, the findings illustrate that participants construct the need for transformative cultural change while resisting initiatives that lead to this change. This is referred to as the intervention paradox. Thus, although a vocal commitment to gender equality is identified, the paradox that underpins this commitment has ideological consequences for how initiatives are presented by leaders and decision makers. The thesis suggests that this paradox contributes to, and is constitutive of, a process of means-ends decoupling, where the means (initiatives) participants promote are disconnected from the ends (goals). This contributes to existing research by demonstrating that leaders and stakeholders mobilize their discourse to construct gender equality initiatives in a way that promotes and legitimizes their effective commitment to change, and adheres to the overall goals of 'gender equality' in institutions, while simultaneously employing discursive strategies that work to maintain and (re)produce the existing status quo.

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HEI(s)	Higher education institution(s)
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
EDI	Equality, diversity, and inclusion
VC	Vice chancellor
DVC	Deputy vice chancellor
PVC	Pro-vice chancellor
EO	Equal Opportunity
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
STEMM	Science, technology, engineering, medicine, mathematics
FTSE	Financial Times Stock Exchange
SWAN	Scientific Women's Academic Network
SAT(s)	Self-assessment team(s)
NIHR	National Institute for Health Research

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis presents a discourse-analytic examination of gender equality initiatives in higher education institutions (HEIs), exploring how initiatives are interpreted by institutional leaders and how these interpretations might influence equality-related workplace practices.

The motivation for the thesis therefore lies in women's persistent underrepresentation in senior and management roles in HEIs in the United Kingdom (henceforth UK; Jarboe, 2018). Despite accounting for more than half of all undergraduate students (57%) and postgraduate students (58%) and nearly half of all academic staff (46%), women hold only 24% of professorships in HEIs across the UK (HESA, 2018). Professorships are nearly always a pre-requisite for more senior roles, and thus the proportion of women continues to decrease as the rank increases (Bagilhole & White, 2011; HESA, 2018). This underrepresentation of women in senior academic positions also corresponds with lower numbers of women in decision-making roles and governing bodies, including academic boards and senior administrative positions (HESA, 2018; Jarboe, 2018). The high number of women graduates and low number of women seen in leadership positions is considered to be symptomatic of failures in the attainment, recruitment, and selection processes of HEIs and symbolic of continuing gendered inequalities (Shepherd, 2017; van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a).

Gender inequality in academic institutions has been extensively documented, with individual, cultural, and structural perspectives being used to theoretically explain and account for the lack of gender parity in leadership roles despite the number of qualified women available (Acker et al., 2010; Seierstad & Healy, 2012; Timmers et al., 2010). These perspectives have identified several barriers facing women when looking to advance to the upper echelons of the institutional hierarchy (Bird, 2011; Winslow & Davies, 2016).

With the intention of alleviating or removing some of these barriers and improving women's progression, gender equality policies and initiatives have been developed and implemented (Bendl & Schmidt, 2012; Huse, 2008; Terjesen & Singh,

2008). While the need to dismantle widespread cultural barriers has been shown, these initiatives most often take an individual-level perspective to understanding disparities in gender representation (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). This means that they focus on equipping women with the skills, competencies, and resources deemed necessary to achieve leadership positions (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Burkinshaw, 2015).

There is limited research on the varied and perceived efficacy of these and other policies and initiatives in achieving gender equality related goals (Timmers et al., 2010; Voorspoels, 2018). The majority of studies that examine the effectiveness of these and other equality initiatives tend to take a quantitative 'head counting' approach (Löther, 2019), where success is measured by increases in the number of women in senior roles. However, researchers have also questioned whether existing and dominant policies are likely to lead to necessary cultural changes (Winchester & Browning, 2015; Wroblewski et al., 2014).

O'Connor (2017) as well as White and Burkinshaw (2019) have argued that increasing the number of women in professor and senior roles, although 'symbolically important,' is not sufficient enough to change workplace culture. Thus, researchers have begun to unpack and review the initiatives and strategies that are most likely to challenge existing male-dominated social and organizational structures (O'Connor, 2017). A common thread throughout these studies is the need for active commitment from leaders and decision makers, recognizing the importance of leadership in driving cultural change and breaking-down dominant paradigms that favour men and disadvantage women (Burkinshaw, 2015; O'Connor, 2017).

Research on organizational change supports this view, demonstrating that programs are likely to be most effective when they are actively supported by those in senior roles and when they are embedded within organizational practices (Bird, 2011; Dobbin & Kalev, 2007). This highlights an important theme in equality research; leaders must be committed to change and to equality more specifically for initiatives to be effective (Timmers et al., 2010). However, there remains limited exploration of the specific role of institutional leaders, as well as to how this need for 'commitment' is interpreted and expressed by leaders and decision makers. This thesis therefore aims to

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contribute to this literature, exploring how leaders interpret gender equality initiatives, how they construct discourses to represent these interpretations, and how these discourses promote or undermine the success of gender equality measures in HEIs.

The key argument advanced in this thesis is that that leaders in HEIs are influential in shaping the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives in individual institutions through their discursive and social practice (Bagilhole, 2002; Bird, 2011). This view assumes that leaders and stakeholders hold much of the power in determining how gender equality initiatives are perceived and evaluated, and as decision-makers play a vital role in the dissemination of knowledge and information regarding not only gender equality initiatives but also for what is considered legitimate and appropriate within institutions (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004).

While each institution varies in their specific goals and approach to gender equality, it is argued that more consistent initiative success is likely to contribute to a more reliable understanding of what is, or is not, working in terms of achieving gender parity in leadership and senior roles (Burkinshaw, 2015). Using critically-oriented discourse analysis as a theoretical background, this thesis therefore explores the relations between discourses of gender equality and the social and cultural developments of gender equality initiatives, viewing women's continued underrepresentation to be embedded within and embodied by these discourses (Fairclough, 1992).

The remainder of this chapter will thus proceed as follows. First, the research questions and objectives that guide this thesis are outlined. The key findings of the project are then introduced, demonstrating how investigation of the research questions contributes to existing literature. Finally, the structure of this thesis is explained.

1.1 Research questions and objective

Informed by the theoretical and methodological approach to be further discussed, the research questions guiding this thesis are as follows:

How are the interpretations of gender equality initiatives constituted through discourse by leaders and stakeholders in higher education institutions, and how might these accounts be mobilized to shape workplace reality?

The objective of this thesis is to examine the discursive constructions of leaders and stakeholders in order to gain insight into potential variations in the adoption, support, and success of gender equality initiatives when there is widespread rhetoric that improving women's representation is an institutional priority (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007, 2015).

In order to respond to the above research questions and achieve the objective, the existing discourses that participants draw on to make sense of gender and (in)equality are examined. Classifying 'existing discourses' involves an identification of existing patterns and features of language that are embedded within leaders' own discourses and explanations of events, thus indicating how actors use language to make sense of what is happening around them (Zanoni et al., 2010). How leaders construct women's (under)representation as well as specific gender equality initiatives will therefore be examined, providing insight into how leaders discursively come to understand and perceive challenges related to women's underrepresentation.

The analytical procedure applied includes principles of Wetherell and Potter's (1988) interpretative repertoires and Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA; further discussed in Chapter 4). The analytical technique allows for the identification of dominant discourses and for analysis of these discourses to determine how they are used by participants and why they are dominant (Dick & Cassell, 2002). These discourses are examined along three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. Through the text dimension, interpretative repertoires are identified and subsequently examined for how they are produced (discursive practice) and for how they ideologically function (social practice).

This thesis therefore examines discursive choices as having ideological consequences and critically investigates how the constructions of institutional actors inform institutional processes (Hook, 2001). Discursive practices are thus recognized for their ability to continuously constitute, disrupt, shape, modify, and maintain gendered

selves and organizational forms (Grant, et al., 2004). With this in mind, this thesis adopts the theoretical perspective of the gendered institution to understand inequality in academia. This perspective is informed by Acker (1990), viewing gender as being "present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life" (Acker, 1992, p.567). Academic decision-making is therefore considered to be embedded within and embodied by gendered practices (Acker, 1990; Hearn & Husu, 2011). When examining gender equality-based initiatives, it is therefore necessary to question who is making decisions and how these decisions shape workplace reality.

Importantly, while gender inequality and specific initiatives are defined in the thesis, there are two key notes to be made. First, conceptually, 'gender equality initiatives' is used throughout the thesis to refer to informal and formal plans of action adopted by institutional actors and/or policy makers with the intention of addressing gender inequality. The term 'initiatives' is thus used to refer to all equality measures, and when necessary distinction is made between different forms or specific practices, such as government laws or regulated policies. Additionally, as has already been seen, women's underrepresentation and inequality are sometimes referred to as (under)representation and (in)equality. This is to demonstrate that in some instances, a situation can refer to both under and representation, and inequality and equality. More critically, it is also used to show that there are debates about whether it is truly an *under*representation or simply a representation, and whether it is an instance of *in*equality or of equality. These debates are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.2 Summary of key findings

Considering the above research questions and objectives, this thesis advances theoretical discussion by critically examining gender equality initiatives as discursive constructions. This research project and related findings are based upon 40 qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals in senior roles in higher education institutions across the UK. On this basis, this study offers the following significant contributions.

First, while merit is often a guiding value in decision making for recruitment and promotion, there is little insight into how leaders come to evaluate and conceptualise merit as a value that underpins equality practices (Castilla & Ranganathan, 2018). This thesis therefore contributes to this literature by identifying leaders' contradictory and conflicting accounts of meritocracy, demonstrating how leaders use pre-existing discourses to maintain the legitimacy of these and other accounts. Leaders are also found to evaluate and define merit differently depending on their discursive and social context. Furthermore, leaders adhere to these evaluations when confronting and or (re)producing unmeritocratic practices, obscuring the existence of unfair practices by drawing on existing dominant discourses of meritocracy and gender equality.

This thesis also identifies paradoxical positions between the change that is constructed as necessary by leaders (cultural) and the equality practices they promote (those that target women). I term this the 'intervention paradox,' and in adherence with existing studies (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014) argue it is a fruitful way of examining challenges to achieving gender equality goals. By identifying this as a paradox, it allows for an awareness of competing tensions between leaders' want to appear committed to gender equality while also recognizing that (1) there exists dominant unpopular opinions regarding certain types of initiatives, and (2) institutional leaders face substantial pressures related to other institutional goals, regardless of their commitment to equality.

Thus, the intervention paradox is paired with discourses of resistance and support to highlight where ambiguities and contradictions lie in efforts to achieve gender parity. Identifying this paradox and the discursive and social practices of which it is constructed contributes to answering the question of how the ambition to increase women in leadership has translated into initiatives that 'fix women.' It also provides insight into how discourses that lack strong empirical evidence remain part of everyday practices, demonstrating that 'gender equality' is a subjective goal that leaves gender equality initiatives themselves open to interpretation.

Using evidence from the empirical chapters, this thesis also offers a theoretical contribution by aligning the findings with the existence of means-ends decoupling (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Drawing on the work of Bromley and Powell (2012), I argue

that the intervention paradox leads to a "goal drift or goal displacement," where leaders promote initiatives unlikely to result in desired changes because the subjective and ambiguous 'ends' (goals/outcomes) are disconnected from the 'means' (equality initiatives; Grodal & O'Mahony, 2015, p.10). Due to this decoupling, gender equality initiatives are fully adopted and implemented but they are not achieving what they intend to achieve (Wijen, 2014). This offers insight into why resources, including time and finances, are directed towards initiatives that are not empirically connected to the goals set out by policy makers and scholars. This therefore contributes a new perspective to examining the shortfalls and successes of gender equality practices, providing insight into the conditions that enable leaders to discursively align practices with outcomes (Dick, 2015).

The findings suggest that the meanings of initiatives and their goals do not move through space and time undisturbed, but rather are altered and changed through leaders' discursive practice to suit an organizational culture, leaving the established culture and status quo largely intact and unchallenged (Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Zilber, 2002). The thesis provides a new vantage point for examining equality initiatives, suggesting a re-theorizing of equality efforts is needed in order to develop explicit goals and outcomes. This as well as additional implications of the findings and contributions are further discussed in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The remainder of this thesis is organized through the following chapters.

Chapter 2 is split into two parts and provides background on gender equality and gender equality initiatives in the UK. The first half of the chapter includes an indication of women's current representation, with key figures being provided in order to 'set the scene.' This is followed by a discussion of equality and diversity discourses, providing a foundation for understanding how initiatives have been developed in the context of equal opportunity and diversity management narratives. Contemporary debates are introduced in relation to the definitions of these concepts. The second half of the chapter builds on this by focusing on specific initiatives within a UK and broader European

context. These specific initiatives include those aimed at individuals (such as training schemes), voluntary targets, accreditation and incentive-based initiatives, and government regulated quotas. These will be critically evaluated within higher education institutions. The chapter will demonstrate how discourses of gender and equality in organizations are intertwined with debates and challenges of the initiatives used in practice.

Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature relating to women's (under)representation in leadership, situating the study using gender and diversity management research, concepts, and theories. This begins with theoretical explanations for women's underrepresentation in senior roles. These are categorized into three perspectives: individual, cultural, and structural. The explanations for women's inequality therefore broadly include: choices and preferences, personality expectations, stereotypes, gendered networks and mentors, the 'ideal academic,' flexible working, and the 'leaky pipeline.' These will be critically evaluated for the extent to which they accurately explain women's underrepresentation. These perspectives are discussed broadly in relation to organizations, as well as with specific examples of the gendered aspects of HEIs and the gender biases that exist within an academic context. It will be demonstrated that despite being a vast research field, the connection between perspectives of women's underrepresentation and gender equality discourses remains undertheorized.

Chapter 4 outlines the methods and methodology of the study. The philosophical assumptions guiding the study are addressed and defined, arguing that a social constructionist approach is both appropriate and effective for evaluating the role of language in constructing social reality. The data collection procedures are then outlined, followed by the analytical technique and process of analysis for each stage of the research. This involves an in-depth examination of each stage of Fairclough's CDA framework, with discussion of analysis at text level, discursive practice level, and the level of social practice. The limitations, trustworthiness of the data, and ethical standards are also considered.

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The findings and interpretation of the data analysis are discussed in Chapters 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. The findings are organized based on key analytical components, presented through discourses and interpretative repertoires. Chapter 5 highlights conflicting and contradictory conceptualisations of meritocracy in organizations. In Chapter 6, it is shown how participants interpret gender and (in)equality through assigning or accepting responsibility and subsequently how they discuss the action to be taken. A dilemma between the change that is required and the initiatives leaders support is found. Chapter 7 looks explicitly at three types of initiatives, Athena SWAN, quotas, and targets. This chapter shows how participants resist or support specific initiatives, and how they represent gender equality programs that exist within their institutions and beyond. Each chapter culminates with a connection of the repertoires together and the implications they have on the success of gender equality initiatives. The implications of the research are considered throughout each empirical chapter through an in-depth discussion.

Chapter 8 draws together the findings from each empirical chapter and extends the discussion to reflect on existing literature. The findings are situated within existing debates, with the implications and contributions carefully considered. This results in the identification of an intervention paradox, where the incongruity between the change that is required and the initiatives that are supported is theoretically described. The disconnect between leaders' goals of gender equality and the practices they support to lead to these goals is then theorized through the application of a process called means-ends decoupling. The thesis therefore offers a new perspective for examining and evaluating gender equality initiatives and women's persistent underrepresentation, providing an alternative explanation for why gender equality initiatives are supported when they are not connected to equality goals. This chapter brings the thesis together to outline that achieving gender parity requires further transparency, coherency, and consistency of actions and behaviours of policy makers, institutional actors, and leaders. This will ensure that the goals of equality initiatives are fully understood, and that these initiatives are able to shed light on the barriers that women face.

The final chapter, Chapter 9, begins by utilising the contributions of the thesis to discuss implications for gender equality research and policy makers. This brings a sharper focus to the steps that can be taken to further promote gender parity in HEI leadership. Recommendations for further study are then discussed. The thesis culminates with closing remarks in line with the thesis contributions and the future of gender equality research.

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Central to this thesis are the following two assumptions. First, that women's underrepresentation in leadership positions is symptomatic of cultural, structural, and institutional inequalities that occur throughout women's working lives. Second, that by focusing on the relations between discursive and other social elements we are able to gain deeper insight into the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of these socially constructed inequalities (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010; Zanoni & Janssens, 2018).

This chapter is split into two corresponding parts. Part 1 begins by setting the scene, providing a background of women's current representation in academia and progress over the last decade. The discussion then moves to equality and diversity discourses in the UK. This will start with definitions of inequality from a legal perspective, followed by definitions guided by a sociological perspective and informed by management and organization studies. This gives background on some of the guiding and governing terminology and how it is used.

Next, the changing organizational discourses and the debates and challenges of *equal opportunity* and *diversity management* approaches will be discussed. Following this, the review will address how the shifting discourses, from equal opportunity to diversity management, have been influential in shaping the initiatives and strategies that organizations implement. It will therefore be argued that differences in terminology and the terminology used in various initiatives have subtle but significant differences in how organizations attempt to achieve a gender diverse workforce.

Part II will build on the above by extending the narrative of equality and diversity management to existing workplace practices and policies. This will consist of a focused description of specific initiatives within a UK as well as a broader European context. There will be a specific focus on initiatives within higher education and research contexts, however, research from the private sphere will also be drawn upon. These specific initiatives include initiatives aimed at individuals (those that intend to alter/improve abilities, skills, etc.), gender-based targets, incentive/accreditation-based programs, and government regulated quotas. Each will be critically evaluated based on

the established success thus far in achieving gender parity at the highest level of the organizational hierarchy and in challenging existing gendered norms and practices.

It will be demonstrated that discourses of equal opportunity and diversity management are intertwined with debates and challenges of the initiatives used in practice. This discussion will then lead into the next chapter, which has a thorough discussion and critique of the prevailing theoretical perspectives for explaining women's underrepresentation in leadership roles.

2.1 Part I: The evolution of equality and diversity discourses

Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) have been central interests to organizations for the last several decades (Oswick & Noon, 2014; Zanoni & Janssens, 2018). The language used in workplace practices reflects many of the definitions of EDI that scholars have developed. However, management scholars have argued that "the slippery construct of diversity has become 'an empirical onion' that reveals more complexity with time and analysis" (Ragins & Gonzalez, 2003, p.133). Similar to the definitions and applications of EDI, the characteristics of anti-discriminatory approaches have evolved over time, with corresponding initiatives being developed.

To provide a foundation for understanding the current state of gender equality initiatives in the UK, it is important to first 'set the scene' and provide details about women's underrepresentation and the progress that has been made over the last few years. This involves a view of women's current representation across academic institutions, providing a view of problem areas.

The evolution of organizational diversity discourses will then be addressed. This begins with a discussion of the legal and scholarly definitions of inequality, followed by an evaluation of equal opportunity approaches and then the emergence of diversity management. The purpose of laying this foundation is to demonstrate under which pretences different equality initiatives have been developed, and what systemic inequalities they are intended to improve upon. This is based on the view that the history of equal opportunity and diversity management discourses are structurally relevant for the implementation of gender equality initiatives (Dobusch, 2017).

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2.1.1 Setting the scene: academic leadership and gender representation

There have been fundamental changes in academia over the last ten years (Braun et al., 2016; Knipfer et al., 2017). These changes include a "marked intensification of academic labor, manifested in higher workloads, longer hours, precarious contracts and more invasive management control via key performance indicators" (Butler et al., 2017, p.468).

The significance of academic leadership has thus also changed; academic leaders are "facing high pressure to foster knowledge production, creativity, and innovation under less-than-ideal conditions" (Knipfer et al., 2017, p.273). This has indeed increased the importance of attracting and retaining qualified and ambitious researchers. Yet, the talent of women in academia continues to be underutilized; with the majority of leadership roles being filled by men, despite the high number of qualified women at the lower end of the hierarchy (Archer, 2008). To demonstrate the extent of the problem, the current state of affairs for women in academic leadership roles is outlined below. This sets the scene for the thesis, which will expand on the above challenges in HEIs to show that women with ambitions to progress to leadership roles are faced with barriers that are embedded in the academic system (Fritsch, 2015).

A full discussion of positions within the academic hierarchy is produced in the research context of Chapter 4 (methodology) but a short summary is provided here for clarity. Briefly, vice chancellors (VCs) are the principal academic and administrative officers of the university. The VC works alongside a university executive team, consisting typically of deputy vice chancellors (DVCs), or sometimes called vice presidents or pro-vice chancellors (PVC). The executive team will also have individuals with responsibilities such as those relating to finance for the university, comparable to chief financial officers in organizations, as well as directors of human resources, registrars and secretaries, among others. There are then deans, executive deans, pro-deans, and deputy deans. This is closely followed by heads of schools. There are then professors, which in the UK refers to the highest academic grade. Professorships, as mentioned previously, are often a necessary pre-requisite for further promotion to leadership roles.

According to the most recent available figures at the time of writing this thesis (2017/2018 academic year), women make up 53.8% of the staff working in higher education and 46% of academic staff. Below, Table 1 gives a comparison of 2010/2011, 2014/2015, and 2017/2018 academic years as reported by HESA, the higher education statistics agency. These years were chosen because of the robust data available for these timeframes and in order to give a wide range of comparison. It is worth noting that the table provides a simplified view of the gender statistics in higher education for the purpose of clarity. In the statistical reports available, there is further breakdown of positions by gender and full/part time roles, contract time, and salary scale. This thesis focuses specifically on the representation of women in leadership roles, and thus the table is designed to offer the clearest insight into the gender breakdown of roles across HEIs in the UK.

Table 1 Representation of women in senior roles in the UK

Position	2010/2011 academic year		2014/2015 academic year		2017/2018 academic year	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Postgraduate Students	56%	44%	56%	44%	58%	43%
Total academic staff	44%	55%	45%	55%	46%	54%
Professorial	19%	81%	23%	77%	24%	76%
Heads of Schools and Deans	28%	72%	31%	69%	31%	69%
Executive teams	34%	66%	34%	66%	37%	63%
Vice Chancellors	17%	83%	22%	78%	29%	71%
Governing bodies	32%	68%	36%	64%	40%	60%

As is shown in the above, some progress is consistently shown in these reports. The number of women in vice chancellor positions has shown the largest increase,

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moving up 12% since 2010. Executive teams, heads of schools, deans, and the professorial however have not shown as much progress, suggesting that institutions are likely to face challenges when looking to appoint further roles in the future (Jarboe, 2018). These numbers are also not reflective of the high number of female post graduates, demonstrating that women are earning advanced degrees but are not remaining within academia. The majority of decision making roles in institutions are thus held by men.

According to Women Count (Jarboe, 2018), a report on the gender balance of UK HEIs, university executive teams range from 3 to 20 members, with an average of 9 members. The average number of women per team is 3, and the average number of men per team is 5. Based on the report, only 27% of executive teams are gender balanced (gender balanced referring to teams being comprised of roughly even numbers of each gender). Although there has been progress, these numbers are troubling and suggest that universities are not utilising the full potential of available talent from postgraduate students (Powell, 2018; Roos, 2008).

The corporate sector has also made progress over the last several years, and most recently between 2010 and 2015, moving from 12.5% to 26% of women on corporate boards in the top 100 companies in the UK. As of 2019, boards in the top 100 of the Financial Time Stock Exchange (FTSE) are made up of 33% women, with women holding 10.9% of executive directorships (Vinnicombe et al., 2019). While the numbers decrease when broadening the analysis to FTSE 250 companies and when looking at upper echelons, in comparison to HEIs, the private sector has seen greater growth in progress overall. This is largely a result of initiatives and programs backed by the government and other third parties (such as the FTSE Board Report; Vinnicombe et al., 2015). Although HEIs use some similar strategies to the corporate sector, there has been arguably less public interest and media coverage of inequality in HEIs, with more focus being placed on private companies (Powell, 2018).

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2.1.2 Defining gender and inequality: legal and scholarly perspectives

The Equality Act 2010 forms the basis of anti-discrimination law in Great Britain. Bringing together previous pieces of legislation, the Act ensures employers and employees have an updated and consistent approach to making the workplace a fair and equitable environment (Hepple, 2010). The Act outlines nine protected characteristics, which are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The primary purpose of the act is to safeguard individuals with one or more of these characteristics from discrimination in the workplace.

The Equality Act 2010 defines four types of discrimination and provides legal guidance on what constitutes inequality and discrimination. The four types of discrimination outlined in the Act are as follows: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. Direct discrimination is when a person treats someone unfavourably because of their protected characteristic(s). In order to show direct discrimination has occurred, an individual must be able to prove that the treatment they received is different than someone who does not have the same protected characteristic. For instance, a case could be made for direct discrimination based on gender if all male colleagues were given pay rewards over more or equally qualified and experienced female colleagues.

Indirect discrimination refers to a rule, policy, or practice that is applied to everyone but disadvantages a group of people with a shared protected characteristic. A rule, policy, or practice can be informal or formal, long-standing within an organization, or a one-off decision. It may be intended to be neutral but ultimately causes collective or individual disadvantage to those with a particular characteristic or characteristics protected under the Equality Act. An example of indirect discrimination given by the Citizens Advice Bureau UK (2019) is a clause in contracts that requires last minute travel and working overtime. This clause could be challenged because of the disadvantage it causes to those with care responsibilities, who are still predominantly women (Blackham, 2017; Citizens Advice, 2019).

Victimisation refers to unfair or differential treatment of someone because they have asserted their rights or the rights of others under law. This means that individuals cannot be treated differently because they have made a complaint, helped someone else make a complaint, or refused to do something that would lead to or cause discrimination, harassment, or victimisation. This form of discrimination is based on the fact that anyone has the right to make a complaint about treatment and that those who make complaints have legal protection. Finally, harassment under the Act involves protection for individuals from unwanted conduct and treatment that negatively impacts a person's dignity and/or self-worth, creates a hostile or degrading workplace environment, and/or causes feelings of humiliation or offence.

The Equality Act 2010 also contains provisions that allow employers to adopt positive action measures. Positive action refers to a range of measures that encourage and train people from underrepresented groups to help them overcome disadvantages (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019). These measures may include things such as advertisements directed for certain groups and/or specific training initiatives. Employers are also allowed to take legally protected characteristics into account when making decisions through the tie-break system outlined in Section 159 of the act. This system is considered a moderate form of positive action and is discussed below (Plous, 2003).

The tie-break system allows for employers to base selection on protected characteristics during the final stages of the hiring process as long as individuals in question are as equally qualified as each other. This allows for the employer to use "the desirability of widening the diversity of the workforce as the criterion for choosing between otherwise equal candidates" (Parliament UK, 2019, pp.2). By selecting those who are underrepresented within the organization, but who meet the qualifications of other candidates, companies can begin to redress issues in the composition of the organization.

Although part of the Equality Act, the tie-break system has received negative media attention. The negative media attention is thought to be related to a misunderstanding of both the voluntary nature of the system as well as the restriction to

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making tie-break decisions when candidates are otherwise equally qualified. Positive discrimination, where those with protected characteristics are given preferential treatment, is unlawful under the Equality Act but is often confused with positive action measures.

Some scholars indicate this 'misunderstanding' is a meaningful and purposeful distortion by the media who oppose the idea that those with protected characteristics should receive special attention (Manfredi, 2017). This is often due to beliefs about reverse discrimination (where men are often perceived as victims), and beliefs about the importance of merit; HEIs regard themselves as meritocratic institutions, where individuals are recruited and selected based on their skills and qualifications that match the job criteria (Deem, 2007; Noon, 2010). Positive discrimination, and sometimes the misunderstood elements of positive action, are thus constructed as going against these meritocratic values (Bird, 2011).

Other than the Equality Act, there are additional governing bodies and groups that provide guidance and definitions for gender inequality and discrimination in the context of the workplace. Although definitions differ, many have similar goals and use similar language. The European Institute for Gender Equality, a European Union initiated agency dedicated exclusively to gender equality, defines gender inequality as:

> A legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles

The above definition makes explicit reference to assumed stereotypes, meaning attributes that are generally and often historically associated with either men or women. This is of importance because it recognizes that inequality may not be the result of directly malicious behaviour, but acknowledges that culture and beliefs play a role in potential unequal treatment and outcomes.

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Scholarly definitions use similar terminology and can be found in the literature from influential authors in the field of gender and inequalities. Acker (2006) defines inequality as:

> Loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities (Acker, 2006, p.443).

In a similar way, Walby (1990) describes inequality through patriarchal social systems, where men hold primary power and social privilege. Thus defining gender inequality and patriarchy as:

> A set of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990, p. 20).

In Lorber's (1998) book titled *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics*, the various forms that gender inequality may take are discussed and gender inequality is described. The excerpt below demonstrates this and is the description adopted for this thesis. It is important as it acknowledges that women's movement up the career ladder is hindered by societal and cultural processes:

> *Gender inequality* takes many different forms, depending on the economic structure and social organization of a particular society and on the culture of any particular group within that society. Although we speak of *gender* inequality, it is usually women who are disadvantaged relative to similarly situated men. Women often receive lower pay for the same or comparable work and they are frequently blocked in their chances for advancement, especially to top positions. There is usually an imbalance in the amount of housework and child care a wife does compared to her husband, even when both spend the same amount of time in paid work outside the home. When women professionals are matched with men of comparable productiveness, men still get greater recognition for their work and move up career ladders faster. (Lorber, 1998, p.5, emphasis in original)

The majority of scholars researching gender and inequalities acknowledge that female-dominated occupations receive lower pay, are undervalued, and that women are subject to various types of workplace discrimination (van den Brink & Benschop,

2012b). Many also focus on the domestic burdens that women face, recognising that care responsibilities are more often placed on women leaving them at occupational disadvantages due to the need to split their time between work and the home. Arguments for gender parity have further worked to encapsulate the idea that gender-balance, where men and women are represented equally, benefits all members of society by giving both men and women unconstrained choices in how they split their time (Acker, 2006; Connell, 2002).

As previously mentioned, the view taken in this thesis is that women face cultural, structural, and institutional inequalities and barriers that negatively impact their opportunities for career advancement. The low number of women in leadership positions is considered to be an indicator of these inequalities. As will be shown in Chapter 3 of this thesis, this is contested in the literature, with arguments being made that women's underrepresentation is not symbolic of inequalities but of personal choice. Thus, Chapter 3 focuses on reasons for women's underrepresentation using theoretical and empirical evidence to demonstrate that despite the efforts of many practitioners, policy makers, and activists, women continue to face a disadvantage when trying to ascend to the top levels of institutional hierarchies. The following sections will continue to demonstrate the changes in diversity and equality discourses.

2.1.3 Equal opportunity

Equal opportunity (EO) policies represent a range of theories and practices within organizations designed with the intention of ensuring that all institutional actors have equal access to resources at all stages of employment (Liff & Wajcman, 1996). EO policies have been documented in the UK since the 1970's and are considered a cornerstone of EU and UK equality law. EO strategies posit that anyone "given the right/same encouragement and conditions, can succeed equally in the public realm *regardless of gender"* (Foster, 1992, p.60, emphasis in original).

While the main purpose of EO is to ensure a level playing field for all organizational actors, EO policies have faced substantial criticism for their failure to eliminate the problems associated with discrimination at work (Dickens, 1994;

Lorbiecki, 2001). Specifically, the emphasis on 'sameness' associated with EO led to debates on equal treatment versus special treatment, relating to the extent to which differences between men and women are adequately accounted for (Liff & Wajcman, 1996). EO and the emphasis on 'equal' (the same) treatment has been argued to ignore past structural gender-based inequalities embedded in organizational social systems (Dickens, 1994; cited in Lorbiecki, 2001, p.351).

Debates on 'sameness/difference' or 'equal treatment/special treatment' have evolved from these views, progressed by scholars that argue that the dependence on discourses of 'sameness' has actually silenced women, meaning "they cannot speak out about their difficulties, as this highlights their difference and their lack of suitability for work, or need for special 'help'" (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005, p. 148). Within this same line of argument, it has been demonstrated that the view of women being the same as men has actually furthered the gendered nature of institutions, forcing women to fit themselves into masculine norms. In much of the diversity and equality literature, traditional EO approaches are considered to play a role in the maintenance of the existing social order by ignoring women's needs and pressing gendered inequalities (Cockburn, 1991; Sinclair, 2000; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

The sameness/difference debates tend to focus on the differences between men and women in terms of motherhood (biological), maternity rights (institutional), and gender roles (cultural); where it is not possible to fit pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood into male models of work (Blair-Loy, 2001; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Advocates for a transition away from equal treatment traditionally argued that in order to see true cultural changes in organizations, there must be changes in work practices such as specialised recruitment or selection techniques geared towards members of underrepresented groups (Noon, 2007).

Although the intention of equal opportunities is to create a more equitable environment, research shows that some institutions are likely to struggle to incorporate both equality policies and other institutional practices because they are perceived to be in conflict with each other (Deem, 2007). Findings of a study of six English, Welsh, and Scottish HEIs suggest that equality policies clash with other institutional policies,

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meaning that changes to equality legislation (legislation that would later form the Equality Act 2010), had to compete for resources with existing goals of research excellence. Confusion about the importance of legislation and changes in the approach has therefore been found to lead staff in HEIs to be less committed to equality policies, limiting their effectiveness (Deem, 2007).

Staff in HEIs also highly value the traditional approach of 'meritocracy' in institutional recruitment and selection, with research indicating that this prevents them from valuing the underlying goals of policies because they are seen as going against these traditions (Deem, 2007; White & Burkinshaw, 2019). Thus, the focus on 'merit' in HEIs makes them less able to adapt to new legislation and new ways of approaching equality (Deem, 2007). The value placed on the meritocratic system can therefore lead to resistance and even rejection of certain policies, especially if they are perceived as being in conflict with current models of the academic system. More recent studies indicate that this resistance is still perceived as a barrier to successful initiative implementation and to equality in organizations, although the connection remains underexplored (Popp et al., 2019).

Part of the challenge facing EO strategies was that they were, for several years, perceived as being something to be 'dealt with' by human resource departments and therefore not requiring formidable change by institutional actors. Oswick and Noon (2014) argue that this perception tends to be exaggerated, with EO approaches being "portrayed as old, tired, failing, and reliant on regulation imposed by the government" (p.25). Still, the limitations and criticisms of EO approaches saw a change of rhetoric, transitioning to discourses of 'managing diversity.'

These discourses emerged as a result of the heavy focus on EO as being 'legalistic,' which arguably allowed employers to use non-discriminatory policies without actually having to be proactive in hiring members from minority groups. As long as they stayed within the regulations and avoided discrimination, they could largely avoid changes to their workforce (Bagilhole, 2002). Efforts for equality therefore moved towards promoting diversity management techniques, aligning equality initiatives with

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more economically-driven corporate objectives (Mcdonald, 2010).

2.1.4 The development of diversity management

Organizational discourses on equality and diversity now tend to focus on a diversity management perspective, arguing that managing diversity is more "proactive and pluralistic" than previous approaches to increasing the representation of minority groups in organizations (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005, p. 149).

Diversity management represents a strategic means of integrating diversity and utilising different skills within a workforce for competitive advantage (Mcdonald, 2010). In comparison to equal opportunity, advocates for diversity management argue that it embraces the differences between all individuals, being "much less likely to generalise about the needs of people and to conflate different forms of discrimination" (Gatrell & Swan, 2008, p.54).

It has also been argued that the language of diversity management has allowed for a movement away from the view that equality is only an issue for women and human resources (Mcdonald, 2010; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Smithson and Stokoe (2005) argue that the turn to diversity management has allowed for flexible working to be seen as a work-life balance issue, expanding it from a woman's issue to one that impacts both men and women, and parents and non-parents. They argue that the varied nature of diversity management allows for organizations to focus on promoting work-life balance, increasing the likelihood of men and organizations positively responding to 'flexible working' and 'work-life.'

For women especially, diversity management is considered a vital way to cultivate women's individual skills and experiences for the betterment of all organizational actors (Noon, 2010). For many practitioners, this perspective remains popular because it is rooted in economic rationales for a diverse workforce (Oswick & Noon, 2014; Zanoni & Janssens, 2018). This rationale, often called 'the business case' focuses on leveraging the skills of diverse employees to improve performance, increase profits, and to enhance innovation (Oswick & Noon, 2014; Squires, 2003). The business case for improving the diversity of organizations has thus been developed within

diversity management literature (Cox & Blake, 1991; Smith et al., 2005). This emergent discourse that women and minorities are 'good for business' has been incorporated into several gender and diversity policy statements.

Through this argument, diversity and performance are linked in order to demonstrate that having a diverse workforce, and specifically a diverse leadership team, is a strategic business asset (Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Turner, 2006). For decision making bodies, this perspective recognizes that the absence of women at top levels means that organizations are not making full use of the skills and talents of nearly half the working population, including younger generations of women who are both ambitious and highly qualified (Hernes, 1987; Seierstad, 2016). The argument also pulls from women having different backgrounds, qualifications, and experiences than male counterparts, meaning they can bring new insights to decision making (Desvaux et al., 2008; Mckinsey, 2007).

Studies in this area have come from a range of disciplines to verify the connection between women in leadership and improved organizational performance (Campbell & Minguez-Vera, 2010; Dezsö & Ross, 2012). This argument remains contested in the literature, with studies finding positive relationships between women in leadership and firm performance (Huse & Solberg, 2006; Torchia et al., 2011), negative relationships (Pathan & Faff, 2013), and nonsignificant relationships (Dezsö & Ross, 2012). However, many equality scholars argue that just because an organization is gender balanced does not mean they encourage the participation of women or are prepared to utilize the talent available to them. This will be further discussed below with the concept of 'inclusion' (Roberson, 2006).

Doubts of the ability for diversity management to achieve the intended aims promoted in the business case have therefore been made clear. Oswick and Noon (2014) explain the lack of 'success' of diversity management by arguing that the shift from EO to diversity management was largely a change in rhetoric, rather than that of material action. Prasad and Mills (1997) argue that management scholars have adopted a form of 'distant cheerleading,' where although diversity management is supported; it is not embedded into organizational practices (Dick & Cassell, 2002). In consideration of this, Dick and Cassell (2002) further argue "that the whole arena of diversity management

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needs to be subjected to a more critical analysis in which some of the core concepts and values of diversity initiatives are scrutinized and problematized" (p.971). This thesis aims to add to this conversation in the literature, providing a critical analysis of the core concepts of equality initiatives based on the discursively constructed perceptions of leaders.

Despite criticisms, the business case remains a popular justification for diversity management in management and practitioner literature. At its conception, the business case largely replaced social justice arguments for a diverse workforce (Edelman et al., 2001). The social justice argument recognizes that the lack of women's representation is an unjust imbalance of power. It is based on the simple principle that women represent half of the population and should therefore occupy a similar proportion of economic and political decision-making positions in organizations and institutions (Dahlerup, 2013; Seierstad, 2016). Ethical justifications are found to influence equality related decision making, meaning the social justice argument is an important way to impact the choices of leaders and stakeholders (Noon, 2007). More recent literature has therefore argued that in order to see a sincere commitment to EDI, organizations must consider business and social justice rationales, recognizing that true diversity management is both good for business and ethically just (Seierstad, 2016; Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010).

Scholars have also argued that in the movement away from terminology associated with EO such as 'anti-racism,' diversity management is less threatening to employers, making it less effective in dealing with the discrimination that members of certain minority groups face at work (Walker, 2008). Sinclair (2000) supports this by stating that "the argument that 'all people are different' renders equivalent systematic sources of inequality and sources of minor discomfort" (p.237). Critics of diversity management thus argue that the approach dilutes historic power differentials, resulting in 'difference' being reduced to prescribed essentialist categories (Liff & Cameron, 1997; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Diversity management therefore faces similar challenges to the 'sameness' debates of EO, where treating people as if 'everyone is different' ignores the more systemic inequalities that individuals face when they are members of

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minority and disadvantaged groups.

2.1.5 The case for inclusion

Discourses of diversity management have begun to stress the importance of inclusion as a means of truly seeing the benefits of a diverse workforce (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2018). Although the movement from 'diversity' to 'inclusion' might similarly resemble a change in rhetoric rather than true cultural change (Oswick & Noon, 2014), the idea of an inclusive environment is one which allows for members of a diverse workforce to fully contribute to organizational processes (Mor Barak, 2000; Roberson, 2006). A lack of inclusivity implies that although organizations may be diversifying their leadership, women and minorities are not given a true voice within the organization and therefore feel undervalued, contributing to higher turnover and absenteeism (Shore et al., 2018).

Many diversity management initiatives and policies stress the importance of inclusion in order to promote best practice for organizations and ensure they are able to reap the benefits of their workforce (Mor Barak, 2000; Shore et al., 2018; Tatli, 2011). The case for inclusion therefore relates back to the business case, and the difficulty in identifying the effectiveness of more women in decision making roles. Having an increase in women in leadership is therefore not necessarily enough to show an economic advantage. In order to reap the benefits of different perspectives, views, and talents, institutions must concern themselves with "the processes that incorporate differences into business practices and thereby help to realise [women's] value" (Oswick & Noon, 2014, p. 26).

While the above arguments therefore focus on *why* organizations should increase the number of women in leadership roles (because it is economically beneficial and/or socially just), related studies examine exactly *how* this can be done and implemented most efficiently. For example, distinguishing between diversity and inclusion, Shore et al. (2011) propose a framework for institutions to help them create feelings of inclusion within their workforce. The framework recognizes the importance of a person being treated as an insider while also having their uniqueness supported, finding a balance

between uniqueness and belongingness. The authors argue that there are antecedents and consequences of inclusion that can be identified, thus helping institutions to recognize when they are achieving the optimal balance needed.

Distinctions between 'sameness' and 'difference' has also been a recurring theme in inclusion literature, signifying further issues when discussing the top echelons of leadership (Liff, 1997). The qualities and traits that make good leaders have thus far been recognized as largely gendered, with stereotypically masculine traits (such as assertiveness) being associated with being good leaders. In this way, when women exhibit their uniqueness or differences, it is assumed by other institutional actors to be associated with their femininity and therefore considered negatively for their ability to lead (Shore et al., 2011). This demonstrates the complexity of 'simply' increasing women in leadership positions as a form of equality for economic advantage.

Recognizing this complexity, Fitzsimmons (2012) outlined several future steps to first achieve gender parity and to next benefit from gender diversity. To benefit from gender diversity, they argue that organizations must "avoid quotas, reach critical mass for the right reasons, and develop a diversity culture" (p. 564). This response suggests that diversity management allows for changes for the 'right reasons,' and the author continues by arguing that institutions can do this by building better boards with the goals of enhanced problem solving, breadth of ideas, and director independence, adhering to many of the arguments of the business case (Ely & Thomas, 2001). At the same time, the author argues that quotas increase women's representation for the wrong reasons, with few benefits being offered to organizations or the women recruited. These debates will be further discussed in upcoming sections, however, provide another indication of resistance to certain equality initiatives, as well as a construction of tensions between the correct and incorrect way to go about achieving gender parity (Fitzsimmons, 2012.

As the above has shown, gender and equality discourses have changed and evolved over the last several years. While the majority of organizations promote the importance of equal opportunities and equality in their organization, fewer provide clear evidence of exactly how they have changed practices to not only increase the number of women but actually encourage and manage their diversity as an organization. Even

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fewer have dedicated information about the use of gender-based policy measures, such as targets, in their strategy and goal statements. Still, there is a relationship between equal opportunity and diversity management discourse and the development of initiatives, with voluntary action, targets, and quotas being reflective of these evolving narratives (Evaline & Bacchi, 2005; Zanoni & Janssens, 2018). In the following section, policies and practices that are used as gender equality initiatives will be discussed and evaluated.

2.2 Part II: Policy and Practice

The previous section outlined gender equality discourses in the UK related to definitions of inequality, equal opportunity, diversity management, and inclusion. These changes in rhetoric as well as practice are important as they also relate to the different equality initiatives that have been developed. The following section will focus on specific initiatives used within UK higher education institutions, with discussion of others that have been established in other European countries.

There is no specific legal definition of what it means to be diverse under UK law. This means that while organizations are legally bound to ensure equal opportunities and prevent discrimination, and in the public sector, organizations have a duty to be proactive in this area, they are not obliged to apply quotas or reach specific targets for underrepresented groups (Goyal, et al., 2018; Scott, 2004). The voluntary nature of equality initiatives in the UK thus means that they are not legally binding and do not have enforceable legal consequences should goals not be met. From a legal context, voluntary initiatives are often used as guiding principles and although they have no legal force, they are found to have practical effects on behaviour and action (Terjesen et al., 2015). This differs from methods used by other countries.

The different approaches to achieving equality have been described by Goyal and colleagues (2018) and placed into three categories. First, there are countries that use gender quotas (Norway was first, followed by other countries across the globe). Next there are liberal approaches followed in the USA and Canada that involve an 'expected' voluntary commitment from organizations. Finally, the approach followed in the UK is

categorized as collaborative, where the government works with businesses and third parties (e.g. charities, campaign groups) to develop appropriate best practice, with some including the use of targets (Goyal et al., 2018; Sealy et al., 2016).

The following voluntary approaches will be discussed and evaluated below: initiatives aimed at the individual, gender-based targets, and accreditation/incentive-based programs (Athena SWAN). These three types of measures are the primary means in which the UK aims to improve gender diversity in their organizations (Goyal et al., 2018). Following this, quotas will be discussed. Quotas are not currently used in the UK but are used across Europe and in other countries globally. Different types of quotas will be presented, including distinctions between those with sanctions for non-compliance and those without, as well as a specific discussion of how quotas could target women's underrepresentation in UK HEIs.

2.2.1 Initiatives aimed at the individual

The dominant approach to countering the lack of women in leadership positions in the UK is to implement measures that work as development programs (Wittenburg-Cox, 2013a). These are specifically designed to help women acquire the attributes, skills, and experiences necessary to obtain leadership roles (Vinnicombe et al., 2013). These programs generally involve mentoring and coaching schemes, leadership training, or women's conferences and workshops. These measures are therefore categorized as those 'aimed at the individual' because they focus on individual skill-attainment and development through tailored programs rather than structural or cultural elements (Terjesen, 2005).

Research indicates that these types of programs are successful as a means of encouraging women to remain in academia, however, they are largely criticized for their focus on 'fixing the women' (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). Still, the extant literature shows strong evidence that women-only development programs are critical to women's career development (Clarke, 2011; Wentling, 2003). Considering this debate, this section will proceed as follows. First, key examples of initiatives that target women within HEIs will be discussed, including mentoring schemes and women focused

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networks. Next, initiatives aimed at skill development such as specialised training will be highlighted. Criticisms of these initiatives will be shown by emphasising the issues with focusing on 'fixing women.'

Within HEIs, there are many mentoring and coaching schemes that operate with the intention of helping women to achieve their potential as leaders. The Aurora programme is a formal example of this. Aurora, run by Advance HE (formerly the Equality Challenge Unit), is a development initiative that is dedicated to helping women in Academia (up to senior lecturer level) develop and explore their potential in achieving leadership roles and increasing their institutional responsibilities (Advance HE, 2019a). According to Advance HE, Aurora does the following:

> Aurora seeks to support women and their institutions to fulfil their leadership potential through thought provoking activities, collaborative problem-solving activities and motivating stories supported by inspirational women role models. Participation embeds strong networks of early career women across the sector to share best practice, insights and experiences.

Case studies examining Aurora show promising results for those who have participated. Women who are a part of the program as mentees have found that participating empowered them to continue in management roles, provided them with long-term role models, and has been a beacon of support when progressing through the upper echelons of academic leadership (Advance HE, 2019a).

These types of programs as well as additional institution-led mentoring programs have increased in popularity. Historically, mentoring was an informal activity that involved forming relationships to help junior faculty develop their skills and career (Gardiner et al, 2007). Formal mentor programs have since evolved and recognize that women are more likely to struggle to find appropriate mentors than men (Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Sealy & Doherty, 2012; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003). Matching mentors and protégés is therefore one of the most common mentoring strategies used in academia and in the private sector, as it helps connect women with available and willing mentors (Davis et al., 2011). This strategy represents a traditional hierarchical relationship, where there is a clear power dynamic and the relationship depends on "trust, honesty, a

willingness to learn about self and others, and the ability to share power and privilege" (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005, p.46).

Academic mentoring also focuses on socialising the mentee into the profession, meaning that mentors can guide individuals through research and teaching, the academic job market, and other demands required for the profession at various stages (Clark et al., 2000; Ortiz-Walters & Gilson, 2005). The further benefits for women therefore include providing safe-environments to share experiences with role-models who have similar characteristics and identities (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Blood et al., 2012; Quinn, 2012).

Informal mentoring relationships are also important in academia (Carter & Silva, 2010). They are not based on prearranged agendas, but are often matters of chance and proximity (Bynum, 2015). Searby and colleagues (2015) found that many of the more positive mentor relationships reported by their sample of female participants were informal but also intentional, meaning that they sought mentorship-like relationships from their superiors but that it was not part of a formalised program. Informal mentorships benefit from the fact that they are not forced or prescribed, allowing them to take shape as suited to the individuals involved (Bynum, 2015).

Although mentoring is useful for both men and women, strong mentor relationships are expected to be more beneficial for women because they provide "a process that can buffer women from both overt and covert forms of discrimination, and assist women faculty to advance in academia and break through the [glass] ceiling" (Agosto et al., 2016, p.77; Hyun, 2005). Many studies have shown that academic mentoring is a positive learning experience for both the mentor and the mentee (Jean-Marie & Brooks, 2011; Kochan & Trimble, 2000). The most common positive outcomes include benefits such as increased confidence and stronger networking ties, the latter being especially beneficial for job progression (de Vries, 2005). The actual success of gender-specific academic networks in translating to more women in leadership is difficult to measure, however, mentoring has been linked to increased career satisfaction and to an increased likelihood that some women will choose to remain in academia,

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increasing the likelihood that they progress through to management and senior roles (Ballenger, 2010).

An examination of the types of mentor relationships that men and women build shows that while women do secure mentors (either informally or through formal channels), men are more likely to have mentors who also act as *sponsors*. Studies show that mentorship does not automatically lead to advancement but that having a senior mentor in a position of sponsorship can be very beneficial to career progression. As Baumgarten (2019, p.1) notes "mentors advise you and sponsors advocate *for you"* (emphasis in original). Overall, sponsors use their position to help their mentees gain visibility in the organization, put them forward for roles and projects, and actively promote them within the field. Having genuine support from sponsors can address achievement gaps, while mentors without vested interest are unlikely to deliver on their goal of helping women overcome the barriers facing their upward movement (Osburn et al., 2019).

Often in addition to mentoring schemes, initiatives and programs have been developed and implemented in HEIs that are designed to strategically improve women's leadership skills and abilities through specific skills training. These types of programs may include workshops as part of wider academic conferences, institution specific events, or women-only development programs. Programs that focus on skills-training and that are typically 'women only' are considered to be beneficial because they "provide a safe space and supportive environment for improving self-confidence, learning new skills, and learning from the experiences of successful role models" (Clarke, 2011, p.498).

Clarke (2011) interviewed participants of a women's development program and found that feedback was largely positive, with attendees benefitting from the supportive environment created by the program that allowed for them to improve their self-confidence, develop new skills, and hear experiences of role models. Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) argue in favor of women-only training as a complement to other equality policy measures because they allow women to "contribute openly, their femininity can be freely expressed, and they can demonstrate authenticity to their values" (p.300). This

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contrasts with male-dominated or gender-mixed training programs where women are found to disregard their differences and preferences in order to fit into male-models of excellence and success (Tanton, 1992; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003).

Overall, supporters of programs aimed at individual behavior and skills tend to argue that they help to identify and combat the social-psychological issues facing women in leadership. Summarized from Vinnicombe and Singh (2002, p.300), these programs may help women (1) identify their own feelings about themselves and their values along different identities (for example as a colleague, daughter, mother, etc.), (2) help them recognize the experiences that are unique to women in their roles, (3) learn about their own styles outside of the male-dominated institutional structure, and (4) provide a resource where they can test and compare their experiences.

O'Connor et al. (2019) argue that in "a context where those occupying formal positions of power are providing mentoring and have at least some structural awareness of gender inequality, mentoring can promote organizational change" (p.39). Thus, in certain contexts, these programs may be beneficial in tackling structural and cultural barriers to women's career progression (further discussed in Chapter 3). However, these contexts for mentoring are rare, and often do not allow for engagement with discussions of systemic inequality (de Vries & van den brink, 2016).

One of the challenges with initiatives aimed at the individual is that these programs are often tailored towards women, making the support that women receive more identifiable than that received by men. Van den Brink and Stobbe (2014) identified what they term a 'support paradox,' where after examining equality policies, they found that the support that men in academia receive is taken for granted as 'simply existing,' while women are expected to advance without similar support. Women's programs were thus recognized as being additional elements that benefited women, and that women require, while support men received remained unacknowledged and as being part of the system. This specifically relates to mentor and training programs, where men are able to have mentors and attend conference training, but women who do so are thought of as needing additional 'help' (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014).

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2.2.1.1 The 'fixing women' debate

As mentioned briefly, some scholars researching gender and inequalities argue that women-focused and women-only programs promote the view that 'fixing women' is the solution to women's underrepresentation in leadership, when this does little to fix deep-rooted structural and cultural biases (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Calas & Smircich, 1995).

The implicit assumption of these types of initiatives is that if women act more like men, meaning if they had the confidence, skills, and attributes of men and made more appropriate lifestyle choices, they would be more successful in accessing leadership roles (de Vries & Van den Brink, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2019). Wittenberg-Cox (2013a) argues that although these initiatives intend to empower women, they actually hinder women's progression:

> These are great, feel-good initiatives. Women love and appreciate them. They are delighted to get some attention and help. But it actually communicates to women that they are missing something (skills, confidence, commitment, networks, vision) and should work harder at acquiring it. Men love them too. It makes them feel as though they are 'doing something' to empower women and solve the gender balance issue. But it confirms in their mind, when these efforts do not deliver, that they have done what they could, and that women are not 'stepping up.' (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013a, p.107)

Critics further argue that these initiatives, while they may be beneficial in the short term, shift the responsibility from organizational structures to women themselves, therefore doing little to actually change gendered and discriminatory processes and practices (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). The individualistic discourse also further ignores masculine models of excellence, highlighting that those who are unsuccessful in the current male-dominated system are required to change (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). This emphasis on fixing women provides a form of rationalization as to why women are not 'measuring up' to the demands of institutional leadership (Bagilhole & White, 2011).

Pragmatically, there is little indication that these programs translate to more women in leadership (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Overall, the value of these programs is found to be for individual women as they maneuver male dominated industries by 'playing the game,' but are not thought to help in challenging the existing status quo or in breaking down gendered processes and barriers (Burkinshaw, 2015).

2.2.2 Gender based targets

In addition to those outlined above, the UK also promotes the use of voluntary targets to increase the number of women in leadership roles. In HEIs, many scholars and policy makers argue that setting voluntary quantitative targets for women's representation is one of the most efficient strategies for achieving gender parity at top levels (Goyal et al., 2018; Vinnicombe et al., 2015). The use of more specific targets in HEIs is reflective of the shifting discourse of EO to managing diversity, where a stronger commitment to EDI requires not only the prevention of discrimination (through EO) but also support for and recognition of the value of underrepresented groups (through managing diversity; Noon, 2010; Peterson, 2011).

The heavy focus on gender diversity within the UK, with HEIs being questioned for their lack of representation, did lead the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to set an aspirational target of 40% women's representation on governing bodies in universities in the 2015-2020 Business Plan (HEFCE, 2015; Manfredi, 2017). The next steps for this target have yet to be set, however, governing bodies are not yet considered to be gender balanced (HESA, 2018). Much of the rhetoric surrounding the use of targets has focused on the benefits of institutions maintaining autonomy and being able to develop their own strategies (Terjesen & Sealy, 2016). Targets may be set for the number of female professors/lecturers at different levels (associate and full), for the gender composition of university boards and/or governing bodies, for recruitment and selection short-lists, or for evaluation committees (Briggs, 2001).

It is argued that making these targets public is also vital to ensuring institutions meet these aims, however, few institutions have made their specific target figures publicly available (Jarboe, 2018; Manfredi, 2017). An example of an institution that does have an available target is below, retrieved from the university's website:

2020 Target:

- To have at least 30% of either gender in all key University committees and boards, including the University Executive Board.

The reasons for not publicly disclosing specific target aims are arguably a result of potential backlash institutions (and individuals) may face if it is believed they are recruiting or promoting simply to 'fill a target' (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013b). The majority of institutions have statements about their broad aims and objectives regarding gender and equality, including open declarations about commitments to gender equality.

Outside of the UK, several European countries have target figures (sometimes called voluntary quotas) for academic decision-making bodies, including university boards, governing councils, and research councils. Austria, France, Greece, Luxemburg, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain all have target figures for these decision-making bodies. A voluntary target model for recruitment of full professors has been in place in Sweden since the 1990s (Tienari et al., 2009). This model involves the government setting target standards for each research area and role level based on the national level. Although set by the government, there are no sanctions for non-compliance and meeting these targets is an expectation, rather than a requirement. These voluntary targets have contributed to the increases seen in the number of female full professors, from 9% prior to implementation to 28% as of 2018 (Statistics Sweden, 2018). This means that Sweden is above the EU average of 21%. The benefit of this type of model is that they are based on realistic values, meaning that the target of full professors is based on the available associate professors (cascading downwards based on position).

Advocates of voluntary target setting as an alternative to government regulation argue that by allowing organizations to create their own regulations and means of achieving gender equality, they are able to maintain flexibility and autonomy which

increases the likelihood of them achieving their goals (Fitzsimmons, 2012; Terjesen et al., 2015). This is true for advocates in both the public and private sector (Bagues et al., 2014). Shaffer and Pollack (2010) argue that non-binding targets provide greater flexibility in times of economic downturn and allow for organizations to be "more ambitious and engage in 'deeper' cooperation than they would if they had to worry about enforcement" (Shaffer & Pollack, 2010, p.133). Connecting back to the support for diversity management because it promotes change for the 'right reasons,' voluntary initiatives are also thought be helpful in creating changes in learning and behaviour, whereas formal regulation is thought to promote compliance without true changes in views and beliefs (Trubek et al., 2006).

One of the main criticisms of targets, and voluntary initiatives more generally, is that although they do influence some practices they do "not have the longevity of hard law [legislation] when priorities change" (Smith & Villa, 2010, p.240). This means that particularly in times of economic strain, or when other institutional issues arise, institutions may lose focus and move away from EDI initiatives (Terjesen & Sealy, 2016). Tying targets to wider institutional objectives (the business case) however helps to alleviate some of these challenges by framing diversity as an organizational imperative.

As mentioned previously, individuals working in HEIs have faced, and continue to be challenged by, recent changes in the nature of academic work. These challenges range from changes to more top-down 'professional' management (Visser et al., 2019) to increases in precarious working conditions (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016), and to enhanced forms of quantitative metrics to measure performance (Adler & Harzing, 2009). As a result, the academic climate has become one of increased anxiety and competitiveness among staff (Knights & Clarke, 2014). When paired with the importance of maintaining a focus on equality in order to see progressive change, it is argued that many institutions will lose sight of equality goals when challenged by other institutional issues and faced with pressing concerns about university success (Grosser & Moon, 2005; Wood, 2017).

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In the corporate sector, the narrative around voluntary approaches turned to one of 'threat,' where independent review bodies that monitor gender equality have argued for the government to put quotas in place if companies do not demonstrate commitment to equality goals. This was the case with the target set by the Davies Review, which stated that the "government must reserve the right to introduce more prescriptive alternatives if the recommended business-led approach does not achieve significant change" (Women on Boards, 2011, p.2).

The Davies Review is a government-backed commission introduced in 2010 to examine the obstacles that prevent women from reaching the most senior positions in businesses in the UK. The review was undertaken on behalf of the UK government and was spearheaded by Lord Davies, the Minister of State for Trade, Investment, and Small Business. The initial review in 2010 challenged the FTSE top 100 companies to achieve boards with at least 25% women by 2015 (Vinnicombe et al., 2015). The goal was reached, with women making up 26% of corporate boards by the end of the given timeframe. The final review laid out several recommendations to companies of the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250 for achieving gender parity, based on extensive research on current gender-related statistics and the benefits of having gender diverse boards. Since the final review, an additional review body called The Hampton-Alexander review, has built on the work of the Davies Review and set a target for 33% by 2020 and is considered "a catalyst for sustained momentum and monitoring of progress" (Hampton-Alexander, 2019, pp.4).

An additional campaign that has received momentum in the UK is the 30% Club. The 30% Club functions under similar 'threat' principles of The Davies Review, stating in 2015 that more needs to be done to maintain the current momentum and to avoid the 'real threat' of an EU-imposed gender-quota. Started by Dame Helene Morrissey in 2010, the 30% Club campaign originally aimed to achieve 30% (minimum) of female representation on the FTSE 100 boards, and was extended in 2016 to a minimum of 30% women on FTSE 350 boards by 2020. Fortunately, the extended target for The 30% Club was reached as of September 2019. The most recent target set is for 33% by 2020. Ambassadors for Hampton Alexander and The 30% club have therefore maintained the

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pressure on FTSE companies and concentrated their efforts to supporting the pipeline and to achieving better balance at the very top of business hierarchies in order to reach this new goal (30% Club, 2019).

The use of 'threat' has had a different outcome in Norway, which officially legislated in 2008 when the voluntary targets were not reached (Teigen, 2012; Walby et al., 2012). Many scholars therefore argue that the effectiveness of voluntary targets in increasing the number of women in leadership does not come from obligatory force, but from the feared threat of tougher and undesired legislation (Shaffer & Pollack, 2010). The narrative that targets be used as a form of coercive action before legislation has been less prevalent in HEIs, with institutional actors' perspectives on quotas in UK HEIs remaining underexplored and undertheorized (Voorspoels, 2018). However, some trends in this area dictate that there have been changes in how quotas for HEIs in the UK are discussed and debated (Pyke & White, 2018; Voorspoels, 2018).

Despite these changes, social dialogue still reflects the preference of targets over quotas and formal regulation, however as mentioned, the corporate sector has seen a change in rhetoric to one which is more supportive of legislative action. For instance, while the Female FTSE Board report 2015 made the claim that success must be made using targets, more recent reports from 2018 have been less adamant against regulation (Vinnicombe et al., 2018). The 2018 report includes quotations from leaders who had changed their minds to the use of quotas over targets, with the authors of the report showing support for these evolving views and for the need to re-evaluate the UK's position on legislation (Vinnicombe et al., 2018). The contestation over quotas will be discussed further in subsequent sections.

It is noteworthy that this change in rhetoric from activists and policy makers is reflective of more radical approaches to change, as stated in the Female FTSE Board Report: "organizations could prepare themselves for a more gender-balanced future only by radically and creatively reshaping their working and leadership practices" (Vinnicombe et al., 2018, p.39). Empirical studies as well as the quantitative changes in women's representation demonstrate that HEIs have seen similar progress in their use of voluntary practices, with improvements being made but progress being slow and

inconsistent (Burkinshaw & White, 2019). This therefore suggests that HEIs could also prepare for more radical and creative change efforts to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality (White & Burkinshaw, 2019).

Although popular rhetoric in the UK has not turned to the promotion of quotas, the use of accreditation and incentive-based practices has escalated the use of voluntary targets and increased the pressure on institutions to reach them (Jarboe, 2016). With the increasing use of quotas and publicly incentivised targets in other parts of Europe, the UK is also facing pressure to adapt their equality policy measures (Wallon et al., 2015).

2.2.3 Accreditation/Incentive based initiatives: Athena SWAN

HEIs in the UK have the opportunity to receive accreditation for their diversity and equality achievements through the Athena SWAN Charter. Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) falls within the category of voluntary initiatives because it is not a legal requirement for institutions to be a member, however, they do receive 'rewards' and are therefore categorically unique from targets or directives. The Athena SWAN charter is a form of an accreditation that is also tied with certain funding incentives. This charter focuses specifically on the representation of women in higher education institutions.

Advance HE (formerly publishing under The Equality Challenge Unit) is a registered charity in the UK that launched the Athena Project in 1999, with grants available to institutions who were working to advance their representation of women in science, technology, engineering, medicine, and mathematics (STEMM). The Athena SWAN Charter developed from this project, and grew to include 164 Athena SWAN members, holding 815 awards between them (Advance HE, 2019b). The charter now includes those working to advance women in the arts, social sciences, humanities, business and law disciplines, and has been extended to Ireland and trialled in Australia, with new developments being brought to Canada for 2020 (Advance HE, 2019b).

The charter invites institutions to apply for Bronze, Silver, and/or Gold awards. This is done at both the institution and department level, meaning institutions may hold a number of graded awards across different faculties, for example a silver award in

Medicine and a Bronze award as an institution. Submissions for these awards require self-assessment teams (SATs) across departments and schools, with analysis of different levels, including senior and junior team members and involvement from a diverse range of people (Advance HE, 2019b). It requires institutions to demonstrate consistent growth and development in their efforts to improve women's representation through the pipeline up to professor level, as well as balanced student profiles across all levels. With the goal of dismantling structural inequality and cultural barriers, the Athena SWAN awards are meant to be representative of an institutions' commitment to being an equitable environment, as well as remaining "competitive and attractive to talented staff and potential students in the global market" (Advance HE, 2019b, pp.1).

Athena SWAN awards are categorized as accreditation/incentive based for two reasons. First, the awards are difficult to obtain and demonstrate commitment to gender equality and good management practices, enhancing the internal and external reputation of institutions across the UK (Gregory-Smith, 2018). Although voluntary, it is managed by an external organization, and "the motivation for participation can be about prestige associated with achieving an Athena SWAN award, as well as links to research funding" (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019, p.7). Receiving an award can thus be used as a marketing asset for institutions (Gregory-Smith, 2018).

Second, certain funding has been tied to achieving Athena SWAN awards. In 2011 Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer for England, announced that funding from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) would be contingent on an institution achieving an Athena SWAN silver award (Donald et al., 2011). Medical schools would only be shortlisted if their Biomedical Research Centres and Biomedical Research Units held an award at this level. Research Councils UK has since required funding recipients to also show evidence of their efforts to managing gender and equality, with Athena SWAN awards being the flagship accreditation for demonstrating this commitment. Evidently, Athena SWAN is a voluntary accreditation process with external funding bodies using it to incentivise dedication to equality (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019).

The majority of studies that evaluate the success or impact of Athena SWAN are in STEMM fields, which is where the awards were first established. A report designed to determine the effectiveness of the Charter in advancing women's careers in STEMM found several positive outcomes, including an improvement in women's career progression, increases in overall staff satisfaction in departments with silver awards, and measurable improvements in staff awareness about promotion processes for staff in departments with an Athena SWAN award (Munir et al., 2014). Despite these positive outcomes, additional academic research has not found consistent results when measuring the effectiveness of Athena SWAN on different gender related issues.

In a study of medical schools, the implementation of Athena SWAN principles was found to have created an environment where gender inequity issues could be openly discussed (Caffrey et al., 2016). At the same time, however, it was also found that the potential for the Charter to redress inequality was hindered by actually reproducing and reinforcing some unequal practices. Specifically, the study found that women were disproportionately tasked with activities related to Athena SWAN, causing them to have less time to dedicate to their own and other work. The authors posit that societal-level norms may decrease the potential impact of Athena SWAN because of the stereotypical assumption that women should undertake, and are better at, caring work (Caffrey et al., 2016). With the focus on family-friendly policies that support working mothers, Athena SWAN is therefore predominantly seen as something that should be conducted by women, for women (Fox, 2005; Monroe et al., 2014).

Thus, while the Charter is found to increase female employment and improve overall recruitment standards, it is difficult to directly tie this with an improvement in women's career status or the number of women in the most senior roles of HEIs. Gregory-Smith (2018) specifically argues the following:

> Despite a general increase in female employment and widespread adoption of the standards of Athena SWAN amongst UK medical schools there is no evidence yet to suggest that either the introduction of the Athena SWAN charter or the announcement of NIHR to tie future funding to Athena SWAN silver status has

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led to a measurable improvement in the careers of females employed in UK medical schools. (Gregory-Smith, 2018, p.479)

Ovseiko and colleagues (2017) argue that Athena SWAN can be influential in bringing about positive structural and cultural changes. However, the authors argue that this change is unlikely to be sustained once a silver award is achieved. They also show concerns about the ability of Athena SWAN to address power imbalances, supporting the findings of Caffrey et al (2016) that women are likely to do a disproportionate amount of work leading up to a submission for an Athena SWAN accreditation, thus not actively challenging existing cultures.

A report conducted in 2019 for Advance HE in partnership with Ortus Economic Research and Loughborough University (Graves et al., 2019), provides a robust evaluation of the effectiveness of Athena SWAN and demonstrates how the charter has had a positive impact on institutions in the UK. The report found that the majority of those interviewed (78%) believed the charter has had a positive impact on equality and diversity issues in their institutions. They additionally found strong evidence that the processes and methodologies of the Charter have instigated and supported cultural and behavioural change around gender equality. At the same time, the report illustrates several challenges that institutions have faced, including a lack of necessary resources and an absence of leadership support in conducting necessary reviews. Respondents also highlighted challenges with the 'unnecessarily burdensome' application process, with the amount of work and resources needed for Athena SWAN being identified as one of the main barriers to participation and success. The intention of the review is to inform the future development of Athena SWAN as a positive agent for change, however, a full strategic plan has not yet been made public by Advance HE.

Overall, evaluating the success of Athena SWAN and related incentives is considered difficult, with the improvements for women in HEIs since the Charter's development not being solely attributed to the work of Athena SWAN (Gregory-Smith, 2018). This is because improvements in women's representation and selection are consistent with general trends experienced by all universities, regardless of their Athena SWAN award status (Gregory-Smith, 2018). Still, Advance HE and Athena SWAN have

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done substantial work to bring gender equality to the fore of institutional goals and strategies, highlighting several of the problem areas and maintaining the need for improvement.

Thus, while Athena SWAN has been found to have a positive impact on advancing gender equality, there remains a need for wider change to also occur in order to see more substantial progress (Ovseiko et al., 2017). Taken together, more research is needed into the effectiveness of Athena SWAN and incentive-based programs. Still, the majority of studies that examine intervention effectiveness suggest that multiple intervention strategies are likely to have the most positive results, with an institutions' efforts towards achieving Athena SWAN awards being a catalyst and driver for other effective change programs (Rosser et al., 2019).

2.2.4 Government regulation: quotas

Government regulated quotas have been used as a means of achieving gender-equality in various institutional processes across the globe, with most being implemented within European countries (Voorspoels, 2018). The main intention of gender quotas is to address historical disadvantages faced by women and to proactively rebalance deep seated structural inequalities which occur at different stages of the recruitment and selection process (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Roos & Zanoni, 2015).

Gender quotas involve certain limits for gender representation, setting percentages either specifically for the number of women required or as a minimum/maximum for either gender (for example no more than 40% and no less than 60% of either gender; IDEA, 2019; Terjesen & Sealy, 2016). Few scholars have investigated the use of gender quotas in academic contexts, with the majority of research on quotas being done on political arenas (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010) or in corporate contexts (Huse, 2016; Terjesen & Sealy, 2016). However, research in this area is growing as scholars and policy makers reflect on the use and successes of quotas in other fields and especially across Europe (Huse, 2016).

This section will first briefly outline the use of gender quotas with key examples in political and corporate spheres. The success of these quotas in achieving their

intended aims will also be shown. There will then be a discussion of gender quota usage in academic contexts. After establishing how they are (or can be) used, the key debates of quota implementation in academic institutions will be introduced and evaluated, drawing consideration from political and corporate fields.

2.2.4.1 Quotas in political and corporate contexts

An increasing number of countries are implementing gender quotas for different processes of public elections (Dahlerup, 2006). Half of the world's countries have some form of electoral quota for their parliament (IDEA, 2019). Gender quotas can be mandated by the Constitution, determined by electoral law, or voluntarily but publicly implemented by individual parties (ACE, 2019; IDEA, 2019). Electoral gender quotas can target different levels, including: the level of the initial nominations (a set percentage for the number of women that need to be considered by a political party), the actual candidates to be placed on the ballot (for instance 40% of the candidates put forward by a party must be of either gender), or for the number of elected individuals who must be women, referred to as reserved seats (IDEA, 2019).

Gender quotas are found to effectively increase the proportion of women in politics, with Dahlerup et al. (2014, pp.4) stating that "to date, gender quotas have [proven] to be the single most effective tool for 'fast-tracking' women's representation in elected bodies of government." While there has been success through quota adoption, women remain underrepresented in political assemblies and executives across European countries without quotas. Although some countries have at least 40% of either gender (for example Sweden, Finland, and Spain), others continue to have 20% or less of their members of parliaments be women (for example Greece and Hungary; EIGE, 2018).

In the corporate world, the Norwegian government was the first to announce a gender quota system for corporate boards in late 2003, requiring 40% of company board members to be of either gender (Bertrand et al., 2019; IDEA, 2019). Full implementation occurred in 2008 (Teigen, 2012). The quota law stipulated regulatory measures for non-compliance, and failure to achieve the quota after a predetermined grace period would result in the company being delisted from the stock exchange (Terjesen et al., 2015).

Since Norway's implementation of quotas, there has been a surge of quota-based legislation being implemented, with 15 countries now using some form of board gender quotas (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Israel, Italy, Kenya, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the regions of Greenland in Denmark and Québec in Canada; de Cabo et al., 2019; Terjesen et al., 2015).

In terms of women's representation, European countries with government regulated quotas have made the most significant improvements compared to countries with no quotas (European Commission, 2019). The European Commission states that when examining the number of women on boards, "the differences show a clear stagnation in the number of women on boards correlating with low levels of action" (p.30). This shows that countries with some form of gender quotas are seeing a measurable improvement in their representation of women, however, this does not necessarily translate to improved work experiences or overall wellbeing because of previously discussed challenges with 'inclusion' as well as the treatment of women being recruited where a quota system is in place (Shore et al., 2018).

Ongoing discourses about improving women's access to senior roles through quotas draw on a range of arguments, including the business case (Seierstad, 2016; de Cabo et al., 2019). To reiterate, the business case for women on boards argues that increasing women's representation will positively impact firm financial performance (Post & Byron, 2015). However, literature on the effects of gender quotas on overall performance remains limited, partly because of the difficulty in measuring causation when it comes to corporate productivity (Costain et al., 2010; Husu, 2004). A key concern in interpreting the effects of quotas is that countries that adopt them may have already demonstrated changing attitudes towards women, thus actively reducing the barriers and obstacles women face regardless of quota usage (Pande & Ford, 2011).

The majority of research on the effects of board gender quotas is based on the experience of only a few countries that implemented quotas long enough ago to see any changes, such as Norway and Italy (Comi et al., 2017). Similar to the overall business case, research in this area is inconclusive. While some studies find that the increase of

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women from quota implementation positively impacts firm performance, others demonstrate a decrease in shareholder value (Dale-Olsen et al., 2013). The majority of studies in this area have found no significant effects of gender on an organization's bottom line (Choudhury, 2015).

Some studies show that board diversity influences decision-making, with more diverse boards increasing the likelihood of organizations committing to social-responsibility efforts (Rao & Tilt, 2015). There is, however, little research that examines the influence of quotas on changing corporate culture. These studies are likely to become more popular as quotas reach longevity across Europe, however, are likely to be susceptible to similar challenges of the business case; organizations with a gender balanced board are not necessarily making use of available talent and therefore are not necessarily going to see changes to workplace practices (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013a).

2.2.4.2 Quotas in academia

Compared to both the political and corporate spheres, there is less research examinig gender quotas in universities (Bagues & Esteve-Volart, 2010; Bird, 2011; Voorspoels, 2018). Normative debates indicate that gender quotas remain controversial (Anderson, 2010; Voorspoels, 2018). For HEIs, the controversy often arises from the interaction (and perceived mismatch) between the nature of quotas and the core values of academia being meritocratic (Anderson, 2010; Peterson, 2015).

Gender quotas have been introduced in some parts of European academia, but it is difficult to give a definitive account of how many institutions have quotas in place because they have been implemented into various academic processes and practices and are not necessarily publicly accessible (Husu, 2000). For instance, quotas have been used for staff recruitment and promotion committees (for example in Austria, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Spain; Bagues & Esteve-Volart, 2010), staff recruitment (Sweden and Spain; Zehnter, 2012), and for the composition of decision making bodies (Sweden and Flanders; Peterson, 2015; Rees, 2002). Some institutions also use quotas for funding agencies and advisory boards, such as in Finland, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Iceland, Isreal, and Norway (Husu, 2005; Voorspoels, 2018).

In terms of the evaluation committees, gender quotas are intended to make academic processes fairer based on the assumption that having balanced representation on a panel will alleviate the negative effects of unconscious bias and stereotyping by evaluators (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). This is guided by reports that show how female candidates receive lower evaluations than male candidates with the same applications (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012) and that male committees are more likely to reject promotion applications of female employees (Bagues et al., 2014). Male candidates are also found to be more likely to already be known within a male evaluators' network, which is proposed to influence the decision-making (Zinovyeva & Bagues, 2014).

Research on the gender make-up of evaluation committees, however, does not provide straight-forward evidence in support of gender quotas for committee composition. For instance, Zinovyeva and Bagues (2010) argue that gender quotas for academic evaluation committees can have different outcomes depending on the context, position, and strategic concerns of the evaluators. The authors demonstrate that both men and women evaluators show bias against female applicants but under different contexts. Male evaluators show this bias depending on position (being more likely to oppose women applying to senior roles), whereas for female evaluators it is more dependent on the applicant origin (being more likely to show same-sex bias against women from their own institution). The authors suggest that gender quotas for evaluation committees need to be reconsidered, as they are unlikely to result in the desired increase of women in senior leadership roles but rather point towards continuing gender biases and discrimination within the academic system under certain contexts (Bagues et al., 2014; Zinovyeva & Bagues, 2010).

Demonstrating an opposition to quotas for evaluation committees, Bagues et al. (2014) found that female evaluators had a negative impact on the likelihood of female success rates. That is, the more women on the committee, the lower the chances of success by female applicants (Bagues et al., 2014). Gender-mixed committees were also found to be less favourable towards female applicants than all-male committees. The authors provide two possible explanations for why this occurs. First, they posit that women evaluators hold stronger stereotypes against female candidates than men.

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Second, it is suggested that men might lower their commitment to gender equality when a woman is already present, and that the increased presence of women might strengthen their male identity, thus making them less likely to be supportive of female applicants (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). Further research into these outcomes is needed, including how gender quotas for evaluation committees might impact recruitment and selection processes at various levels of the hierarchy, including doctoral level applications. Still, these studies demonstrate that there are potential biases in the recruitment and selection procedures in HEIs and that regulation might not be an overall solution.

An additional concern regarding quotas for evaluation committees, or for governing and executive bodies, is that they would force women in senior roles to sit on more panels and boards than their male colleagues because there are fewer women who are qualified (van den Brink et al., 2010). Women in senior roles would thus have less time to invest in their research, causing a time squeeze and a negative impact on their research or teaching output which is vital to academic success (Bagues et al., 2014). Gender quotas, therefore, could be a hindrance to women's success until there are more women in senior roles to support them in creating balanced committees and boards, alleviating some of the pressure on the few women appointed to these roles. This therefore calls into question the efficacy of evaluation committee quotas in improving women's representation in senior leadership (Abramo et al., 2016).

Some advocates for quota-based systems in academia argue that quotas should be implemented for research grants and fellowships, such as those adopted by the Swedish Research Council and the Helmholtz Association in Germany (O'Connor, 2014; Wallon et al., 2015). These two funding bodies publicly aim for the success rate to be equal for male and female applicants. This technically falls under the category of 'soft' quotas, as there are no sanctions if the proposed goals are not met. Advocates for quotas for funding base their support on the argument that there are biases in how women's and men's applications are evaluated (Jacobson et al., 2007; Ledin et al., 2007). The unequal distribution of these awards likely influences the number of women who progress to senior roles because achieving funding for research is often a requirement for promotion (Wallon et al., 2015).

Opponents of quotas in HEIs argue that they challenge the academic tradition of self-governance that is based on the principles of meritocracy and neutrality (Bleijenbergh et al., 2012; Zehnter, 2012). Similar to corporate fields, opponents of quotas argue that they stigmatize women and by nature they are discriminatory towards men (Faniko et al., 2017; Zehnter, 2012). In contrast, advocates for gender quotas largely emphasize that quotas force organizations to broaden their view of available talent (Peterson, 2015). They also help compensate for the unjust practices and barriers that women face throughout their careers and increase the available role models and mentors for women and other minority groups throughout the pipeline (Voorspoels, 2018).

The argument that quotas run counter to equal opportunity and that women are given preference over men is based on the idea that candidates should be recruited and selected based on merit, with gender being seen as obsolete in the search for the best qualified candidate (Anderson, 2010; Castilla & Benard, 2010; Bleijenbergh et al., 2012). Increasingly, advocates for quotas emphasize that the current 'merit' based institutional system is already gendered and not neutral, and quotas would help to adjust for existing discriminatory and gendered practices that favour men (Voorspoels, 2018; Noon, 2010; Thornton, 2013). The merit based argument also assumes that merit can be applied across cultures and context, and that it is value-neutral (Deem, 2007; Young, 1990). As already mentioned, this thesis examines organizations as gendered, therefore recognizing that 'gender,' and corresponding values that favour men, are infused within definitions of merit and excellence that compose the necessary 'criteria' for job success.

More critically, the 'paradox of meritocracy' identified by Castilla and Benard (2010) indicates that when organizations promote their practices as meritocratic they are more likely to make biased choices (often in favour of men) than organizations who do not have public statements regarding their meritocratic processes. This is suggested to be because individuals who think they are objective are likely to exhibit biased behaviour because they no longer scrutinize or evaluate their decisions in reference to fairness and objectivity (Castilla & Benard, 2010). The argument that merit should be the resounding

factor in decision making is also used to counter arguments for additional equal opportunity and other policy measures, not just quotas (Deem, 2007).

One of the key benefits of quotas is that they may work to prevent situations of tokenism. Tokenism in this situation refers to the practice of recruiting a small number of women to give the appearance of equality in a workforce without necessarily believing in their abilities or contributions to the organization (Zimmer, 1988). Incremental increases of women seen thus far with voluntary practices, rather than a swift increase that would be seen through legislative quotas, means that women appointed are more likely to suffer from tokenism. Tokenism theory (Kanter, 1977) confirms this and suggests that when a minority group is easily identifiable the clear distinction between the groups increases stereotypical perceptions. When there are fewer women, the women present are also more likely to feel marginalized and record lower levels of organizational-culture fit (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Quotas therefore have the potential to circumvent issues of tokenism by mandating a quicker increase in women at senior levels.

The swift increase of women brought by quotas is also thought to bring a 'critical mass' of women into leadership roles (Kanter, 1977). Critical mass is a theory on group gender dynamics that outlines how gender proportions can influence how people interact with each other (Celis et al., 2008; Kanter, 1977). It has been found that three in ten, or roughly 30% women, is the 'critical mass' needed for integration. Gender quotas for governing bodies of universities, for instance, would benefit from achieving this 'critical mass' because women who sit on decision making boards with a poor gender balance would be less likely to be viewed as the 'female member' and instead be integrated into institutional decisions (Wroblewski, 2019).

For example, Konrad, Kramer and Erkut (2008) found that three women increased the likelihood of women being seen and heard as members of the organization, as opposed to the 'female member' (Kanter, 1977; Konrad et al., 2008). Being the only member of a board gave women the label of representing all women instead of being seen as individual members of the organization (Konrad et al., 2008). Individual women also had to work harder to have their voices heard and for other members of the board to

take their ideas seriously. When there were two women, the situation improved through increased feelings of comfort and having a 'strategy partner.' However, two women increased feelings of 'conspiracy' among male members, with the idea that if women agreed with each other it was only because of their shared women-ness. By achieving roughly 30%, (or 3 in 10 as the study found), women were considered as members of the board and these negative perceptions weakened. Thus, it is argued that quotas provide space for a quicker influx of women, helping to more quickly achieve this critical mass (Joecks et al., 2013).

Despite these potential benefits, quotas have been challenged for their overall ability to change organizational culture (White & Burkinshaw, 2019). In a recent study of gender quotas for academic decision making bodies in Austria, Wroblewski (2019) suggests that quotas might not lead to the desired cultural change without proper frameworks in place. Through the quota system, Austria succeeded in increasing the participation of women from 27% in 2011 to 50% in 2018. However, in terms of cultural change, the author notes:

> It depends on whether these women have prior gender or gender equality expertise or at least recognize and are open to gender equality issues. If this is the case—and the other members of the rectorate share this awareness—women in rectorate positions can achieve a great deal for gender equality and trigger steps towards structural and cultural change (Wroblewski, 2019, p.11)

The author above also found that women recruited through the Austrian system tended to be younger than the men appointed and that they entered from lower level positions or from external roles, suggesting that they might struggle to get managerial roles at another university. Without the same experience as their male counterparts, it might also mean that women in these roles are more likely to face resistance and to not be treated with authority (Wroblewski, 2019).

The expectation that quota systems and an increase of women in senior roles will lead to cultural change puts pressure on women in these roles to instigate this change, without having it be part of formal board or governing practices (Peterson, 2015). As demonstrated in the excerpt above, the author maintains the view that women in these

positions have the potential to achieve change, however, that 'gender competence' should be considered necessary and fundamental knowledge for all senior roles. Thus, while expectations about quotas bringing about cultural changes lack empirical evidence, there is evidence that an increase of women in senior academic roles would help to enhance the potential for organizations to achieve the changes required.

As mentioned, quotas are not currently a part of institutional landscape in the UK. They do, however, remain both a viable approach as well as an increasingly pressing discussion to be had at each level of the institutional pipeline. Still, there are limited studies that explore the attitudes towards gender quotas in academia, with voluntary efforts still working to achieve gender parity in HEIs in the UK (Bagues et al., 2014; Peterson, 2015).

2.3 Concluding remarks

This chapter has established the discursive elements related to organizational practices and policies intended to improve women's representation in leadership positions of HEIs. The discussion of equal opportunity and diversity management demonstrates how these evolving discourses are connected to changes in processes, seeing a move from policies intended to eliminate discrimination to ones that more actively focus on recruiting from different talent pools and using this talent to improve organizational performance. Voluntary initiatives were also theoretically connected to arguments of the business case, highlighting the importance of maintaining meritocracy while also acknowledging the benefits of a diverse organization. Government regulation in the UK reflects an emergent discourse, with the 'threat' of targets leading some policy makers to call for more transformative action.

This thesis recognizes the complexity in developing and understanding initiatives that strategically address the nearly universal and individual barriers that women may face. Still, information about the variation and efficacy of policy measure implementation in academia is limited (Kalev et al., 2006; Timmers et al., 2010; Voorspoels, 2018). While scholars have responded to how best to implement them (as in; best practice for creating a strategic plan focused on diversity) there is little that

theoretically and conceptually addresses the elements that account for the successful adherence to these strategic plans. Considering the evolving discourses and their relationship with the initiatives that they inform, this thesis argues that an examination of the discursive constructions of those in power is needed in order better understand gender equality initiatives in practice.

For the foreseeable future, voluntary practices will be the main mechanism for the UK to improve women's representation at all levels of work. Substantial effort and resources are put into these initiatives. They are generally designed to be top down; meaning they are implemented at the top by organizational managers and leaders (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Alternatively, those 'from the top' are required to set up working groups and task forces geared towards these specific initiatives (for example recruiting a diversity and equality officer).

This is the case for regulation that is implemented by the government and is largely the case for more voluntary initiatives that are designed and introduced by campaign groups and government backed commissions. Although HEIs may have strategic teams, the direction and control of these teams and groups largely involves managerial intervention. Criticisms of these approaches therefore are inevitable, as they require hierarchical power and adherence to the recognition that current practices are susceptible to possible inequality and discrimination.

The debates of gender and equality initiatives also involve some form of 'taking sides' where individuals, and especially those in power, are required to publicly take a position within the debate about the most suitable way they wish to tackle the challenge of women's underrepresentation in leadership (implicitly or explicitly subscribing to a business or justice rationale or both, for instance, and publicizing accordingly). The communication of these initiatives, as is seen above, can thus vary greatly. There are criticisms for voluntary, incentive based, and formal regulations; as well as discrepancies as to why a diverse workforce is important (Sealy et al., 2016). The way in which leaders and decision makers discursively align the initiatives with the organization's greater visions and goals is thus of relevance for scholars, policy makers, and institutional actors more generally.

Chapter 2: Gender, inequality, and higher education institutions

The following chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the theoretical perspectives for women's underrepresentation. This will outline existing obstacles and barriers that face women as they progress through the academic hierarchy. Rhetoric surrounding women's careers and choices will also be addressed. Areas where the equality initiatives outlined above have attempted to improve the situation for women will be identified, with a discussion of how these initiatives may alleviate some of the challenges women face.

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Chapter 3: Women's (under)representation in leadership

Researchers and practitioners have developed several theoretically and empirically based arguments for why women are underrepresented in leadership positions. The following chapter reviews these theories and perspectives. Following the structure of other scholars of gender and inequalities (Evetts, 2000; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Timmers, et al., 2010), the different perspectives are categorised as follows: (1) individual, (2) cultural, and (3) structural.

Women are likely to face multiple barriers at one time and at different points throughout their careers, thus elements of each perspective can be drawn upon to account for women's underrepresentation. As such, these different factors are not mutually exclusive. The categorization of these perspectives is thus not meant to ignore their interaction; for instance, factors identified as 'individual' can be attributed to cultural patterns and behaviour, in the same way that structural and institutional factors are influenced by culture. The categorization therefore reflects the way these perspectives most effectively function as a comprehensive framework for explaining women's continued underrepresentation in senior roles (Benschop & Brouns, 2003; Liff & Ward, 2001). Based on each perspective, examples of different barriers women face are provided in consideration of corporate and academic fields, with explicit discussion of elements related to women in leadership and HEIs.

3.1 Individual perspectives

Individual differences between men and women are often used to account for the complexities surrounding how and why people make choices when progressing through their careers (Osborn et al., 2000). Through this perspective, women's underrepresentation at senior levels is attributed to fundamental differences between men and women, either because of innate psychological traits or socialisation (Fagenson, 1990; Timmers et al., 2010).

The expected differences between men and women often correspond with initiatives aimed specifically at supporting women. This perspective therefore relates to

the 'fixing women' debate, with interventions at this level adjusting for deficits in social or human capital (Kalev et al., 2006). The following section will expand on this, focusing first on preferences and choices. Briefly, this perspective accounts for men's and women's representation in the labour market by emphasizing their freedom to make their own choices about their careers and lifestyles, with some choosing to 'opt out' of leadership roles (Stone, 2007). Next, there will be a discussion of research that focuses on expectations about personality differences. This refers to a body of literature that focuses on innate characteristic differences between men and women that account for their positions in leadership, such as communication styles and confidence. These will also be critically evaluated.

3.1.1 Choice and preferences

The recognition of personal preferences remains a prominent explanatory factor to why women are less likely than men to progress through to leadership roles (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Osborn et al., 2000). Research in this area has attempted to establish not only if there are fundamental differences in men's and women's ambitions towards leadership positions, but also if their choices are intertwined with preferences about home and family life, and if current academic leadership positions are compatible with these preferences (Harding & McGregor, 1995; Probert, 2005; Schiebinger, 1999; Sonnert & Holton, 1995; Valian, 1999).

The emphasis on preference and choice to account for women's disproportionate representation in leadership differs from the view taken in this thesis. Again, the perspective taken for the present study argues that women's disproportionate representation is an indicator of systemic inequalities and discrimination that women face at various points throughout their lives. In contrast, the choice and preference perspective considers the number of women in leadership to be an expression of agency and a symbol of women's freedom of choice about their careers and lifestyles. Advocates for this perspective argue that women's position in the labour market and socio-economic status is reflective of personal preferences, work values, and gender role attitudes of women (Hakim, 2000; Fortin, 2005).

One of the pioneers of this view is Catherine Hakim, who established a theory called preference theory. Preference theory (Hakim, 2000) seeks to explain and predict women's choices in the labour market as they relate to productive and reproductive work. The main tenets of this theory will be outlined below along with other supporting literature including the 'opt out' revolution (Stone, 2007). Research that criticises these arguments, demonstrating that women's 'choices' are constrained by other existing barriers, will also be discussed.

One of the main arguments set out by Hakim (2000, 2002, 2006) is that in modern societies women have genuine choice between family work and market work. Hakim argues that the 'new scenario' started in the late 20th century and is formed of five conditions that have allowed for women to have equal access to housing, public services, and to therefore make real choices in how they commit their time to work and family life. These changes include: (1) the contraceptive revolution (where women were able to take control of their own fertility), (2) the equal opportunities revolution, (3) increases in white collar jobs, (4) non-standard work and work for secondary earners, and (5) the emphasis on personal attitudes, values, and preferences in lifestyle choices (Hakim, 2000, 2003).

Hakim claims that the equal opportunities revolution meant that "for the first time in history, women obtained equal access to all positions, occupations, and careers in the labour market. Sometimes, this was extended to posts in the public sphere more generally" (Hakim, 2000, p.3). Examples of legislation prohibiting sex discrimination are used by Hakim as evidence for the equal opportunity revolution, as well as legislation that allowed for equal access to housing and other public services.

Hakim also argues that policy makers and social scientists overlook the true desires of women, ignoring their views about how they wish to function in current society. One of the ways the argument is made is through evidence from research programs done in 1998 and 1999 that used focus groups, social attitude surveys, and opinion polls to collect information about women's values and priorities (Hakim, 2000; 2003). These programs found that one third of women believe home and family are women's main focus and that women should not combine careers and children (Bryson,

1999; Hakim 2003). Two-thirds of women felt that jobs were the best way for women to be independent, and women were evenly split on their views towards whether or not being a housewife was as fulfilling as having a waged salary.

Based on these findings, one of the central arguments of preference theory is that when genuine choice is given to women as a result of the new-scenario's social-economic changes, women are able to choose from three different lifestyles: home-centred, adaptive, or work-centred (Hakim, 1996, 2000, 2003). Home-centred women, according to the theory, are a small proportion of the population and are women who typically have larger families. They choose not to work unless financially necessary. These women may be educated, recognizing the education system as a 'marriage market' where women can meet prospective husbands with equal or better qualifications (Hakim, 2000). Hakim argues that women are even more likely to marry men with better qualifications if they themselves have degrees. She also argues that this is why more women than men study in the arts and humanities, which Hakim claims have lower economic value and earnings potential than male dominated disciplines.

The next type of lifestyle preference is labelled as adaptive. These women are more attracted to positions that will allow for work-life balance, typically jobs that allow for part time, seasonal, or temporary work. Adaptive women make up the majority of women today, combining work and family life. Finally, there are work centred women. These women make up 10% to 30% of the female population and are those who choose careers over being the primary family caregivers. These women generally do not have children even when they are married and focus instead on competitive activities in the labour market.

An additional important feature of preference theory is that the heterogeneous interests of women are not only divided but also create conflict among women themselves. This is argued to contribute to the lower number of women than men in leadership positions because women are less likely to support those with differing lifestyle preferences. This means that women are "not only qualitatively different but also have *conflicting* interests" (Hakim, 2000, p.157, emphasis in original). Men,

alternatively, are considered to be homogenous; they are all work centred and thus likely and able to support men in their efforts to senior leadership.

Home-centred women are likely to be in favor of men being work-centred, and men are more likely to support each other in their focus, having been "exceptionally successful in institutionalising the social conventions and rules that support, maintain, and extend male dominance in all spheres of life." (Hakim, 2000, p.10). This therefore provides support for the importance of *mentors* and *sponsors*. As outlined above, initiatives that pair women with willing and suitable role models can help them in alleviating the struggle associated with the conflict between career and home oriented women (O'Connor et al., 2019).

Supporters of preference theory argue that evidence of these lifestyle preferences can be seen when looking at families of those in senior roles (Kan, 2007). Around half of the women who do have senior-level positions in the UK are childless, regardless of marital status, which reduces or eliminates any work-life balance issues (Campbell & Childs, 2014; Hakim, 2004, 2006). This is also true when looking at the family demographics of female vice chancellors, who are less likely to have children than male vice chancellors (Breakwell & Tytherleigh, 2008). This research suggests that women "may require greater social and domestic sacrifices" in order to be successful in HEI leadership roles (Breakwell & Tytherleigh, 2008, p.124). From this view, women in senior roles have made the choice to commit to being work centred. However, Hakim argues that most women are unwilling to make their career a priority over personal and family life, and that this is:

> Unwelcome news to many feminists, who have assumed that women would be just as likely as men to be work-centred once opportunities were opened to them, and that sex discrimination alone has so far held women back from the top jobs in any society (Hakim, 2003, p.55).

This also relates to the 'opt out' revolution, referring to a semi personal essay by Lisa Belkin in the New York Times in 2003. Belkin labelled the idea that well-educated women leave their careers to choose to stay home with children as the 'opt out' revolution, stating that women were increasingly disinterested in workplace gains, and

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instead were choosing to be married and stay at home. This article was controversial and received substantial media attention. Since this time, additional coverage of the topic has been published in countless books, magazines, and journal articles.

In 2007, Pamela Stone's influential book further investigated why mothers leave successful careers in order to stay home, critiquing the 'opt out' revolution to discuss the realities for working mothers. In doing so, Stone identified that women are more often pushed out of their careers due to being unable to manage both home life and work life, making it less of a 'choice' to stay home. Stone challenged organizations to develop more accommodating policies and arrangements that ensure women are able to balance work and family, and that they are able to return to work if they do take periods of leave. Similar findings have been found elsewhere, with researchers questioning whether women are choosing to 'opt out' or are 'pushed out' (Williams et al., 2006).

One of the most popular taglines since the original article is by Judith Warner and her article titled, '*The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In*' (published in the New York Times in 2013). In this article it is argued that the generation that 'opted out,' 10 years later, is wanting to re-enter the labour market but is struggling to do so after substantial time out. The author found that many of the women who made statements for the original article are now looking to supplement their family income because of economic changes, because they are divorced, or most often because they now have grown children and are looking for fulfilling and challenging ways to spend their time (Jones, 2012). These women, especially those who did not maintain professional contacts or further develop their skills, are struggling to find work. Those who are successfully attaining waged labour are doing so at lower pay and with a reduction in responsibility than what they had previously (Graff, 2007).

The book and articles above are examples of only a few of the many that have been published regarding the 'opt out' revolution and related criticisms. Between 1980 and 2006, 119 newspaper articles covered the 'opt out' storyline to discuss women's choices in leaving the workplace (Williams et al., 2006). These stories had prominent placement, functioning as a tool to explain women's socioeconomic position. The reasons these articles, and the 'opt out' story line more generally, remain important is

because of the rhetoric it (re)produces regarding women and family work/life balance. Criticisms of these articles have highlighted how the mainstream media and press pick up on trends that reflect historic stereotypes and 'comfortable' discourses about women and work (Jones, 2012).

This rhetoric ignores the substantial evidence about structural barriers experienced by women, such as workplace inflexibility, the gender pay gap, and discrimination against mothers by employers (Graff, 2007). Scholars have argued that these types of articles function as a form of 'selling anxiety,' where the media aims to scare women into making choices that are 'comfortable' and fit the standards of women as caregivers (Rivers, 2008). They also draw heavily on gendered roles and values, helping to ensure that institutional and social culture remains under a veil of patriarchal norms (Acker, 1990; Hearn & Husu, 2011).

The popularity of the 'opt out' storyline thus helped to create and maintain the dominant ideology about women and their labour market/home life choices. However, it was based on select highly-education white women who graduated from top American universities (Jones, 2012). The 'opt out' revolution discourse largely ignores socio-economic challenges facing women from minority ethnic groups and/or less advantaged backgrounds who are likely to face further discrimination and not be given the freedom of choice afforded to those from privileged groups. It provides organizations with a justification for why women are not progressing through organizations, allowing them to ignore the structural and cultural barriers placed upon women workers. It therefore prevents organizations from developing and implementing effective retention strategies, meaning that they also lose out on talented women and increase turnover costs (Reddy, 2007). Again, this has particularly negative implications for women who are not from the same privileged backgrounds as those who were interviewed in the 'opt out' revolution article.

Considering the above, preference theory as well as the 'opt out' revolution and related rhetoric can be used as a means of explaining the lack of women in leadership positions in HEIs. From the perspective of preference theory or 'opting out,' fewer women have chosen to be in leadership positions because of other goals and values

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related to work and family life. If the 'new scenario' is indeed accurate, it offers an optimistic view about individual agency, suggesting that both men and women are able to make unconstrained choices regarding their lifestyles. However, as will be demonstrated in the remainder of this chapter, these ideals are largely contested.

3.1.1.1 Critiquing individual preferences

Although preference theory and opting out has garnered much popularity in research and in the media, additional scholarship has suggested that it takes an overly simplistic view of both choice and constraint and is lacking in a holistic understanding of women's ability to navigate through an unequal society (McRae, 2003).

For instance, Collins and Wickham (2004) used interview data to determine how women make the decision to start work and what makes them stay. Confirming parts of Hakim's arguments, they support the idea that women's preferences do play a large role in determining women's place in the labour market. They also critique Hakim's perspective pointing to the significance of the different constraints that women face, stating that "women neither have complete freedom of choice nor do they fall into neatly defined, unchanging, universal 'types' with fixed preferences" (Collins & Wickham, 2004, p.43). In a similar study, Gash (2008) argues that while preferences do play a role and should be taken into account, factors such as national policies for maternal employment do not always allow for these preferences to be met. Thus, while parts of Hakim's theory are supported, other research stresses the significance of structural constraints on how women's choices are realised (Gash, 2008; Lewis & Simpson, 2017).

Focusing on the issue of constrained choice, McRae (2003) demonstrates how women with reportedly similar preferences have different outcomes to their choices. In a longitudinal study of women's work histories following the birth of their first child, McRae found that women differed in their ability to overcome barriers and act upon perceived preferences. This ability was influenced by an array of socio-economic and personal factors. One of the main determinants in which women were found to overcome barriers was their income level, with women with the highest income being able to live "*as if* they faced no constraints" (McRae, 2003, p.329, emphasis in original).

These findings led McRae (2003) to argue that understanding women's choices, particularly after childbirth, "depends as much on understanding the constraints that differentially affect women as it does on understanding personal preferences" (p.317). Linking to women's underrepresentation, this indicates that only *some* women may be able to have unconstrained choice, demonstrating that personal privilege and advantage plays a large role in the types of women who are able to achieve leadership roles when faced with other societal barriers.

Kumra (2010) specifically investigated the idea of the 'work-centred' woman and her perceived unconstrained choices. Using interview data from female consultants in a UK firm, it was identified that women do feel constrained by organizational practices and norms and feel that the same constraints do not pertain to their male counterparts. Similarly, Leahy and Doughney (2014) refer to the phenomenon of 'adaptive preferences,' where women are forced to make adjustments to their choices in response to persistent gender inequality. Gender imbalances and the lack of women in top level jobs are indicative of these 'forced' changes in preferences that are a result of persistent barriers, rather than a result of true differences in aspirations.

An additional component to the idea of unconstrained choice critically examines the voluntary nature of domestic responsibilities. Although some women do voluntarily leave work to raise children, "the evaluation of any voluntary act depends on the quality of choices on offer – that the action chosen appeared to the agent preferable to the alternatives available at the time does not tell us much" (Barry, 2002, p.14). This refers to the idea that because of gender differences and unequal practices in the labour market, where women are likely to earn less income than male counterparts, are likely to face discrimination, and/or to feel constrained in their work-choices, it is difficult for women to have favourable alternatives after childbirth (Barry, 2002; Laurijssen & Glorieux, 2011).

Men are also consistently more likely to be the partner with the highest income, thus pushing them to remain in the workforce on their higher earnings, while women take longer periods of leave (Kan & Gershuny, 2010). Alternatively, women may be forced to quickly enter back into the workforce after having children due to not being

able to survive with no income or in a single income household generated from a working partner, thus being more likely to accept lower ranking or part-time roles (McRae, 2003). Furthermore, research indicates that when or if women do return to work after periods of leave, specifically after having children, norms of organizational culture and preconceptions about working mothers mean that organizations are not necessarily supportive of parents' needs (discussed further below; Hoffman & Cowan, 2008; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Therefore, differences in lifestyle choices are not necessarily reflective of unconstrained choice, but are affected by other substantial socio-economic factors.

Similar to the 'opt out' revolution, a notable effect of Hakim's theory has been its presence in the media. When looking at the influence of Hakim's theory, Lewis and Simpson (2017) argue that the media attention from Hakim's work has had an impact on opportunities for women by changing the narrative around women's careers. They bring attention to the fact that in 2015 *The Times* published an article referencing Hakim that asserted that it is women's choices regarding their employment that drives the gender pay gap, not discrimination (Philips, 2015). Critically, this provides a 'comfortable' alternative to bias and discrimination, allowing for the public view to move the responsibility of equality away from organizations and place the explanation for the lack of gender parity on the choices of individual women themselves (Kumra, 2010). Considering this, the remainder of this chapter will first focus on biases in gender-based personality expectations, followed by a discussion of the cultural and structural barriers women face that are used to theoretically account for the disproportionately low number of women in leadership roles.

3.1.2 Expectations about personality differences

The previous section described an individual level perspective in which women's representation is attributed to differences in preferences and choice. Taking a different but related approach, this section outlines what Fagenson (1990) refers to as a 'gender-centred perspective.' The premise of this view is that there are fundamental differences

in men's and women's personalities, which can account for their differences in skills and behaviour (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Fagenson, 1990).

The gender-centred perspective informs intervention strategies intended to support or 'improve' women, and thus do not consider the relevance of organizational structures in the construction of gendered views or expectations. The expectations about personality are likely to lead to men's and women's skills, abilities, and experiences being assessed differently, which can influence their career progression (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013a). One of the ways in which men and women are perceived as different is in their confidence and self-esteem in connection with putting themselves forward for leadership roles (Bleidorn et al., 2016; Dickerson & Taylor, 2000). The 'confidence gap' is a term used to refer to this separation, where women are less likely to consider themselves for promotions and ultimately underestimate their own abilities in comparison to men.

Dickerson and Taylor (2000) found that women do not apply for promotions if they lack any of the requirements listed on the job criteria, however men apply for roles even if they only have a few of the skills needed. This was claimed to be related to a lack of self-confidence in individual ability. The popularity of books such as Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) suggests that there is an accepted problem with women's confidence. The *Lean In* mantra specifically explains women's low representation by claiming that women do not seize opportunities and that they must look inward in order to close the confidence and therefore leadership gap.

The existence of a confidence gap has been widely contested, with some researchers arguing that there are "no consistent gender differences in self-confidence in achievement-oriented domains" (Guillén et al., 2018, p. 839). Specifically, findings suggest that women in academia are less optimistic about their career opportunities than men, considering professorial roles to be "undesirable, unrealistic, and unattractive" (Evers & Sieverding, 2015, p.168). While some have attributed this to a lack of self-confidence (Knipfer et al., 2017), others have argued that it is a reflection of the very real barriers women are likely to face if they do have ambitions to progress through the academy (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). Thus, attempts to enhance women's confidence

have been criticised for trying to fit women into male models of academic culture rather than to make the culture more encouraging and accepting of women (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010).

Other researchers contend that the perceived confidence gap is actually an incorrect interpretation of women's behaviour (Gourguechon, 2018; Wittenberg-Cox, 2013a). The problem might not be that women lack confidence, but rather that women recognize the negative consequences of putting themselves forward and must balance the advantages and disadvantages of certain behaviour. When asking for promotions, women are more likely to be negatively perceived than men, which may hinder their ability to earn workplace rewards in the future (Heilman, 2001). Women refraining from putting themselves forward during these uncertain situations thus leads others to see them as 'lacking confidence.'

Regardless of actual confidence differences, the *perception* that women lack confidence places disadvantages on women who are in senior roles. Successful leaders are required to give off a self-confident *appearance* as it is positively related to ability, promotion (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009), and with having influence on team decisions (Guillén et al., 2018). However, Guillén, Mayo, and Karelaie (2018) argue that the appearance of being self-confident has different consequences for men and women in leadership. They argue that while male confidence leads to more influence in the organization, the effects of women's self-confidence is conditional on them exhibiting pro-social behaviour. Women are therefore not only disadvantaged by being perceived as lacking confidence; they also must compensate when they demonstrate confident behaviour. The authors determine the following:

> While men benefit from their high performance independently of whether they are motivated to take others' interests at heart, women must exhibit pro-social behaviour to reap the benefits of their job performance (Guillén et al., 2018, p.850).

Looking at other expectations regarding personality, a difference between men and women in displaying their individual skill set has also been found. Women are found to be less able than men to accurately display their skills to male managers (Smith

et al., 2013). Bjerk (2008) developed a model to examine these differences, and found that unequal outcomes in promotion can be explained through gendered differences in sending 'signals.' Signals refer to the ways people communicate their specific skill sets, either through completing tasks at work or through social activities (Bjerk, 2008).

In order to receive promotions and seize relevant opportunities, employees must send positive signals to their managers. Signals are better understood by those within the same social group, meaning that women are better at understanding signals from other women and men are better at understanding those from men (Bjerk, 2008; Smith et al., 2013). Given the majority of leadership positions are occupied by men, the signals men send are more likely to be understood, resulting in their aspirations being recognized and them being put forward for additional tasks, promotions, and senior roles.

Similar studies argue that men have higher status roles than women because of differences in how they communicate the reasons for their success within the workplace (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). This research demonstrates that women who perform well in leadership roles are more likely than men to have their success attributed to something or someone else, such as luck or good fortune (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). It is not just men who attribute a women's success to luck, but women are often found to describe their success and success of other women as being down to happenstance and good timing (Tutchell & Edmonds, 2016). Men, in contrast, more often attribute their success to hard work. When this happens, managers are less likely to see women as being ready for leadership roles and will therefore appoint men into open positions (Tutchell & Edmonds, 2016).

The individual perspectives outlined here argue that women's representation can be attributed to fundamental variances in preferences, choices, and gender-based personality differences. These views have been critiqued for their inconsistency as well as for their overall ability to account for women's underrepresentation. A key feature of these debates is that they highlight the complexity of organizational gender (in)equality. Based on the above, one way to close the gender gap in leadership roles would be to decrease the focus on gender differences when developing intervention strategies (Martin & Phillps, 2017). This would in theory help to deemphasize existing beliefs

about men and women, and instead allow for differences between individual people to be recognized and reinforced. However, this would require transformative change at the level of organizational culture, which as will be demonstrated below, reflects a fundamental challenge in achieving gender parity (de Vries & van den Brink, 2016; Liff & Cameron, 1997).

3.2 Cultural perspectives

The cultural perspective views women's underrepresentation to be a result of an internalised set of values "that are consistent with characteristics traditionally valued in men, stereotyping, and a preference for men," with these gendered values being embedded within the academic system (Timmers et al., 2010, p721). As mentioned in Chapter 1, this thesis adopts the perspective that the higher education system has been socially constructed in a fashion that privileges men and disadvantages women (Acker, 1990; Charles, 2008; Kohn, 1977). From this perspective, the definition of organizational culture adopted for this thesis is as follows:

> Rules and expectations for behaviour that arise through both the deliberate actions of leadership and the on-going interaction of group members. Typically unwritten and often unspoken, this culture gives the organization a certain style and character and may have considerable impact upon the values, attitudes and actions of employees in both work and non-work domains (Bowen & Orthner, 1991, p.190).

From this perspective, the specific elements that will be discussed below include inaccurate gender stereotypes and assumptions about men and women and the behavioural outcomes of these inaccurate assumptions, including male-dominated networks. It is thus argued that gender stereotypes and male-dominated networks are products of institutional culture, and that they also reproduce institutional culture as often "unspoken rules" (Bowen & Orthner, 1991, p.190).

While previous literature has categorized gendered networks as a structural constraint that prevent gender parity, it is argued that workplace practices have changed

and gendered networks are now more subtle than they were previously. They are considered symptomatic of "a pattern of basic assumptions" about relationships between men and women at work that influence and are influenced by the organizational culture (Schein, 1985, p.9). They do create structural constraints by preventing access to certain opportunities, however, are considered here to be a result of pervasive male-dominated social structures.

Through empirical evidence and theoretical models, the following sections will demonstrate that gender stereotypes continue to have an impact on the likelihood of women being considered for senior roles, the types of senior roles they are likely to obtain, and how successful they are predicted to be once placed in these roles (Heilman, 2001). It will then be shown that these stereotypes, as well as other gendered practices, result in male-dominated networks that also influence women's access to appropriate mentors and sponsorship. These networks are vital for obtaining senior academic roles, and by having limited access, women are disadvantaged (Bird, 2011; Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2010).

3.2.1 Role stereotyping: women as leaders

Research on gender stereotypes has been substantial and ongoing over several decades (Bakan, 1966; Eagly et al., 2019; Lueptow et al., 1995). Gender stereotypes are culturally shared beliefs about expectations for the behavior and interests of men and women based on their categorization into gendered social groups (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). These traditionally held beliefs are pervasive and resistant to change, specifically in regards to organizational and institutional settings (Heilman et al., 1995).

For this reason, gender stereotypes are an often-analysed reason for inequality, with several theories and frameworks being developed to better understand how stereotypes modify the perception and evaluation of female workers aspiring to leadership positions (Gipson et al., 2017). A brief overview of the nature and history of gender stereotypes will be discussed to demonstrate their pervasiveness over time and the impact they have on women aspiring to senior roles. Theories and frameworks will then be explored, including Schein's (1973, 2007) think manager-think male paradigm,

Heilman's (1983, 2001) lack of fit model, and Eagly and Karau's (2002) role incongruity theory.

One of the reasons gendered stereotypes remain pervasive is because gender is considered a primary and unchanging feature in human perception (Ellemers, 2018). The existence of stereotypes is largely attributed to traditional cultural norms and beliefs about men and women and their occupational roles (Eagly, 1987). In the past, women were expected to perform maternal duties and domestic work, while men were expected to be bread-winners. This led to differences in gender socialization. Although professions are no longer only for men and women are no longer expected to 'be in the home,' certain aspects of these gender stereotypes remain because "they are evoked by highly visible, biological characteristics, and they are based on selective information and myth acquired throughout people's lives" (Rudman & Phelan, 2008, p.63).

In much of the gender stereotype literature, the perceived differences between men and women are summarised using Bakan's (1966) proposal of two fundamental modalities of human existence: agency and communion (Eagly et al., 2019; Diehl et al., 2004; Heilman, 2001). Agentic characteristics (associated with men) are those such as confidence and assertiveness, while communal characteristics (associated with women) are those that demonstrate warmth and kindness. As Heilman (2001, p.658) summarises:

> Men and women are thought to differ both in terms of achievement-oriented traits, often labelled as 'agentic' and in terms of social-service-oriented trains, often labelled as 'communal' (Bakan, 1966). Thus, men are characterised as aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive, whereas women are characterised as kind, helpful, sympathetic, and concerned about others. Not only are the conceptions of women and men different, but they also often are oppositional, with members of one sex seen as lacking what is thought to be most prevalent in members of the other sex (Heilman, 2001, p.658).

These communal and agentic traits ascribed to women and men "form a constant backdrop to social interaction, coloring the judgments made about people encountered in organizations and in other contexts" (Koenig et al., 2011, p.617). These traits are found to be associated with men and women regardless of whether or not they actually display

them (Powell & Butterfield, 1979; Koenig et al., 2011). This leads into the *descriptive* function of gender stereotypes.

3.2.1.1 Descriptive function of gender stereotypes

A common theme among the use of stereotypes as a theoretical reason for women's underrepresentation is the focus on tensions between the characteristics necessary for leadership and those associated with men. Schein's (1973) think manager-think male paradigm suggests that the same characteristics associated with successful leaders are those associated with masculine stereotypes (such as assertiveness, determination, and verbal reasoning; Gipson et al., 2017). Therefore, because women are not as often associated with the traits of good leaders, they are less likely to be considered for leadership roles (Schein, 1973, 2007).

Heilman's (1983, 2001) lack of fit model builds on this idea by specifying that due to the perception that women are ill-equipped for leadership roles, if they do achieve these positions, they are expected to be less successful by other leaders and by their staff. This results in women in leadership roles being more harshly evaluated and negatively judged, irrespective of their actual performance (Heilman, 2001). When these evaluations are formal, or are taken into account for promotion or recruitment decisions, women are disadvantaged due to preconceived notions about women and leadership.

In support of this, Sinclair and Kunda (2000) found that women in management roles were viewed as less competent after they gave negative feedback than when they gave positive feedback. There was no effect found for the perceptions of male managers regardless of the type of feedback they administered. This bias in evaluation and expectation begins from the point of recruitment; male applicants are often recommended for senior positions over female applicants despite having similar applications, credentials, and experience (Davidson & Burke, 2000; Heilman, 1995).

The similarities in theories on gender stereotypes suggest that the low representation of women is a reflection of a mismatch between the traits associated with leaders and those associated with women. Eagly and Karau (2002) refer to this as *role incongruity.* This theory specifically points out that men's social roles overlap with

leadership while women's do not; men's traits are directly associated with leaders, while women's traits are seen as desirable but not essential to leadership.

The challenge for women in senior roles is then furthered because of their *status* incongruity, referring to the hypothesis that powerful women face negative consequences because their achieved status as leaders is incongruent with their ascribed status as women (Rudman et al., 2012). Rudman and Phelan (2008) argue that powerful women make others uncomfortable, because the "incongruity jeopardizes pre-existing rules for gender roles, forcing people to do more mental work to reconcile the perceived contradiction" (p.69). This then also relates to research discussed previously on gender quotas for academic evaluation committees, where male committee members were thought to be less supportive of women applying for senior professor roles than women applying for junior roles (Bagues et al., 2014).

This begins to demonstrate the way in which stereotypes function both descriptively and prescriptively (Heilman, 2001). While the above demonstrates that there are assumptions about how men and women *do* behave, there are also held assumptions about how they *should* have; prescribing what is suitable behaviour based on an individual's gender (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman, 2001). Women therefore face two types of discrimination as leaders: descriptively, women are considered to be less natural in leadership roles, and prescriptively, women are seen negatively when they display the behaviours required for these roles (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Koenig et al., 2011).

3.2.1.2 Prescriptive function of gender stereotypes

More specifically, when women adopt stereotypically male behaviour, they are seen differently than men who perform the same actions. Behaviours that are beneficial to men can be detrimental to women, for example men being seen as confident versus women being seen as abrasive when performing similar tasks (Heilman, 2001; Koenig et al., 2011). This reflects role incongruity as discussed previously, where there is a mismatch between how a person acts and how they are expected to act (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Snyder, 2014).

Taken together, this has been referred to as a 'double bind;' where women who act in ways seen as typically male are perceived as unfeminine and women who act in ways seen as typically female are perceived as potentially incompatible with leadership roles (Catalyst, 2007; Ibarra et al., 2010). Women leaders are found to face this double bind in both the public and private sector, with those in higher education being expected to demonstrate behavior associated with 'teachers,' such as compassion and warmth (Fitzgerald, 2013; Kawakami, 2000).

In addition to the double bind, Rudman (1998, 2012) identified a 'backlash effect.' When women behave counter-stereotypically (that is, when they adopt the behaviours and traits associated with men rather than with women), they are subject to social and economic reprisals (Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Rudman & Glick, 2012). This relates again to the prescriptive nature of stereotypes; when women are considered to be atypical women, they are going against the way they are expected to act and consequently negatively perceived. Specifically, when women present themselves as confident, assertive, and competitive (stereotypically male behaviours), they are viewed as "socially deficient and unlikeable by both male and female perceivers" (Rudman & Phelan, 2008, p.64).

Rudman and Phelan (2008) argue that backlash effects exist at all stages of employment, including recruitment, promotion, evaluations, and relevant workplace-negotiations. The backlash effect therefore continues to impact women once they obtain high-powered jobs. Women are more likely to be negatively evaluated as leaders even when the traits they present are considered to be required for career success. The epithets applied to powerful women are evidence of this, such as 'dragon lady' and 'iron maiden' (Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

The backlash effect has been found to not have the same consequences for men as it does for women. When looking at the impact on men, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Rudman (2010) found that 'modest men' applying for managerial roles faced prejudice in comparison to identically modest women. This is thought to be because displays of dominance are not only expected of men but they are also required in professional settings. However, the study found that hiring recommendations still favoured men;

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meaning that although modest men were more disliked than modest women, they were still more likely to be recommended for roles. The authors postulate that "it is possible that backlash against atypical men encompasses prejudiced (dislike), but stops short of actual discrimination (hiring)" (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010, p.148).

Gender stereotypes appear to be cross-cultural because similar gendered patterns have been found in the United Kingdom (Schein & Mueller, 1992), United States (Schein, 1973, 2007) as well as Japan and China (Schein et al., 1996); with individuals more strongly associating the same traits with men as they do with those that make effective leaders. Although the nature of work and society has changed since many of these studies were conducted, more recent studies have found these trends to be relatively stable over time and to still exist in modern workplaces (Koenig et al., 2011).

For instance, Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, and Ristikari (2011) examined the extent to which stereotypes of leaders are based on masculine traits, and while it has decreased over time, there was still an association between the traits that make good leaders and the traits of men. Even more recently, a study that compared data from the 1980s to new data from 2014 examined the stability of gender stereotypes and whether they exist in the same way they did in the past (Haines et al., 2016). The results indicate durability in the basic stereotypes about the traits that men and women possess. The authors suggest that those in the position to recruit and promote men and women should maintain "constant vigilance and an awareness that gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in our culture" (Haines et al., 2016, p.360).

Research has shown evidence of gender stereotyping and bias in student evaluations in higher education (Miller & Chamberlin, 2000). Although the findings are somewhat conflicted, there is evidence that suggests that women are rated lower than men in evaluations as a result of their gender, suggesting that this is because of conflicts with stereotypical perceptions of how men and women should behave (Mitchell & Martin, 2018). This disadvantages women because student ratings are often considered during recruitment and promotion, with lower ratings leaving women at a disadvantage during these processes (Benton & Cashin, 2014).

The gender bias in evaluations has been found to exist even in online forums, controlling for any differences in appearance, presentation style, or content. For example, Macneil et al. (2015) used a controlled online experiment to assess how students taking an online module would rate instructors when they believed they were female versus when they were male. The authors found that students consistently gave higher ratings to the instructor with a male identity than they did to the instructor with the female identity. The instructors, when posting online, administered the same content and course materials to the groups of students. This study particularly demonstrates the pervasiveness of gender biases and stereotypes, and offers a link to how these stereotypes might disadvantage women when they are taken into account for promotion decisions (Boring et al., 2016; Macneil et al., 2015; Mitchell & Martin, 2018).

It has also been found that not only do students give female instructors lower ratings but they also evaluate them on the basis of different criteria (Bates, 2015; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). Researchers have found that female faculty are evaluated more often on personality and appearance than on competence and ability (Boring et al., 2016; Marcotte, 2014; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). This was evidenced through differences in students' language use and comments, where evaluations would more often reference a female instructor's personal appearance and attractiveness. The authors argue that this suggests students have less professional respect for women in academia, further supported by the finding that students more often refer to women as 'teachers' and men as 'professors' in their evaluations (Miller & Chamberlin, 2000; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). These findings have led many scholars to argue that student evaluations should not be used for promotion decisions because of the pervasiveness of stereotypes and biases against certain groups (Baldwin & Blattner, 2003).

Despite the above findings and the persistence of gender stereotypes, some women have progressed into senior roles, achieving leadership positions in public and private institutions (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2010). This suggests that women are finding ways to overcome stereotypes or that gender stereotypes are changing (or both; Peterson, 2015; Powell et al., 2002). Some scholars argue that the increased presence of successful women in leadership will likely help in gradually changing stereotypes over time by

providing disconfirming information about gender roles (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Stoker et al., 2011).

3.2.2 Gendered networks

The following sections will address male-dominated networks and how these networks act as barriers to women looking to gain leadership and decision-making positions in HEIs. As previously mentioned, gendered networks have also been theorised as being a structural constraint to women's progression. However, considering the definition of organizational culture adopted for this thesis, and equally the recognition that workplace practices have changed to represent equal opportunity legislation, it is argued that gendered networks fit more appropriately in a discussion of workplace culture as they are often informally created through ideas of "the way things are done around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, 2000, p.4)

Existing research demonstrates that there is a natural human tendency to gravitate towards people who are perceived as being similar in terms of social status, background, gender, and ethnicity. From a psychological perspective, the inclination to form relationships with those similar to us comes from the belief that people we perceive to share traits such as gender and race are also more likely to share other characteristics such as interests, behaviors, and cultural background (Lazarsfield & Merton, 1954; Perrault, 2015). Individuals are also more likely to perceive those with similar characteristics to them as being more talented, more capable, and as having more potential than those who differ from them (Perrault, 2015).

The terms homosociality (Lipman-Blumen, 1976) and homophily (Lazarsfield & Merton, 1954) have been used to describe the way that actors within a network tend to display similar characteristics to each other and will select additional group members based on these shared characteristics. For clarity, following the lead of Perrault (2015), the term homophily (meaning 'love of the same') will be used below to describe the phenomenon where men recruit and promote candidates similar to themselves; often white, middle aged males (Mcdonald & Westphal, 2003; Sorenson & Stuart, 2008).

The gendered nature of networking leaves women at a disadvantage due to the dominance of men in leadership roles and their tendency to create close bonds with and to promote the skills and attributes of other men, therefore performing homophilous reproduction (Checchi et al., 2019; Mcdonald, 2011). Networking is considered to be vital for career success, with supportive role models and access to gatekeepers being central to academic career progression (Gersick et al., 2017; Hogan et al., 2005). Often referred to as the 'old boys' club,' this refers to an informal system where men are thought to use social and business connections to help other men significantly increase their labour-market opportunities (Gamba & Kleiner, 2001; Mcdonald, 2011; Oakley, 2000).

Historically, the old boys' club involved male colleagues organizing and attending social gatherings and events geared towards stereotypically male activities such as golfing, gambling, and other sporting events. Women were often purposely excluded from these events or not able to attend (Cross & Armstrong, 2008). One of the key reasons women were typically left out was because they were held 'out of hours,' after work or on weekends, preventing attendance from those with care responsibilities (more often women; Linehan, 2001). The impact of these informal meetings extends beyond missing social activities, but were also where information was shared and decisions were made, leaving those not in attendance at a professional disadvantage by preventing them from accumulating the necessary social capital (resources and/or status based on personal relationships; Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Nielsen, 2016).

Recent literature indicates that although there are no longer formally closed networks where women are excluded (Diezmann & Grieshaber, 2019), more informal networking practices still act as a barrier to women's academic progression (Knight, 2000; Searby & Tripses, 2006). This is especially true when considering where academic networking takes place, such as during international conferences or events that involve travel. Women with children are thus more likely to be excluded, making fewer connections and limiting their opportunities for cross-institutional authorships and potential citations (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a).

An additional disadvantage for women in academia comes from the impact of these male dominated networks and informal social structures on recruitment and selection procedures (Nielsen, 2016). In examination of how institutions create long and short lists to fill high-level academic positions, van den Brink and Benschop (2014) identified the importance of academic 'gatekeepers.' In line with the work of Merton (1973), they argue that gatekeepers are elite academics who become involved in the recruitment of candidates at an early stage, often before a position is formally announced. These gatekeepers act as 'scouts' who use formal and informal networks to help determine the list of potential candidates for positions such as full professor (Husu, 2004; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Gatekeepers are involved at multiple phases of the appointment process, influencing "which candidates are shortlisted, interviewed, and nominated" (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p.464).

In a study of appointment processes of full professors in the Netherlands, van den Brink (2010) found that more than half of those recruited had been selected through closed procedures. In the study, gatekeepers were found to "deliberately lobby or construct new positions, framing the profile to suit a particular candidate and resisting or undermining the policy measures of administrative staff" (van den Brink, 2010, p.229). When candidates are chosen through these informal networks, it means that the gatekeepers are using "their own view of excellence to assess these candidates" and often leave women at a disadvantage because they do not fit the predetermined male-models of academic excellence (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p.78).

Additional research across Europe has demonstrated the negative effects of gendered networks on academic researchers. O'Connor, O'Hagan, and Brannen (2015) explored Irish universities and found that academic gatekeepers varied in their definitions of excellence and were unaware of their subjective use of criteria to select and appoint potential candidates. The authors argue that the subjective definitions effectively marginalize female researchers and perpetrate male privilege because assessors are more likely to favor men (thus displaying homophilous group preferences).

Similar work in Finland universities (Husu, 2000) has shown that women are less likely to be appointed if the process involves invitation-based recruitment than if they

are based on open-competition. Nielsen (2015) showed that formal recruitment procedures are susceptible to alterations by academic gatekeepers, meaning that they may change some of the requirements or gear certain 'calls for applications' in order for them to use their personal networks. Thus, despite formal institutional procedures, academics in positions of power are able to "widen the space available to department heads to make decisions on the basis of personal idiosyncrasies, in-group favoritism and informal networks, potentially resulting in the reproduction of gendered power relations" (Nielsen, 2015, p.396).

An additional form of networking bias that is specific to academia can be found in citations and inclusion in academic reading lists. This represents a less abstract form of networking and instead demonstrates a specific barrier of weak networking ties. In a study of female and male author inclusion (and exclusion) in reading lists, Phull and colleagues (2018) found that in the department of international relations in one of the UK's leading institutions (London School of Economics), 79.2% of all assigned readings were exclusively written by male authors. The study offered a robust examination of core and elective courses, including books, book chapters, and journal articles, amounting to 12,399 textual sources. The authors argue that this represents a lack of gender equity because it is disproportional to the number of women in the field across the UK and globally (Phull et al., 2018). The authors suggest that this is due to patterns of institutional, disciplinary, and potential individual biases, as well as gender stereotypes about knowledge acumen for men and women. It is argued that reading lists and the work distributed to students within a field:

> Help to delineate the boundaries of the discipline and its subfield, [and] shape how knowledge is reproduced. In many ways, they are manifestations of (what is perceived to be) the state of the discipline at a given moment in time. (Phull et al., 2018, p.402).

When paired with other cultural practices, the exclusion of women, therefore, suggests that research questions and topics that are constructed through patriarchal and male-dominant modes of knowledge will continue to dominate research domains, representing what is considered world-leading across the academy.

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Research on academic networks has been criticized for neglecting the role of human agency in the construction and maintenance of these structures (Ibarra et al., 2005). While many scholars acknowledge the explanation provided previously about forming homophilous relationships, others argue that this negates the importance of strategic networking as a form of career management. More critically, it is important to recognize that having strong personal and professional networks allows for individuals to maintain the status quo and prevent the disruption of privileges for those at the top (Gallant, 2014).

Connell (2002, p.142) makes the arguments that "inequalities define interests, and those benefiting from inequalities have an interest in defending them. Those that bear the costs have an interest in ending them." What this means is that the advantages that come along with these closed networks, including increased wealth, security, independence, and so on, can actually encourage those in leadership roles to uphold the gender order (Connell, 2009). These privileges are under threat with the growing focus on improving gender parity in organizations (Oakley, 2000). It is not only the addition of women but the concern of what more formal or defined systems might take away from those 'in the club' (Gamba & Kleiner, 2001).

3.3 Structural perspectives

The structural perspective concerns the nature of academic work and the organization of work more generally to account for women's progression to leadership roles (Timmers et al., 2010). From this perspective, studies generally consider the requirements of academia in congruence with life outside of work, and demonstrate the gendered academic system.

In order to best demonstrate the structural challenges women in academia face, the concept of 'the ideal academic' is discussed. This is addressed to show that despite accumulating necessary experience and qualifications, women in academia face disadvantages because they do not always fit the 'male' criteria for excellence that is based on, and contributes to, the structure of academic work. It will also be shown that because women struggle to achieve senior roles, the vision of the 'ideal academic'

remains largely unchanged and male-oriented (Thornton, 2013). This is followed by a discussion of flexible working arrangements, and how expectations of academic leadership roles (constructed as the ideal academic) are often considered to be incompatible with the work of women, mothers, and parents.

Finally, there will be a discussion of 'the leaky pipeline,' which refers to women leaving their positions within the academic hierarchy. The pipeline model is introduced as a useful way to discuss women's structural constraints while also providing imagery for understanding when women are likely to leave their careers. Similar to the ideal academic, the leaky pipeline is both an explanation for women's underrepresentation and a structural result of it.

3.3.1 The 'ideal academic'

The 'ideal academic' or the 'ideal scientist' is most commonly used to refer to the notion that "women are welcome, but only when they conform to existing images of the ideal scientist, meaning a more than full-time devotion and willingness to spend long periods abroad" (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b, p.85).

Commonly called 'the ideal worker' in corporate contexts, this phenomenon refers to the image of what excellence looks like, constructed based on historical masculine norms (Acker, 1992; Bailyn, 2003; Valian, 1999). Thornton (2013) argues that in many contexts, the ideal academic's career trajectory emulates the following:

> An Honours undergraduate degree, an *international* postgraduate degree, an *international* postdoctoral fellowship, followed by an unbroken academic career focusing on research rather than teaching, regular attendance at international conferences, international institutional visitorships, as well as a string of grants, publications, awards, honours and prizes (Thornton, 2013, p.130, emphasis in original)

Despite improvements in women's representation across academia, some scholars argue that the masculine model for the 'ideal academic' remains unchanged; as is shown in the definition above, the ideal academic is someone who is able to make

work a total priority and able to have an international presence with little to no outside responsibilities (Bailyn, 2003). Women are therefore likely to miss out on recruitment and promotion opportunities if or when they demonstrate behavior (including the qualifications and experiences on their CV) that is outside of this gendered 'ideal' (Bowles et al., 2007).

Considering the already established barriers that women face, it is likely that women's career paths do not reflect this normative model of 'the ideal.' The most obvious example of this can be seen in the connection between the 'ideal scientist' and the expectation that excellent academics have no commitments or interests outside of work (Bailyn, 2003). Based on this expectation, women with other care obligations (such as for children or for elderly relatives) are not considered 'committed' to their fields. A key issue with this is that women who do choose to have children or take periods of leave are not supported in their transitions to and from work, making them more likely to drop off the pipeline or feel unable to progress through the hierarchy (Kemelgor & Etzkowitz, 2001). Additionally, women who take periods of leave are more likely to have gaps in their research output, therefore signaling a lack of commitment to research and furthering them from the label of the ideal academic and related rewards (Smith et al., 2013).

Recent research also indicates that women in academia perform more service work than men, disadvantaging them professionally (Guarino & Borden, 2017; Misra et al., 2011; Mitchell & Hesli, 2013). In one study, Guarino and Borden (2017) found that women were more likely to perform activities related to "faculty governance, faculty recruitment, evaluation and promotion, student admissions and scholarships, program supervision, development and marketing, [and] internal awards" (p.673). Although these activities are often recognized during performance evaluations, they do not carry as much weight as publications or funding awards, especially during promotion reviews. As a result of this participation in less desirable activities, women have less time to dedicate to the activities that will lead to leadership roles, and will once again have experiences outside of the ideal norm (Bird, 2011).

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Importantly, studies have examined exactly why women are more likely to perform service roles than men in academia. Studies from previous decades found that gendered socialisation patterns and stereotypes were likely to be the cause of women performing, and being expected to perform, more activities related to 'caretaking' (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). More recent studies, however, have argued that gendered academic power-dynamics make women less likely to refuse requests for service work because of fears of retaliation and for fears of shifting the burden to other female faculty (Bowles et al., 2007; Pyke, 2011).

Finally, Vesterlund, Babcock and Weingart (2014) found that women faculty at associate and full professor levels are more likely to volunteer for committee assignments than men. However, some critics have rejected that this is due to the notion that 'volunteerism' is highest among women. Rather, additional studies have argued that both men and women faculty expect women to volunteer more than men and, relatedly, women are asked to volunteer more frequently than equally suitable male colleagues (Babcock et al., 2017). Once again, this type of academic work, although important, is less valued than research output, publications, and successful funding applications, making women less likely to have the necessary components to fit into (or even change) the ideal academic norm and thus be considered qualified for senior positions (Guarino & Borden, 2017).

While the 'ideal academic' is detrimental to women because it reflects male-standards of excellence, it also reflects an endemic feature of academic life. Academic work has evolved over the last ten years, and while many features have remained constant, some researchers argue that professional overload, unpaid work, and the intensification of work have become more common and readily accepted (Gill, 2016). The increased corporatisation and privatisation of higher education has influenced this, with resultant changes to working conditions (Graham, 2002; Visser et al., 2019).

The changes in academia are not the topic of this thesis, however, it is important to note that the 'ideal academic' is likely to continue and intensify with these increasing pressures; requiring workers to demonstrate complete commitment to their roles. Regardless of equality efforts, it is likely that work-life and home-life will

remain at odds for individuals, and women especially, looking to move up the academic hierarchy (Nakhaie, 2007; Kinman, 2008).

To conclude this section, it is noteworthy that a version of the ideal scientist is argued to exist in all fields, and that "our system of government, our professions, our companies, our institutions and almost every aspect of British society was fashioned by men for the convenience of men" (Tutchell and Edmonds, 2016, p.130). Bailyn (2003) argues that in order to have gender equality in academic careers, there must be an integration of home and work identities, effectively working to alter what is viewed as the ideal academic:

> Such an integration would require also that work practices, structures, and cultural definitions of competence and success be embedded in the belief in, and acceptance of, a worker whose identity and commitments are legitimately anchored in both the occupational and the private world (Bailyn, 2003, p.140).

3.3.2 Flexible working arrangements

As can be seen in the formation of the 'ideal academic,' the nature of academic work allows for (and even encourages and/or necessitates) long hours and a deep commitment to research work. This is therefore an additional structural barrier to women's progression, with the above attitudes, customs, and practices interacting to produce environments that prevent women from being able to move up the organizational hierarchy. Flexible work has taken shape in response to these issues, as well as the need for organizations to provide a way of working that suits an employee's work and home commitments (Tomlinson, 2004). The following will discuss and critically evaluate flexible working in the UK, relating it to academic life and women's careers.

In the UK, The Flexible Working Regulation states that flexible working is "any working pattern other than the normal working pattern" (Deakin & Morris, 2012, pp.1). According to the UK law, types of flexible working may include: job sharing, working from home, working less than full time hours, working compressed hours, flexitime (employee chooses when to start and end work), annualised hours, staggered hours, and phased retirement (UK Government Employing People, 2019). Although anyone has the

right to request flexible working arrangements, they are seen as a critical resource to families and those with care responsibilities tasked with managing demands at home and at work (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019).

Research shows that there are inconsistencies in how organizations promote and value flexible working practices. Lewis (2001) argues that some employers view flexible working as favors rather than as something employees are entitled to, thus leaving employees to feel they must deserve these work-life initiatives in order to use them. The flexible working policies that organizations have are therefore sometimes seen as perks or benefits rather than entitlements (Lewis, 2001).

While flexible working arrangements intend to help people access and stay in work, manage care responsibilities, and support wellbeing; they have been found to "carry a price" (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019, p.4; Munsch et al., 2014). This price is often termed 'the flexibility stigma' and refers to the perception that those who take up flexible working arrangements for care purposes are less productive and less committed to work than those who do not (Chung, 2018; Williams et al., 2013). These perceptions go against the concept of the ideal academic who is meant to "demonstrate commitment in terms of long hours and [have] exclusive dedication to the job" (Gambles et al., 2006, p.45; Anderson-Gough et al., 2001; Lewis & Cooper, 2005).

The stigma has been found to be especially detrimental to working mothers, who are more likely to have to find balance between obligations at home and obligations at work (Chung, 2019). However, it is also found to be problematic for men and non-parents as well (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). The flexibility stigma can then lead to inaccurate assumptions about women's career preferences, preventing those in senior roles from providing women with resources to help them progress or from considering them for senior positions (Tomlinson, 2004; Williams et al., 2013).

In an examination of staff at a leading Australian research institute, Cech and Blair-Loy (2014) found negative consequences to the uptake of work-life policies related to the view that mothers and fathers are perceived as less committed to their departments than those who do not use the policies. The results demonstrate several consequences to the existence of 'flexibility stigma,' arguing that departments who are unsupportive of

these policies are more likely to have staff who want to leave academia for industry related jobs, do not perceive their university as being a 'long term fit,' feel less able to balance their work and home life, and are overall less satisfied with their work (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014). Flexibility stigma was also found to be part of wider cultural beliefs about the nature of work, meaning that departments with this stigma are likely to see negative outcomes for staff regardless of gender and family status. The authors therefore argue that flexibility stigma is problematic for departments as a whole, not just for families and people who use related policies.

Academic employment is argued to be relatively flexible in comparison to more rigid working patterns seen in other fields (meaning that much of academic work can be done from home, at night, or on weekends; Probert, 2005). However, it is argued that it is this inherent flexibility that negatively effects those with care responsibilities by making it more difficult to actually be 'absent' from the workplace (Mason et al., 2013; Rafnsdottir & Heijstra, 2013). Largely, the academic career model continues to follow that of the 'ideal academic,' where there are expectations about long working hours, travel, relocation, and a lack of work-life balance regardless of the uptake of flexible working policies (Mason et al., 2013).

Different types of flexible work arrangements also have different consequences. For instance, female academics who arrange to work from home during standard work hours are also less likely to attend work related social events. They then miss out on valuable opportunities to network, socialize, and be considered as 'part of the team' (Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2017). This is especially true for women who arrange to work part-time or wish to re-enter the work force after a set amount of parental leave, largely due to their need to be at home with children after working hours (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2010). Women who take flexible work can therefore be excluded from the bonding and decision making that is done in informal settings and out of office hours (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

In addition to the reasons outlined above, flexible working arrangements are not always as beneficial as intended because they often do not take into account additional workplace activities performed by staff (Heijstra et al., 2015). As mentioned previously,

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women are more likely to perform service work than men. This service work, although often necessary for efficient functioning of the workplace, generally receives little recognition when looking to further one's academic career. Bird et al. (2004) refers to this as 'institutional housekeeping,' and it is described as the following:

> Service work costs the university nothing, because administrators define these activities as secondary to the objectives of the organization, service work carries little if any exchange value for those who do it (Bird et al., 2004, p.195).

This institutional housekeeping is often considered to be 'women's work,' and is undervalued and often 'invisible.' Importantly, because this service work is less likely to be considered as 'official,' academic managers (heads of departments, etc.) struggle to properly quantify it and have it included in a person's workload (Heijstra et al., 2015). When women especially attempt to take up flexible working arrangements, this service work thus often remains spread across typical full-time hours, with little change in actual expectations about where and when women contribute to these activities.

Research has found that the repercussions of flexible working are known to employees and actually prevent them from taking up the options available to them (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014). This resistance towards flexible working options increases at the more senior levels of institutional hierarchies (Fagan, 2001; Piterman, 2008). As organizations undertake initiatives to enhance the options available, a major constraint is embedding them into the existing work-place culture (Piterman, 2008). Many women are aware of flexible working options but must balance their interests as a mother with the gendered ideas of a committed 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990; Teasdale, 2013).

There has also been attempts from institutions to make flexible working practices more available and more attractive to all employees, recognizing that everyone deals with conflicts when trying to reconcile work and private life (Rothausen et al., 1998; Wilkinson et al., 2018). In investigating work-life experiences of professionals who live alone, Wilkinson, Tomlinson, and Gardiner (2017) identified distinct challenges relating to work-life balance facing this under-researched but growing work population. They argued that flexible work policies must be reevaluated and refocused to not center only on those with children and care roles (Wilkinson et al., 2017, p. 652). Increasing the

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sense of legitimacy around access to flexible arrangements for men and other organizational actors might result in a positive change in culture and decrease the resistance and consequences for those who use them (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

3.3.3 The 'leaky pipeline'

Pipeline explanations are another common way to account for women's lack of representation in leadership roles, specifically referring to the number of qualified and available candidates at different levels of the organizational hierarchy (Berryman, 1983). The leadership pipeline is therefore made up of those who are at the stage in their careers where they have the potential and the interest to continue progressing further (Resmini, 2016). The 'leaky pipeline' represents the drop off of women at various stages throughout their career.

The following will unite and consolidate the literature already discussed (gender stereotypes, preferences, and the structure of work) to explain why the *pipeline model* is a useful tool to better understand where policy intervention can be targeted in order to ensure women not only remain at work but also have their talents and potential recognized.

Important contributions to the theoretical and political debates about women's underrepresentation in leadership have been made using the pipeline model. When using the model, it becomes possible to identify where the pipeline narrows, and can aid in visually describing leakages; where and when women drop out from the progression towards leadership roles. This in turn allows for the identification of reasons women leave, including organizational practices and lifestyle preferences. This provides the ability to coordinate literature on individual preferences, gender stereotypes, and the work environment in order to account for the shortages in available women at the top of the pipeline (Bennett, 2011).

The 'leakages' in the pipeline are representative of female attrition. This refers to women who leave from their positions in the hierarchy either to leave work altogether or to enter new roles. Historically, women were thought to leave their careers at a rate two

to three times faster than men (Forbes, et al., 1988). More recently, research shows that men and women leave their jobs at similar rates when looking at variances in sector, however, the reasons they leave their jobs differ (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

In 2004, three of America's leading business organizations sponsored a survey of working female graduates to understand more about their careers in and out of organizations, defined as those with a graduate degree, professional degree, or high-honours undergraduate degree (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). They categorized factors that influence why men and women leave their work as those that 'pull' and those that 'push' (Hughes, 1997). Among women, the most cited 'pull' reasons for leaving careers were to have or raise children, to care for elderly parents or family, or for personal health issues (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Bilimoria et al., 2008). In contrast, the top three reasons men pull away from their careers was shown to be a change in career, to earn additional training or qualifications, or because they were unsatisfied (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Women's decision to leave work was not made lightly; the women in the study found the decision to leave work a difficult one after investing in their education, training, and accumulating skills and credentials.

Some of the main reasons cited for why women feel 'pushed' from academic positions is due to frustration with career progression, perceived discrimination and inequality, and lack of social/networking opportunities, which were cited as being greater reasons to leave than the expected 'pull' of family and caring duties (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Piterman, 2008). The authors posit that women are not given the same opportunities because of the expectation that they are going to leave work, thus preventing senior leaders from investing in women and their careers. This makes the leaky pipeline argument relatively cyclical; women leave work because they are not valued and are not valued because they are assumed to be more likely to leave.

In connection with flexible working arrangements and work/life balance, 'leakages' in the academic pipeline are found to be more common in women who have children (Bos et al., 2019). Christensen et al. (2011) argue that family formation and childbirth account for the largest leaks in the pipeline between graduate school and permanent academic positions. Women with children are found to be far less likely to

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receive tenure than childless women; men's family status has little to no influence on them achieving tenured roles (Mason et al., 2013). The 'mommy penalty' is thought to be one of the most "formidable barriers holding women back in the academy" (Mason et al., 2013, p.750). Despite the efforts towards achieving environments that are more friendly to women and mothers, research indicates that women in higher education continue to identify having children and work-life conflicts as being one of the most difficult barriers to their desired career progression (Jakubiec, 2015).

The leaky pipeline has historically been more problematic in STEMM fields than in the humanities, social sciences, and business disciplines when examining progression from bachelor degrees through to academic positions (Barr et al., 2008; Schroeder et al., 2013). More recent studies suggest that the leaky pipeline metaphor only accounts for a small amount the gender imbalance seen in the number of men versus women who complete post-graduate degrees. Women and men are now considered to be equally likely to transition to doctoral degrees after earning their bachelors (Miller & Wai, 2015; Schroeder et al., 2013). Miller and Wai (2015) argue that decades of focusing on fixing the leaky pipeline from the bachelors level and above has solved many of the attrition problems seen in STEMM fields, however, that we now must turn to better understanding "gender differences at the bachelor's level and below to understand women's representation at the Ph.D. level and above" (Miller & Wai, 2015, p.9). Thus, there is proposed benefit in extending the leaky pipeline model to holistically examine why young women and girls interested in the sciences do not pursue advanced STEMM degrees (Miller & Wai, 2015).

Some of the ways to address the leaky pipeline have been discussed, such as flexible working arrangements. However, scholars recently have called upon the academy to increase their efforts to prevent women from leaving due to constraints between work life and home life. Bos and colleagues (2019) argue that one of the ways the academy could be more effective in keeping women throughout their careers is by improving the family friendliness of conferences.

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The authors argue that the logistical challenges and costs of travelling with family or accommodating them at home prevents women from benefitting from essential conference-related opportunities. Specifically, conferences help to fuel publications through presentation feedback, improve visibility of work to increase citations, and enhance networking opportunities (Bos et al., 2019; Maliniak et al., 2013). Drawing on their own experience with conference organization, Bos et al. (2019) provide several recommendations to make conferences more accessible for women and families, including providing child care, changes in scheduling, support for breastfeeding mothers, and other features designed especially for children. They argue that these changes in the fundamental way conferences function could enhance women's opportunities and address elements of the leaky pipeline (Bos et al., 2019).

The difficulties women face from graduate school to the professorial are well theorized and well documented. Women who do enter academia are found to achieve full professorships at slower rates than men, to report higher levels of service work (as previously discussed), and to report lower levels of job satisfaction than men (June, 2009; Misra et al., 2012). However, the 'leaky pipeline' as a reason for women's underrepresentation has faced criticisms based on evidence that suggests that there are indeed enough women within the majority of academic disciplines who are both qualified and available for leadership roles (Vaughn et al., 2019). These women, however, are not recognized as potential candidates (Tatli et al., 2013).

The assumption that there are not enough available women adheres to the view that current decision making positions are assigned based on merit, without bias or underlying sexism. The argument that the problem is that there 'are not enough women', adheres to a consistent and limited idea of what constitutes the 'ideal academic' and what warrants promotions (Gasser & Shaffer, 2014). Institutions are thus missing women with non-traditional career paths who are able to enhance their institutions and fulfil the required job criteria (Krefting, 2003).

3.4 Concluding remarks

This chapter has provided a thorough examination of the theoretical perspectives used to account for women's underrepresentation in leadership roles with an explicit focus on leadership in higher education institutions. Despite substantial efforts from policy makers, scholars, and practitioners, gender-based inequalities persist in HEIs, and as has been shown, influence the likelihood of women achieving senior roles.

Drawing together this and the previous chapter, it is argued that understanding the views leaders have regarding the barriers women face are likely to influence their support and promotion of workplace policy and practice. For instance, if leaders attribute women's representation to choices and preferences rather than constraint, it is likely they will support initiatives that ensure women's preferences are met and fully considered. Thus, this thesis aims to explore these views, building an understanding of how leaders construct women's underrepresentation and what they feel is necessary for progress; giving insight into whether and how different types of initiatives can be discursively embedded into organizational culture and processes. This assumes the importance of leaders in setting organizational culture, with their views towards indicators of inequality setting a precedent for the types of initiatives that will be used and popularised in their organization.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodological approach taken in this thesis. The following sections will first provide a brief overview of the research design, followed by a discussion of the philosophical assumptions underpinning this thesis, addressing how they have guided the research process including choices related to methodology and analysis. The research methods are then introduced, including the approach to interviews, participant sample, and the procedure followed for all data collection.

Collectively, these approaches (philosophical underpinnings and methods), represent an in-depth qualitative approach (Lincoln & Guba, 2004). The analysis is then outlined in three sections. First, the broad analytical technique taken is discussed. This is followed by an overview of the principles of discourse analysis (DA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Next, Fairclough's three-dimensional approach to CDA is introduced and evaluated to demonstrate its usefulness in analysing the data. This is followed by an explicit explanation of each level of analysis, including a discussion of the initial steps and the identification of interpretative repertoires. The trustworthiness of the research project (the extent to which the research is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable), methodological limitations, researcher reflexivity, and ethical standards are also considered.

4.1 Overview of the research design

The findings of this thesis are based on data collected from 40 semi-structured qualitative interviews with members of higher education institutions. Findings are further substantiated with analysis of relevant and available policy documents and goal statements on university websites.

Purposeful sampling was undertaken in order to focus specifically on leaders in HEIs who have insight into the central question of the thesis (Patton, 1990). This was considered the most appropriate form of sampling because it allows for the selection of participants based on particular characteristics (e.g. their position at an institution) and expertise (Patton, 1990, 2002). A detailed exploration of the topic area is needed in order

to gain access to the perceptions, opinions, and constructions that are not otherwise easily measurable, and therefore, qualitative research was deemed both suitable and useful (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interviews were used to respond to the research questions, reiterated from Chapter 1:

> *How are the interpretations of gender equality interventions constituted through discourse by leaders and stakeholders in higher education institutions, and how might these accounts be mobilized to shape workplace reality?*

The overarching focus for this thesis is to better understand the persistent underrepresentation of women in HEI leadership positions. To do this, I focus on how the strategies used to improve gender representation are discursively enacted. Considering the lack of research that focuses on the performative effects of discourse in the context of gender and diversity management initiatives in HEIs, this thesis provides a timely, in-depth, qualitative contribution (Izraeli, 2000; Roos & Zanoni, 2018).

4.2 Philosophical assumptions: epistemology and ontology

An important aspect of any research project is the outline of a theoretical perspective, or the foundation for which the entire project sits in terms of context and process (Crotty, 1998). This includes the ontological and epistemological perspectives. Ontology refers to the nature of reality; the fundamental nature of existence (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The term epistemology broadly questions what counts as knowledge, including how social phenomena come to be known and how that knowledge is displayed in a social world (Saunders et al., 2007). In what follows, the assumptions and perspectives that inform this project are outlined and defined in detail.

The philosophical assumptions underpinning this research adhere to that of social constructionism. This epistemological approach is influenced by and composed of several distinct theoretical explanations that have been brought together as an attempt to describe the nature of reality (Burr, 1995). This, however, makes it difficult for scholars to neatly outline or unpack such an evolving and complex set of assumptions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Burr, 2006; Gergen, 1999). In what follows, I will describe the elements that are relevant to this thesis.

Pervasive within the approach of social constructionism, and the approach adopted for this project, is that reality is continually constructed and reconstructed through language. This rejects the notion that there is one *objective truth* for researchers to discover (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Burr, 2003). Language is at the core of the active construction of the "nature of individuals, their relationships, and of the world" (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 203). A social constructionist approach is particularly useful for research agendas that include inequality, gender, and discrimination, because it recognizes these processes as something that is *done* or *performed*, rather than as stable, external entities which inherently exist (Beauvoir, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Social constructionism is therefore inherently linked to discourse, and conceptualises discourse as having a dialectic relationship with social reality; discursive practices are influenced by society, and society is influenced by discursive practices (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). This also means that "each 'internalises' the other without being reducible to them" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.37). Discourse is both constitutive of the social world and constituted or influenced by other social practices (Fairclough, 1992). This thesis therefore recognizes that discourse *constructs the objects of which it speaks*, but also that society has an impact on the language we employ to *describe* such objects and social phenomena (Edley, 2001; Fairclough, 1992).

This approach is particularly useful when looking at inequalities and subtle forms of power. This is because of the role discourse plays in the reproduction of socially constituted inequalities (van Dijk, 1993a, 1993b). In recognizing that discourse is the mechanism that allows us to "see things that are not really there," we can give ontological status to less visible realities (Tuffin et al., 2001, p. 479). Language, thus, is central in shaping our knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and feelings towards phenomenon (Parker, 1992).

By specifically examining the processes related to gender representation in leadership of HEIs as socially constructed, we can begin to understand how discrimination and inequality is constituted through interaction. This perspective differs from those that use an increase in the number of women in positions as 'success' stories

(Vinnicombe et al., 2015). While increasing the number of women in leadership is certainly a goal, a 'body counting' perspective fails to recognize individual experiences, cultural patterns, and other nuanced discriminatory practices towards women and potentially other disadvantaged groups (Alvesson, 2003; Cassell, 1996; Elder-Vass, 2012; Hacking, 1999).

Social constructionism, as with all philosophical approaches, is not without criticism. An enduring criticism is that by rejecting the idea of an *objective truth* for that of multiple versions of reality, social constructionists are subscribing to a position of relativism (Dick & Cassell, 2002; Reed, 1998). This criticism suggests that by having no objective truth, and by asserting that the only knowledge of reality obtainable is that which is discursively constructed, social constructionists are assuming that reality does not exist outside of discourse (Davidson & Layder, 1994; Reed, 1998; Stam, 1998). The main argument is often that if truth is constructed, and all constructions have equal authority, unethical or immoral events can be justified, or even denied, as being *only* socially constructed (Dick & Cassell, 2002).

Edley (2001) counters these arguments by demonstrating a flaw within the debate itself; critiques of social constructionism confuse the ontological and epistemological claims of the approach. Social constructionists, when claiming they can 'know nothing outside of discourse' are taking an epistemological stance about how we know what we know, not an ontological argument about what constitutes reality. The argument social constructionists make is therefore that reality is subject to the *rules* of discourse, and that anything that exists necessitates being constructed through the medium of language (Edley, 2001; Edwards, 1995).

The method and methodology of this thesis are founded upon this view of knowledge and the construction of reality. The method and analytical framework discussed below complement this approach, aiming to provide an understanding of how realities are socially constructed in relation to gender and (in)equality (Batstone, 1995).

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.3 Methods

In the following sections, the research methods for the project are presented and discussed. This will therefore outline the specific steps taken to conduct the research project and gain in-depth qualitative data. The following will first briefly discuss the research context of higher education and university governance. This will be followed by details regarding the qualitative interviews conducted, including pilot interviews, participant sample, and interview procedures. Aligning with the methodological approach, a brief discussion of the interview power dynamics is evaluated. Ethical components of the project are then addressed with consideration of the participants' positions, anonymity, and confidentiality.

4.3.1 Research context: university governance and management

Central to this thesis is an examination of the discourses of leaders in HEIs. It is therefore important to provide some specifications on the roles within institutions and of the university structure and leadership. Specific titles used to refer to those in decision-making positions varies by institution. As discussed in Chapter 2, the following roles and titles were used to recruit for the project.

At the top of the hierarchy for this project is the Vice Chancellor (VC). VCs are the principal academic and administrative officers of the university. Typically, the VC chairs the council of the university and leads and manages the executive board and other university committees (the specific committee is individual to institutions). Generally, the main tasks of VCs are to provide strategic leadership to the university community including staff and students, to be accountable to the Senate and Council, to represent the university internally and externally as a point of contact for stakeholders (including funding bodies, donors, partners, etc.) and to ultimately guide and deliver the university's aims and objectives (HESA, 2018; Jarboe, 2018). VC appointments generally go through an open call for recruitment, with the final decisions being made after a rigorous hiring process by the board.

When looking at other members of the university executive and those that work at the second tier of university management, the position titles as well as specific job

roles again vary between institutions. Some institutions have a series of Deputy Vice Chancellors, with titles such as Deputy VC of student affairs, or Deputy VC of research. Other institutions use the title of Vice President or Pro Vice chancellor to label those who work alongside the VC on the executive team. These members often lead on the strategies relevant to their titles such as administration, education, research and development, and student affairs. The executive board will also have individuals with responsibilities such as those relating to finance for the university, comparable to Chief Financial Officers in organizations, as well as directors of human resources, registrars and secretaries, among others.

Following the executive team, institutions commonly have a series of Executive Deans or Deans who represent specific faculty within their institution. They provide oversight for a range of activities relevant to their specific disciplines. Some institutions have Pro Deans, Deputy Deans, or Associate Deans who have a range of responsibilities relating to learning and teaching. There are also institutions who have Deans that have operational titles, such as Pro Dean of Faculty Affairs.

For the recruitment of this project, attempts were made to recruit from all available positions of the executive teams. Members were contacted based on their specific roles, rather than based on their specific disciplines (for instance, Deans were contacted based on their institution, available contact information, and role in equality work, and not because they were 'the Dean of Arts and Humanities' or 'Dean of Medicine and Health'). Other institutional actors and stakeholders were also contacted based on their involvement with the goals of equality and diversity in their institution. This ranged from Deputy VCs, Deans, heads of schools, members of the governing body (labelled as 'governing members'), and Professors.

The interest in these positions specifically lies in the recognition that they are leaders who play a role in setting cultural standards and expectations of a university (Schein, 2010). In this study, the perceptions and attitudes of male and female leaders in HEIs are explored because it is acknowledged that all leaders are needed to create a culture of commitment to equality and inclusion within their institutions, and to create a supportive environment that harnesses the benefits of gender equality initiatives.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In addition to the specific position roles and titles, of relevance at the time of writing this thesis are the changes within higher education and the impact these changes have had on management systems and practices across institutions (Shepherd, 2017). In 2003, the Lambert Report of Business-University Collaboration was published by the UK government, which was a review conducted with the intention of illustrating opportunities for universities and corporations to collaborate on research and development, and to demonstrate ways businesses and universities can work together to develop appropriate research-led policies (Lambert, 2003). The report showed clear pressure from the government for universities to behave in ways that more closely resembled private corporations. As a result, institutions are finding themselves "on the front-line of the resultant battles and challenges prompted by heightened managerialism and marketization" (Visser et al., 2019, p.1; Koris et al., 2017; Way et al., 2017).

In order to be competitive, HEIs must cater to students and research as well as remain responsive to legislation and government funding and policy (Middlehurst, 2004; Chandler et al., 2002; Diefenbach 2009). These changes ultimately result in "quantitative performance metrics and measurement and management systems" (Visser et al., 2019, p.1; Adler & Harzing, 2009; Burrows, 2012; Craig et al., 2014; Hussain, 2015; Mingers & Willmott, 2013). The external control of academic life and a more corporate-managerial approach also means changes in budgets, in managerial practices, and in expected return from commercial environments (Clegg, 2015; Visser et al., 2019). It also means there are pulls from different goals and strategies, with institutional actors needing to balance internal and external relationships and executive third parties (Huzzard et al., 2017; Shepherd, 2015). HEIs are more bureaucratic than in the past and their drive for success increasingly resembles that of the corporate world

Considering this, it is understandable that a parallel also exists in how universities versus corporations respond to issues related to diversity, equality, and inclusion. This is why throughout this thesis, and in the discussions with participants, there is some integrated discussion of both public and private sector initiatives. Additionally, many of the participants did not come to their leadership roles directly or exclusively with academic backgrounds, with many having many years of experience in

corporate and political fields. Thus, they pulled from these experiences to construct and present their accounts of organizational gender (in)equality.

The reference to these programs and problem areas is not to demonstrate that they function identically in universities and private institutions, but rather to give some context for comparing and contrasting successful or unsuccessful initiatives as they pertain to gender equality programs, and to acknowledge that discrimination, biases, and structural and cultural inequality is pervasive in all areas of work.

4.3.2 Qualitative interviewing

Qualitative research relies heavily on the analysis of peoples talk (discourse) and one of the primary methods for qualitative data collection is through the research interview (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Qualitative interviews can be used within different philosophical positions (Madill et al., 2000; Willig, 2013).

Following the social constructionist perspective previously discussed, the approach for this thesis focuses on the interview as produced in specific space, time, and setting (Madill et al., 2000; Symon & Cassell, 2012). The data collected is therefore seen as participants' constructions of the world around them, while recognizing that these constructions are not neutral; they are positioned within the context of the interview, as well as socio-demographic factors of both the interviewee and the researcher (Edley, 2000).

Aligning with the methodological approach, the discourses of leaders are also considered to be dialectically related to social practice, meaning that discourse and social practice are "different elements but not discrete, fully separate, elements" (Fairclough, 2001 p.1). They are therefore considered to compose, and be composed of, diverse representations of social life and extend beyond the interview context to that of the social world.

4.3.3 Pilot interviews

During the early stages of the research project, pilot studies were conducted with seven participants. The sample of participants held high-ranking academic positions in Ontario, Canada. These positions included Presidents and Vice Presidents (VP Academic, VP student affairs). These positions are considered to be of similar hierarchical roles as U.K. Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors.

The objective of holding pilot interviews was to gain a more accurate assessment of the suitability of interview questions and direction. While the Canadian academic system functions differently than that in the UK and Europe, the importance of these pilot interviews was in determining the appropriateness of my interview approach with such an elite group. I was eager to determine how long the questions would take to discuss, and to explore if they were appropriate for the aims of the research project. I was also interested in determining independent reactions to certain questions, and while each individual is different, I wanted to gain experience in responding to certain topics of conversation. I had access to this elite group in Canada, and therefore used this access to gain interview practice. As a result of these pilot interviews, I adapted my questions and made several key revisions to the final interview design. An outline of interview questions is in Appendix A.

4.3.4 Participant sample

Formal research interviews ran from October 2017 to March 2019. 40 interviews were conducted in total (not including the pilot interviews), with 23 being women and 17 being men. This gender composition was not intentional, roughly 50% of the invitations were sent to women and 50% to men.

The sample size is typical of discourse analytic studies, where the aim is not to achieve generalisability or to match the principles of quantitative studies, but to establish how different variations of phenomena are constructed (Dick & Cassell, 2002; Mama, 1995). Additionally, by the final few interviews, ideas and views were starting to be repeated with little insight into alternative discourses, thus it was determined that theoretical saturation had been reached (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017).

All participants held positions in UK HEIs. The inclusion of a range of positions was done to hear a variety of stories across different areas of HEI leadership and from various perspectives, in order to gain well-rounded insight into the research topic (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). Table 2 outlines the positions of interviewees:

Table 2 Research sample demographics

Position	Number of interviewees
Vice Chancellors	13
Deputy Vice Chancellors, Pro Vice Chancellors	6
Dean	5
Deputy Dean	4
Professor, head of school	8
Governing body member	4
Total	40

As mentioned previously, purposeful sampling was adopted for the recruitment of participants of this study because this sampling technique allows for the selection of participants who are assumed to be "information-rich" to yield results pertinent to the study (Patton, 2001). This method of purposeful is based on the work of Hollway (1989) and Mama (1995), who determined that the richest data is gained by talking to participants who have a genuine interest in the research aims.

To begin, requests to participate were sent to 10 Vice Chancellors and 10 Deputy-Vice Chancellors at Russell Group Universities in the U.K. These were initially chosen based on their gender balance at executive level, availability of contact information, and proximity. I then waited for some responses prior to the next wave of recruitment, as I wanted to ensure I did not contact too many participants from one university to ensure a range of viewpoints. Next, I explored the diversity and inclusion roles at 50 institutions in the UK, selected again based on proximity as well as their

gender balanced. I then selected individuals from various positions who were listed as having a defined and institutionally visible role in gender, equality, or diversity related initiatives at the university. I elicited interviews from participants in a range of positions; not limited to that of the specific demographic directly in question (e.g. women in senior positions of HEIs) but also other positions as well as from men, allowing for a range of discourse practices to be collected and analysed (Dick, 2004a).

In the first round of sampling, which occurred between October 2017 and June 2018, roughly three invitations per institution were sent out to potential participants. As interviews progressed, I continued contacting members of universities who would best inform the research project, ensuring I had a good range of people in various positions in order to hear a well-rounded set of perspectives. In the second round of sampling, from September 2018 to March 2019, I continued the approach of Hollway (1989) and Mama (1995), contacting participants with visible roles in gender, equality, or diversity initiatives as well as those in top leadership positions. These techniques resulted in 77 requests being sent, with 37 rejections and 40 agreeing to participate.

4.3.5 Interview procedure

The interviews for this project followed a semi-structured process. A 'skeleton' guide of questions was composed based on existing literature, however, was not necessarily adhered to for each interview conducted. This allowed for participants' responses to guide the interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). For the interviews, I remained flexible in my questions, referring to the skeleton guide when necessary. I had a set of probe questions to follow up on topics of interest (Appendix A).

I maintained reflexive accounts after each interview as well as during analysis. Reflexive accounts of interviews are further described in section 4.10, however, involved taking careful notes during and directly after the interviews, and referring to these notes during analysis to ensure my recollection of events was accurate. This allowed participants' responses to largely determine the direction of the interview, while also allowing the interview to have an 'organic' feel in regards to conversational flow (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Due to the busy schedules of prospective participants, they were approached with the intention of holding interviews in a location convenient to them. In all in-person cases, interviews were held in their office or dedicated conference space within their office building on campus. Two interviews were conducted over the phone. One hour was requested and confirmed for every participant, but interview length ranged from 32 minutes to 2.5 hours. The average interview length was 64.5 minutes and the total number of hours recorded was 43. The variation in length was mainly a result of participants own schedule, sometimes with last minute changes. I often was told upon arrival to the interview if participants were short on time or if they had other meetings set directly after the interview. Where participants did not appear to be in a rush or were offering longer responses to questions, I made sure to allow them to speak for as long as they liked and to allow the conversation to come to a natural conclusion.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Leeds Ethics Committee prior to starting data collection. The interview questions were also approved. Potential participants were informed when first contacted through email of the broad research area and of my intentions to use their interview within my PhD project. An example 'request to participate' email that was sent can be found in Appendix B. This email varied slightly based on the participant's position, however the core information about the project remained the same. All participants were provided with consent forms (Appendix C), and participant information sheets (Appendix D). Participants were given a copy of the information sheet, which provided details prior to, during, and after the interviews regarding their rights as participants and the goal of the project.

Due to the seniority of participants, I chose to contact their administrative assistants or alternative main contacts as outlined on university websites. To further ensure they were not inconvenienced, I attached copies of consent forms and participant information forms to initial requests. This ensured that fewer, more efficient emails were sent and, if they agreed to participate, participants and administrative assistants had the means necessary to fit interviews into their schedules. Prior to participating, and again at the interviews, participants were informed that participation as well as recording of the interview was voluntary. No participants refused recording; however, some parts of the

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interview were excluded from transcription if participants made statements such as 'don't include this bit' or 'this is off the record.'

4.3.6 Power in interviews and the 'institutional elite'

Connecting the philosophical and analytical approaches, the interviews are recognized as co-produced interactional exchanges (Alvesson, 2003; Cassell, 2005). There are, at any given time during an interview, several different 'power plays' occurring. This requires reflexivity of the researcher to acknowledge the different functions of the interview setting. The 'institutional elites,' a term I have chosen to use to describe the participants of the study, refers to their senior position within academia.

Considering my position as an academic interviewing academics, it is important to recognize the power dynamics within the interviews. By interviewing elites, the traditional dynamics of interviews is reversed; participants held much of the power in terms of length, style, and direction of the interviews (Conti & O'Neill, 2007). In contrast, scholars argue that researchers are traditionally the ones who hold positions of power over their research subjects, stating that interviews represent a one-way relationship where the interviewee receives little in return for their answers and time (Finch, 1984; Wilkinson, 1998).

To counter act potential power imbalances, it was necessary to create rapport, to try to build on a non-hierarchical relationship, and to encourage mutual disclosure and collaboration (Davies et al., 2006; Oakley, 1981; Peckover, 2002; Peters et al., 2008). In doing this, many participants disclosed that the interview felt cathartic in that they were able to discuss issues and explain their perspective on topics they are not generally invited to discuss. In this way, the topic of the research study further added to the complexity of power dynamics in the interview, where I, as a feminist scholar, was investigating gender, inequality, and institutions with both men and women (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Considering these dynamics, I was concerned with two potential issues during interviews; the student-senior academic dynamic as well as the male-female dynamic. As institutional elite, the participants of the study are aware of the PhD and academic

process, as well as the importance of being seen as 'positive' within the research project findings. Several participants would inquire about my research goals, and ask if male voices would be welcome in my narrative. This created a somewhat uncomfortable situation in a few cases, where I would confirm with male participants that it is not my goal to uncover 'secret sexism' or to profile them as 'sexist academics.' As discussed above, I made clear attempts to create rapport, allow mutual disclosure, and encourage collaboration (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2003). The comfort in which participants shared anecdotes and personal stories signalled to me that I was successful in creating an open, judgment-free environment, while still ensuring participants were aware of my own vested interests as a PhD researcher.

Within this project, I noted very few times where power was explicitly exerted. Similar to Brown (2017) within their doctoral studies on elite individuals, I did notice a pattern where interviewees wanted to be helpful and tried to guide my research, rather than to participate or contribute. This included offering to contact potential interview candidates on my behalf, asking specific questions about my supervisors and research progress and offering advice regarding my research questions and approach specific to the PhD. Some offered alternative questions for the interview more 'in line' (in their view) with my research questions. I took these offerings as they were presented, and contacted some potential participants as a result of suggestions from other interviews.

4.3.7 Ethical considerations

There are a range of issues that must be considered when conducting qualitative interviews in the social sciences. These include informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and the potential impact on interviewees and researcher (BPS, 2014; Silverman, 2000). Measures were put in place to confront these separate issues. As already mentioned, participants were informed of the projects aims and goals to ensure they were aware of the intentions of the request for them to participate. All participants were provided with consent forms at the time of requesting to participate (Appendix C). Participants were also given an information sheet to take away from the interview (Appendix D).

Due to the nature of the project, which deals with potentially sensitive issues of inequality, participants were also given the opportunity to discuss any issues prior to the interview itself, either through email or telephone. No participants took up this offer or requested further information prior to the interview date, but many had questions at the beginning of the interview. At this time, participants were reminded that the data may be used for future research related to this project and publications, as well as how the data would be stored and who would have access to it.

An important aspect for both ethical standards as well as for participants was the declaration of anonymity and confidentiality procedures. Participants were informed that full anonymity could not be guaranteed due to the nature of the research exchange (Saunders et al., 2015). This refers to the fact that interviews were conducted in relatively public office spaces and were often organized by a third party (administrative assistants). Many participants, having conducted research themselves, began the interview with comments such as 'I assume you have ethical approval and won't be connecting my name with anything,' indicating an awareness of the procedure from the beginning.

All attempts for complete confidentiality and anonymity have been made throughout this report. Several steps were taken to this end. First, all audio recording, consent forms, transcriptions, and any other documents linking participants with the research were stored and encrypted based on the University of Leeds regulations for data storage. Next, as the research was transcribed, names and genders were indexed alpha-numerically based on the order they were interviewed (e.g. the first female participant became 1A, followed by 2A and so on, and the first male participant was labelled as 1B, followed by 2B). Their role titles remained intact, for example a female Vice Chancellor would be labelled 6A, VC. Finally, for the findings of this thesis, extracts are numbered with the inclusion of gender and positions (Berg & Lune, 2014). This was the most logical and suitable way to address the findings and analysis. Any other identifiers have been replaced with pseudonyms or removed.

4.4 Analytical approach: critical discourse analysis

The following sections provide definitions of discourse, discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis. This includes a discussion of the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the fundamental considerations which framed the analysis for this thesis. It is demonstrated that CDA is not one specific 'method' for analysis, but rather incorporates several different ways to 'do' analysis, with various scholars taking different approaches. The following sections therefore discuss some of these various approaches, including a definition of what is meant by 'discourse' and the 'critical' aspects of CDA. The appropriateness of CDA for this thesis is also demonstrated with an evaluation of its main tenets.

4.4.1 Discourse, discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis

There are many different definitions of discourse and discourse analysis that are dependent on the scholar and field of study (Potter, 1996). The definitions adopted for this thesis are discussed below, with reference to popular definitions used in theory and research. This is done to demonstrate ways in which discourse analysis is not just a method but "a whole perspective on social life and research" (Potter, 1996, p.130). It also provides a foundation for understanding the approach taken to analyse the data from this project. Broad definitions of 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' will be discussed before giving an overview of the definition of CDA. Specific principles of CDA will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

A challenging aspect of all discourse analytic studies is the definition of discourse, as the conceptualisation of discourse is dependent on and formulated by various disciplines and theoretical underpinnings (Kress, 1989). Fairclough (1992) argues that discourse is "a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (p.64). Discourse analysis is therefore a means of approaching a problem, recognizing that language creates meaning and that analysis allows for the interpretation of this meaning (Mogashoa, 2014). The description of discourse outlined by Wodak and Meyer (2001) informed my initial understanding and approach to discourse analysis:

A complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as 'texts', that belong to different specific semiotic types (Wodak and Meyer, 2001, p.66)

Although based on language use, discourse analysis extends beyond the analysis of sentences, grammatical units, or diction, and sees "language as social practice" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.5). Discourse analysis therefore emphasizes the importance of language in the construction of social reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This definition draws on the ideas of Wodak and Meyer (2009) who integrate three different trends of discourse analysis: discourse from text linguistics, discourse in reference to written and oral texts, and discourse as an abstract form of knowledge (Jäger & Maier, 2009). This use of discourse analysis follows the philosophy that our access to reality is through language, not as a reflection, but as a process through which reality is constructed (Fairclough, 1995; Hardy et al., 2005).

Critical discourse studies approach discourse as being embedded within sociocultural context (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Zanoni & Janssens, 2018). Although discourse analysis and CDA are characterised by similar principles, CDA is often distinguishable from other discourse analytic methods because it focuses specifically on social problems and the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power and inequality (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018; Blackledge, 2005; van Dijk, 2001). CDA is therefore differentiated from other forms of discourse analysis in that it is problem oriented, not focused necessarily on linguistic elements but rather on social issues with discursive or semiotic dimensions (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Thus, CDA is fundamentally concerned with analysing "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p.11).

4.4.2 'Under analysis' and discourse analysis

Discourse analysis, with different types and forms evolving, has increased in popularity in the social sciences and organizational research over the last several years (Antaki et

al., 2003). In order to fully explain how my analytical technique unfolded, it is necessary to explain what my analysis, and discourse analysis more generally, is *not* (Silverman, 2001; van Dijk, 1990).

Prior to collecting data, I familiarized myself with many different analytical techniques. This was done to ensure that analysis was done purposefully, consistently, and in line with my philosophical approach. A large concern with discourse analysis, or any analytic method, is performing *under analysis*. According to Antaki et al. (2003, p. 1) in discourse analytic work under analysis can be through: "summary, taking sides, over quotation or isolated quotation, circular identification of discourses and mental constructs, false survey, and/or analysis that consists of simply spotting features."

Thus, one aspect of under analysis, also sometimes referred to as non-analysis, is the prevalence for researchers to only summarise their data findings (Antaki et al., 2003; Willig, 2013). I took a number of steps to counter this form of under analysis and to also ensure rigour in my own analytical procedures. While transcribing each audio recording, I maintained clear and detailed notes about interesting concepts and began drafting potential codes that I could apply later. Transcription was done through NVivo software, and potential codes or notes were written down on a word processor that I kept separately labelled from transcriptions. During this initial phase, I kept the transcripts intact (rather than segmenting them by theme, for instance) so that I could read through them thoroughly while maintaining a clear view of the context of comments made by participants (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Summarising the transcripts would involve losing much of the complexity within the interview, including the relationship between myself and the participants.

An additional issue for qualitative researchers is 'showing and telling,' referring to the importance of having a balance of quotations and analysis. The over-use of quotations to support findings is the 'show,' which lacks in proper analysis and interpretation. The under-use of analysis, where there are not enough quotations to go with the interpretation, refers to the 'tell' without 'showing' (Antaki et al., 2003). The use of quotations is useful in support of analytical claims; however, it is important to not

'let the data speak for itself' but to provide a theoretically informed analysis when utilising quotations.

To avoid this limitation, I noted the proportion of my own text compared to the quotations used as a form of self-guiding, to ensure there were no excessive or unnecessarily long quotations without appropriate interpretation. This also ensured that I was not leaving the readers to perform their own interpretation. I provide exemplary extracts to demonstrate my arguments, providing examples without presenting the entirety of my data. The analysis is therefore partly a reflection of my own interpretation based on my experiences, readings, and context, and therefore these features must be relayed in the actual analysis. Finding useful and exemplary quotations for phenomena became a part of my analytical procedure, but does not constitute the entirety of my discursive analysis.

Considering the above potential challenges with analysis is not only helpful to ensure the rigour of my work but it also adds to my own reflexivity as a researcher. In describing my analytical technique, and bringing the reader along my analytical procedure throughout this chapter, I have aimed to illustrate my efforts to be systematic and transparent with my analysis.

4.4.3 Principles of critical discourse analysis

Adhering to the social constructionist paradigm, CDA is used to analyse the data as well as to inform the overall approach of this thesis. CDA is a label used to describe both an extensive movement within discourse analysis as well as a more specific and developed analytical technique (Fairclough, 1995; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). CDA has roots in critical linguistics and critical social theory (Fairclough, 1995), and is an approach that represents a set of philosophical premises and methodological guidelines for studying the relationship between language use and social context (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

An important aspect of CDA, outlined by two prominent CDA scholars, Fairclough and Wodak (1997), is that CDA is problem-oriented, with social problems, such as inequality and social change, being main areas of research (Luke, 2002; van Dijk, 1999). Specifically, CDA is interested in the relationship between language and

power, the relationships of dominance and discrimination, and in social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, and legitimized through language use (Wodak, 1997).

CDA views the relationship between language and society as dialectic: discursive practices are influenced by society, and society is influenced by discursive practices (Fairclough, 1995; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). As defined by Fairclough and Wodak (1997):

> Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.258).

'Reality' within a CDA framework is therefore not immutable but is something that can, and is, changed within different contextual settings. Although specific approaches differ, the goal of CDA scholarship is to "illuminate ways in which the dominant forces in a society construct versions of reality that favour the interests of those same forces" (McGregor, 2003, p.2). Revealing these forces then allows for increased acknowledgment, support, and action to be taken in support of those who are victims of these forces, and specifically those who are victims of specific forms of societal oppression (Fairclough, 1992).

The definitions of CDA vary depending on scholars within the field, with CDA often being referred to "as an entity, a recognisable approach to language study or program" (Breeze, 2011, p. 494). Many scholars argue that CDA should not be defined as a united paradigm or school of thought, with several groups identifying as being 'within' CDA (Wodak, 2011). Being an interdisciplinary paradigm, CDA thus has many

different but related definitions. These definitions have informed the analysis and analytical technique taken for this thesis, including the following (Breeze, 2011):

> CDA takes a particular interest in the relationship between language and power. This research specifically considers more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p.12).

> By critical discourse analysis I mean analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power, and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (Fairclough, 1995, p.132-33).

> CDA involves a principled and transparent shunting backwards and forth between the microanalysis of texts using varied tools of linguistic, semiotic and literary analysis, and the macroanalysis of social formations, institutions and power relations that these texts index and construct (Luke, 2002, p.100).

The above definitions have been considered and adopted for this thesis, adapted and transformed by other prominent scholars within the field. Additionally, Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p.270-280) who draw on the criteria of Kress (1990), have outlined eight principles of CDA that relate to this thesis, summarised as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory

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8. Discourse is a form of social action

Taking the above into consideration, CDA is an especially useful approach when looking at gender (in)equality within an institutional context as it takes into account specific socio-cultural elements. This means that it allows for the consideration of how discursive practices are influenced by organizational elements such as employee-supervisor dynamics, political systems, as well as other structural and institutional features related to discrimination, biases, culture, and gender stereotypes (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Chouliarki & Fairclough, 2010; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Referring again to the dialectical relationship between discourse and social practice, these features can be considered as partly discursive, or as part of the social process of language, however cannot be reducible to discourse alone (Chouliarki & Fairclough, 2010; Harvey & Braun, 1996).

To conclude, CDA involves the close analysis of texts that have the potential to be politically or culturally influential. CDA scholars thus aim to take explicit positions, wanting to expose and resist social inequalities (van Dijk, 2001). To do this, CDA not only involves analysis at the discursive level, but also incorporates the 'non-discursive', or the larger context in which the text is situated. For this reason, CDA is an important tool for researching language in relation to power and the development of particular ideologies or schools of thought. This makes it a promising paradigm for advancing understanding of women's underrepresentation in leadership positions and gender equality more broadly.

4.4.4 The 'critical' in critical discourse analysis

In analysing societal issues, CDA tries to connect at least three different levels of analysis: the text, discursive practice, and societal context (Fairclough, 1992; Huckin, & Miller, 1997). This 'context' therefore moves beyond the immediate setting in which text is produced towards the larger social context that the text is situated. This necessitates a 'critical' consideration of the cultural, political, and social aspects that allow a text to be produced (Huckin & Miller, 1997).

The 'critical' of CDA, as claimed by Fairclough (1992, p. 9) implies "showing connections and causes which are hidden." CDA researchers also make clear that their goal is not only to uncover possible inequalities, but also to potentially intervene; for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged. The following description by Wodak (2001) most suitably demonstrates the interpretation followed for this thesis, viewing 'critical' as:

> Not taking things for granted, opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies, being self-reflective in my research, and through these processes, making opaque structures of power relations and ideologies manifest. 'Critical', thus, does not imply the common sense meaning of 'being negative'—rather 'sceptical'. Proposing alternatives is also part of being 'critical' (Wodak, 2001, p.1)

CDA scholars are regularly explicitly political in their objectives, drawing attention to power imbalances and injustices. These studies often involve suggested changes to be enacted by readers or members of dominant groups, or an insistence on resistance by marginalized groups (Kress, 1993; Luke, 2002; van Dijk, 1993a).

Part of the politically oriented nature of CDA requires adherence to a level of transparency by the researcher. This involves not only transparency of the overall goal, but also necessitates critical self-reflection throughout the research process. For this project, I uphold these standards in my critical examination of women's underrepresentation in leadership by remaining transparent and reflexive, including a detailed description of my technique and a critical reflection on the process.

4.5 Analytical technique

This section provides an explicit outline of the approach to CDA followed for the project. The following section is organized as follows: first, I will provide an overview of the analytical steps I took for this project. Key features and benefits of using Fairclough's CDA framework are discussed, followed by descriptions of the different levels of analysis.

Several critical and organizational scholars have combined various forms of discourse analysis with CDA, including rhetoric schemes (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004), interpretative repertories (Dick & Cassell, 2002), and transivity analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Sriwimon & Zilli, 2017). In order to best answer the questions posed, I employed different analytical techniques at various stages of the analytical process.

The analytical process for this report includes using different elements of analysis, including the application of coding and identification of interpretative repertoires, within Fairclough's CDA framework (involving text analysis, discourse as social practice, and discourse as discursive practice). For clarity, the overall process I followed for my analytical technique is represented diagrammatically below in Figure 1:

Figure 1 Analytical Technique
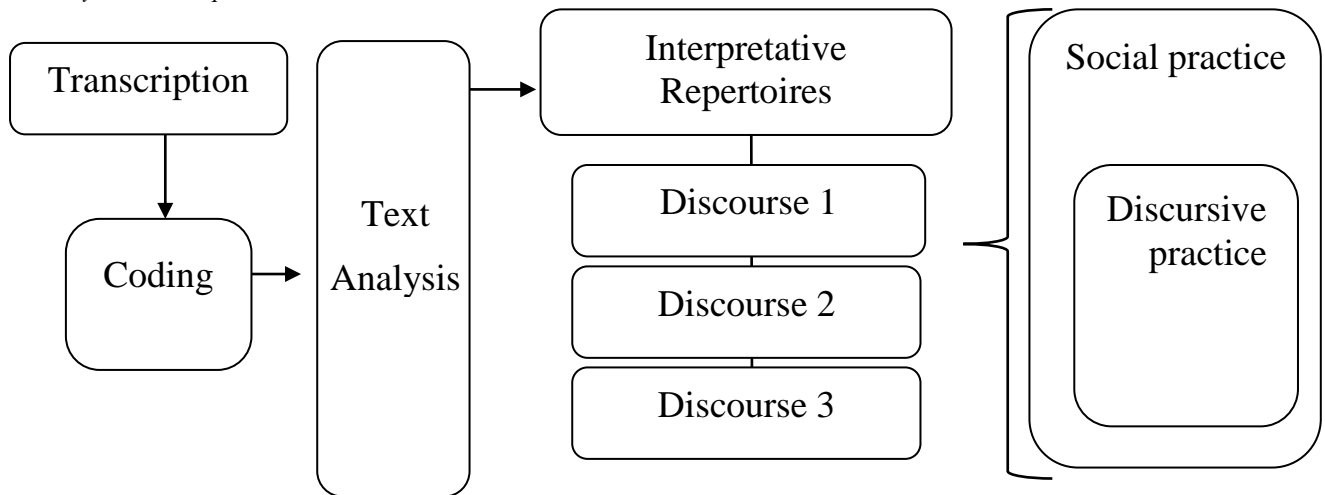
The diagram represents the process I went through when analysing the data. Fairclough's framework and each stage of analysis is further detailed below, in the order it was conducted. As shown, after transcription I went through the process of initial coding. This was then followed by the text analysis, which involved the identification of interpretative repertoires, defined briefly here as sets of linguistic resources individuals use to refer to specific themes and topics (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

These interpretative repertoires were organized under 'main discourses.' The next two levels of Fairclough's framework were then used, meaning that repertoires and main discourses were analysed at the level of discourse practice and social practice. The

process was iterative, with each stage informing the next, and constant back and forth between each stage to produce the 'final' product (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

4.5.1 Fairclough's analytical framework

Many attempts to systemize CDA have been made, with different ways of 'doing' CDA evolving as a result. For this thesis, I employ Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for analysing texts. Relating to power and inequality, this framework involves the examination of how discourse constructs social structures. That is, social practice can be analysed through the sum of all discourses that are occurring in a specific domain or institution (Fairclough, 1993).

This framework connects and relates micro orders of language use to more macro orders of social practice. Fairclough (1992) suggests that the construction of social structures involves the identity of individuals, the relationships between them, and the ideological systems within society (Dick, 2004a). Fairclough's (1992) three dimensions respond to three analytical traditions within discourse analysis: the close study of linguistic features; the interpretivist tradition that acknowledges individual agency; and the macro-sociological emphasis on social structure construction (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Giddens, 1984). A simplified three-dimensional framework is demonstrated below in Figure 2:

Figure 2 Fairclough's CDA Framework
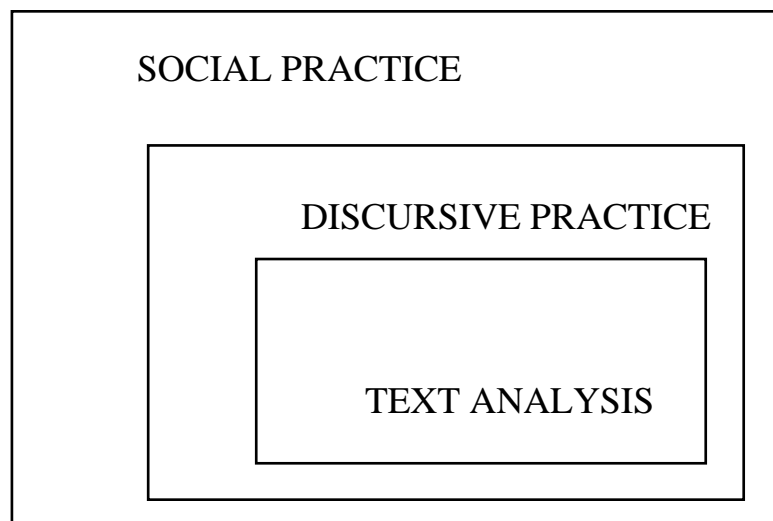
Fairclough developed his three-dimensional framework for carefully analysing discursive data in order to analyse how discourse specifically constructs each component. Every communicative event consists of the three dimensions outlined in the framework (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). At its essence, each individual text is therefore simultaneously text, discursive practice, and social practice. These levels of analysis are also described as description (text), interpretation (discursive), and explanation (social). In this way, through a careful critical discursive analysis, linguistic properties are described (textual analysis), the productive and interpretative processes of the text are interpreted (discourse practice), and the relationship between discourse practice and social practice is explained (social practice level of analysis; Fairclough, 1995).

The embedding of the boxes is an intentional step by Fairclough (1992, 1993) to show the interdependence of each dimension, as well as the way analysts must move back and forth between each type of analysis. In order to analyse one level, one must 'disturb' or recognize the others, therefore necessitating the interdependence. At the beginning of my discursive analysis, I drew these three large boxes on paper and recorded my analytic comments throughout transcription and onwards. This prevented me from viewing my data one-dimensionally, and instead allowed me to see the connections between discursive patterns (Janks, 1997). I was also able to move back and forth between these analytic comments, interpretative repertoires, and the CDA framework.

CDA scholars, and Fairclough himself, highlighted that the beginning point for the framework is arbitrary; any starting point necessitates an analysis at the other two levels. The analysis could therefore start from any level, including social, and would eventually merge into an analysis at the other levels (Fairclough, 1995). For my project, I began with a close *text analysis*. This was because, in conducting initial coding and making comments, I had already participated in some form of analysis on the interpretation of text, as well as on the socio-historical conditions that govern those discursive processes. By beginning the CDA with text analysis, therefore, I had a deeper understanding of what linguistic features for which to look.

4.6 Analytic procedure: initial steps

The analytic procedure involved several steps and a movement back and forth between the data and Fairclough's framework, including a consideration of the relationships between the text and societal context. Prior to formal analysis, I required a means of familiarising myself with the data, and thus began a process similar to qualitative coding with this goal in mind (Kleining, 1982). To maintain transparency and ensure clarity, I will outline my initial steps of this process.

'Codes' in qualitative inquiry are words or short phrases that capture a summative or evocative attribute in a portion of text (Saldaña, 2015). I therefore coded heuristically, meaning that identifying words or phrases to thematically organize large portions of interview texts was the most practical way for me to take a large amount of data and break it down into a series of information logically organized. The intention was not to conduct in-depth analysis, but to become familiar with patterns of speech within the text.

My initial coding was done by hand, where I printed each transcript and highlighted different potential codes in different colours. In some cases, I cut out excerpts and manoeuvred them under codes to have a more visual representation of each code and the data sets. This manual coding helped me familiarize myself with the data and acted as the beginning of my formal analysis. Codes were created as and when a concept of interest was apparent in the data, and did not require a particular quantity of similar responses to qualify (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004). This first round was done iteratively, allowing for flexibility and changes each time I went through the codes.

For the second cycle of coding, I used Nvivo software and continued developing and adapting code headings (King, 2012). Having already done a thorough review of the literature, I was aware of the various issues related to gender inequality and organizations, and therefore I approached the data considering these issues as potential topics for exploration. Where appropriate I used some current academic ideas and terms as a way of organizing some of these codes into more manageable parts, including topics such as 'critical mass', 'tokenism' and 'male-as-manager paradigm.' Where the code

didn't relate to a specific topic, it was more broadly coded under headings such as 'changing culture,' or 'personal experiences.'

Each set of text was coded over several times, where I returned to different transcripts after each iteration of the coding structure. Excerpts were also coded based on idiosyncrasies, commonalities, and differences (Agar, 1996; Strauss, 1987). This means that I identified places where participants had opposing views or where views were particularly unique to one or a minority of participants. This again relates to the idea that coding was not done as a means of full analysis, but was rather a useful tool in organizing a large portion of data. By initially identifying these patterns and having a better sense of the data, I was given a 'snapshot' of different areas that may be important or relevant for further analysis. The coding structure is inevitably bound within my own analytical lens, influenced by my experience, goals, and research questions (Oakley, 2016). To reiterate, coding the data was not intended to be a complete analysis; it helped facilitate the development of interpretative repertoires and therefore analysis of discursive connections with social practice.

For the remainder of the analysis, I followed specific analytical procedures with the above initial coding in mind, meaning that while familiarising myself with the data, I had a sense of how I might perform the other forms of analysis, and how the data might 'look' throughout. The following therefore describes these more formal analytic processes under the direction of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis.

4.7 Conducting critical discourse analysis

The process of conducting critical discourse analysis followed several different steps and procedures. I began at the text level of analysis and identified interpretative repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). I then moved back and forth from analysis and data to theoretically 'fill in' Fairclough's three-dimensions: text level, discourse practice, and social practice. The full analytical steps are outlined below.

4.7.1 Description: analysis at text level

As discussed, the coding of data allowed for smaller chunks of data to be examined more closely under theme headings and topic guides. Following this, I was better prepared to begin a close textual analysis. The text analysis level reflects more traditional conversation and discourse analytic methods (Janks, 1997). The text level of analysis deals with small units of analysis such as vocabulary, grammar, voice, cohesion, and force (Fairclough, 1992). For this level, my motivation was to understand what the text is trying to achieve (Dick & Cassell, 2002; Dick, 2004a).

In order to systemize this data analysis, I followed Jank's (2005) linguistic analysis rubric to systematically examine various linguistic features (Appendix E). This was derived from Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1985, 1994) who was also deeply influential in Fairclough's views of conducting discursive analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). For my own analysis, I found the following to be of particular relevance, considering the setting, topic, and interviewees (adapted from Janks, 1997, p.6):

1. Lexicalisation
2. The use of active and passive voice
3. The use of nominalisation
4. The choices of mood
5. The choices of modality or polarity
6. The thematic structure of the text
7. The information focus
8. The cohesion devices

The above eight features were considered particularly relevant because they did not break the text down into only textual or linguistic elements, but rather allowed for the continuous consideration of social context (Wodak, 2001). I examined these features and identified their patterns within the data. Through this text analysis, topic-relevant linguistic and discursive data was easier to examine. This allowed for the identification of interpretative patterns, discussed further below.

4.7.1.1 Identifying and classifying interpretative repertoires

After initial familiarization and textual analysis, I turned to Wetherell and Potter's (1988) concept of interpretative repertoires and began organizing linguistic patterns found through the text level of analysis.

Interpretative repertoires are described as "bounded language units" that are used in a specific way (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p.172). There is an inherent flexibility in how participants may draw on particular linguistic features or resources, and by addressing interpretative repertoires through analysis, it gives insight into how participants are using language *to do something* as well as how their language use reflects wider understandings of particular phenomenon. As described by Potter (1996), interpretative repertoires are linguistic resources that are available in a particular cultural setting:

> Interpretative repertoires are systematically related sets of terms, often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence, and often organized around one or more central metaphors. They are historically developed and make up an important part of the common sense of a culture; although some may be specific to certain institutional domains (Potter, 1996, p.131).

The process of identifying interpretative repertoires is informed by several scholars exploring similar domains. It is often used, as it is for this thesis, as one part of a larger analysis, paired with a complimentary form of further analysis. In other studies, similar concepts are also referred to as *Grand Discourses* (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014), *sets of regulated statements* (Henriques et al., 1998), or simply *thematic resources* (Tuffin et al., 2001).

For example, Dick and Cassell (2002) identified interpretative repertoires to better understand *resistance* as a discursive resource in UK police forces. For their analytic technique, they employed Glaser and Strauss' (1967) method of constant comparisons to examine vocabulary used by participants and themselves when referring to a particular topic. They compared extracts, looking for similarities and differences, identifying two dominant interpretative repertoires related to their topic (promotion and sexual harassment in police work). They then proceeded with Fairclough's (1995) CDA

framework to understand why these discourses remain dominant within the police force literature and in practice. In a similar vein, Edley and Wetherell (2001) identified two competing interpretative repertoires within their research of men's responses to feminist principles. They identified routine arguments, descriptions, and evaluations maintained with clichés, tropes, and characterisations of actors and situations to identify patterns of repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1988).

Interpretative repertoires have also been explored by feminist scholars interested in discursive practices and the reproduction of sexist dialogue (Edley & Wetherell, 2001). They are a resource individuals might draw on in a cultural setting to legitimize particular sexist practices (Nairn & McCreanor, 1991; Potter, 1996; Wetherell & Potter, 1998). They are thus a useful form of analysis as they demonstrate 'common sense' features of language.

Closely in line with the description above, I used interviews to assess a range of accounts of the same phenomenon, identifying consistent linguistic resources that participants used to construct realities. Interpretative resources are thus identified through sets of these linguistic resources and devices (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The repertoires are considered as 'building blocks' that individuals use to construct their versions of reality, restricted by a range of terms and linguistic stylistic patterns within their individual experiences. Specifically, I use interpretative repertoires to explore the ways individuals construct gender (in)equality and gender equality initiatives, and how they discursively construct a reality that makes sense for them, considering their own interpretation, position, and cultural context.

As with many approaches to discourse analysis, there is no strict set of rules for identifying interpretative repertoires. Wetherell and Potter (1988) describe the process as a 'craft skill' which must be fostered and practiced for both novel and experienced researchers. A starting point is to be familiar and comfortable with the data, something I accomplished through my transcription notes, initial coding phase, and closer textual analysis. I then used the codes and extracts identified to find common and dissimilar features within the data set. Having categorized codes based on occasions where I, or the participants, spoke about gender and diversity management, internal and external

initiatives, gender equality programs, or related topics, I was able to compare extracts and find similarities and differences in the ideas as they were represented.

To be as transparent as possible with my own analysis, I developed three tenets of repertoire inquiry which I considered core requirements for identifying repertoires:

1. Using the initial organization and textual analysis as guides, while paying close attention to the language as it is used within the full excerpts, iteratively moving back and forth between full transcripts, codes, excerpts, and identified repertoires.
2. Consider both similarities and differences across and within transcripts; allowing for identification of different subject positions and patterns in language use.
3. Consider the adopted framework of discourse analysis that recognizes discourse as constructions of reality, and not necessarily transparent representations of the true nature of events, or an individual's deeper values and beliefs (Wetherell & Potter, 1988).

Following this structure, I identified three sets of interpretative repertoires which were nested within three main discourses: *meritocracy as conflict, interpreting gender (in)equality,* and *understanding equality initiatives*. These three discourses are symbolic of the interpretative repertoires of which they are comprised.

To complete analysis, I moved to the next stages of Fairclough's analytical framework in order to understand the more nuanced aspects of power (re)production (Fairclough, 1992). This included exploring the way language operates to maintain unequal gender relations within the context of the study: identifying and evaluating "why these discourses were dominant, how they were used by [myself] and the participants, and why they were used in the ways [I] identified" (Dick & Cassell, 2002, p.961; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004).

4.7.2 Interpretation: analysis of discursive practice

There are different potential aspects or interpretations of what the *discursive practice* level of analysis may entail (Fairclough, 1995). This level of analysis is concerned with

investigating the context of a specific narrative, including the production, distribution, and consumption of a text. It is at this analytic level that "enables the analyst to infer the types of interpretation that might be made of the text or parts of the text" (Dick, 2004a, p.205).

For this thesis, this analytic level considers the roles that individuals adopted during their construction of a particular discourse, referring to whether there were explicit discussions of their position in the organizational hierarchy (especially in reference to my position as a PhD researcher) and whether or not they had a specific goal in orienting themselves this way (Drew & Heritage, 1992). This level of analysis is important for understanding how certain statements (questions, assertions, etc.) are interpreted by myself and the participants (Dick, 2004a). At this level, the focus was the relationship between the researcher/participants and how accounts and interpretations of events were constructed, and what consequences this might have on the text that is produced. The research interview is a complex setting, and as already mentioned, the nature of the student-elite interview alters traditional interview power positions (Dick & Cassell, 2004; Drew & Heritage, 1992).

Beyond the interview setting as a specific situational context, I also considered the importance of time and space. Based on Fairclough's own guide, I considered a series of questions to this end, including the following: could this text have been produced in a different time period? Would this text and its outcomes have been different 5, 10, or 15 years ago? How is this text reflective of current social and political climates? Could this text have been produced outside of the UK? More broadly, what contextual factors impacted the production and interpretation of this text?

4.7.3 Explanation: analysis of social practice

The final level of Fairclough's CDA framework is the level of social practice and is ideological in nature, concerned with how texts are produced in a way that is taken at 'face value' (Fairclough, 1995). It also therefore reflects on the hegemonic functions of discourse, aiming to detail how ideological constructions of reality can either reproduce or resist dominant social views (Fairclough, 1992). It is here where Fairclough asserts

the importance of examining how discourses contribute to the production, reproduction, and transformation of unequal power relations (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, a focus for this level of analysis is the "extent to which an individual 'gets away with' using a specific discourse without being challenged" (Dick & Cassell, 2002, p. 962).

Specific to this thesis, this level of analysis involves looking at social elements related to inequality, stressing the connection between language and power. This focuses on the role discourse plays in creating or sustaining unequal power relations and the current 'status quo' (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). 'Power' in this sense is not always obviously exerted, but rather can be reflected through dominant or hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2005), laws, norms, and cultures that reinforce unequal relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This approach has been applied in many areas of inequality, including in the exploration of the role of discourse in maintaining unequal race relations (van Dijk, 1993b), as well as unequal gender orders (Benschop & Dooreward, 1998; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). More specifically, Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) included the social level of CDA to argue that diversity management techniques can actually be detrimental to combatting issues of inequality by creating segregated groups within organizations and highlighting areas of difference.

4.8 Trustworthiness in data collection and analysis

The concept of trustworthiness has become widely accepted as a means of describing the merits and value of qualitative research without requiring the use of criteria commonly associated with quantitative research (such as reliability and validity; Saumure & Given, 2008).

For this thesis, Lincoln and Guba's (1985, p. 218) criteria were followed: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Although there is overlap in how these elements were managed during the process of the study, they were all considered when making research choices from the beginning of the project. They are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3 Criteria for trustworthiness

Criterion	Description
Credibility	Confidence in 'truth' of the findings
Transferability	Showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts
Dependability	Showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated
Confirmability	Degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest

The credibility of the study refers to the issue of how researchers ensure rigour and how this is reinforced and communicated to others (Gasson, 2004). There are different methods used to ensure the credibility of a research project. For this thesis, two elements were used: thick description (Geertz, 1973) and researcher reflexivity (Ashmore, 1989). 'Thick description' involves including all details that the reader needs to know in order to understand the research project, involving "rich descriptions not only of participants' experiences of phenomena but also of the contexts in which those experiences occur" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252).

Thick description therefore "refers to the task of describing and interpreting observed social action (or behaviour) within its particular context" (Ponterotto, 2006, p.543). This can be seen in the detailed descriptions of the methodological and analytical procedure, the descriptions of the context and setting, and of the analysis and findings that will be shown in subsequent chapters. The aim is to display the participants' perceptions and discussions with my own interpretation of their experiences, leaving the reader able to understand the important elements of the findings and discern whether they would have come to the same or similar interpretive conclusions (Ponterotto, 2006).

The criteria of transferability and dependability refer to the applicability of the study to other contexts and the consistency of a study across time and researchers (Gasson, 2004). Although these forms of generalizability to a wider population is not a

claim nor a goal of the study, steps were taken to ensure a relevant trail of sufficient detail. This again refers to the inclusion of thick description of different aspects of the research project. Lincoln and Guba (1985) make it clear that the 'burden' of generalisability and transferability lies with the researchers who are aiming to transfer the findings to another context, rather than the original researcher. Still, there is a recognized necessity to include contextual details in order to allow judgments of transferability to be made and to make claims regarding the similarity between contexts.

Finally, confirmability refers to the core idea that the data represents what was researched and found, rather than any beliefs, subjective judgments, or biases of the researcher (Gasson, 2004). Again, to this extent, many of the procedures used to accomplish credibility, transferability, and dependability can be applied. This includes the use of thick description to outline all procedures as well as reflexivity and transparency on all decisions made during the research process.

As previously discussed, researcher reflexivity was considered throughout, with attention being paid to the researcher's perspective during the research progress. As Malterud (2001) writes "preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them" (p. 484). Considering this, I was open about my own perspective when asked or when it was relevant to the conversation. To this extent, I honestly responded to questions posed by participants, including questions regarding my marital status, if I have children, and for my views on some current events. I was careful to provide my opinions only when relevant and when I felt it would best allow for an organic conversation.

I also had a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Gube, 1985) which took form as notes and comments written during and after interviews. This included ideas and methodological and logistic decisions (for example who to email for interviews and why). This provided me with the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of how my world view might affect the research, and ways to confront these issues.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.9 Methodological Limitations

The methodology outlined above has been applied with the aim of using the data to gain insight into the current state of gender equality in higher education institutions. Considering different elements of the study design, there are some limitations that are carefully considered.

One of the key limitations lies in the core question of gender equality as a topic of study: feminist and intersectionality scholars argue that gauging insight into gender (in)equality requires the acknowledgement of multiple identities that may intersect and influence experiences of discrimination (Browne & Misra, 2003). The focus of this study was not the intersectionality, for example, between a person's race and gender, or any other characteristic that a person may identify with when considering their perceptions and interpretations (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2015). While participants may have discussed these multiple identities and referred to the problems relating to intersectionality, it was not explored further as it was not central to the core focus of this thesis.

A related limitation of this is the lack of diverse representation within the data sample. From 40 interviews and 7 pilot interviews, only 3 participants were from black or minority ethnic groups. This was not intentional; however, this low representation is also indicative of the structural inequalities that exist beyond the spectrum of gender at upper echelons of institutional hierarchies. The lack of diverse leaders in the UK with a range of protected characteristics (or at least those publicly declared or visible) made it more difficult to have a larger sample participate in this study. Regardless, a more diverse sample may have resulted in different discussions and outcomes. Given this, however, it is argued that the sample gives representative insight into the problem of inequality in academic hierarchies, with action from the majority group needed in order to have transformative cultural change that better supports the upward mobility of all organizational actors.

It might be argued than an additional limitation is the sample size and sampling procedure. The participants were also from a relatively homogenous background and education, given their positions in academic hierarchies. While I tried to ensure various

positions were included from different institutions, many of the participants had advanced degrees from similar universities. With more participants, I may have been able to get a wider range of perspectives from different backgrounds and viewpoints. However, research indicates more interviews would not necessarily contribute to new insights once theoretical saturation is reached, which was ultimately found with the sample of 40 participants (Guest et al., 2006). This means that towards the final interviews, new data did not appear but rather ideas and views were beginning to be repeated.

An additional limitation comes from the organizing premise of this thesis that discourse is both constituted by and constitutive of social reality, with implications for social practice (Fairclough, 1992). With the data collected and the topics covered in each interview, there was some selectivity in coding and identification of repertoires. The linguistic parameters set out at the text level of analysis are also a result of choices made by the researcher, including which linguistic patterns and discursive strategies to include in the final write up of this thesis. Although the objective of the thesis appropriated the use of critical discourse analysis and the acknowledgement of unequal power relations, a different researcher in a different space and time may have interpreted the interviews with alternative conclusions.

The findings of the thesis are also somewhat dependent on different aspects of the interactional and situational context. Having already established that generalisability is not a goal of this research design, there are still implications relating to the space and time within which this research was conducted. The research was conducted by a female researcher, during a time of political change for women's movements across the globe, including movements related to sexual harassment (such as MeToo and TimesUp), women's rights to body autonomy and choice (debated changes of Roe versus Wade in the United States), and women's marches in favour of human rights (Women's March 2019).

Many of these topics, including conversations about political leaders and choices relating to gender equality and sexism, came up during the interviews and guided some of the conversation. At times, this created an energized space with other women where

anecdotes were shared. Contextually, this does inform what and how statements were made, with a different time and place perhaps resulting in different interactional contexts. Although it could be argued this is true for all research, it is important to note here because of the analytical approach taken, which explored this contextual space as influencing language and discursive practices (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). However, it is argued that this also worked as a strength of the research, recognizing that conversations about gender inequality and the hope to achieve gender equality have transcended beyond policy makers and academics, moving to a point where recognizing and dismantling the barriers the women face is of upmost relevance in today's media driven political, social, and economic arenas. Some of these elements will be further discussed below.

4.10 Critical Reflection

In line with the methodological approach, it is important to remain reflexive and present certain accounts of the research process. To begin, prior to starting interviews, I had considered the issue of my own appearance and presentation as a young, white, able-bodied woman with a North American accent studying issues related to gender (in)equality in the UK. This began my reflexive process as a researcher.

It is recognized that 'reflexivity' and 'reflection' have a clear distinction. Reflection involves "reliving and rerendering: who said and did what, how, when, where, and why. Reflection might lead to insight about something not noticed in time, pinpointing perhaps when the detail was missed" (Bolton, 2010, p. 13). Alternatively, reflexivity involves acknowledging our own attitudes, perceptions, value systems, and actions, striving to recognize how these different features may relate to other social, political, and cultural elements that impact our research. Thus, the reflections included in this thesis are products of my reflexive process.

This began with a process theorized as aesthetic labour, referring to expectations about 'looking good and sounding right' in professional environments (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001). The process of aesthetic labour is rarely discussed in methodological literature concerning academic research (Brown & Kelan, 2016; Spry, 2001). Brown

(2017) identified ways in which, during her qualitative interviewing for her own doctoral degree, she had to look the part in order to build rapport. I had a similar experience, where attending interviews in formal, professional office settings often left me feeling 'out of place' because of my visual appearance. As a result, I found myself wearing clothes similar to the people I was interviewing and adapting to the environment in order to 'fit in' (Warhurst et al., 2001). However at the same time, my position as a student was inescapable; I had contacted participants on behalf of my PhD research, and as academics, they were aware of the PhD and data collection process and requirements. Still, during interviews, I attempted to establish a balance between me as a student, who participants were helping, and me as a listener and professional, someone eager to discuss different issues related to gender and (in)equality.

After 3 or 4 interviews, I found a further richness in the data. My position as a female researcher investigating gender (in)equality, from the position of my participants, seemed to exonerate me from maintaining a neutral position. This was felt in different conversations with participants. Often, men in the study were quick to make reference to me in relation to stories involving their wives or daughters. They would make references such as '*my daughter, who is about your age and is doing a similar degree actually…*' or *'my wife…you two would get on well.. she says…'* Women would also use language to connect me to their anecdotes, such as '*it's happened to all of us*' or '*us women know what it is like out there*,' thereby assuming that I had, at some point, been through a similar experience. I adjusted my role in these cases to frame myself as a colleague or confidant, to build rapport, and ensure the participant remained comfortable giving me answers to relevant research questions. These adjustments have implications for the data, and my attempts to remain reflexive took form in actively writing notes either during or directly after the interview. I also approached the analysis in a way that allowed for the account of these issues, in some cases referencing where the interactional context was particularly relevant (Fairclough, 1995).

Interviews were held across the UK and therefore required some long train journeys, and on each return journey I listened back to recordings and wrote notes about my own perceptions of the interviews. This was done to note relevant areas for potential

analysis and to ensure questions and comments during interviews were in line with the research goal. It also allowed for me to recognize my own emotions and attitudes during and after interviews, particularly in cases where I did not, on principal, agree with some of the comments that were made by participants. This active reflexivity allowed for immersion in the data, and references to the notes after transcription were made to ensure there was an accurate representation of events.

Interviews are recognized as an interactional exchange, resulting in the co-production and interpretation of data (Cassell, 2005). Consequently, interviews are not seen as neutral but as important components of study with different functions in the overall research. Instead of attempting to achieve complete neutrality, I acknowledged my own socio-political stance as a young feminist scholar. In the report presented, I used my own knowledge to present a depiction of research findings that resulted from my own interpretation of events, interviews, and social context (Alvesson, 2003; Ryle, 1971).

As a feminist researcher studying academic hierarchies, there were some key ethical challenges that I faced when conducting interviews, analysing data, and disseminating my research findings. As a dialogical process, the interviews were influenced by my own position as a female PhD candidate, and by the identities of the participants themselves. As van den Brink (2010) identified with a similar scenario in their own research:

> Being 'just' a woman PhD candidate meant that I was relatively 'harmless' and this may have encouraged the disclosure of sensitive information that was contrary to the formal rules and regulations governing appointments (van den Brink, 2010, p. 76, emphasis in original).

The openness of participants was seen in their discussions of times they deviated from formal policies and times in which they openly discussed instances of sexism or other forms of discrimination in their institution, many instances that were not included in the extracts of this thesis. The analysis and inclusion of extracts was therefore of concern, as I have been trained to identify gendered practices and inequalities, thus making me susceptible to 'gender-oversensitivity' (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; van den

Brink & Benschop, 2012). To counter this, I specifically focused not on identifying inequality but on the specific discourses and that were used and produced. The goal was thus not to identify inequality as an organizational practice, but to focus on aspects that would contribute deeper to our understanding of what makes gender equality initiatives successful.

Finally, as a researcher and as a feminist, it can be difficult to study inequalities while also functioning within a system that reproduces them. One of the key components of this is the consistent reference to heteronormative partnerships in the literature, with many studies referring to inequalities between women and men, and husbands and wives. This can be seen explicitly in the discussion of 'women's preferences,' as well as in my own representation of these studies, taking a heteronormative approach to relationships. This is also seen in the discussion of flexible working practices and with discussions with participants, which centred on women giving birth and men remaining at work.

The reference to 'male and female' also refers to gender and sex as binary. In much of the literature, there was little reference to same-sex couples, adoption, or other types of families or gender and sexual identities. While this thesis makes a contribution to the inequality literature and to the discussion of initiatives that improve women's representation, upon critical reflection, more research in this area is needed to establish initiatives and programs that benefit the myriad of different families, relationships, and sexual identities that exist within society.

4.11 Concluding remarks and presenting the findings

This chapter has outlined the chosen methodology of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the institutional elite and key stakeholders in higher education institutions. A total of 47 interviews were conducted, with 7 being used as pilot interviews to direct the further 40 interviews done across the UK. This approach allowed for in-depth discussions with leaders about their views on gender (in)equality, gender equality initiatives, and women's representation in leadership positions.

The analytical technique has been outlined in detail to adhere to the goal of being transparent with the data collection and analysis. To reiterate, critical discourse analysis, including the identification of interpretative repertoires, is considered a craft skill that requires careful attention and adherence to the chosen procedural guidelines (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). This approach has been taken as it aids in answering the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and further situated in Chapters 2 and 3. Previous studies have largely focused on specific initiative implementation or the results of this implementation, therefore, capturing the existent attitudes and perceptions offers a unique way to examine gender equality and relevant initiatives.

4.11.1 Presenting the findings

The research findings are presented in the following three chapters. Each chapter uses empirical evidence to engage with the overarching question concerned with the interpretations of gender equality interventions and how accounts of these interpretations shape workplace reality.

In adherence to the methodological approach, interview transcripts were analysed using Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional approach to critical discourse analysis. Analysis was done at three levels: text (description), discourse practice (interpretation), and social practice (explanation). The text level allowed for identification of interpretative repertoires that were then analysed at the additional two levels. Together, these forms of analysis allow for the identification of dominant discourses and sets of linguistic resources that are used by participants, and provide insight into why these discourses are dominant, how they are used, and why they are used in the ways identified (Dick & Cassell, 2002).

Analysis began at the text level with the identification of linguistic tools and discursive strategies used between and within interviews. This refers to specific textual and discursive uses of language that were repeatedly used by interviewees. At this level, I asked myself questions such as the following: What patterns exist between and within interviews? and What interpretative repertoires do the institutional elite draw on when discussing gender and diversity management initiatives?

After identifying the repertoires, analysis was approached from an interactional perspective (discourse practice), investigating the production, distribution, and consumption of a text in its context. This involved asking the following questions: How does the interactional context affect the construction of these interpretative repertoires? and How and why are specific discourses being used? Finally, at the level of social practice, the data was used to respond to the following: How do leaders' constructions reflect on their interpretation of gender equality practices? How might leaders' use of interpretative repertoires contribute to the enhancement of equality practices? Why might leaders be using these discourses and repertoires? and How might they contribute to unequal institutional practices? In answering these questions, responses to the research questions emerged and evolved.

The identification and analysis of the interpretative repertoires showed that there were different discourses and repertoires that participants drew upon as strategic ways to use language to discuss, interpret, and represent various aspects related to gender (in)equality. Each repertoire also consisted of linguistic devices and discursive strategies that were identified through the text level of analysis. For Chapters 5 and 6, these have been labelled 'discursive strategies,' with relevant descriptive titles shown to adhere to the goal of demonstrating how and why they were used in a broader sense, rather than focusing on specific linguistic properties identified in analysis (Fairclough, 1992). For Chapter 7, three specific initiatives became the focus for analysis and thus are described through relevant interpretative repertoires.

The repertoires have been categorized under three main discourses, with each discourse being presented in an individual chapter. The following chapter, Chapter 5, focuses on discourse one, Chapter 6 on discourse two, and Chapter 7 on discourse three. The discourses and sets of interpretative repertoires are outlined in Table 4:

Table 4 Identified discourses and interpretative repertoires

Chapter 5: Meritocracy as Conflict

Interpretative Repertoire	Discursive Strategies
Meritocracy as 'the best wins'	Belief in the system Disengaging
Meritocracy as an illusion	Justifying unmeritocratic practices (justification and exception) Challenging 'meritocratic' ideals (challenging)

Chapter 6: Interpreting gender (in)equality

Interpretative Repertoire	Discursive Strategies
Repertoire of Causality	Assigning responsibility: culture Accepting responsibility: leaders and choice
Repertoire of action	Action at the individual level Action at institutional level

Chapter 7:Understanding equality initiatives

	Athena SWAN	Quotas	Targets
Interpretative Repertoire	*The motivation repertoire* *The process repertoire*	*The invisible audience repertoire* *The legitimacy repertoire*	*The repertoire of ambiguity*

Chapter 5: Meritocracy as Conflict

This chapter discusses the first identified discourse, which relates to one of the dominant perspectives within the gender equality policy literature: institutional promotion and recruitment practices promote upward mobility through meritocratic principles (Ladd & Bowman, 1998; McNamee & Miller, 2004; Nielsen, 2015; Scully, 1997). The first two interpretative repertoires are situated within this discourse. Table 5 below outlines the main discourse, interpretative repertoires and discursive themes that will be discussed:

Table 5 Meritocracy as conflict

Interpretative Repertoire	Discursive Strategies
Meritocracy as 'the best wins'	Belief in the system Disengaging
Meritocracy as an illusion	Justifying unmeritocratic practices (justification and exception)
	Challenging 'meritocratic' ideals (challenging)

As an overview, in the following analysis the notion of institutions as meritocratic is presented and problematized. As discussed in Chapter 3, the meritocratic nature of institutions refers to a system where it is believed that positions are gained as a direct and objective result of candidates displaying the ability, qualifications, skills, and experience as required for the job criteria (Scully, 1997). Advocates of a merit based social and organizational system stress that within this structure everyone has equal opportunities and chances to obtain rewards, regardless of gender, race, class, or other characteristics (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

A truly meritocratic approach would mean that individuals are evaluated on their skills, abilities, and qualifications, without consideration of gender or other characteristics. As a dominant discourse, this represents the 'taken for granted knowledge claim' that has been persistent in equality literature (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). The findings show how participants position themselves in regards to this argument. Importantly, the following chapter highlights that although all leaders

understood the importance of merit, there is not one uniform definition of what merit incorporates conceptually. Thus, while merit was the guiding principle for many decisions, there were differences in how leaders presented their understanding of merit and how they discursively argued it should best be incorporated into their organization.

This first repertoire, *meritocracy as 'the best wins,'* was produced throughout interviews at different times and while discussing various topics. This repertoire is indicative of a collectively shared consensus where 'merit' is the prevailing value in institutions. This is reflective of existing common-sense features of organizations, where merit is consistently presented as a value underpinning organizational life (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Castilla & Ranganathan, 2018; Petersen & Saporta, 2004).

The second repertoire represents a form of 'troubling' (Wetherell, 1998), described as a form of resistance to the dominant repertoire. This is often labelled as reciprocal positioning, (Ball & Wilson, 2000) where participants exercise resistance by utilising "the terms associated with the dominant discourse, [but] they do so in a way that enables them to position themselves in opposition to it" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.530). This has been labelled *meritocracy as an illusion* and was constructed in two ways. First, when discussing specific organizational practices. Although participants may have not been intentional in this positioning, they did reference accounts that go against the traditional values of a meritocratic system. Second, it was constructed purposefully, with participants referencing meritocracy as inherently flawed. Many of these participants showed awareness towards gender (in)equality literature.

These two repertoires will be discussed individually below with reference to the discursive strategies participants utilized during interviews. Taken together, it is argued that the discursive strategies are used by participants to discursively and strategically demonstrate that they are motivated to improve gender equality in their institutions, while equally constructing current processes as inherently flawed. It is therefore argued that institutional actors maintain legitimacy of unmeritocratic practices by creating exceptions and adopting justifications that 'make sense' in an era where gender equality is an ultimate institutional goal.

5.1 Meritocracy as 'the best wins'

The first interpretative repertoire is situated within the *institutions as meritocratic* discourse that is pervasive in the literature (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Scully, 1997). The view that institutions are meritocratic has long been circulated and maintained as self-evident in organizational settings (Mills, 1995; van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). To construct the view that their institution is meritocratic, participants employed the discursive strategies of *belief in the system* and *disengaging* (Wodak, 2001). Briefly, *belief in the system* refers to the way participants, often passively or in a 'matter of fact' way, referred to meritocracy as the prevailing and most legitimate way decisions are made. More critically, *disengaging* refers to the notion that the problem of gender inequality is not 'that severe.'

Through the strategy of *disengaging,* the argument is made that gender (in)equality practices are subjective and objective experiences. Individual interpretations and accounts of these practices present at best a complexity for the goals of equality policies and at worse a contradiction. In the use of these two strategies, the assumption that institutions are meritocratic remains intact. They therefore work to sustain the persistent repertoire that HEIs function as a meritocracy and that 'the best win.'

5.1.1 Belief in the system

Finding that participants referred to their organization as meritocratic and that they are motivated to ensure that equality goals are achieved (and/or achievable) in their institution is not surprising. This is due to the position of the interviewees and their assumed desire to present their institutions positively. It is understandable that they would work to present their institution as unbiased and to feel that their status, and the status of their colleagues, was earned fairly. This is therefore an easily recognizable construction of meritocracy, intended to represent the 'true' nature of institutions (Edley & Wetherell, 2001). The following are examples of this construction:

> **Extract 1***: I was never bothered about being the only woman, I just cracked on. I worked in a really male environment, so I've always just, you know, it's a meritocracy. I just work really hard.* (female, Dean)

Extract 2*: Diversity isn't just a gender thing. It's a much more general thing than that. And I think that the issue is, it is a meritocracy in a way, you are trying to get the best person. We hopefully have a diverse short list as well and then may the best person win. Whomever they may be.* (female, DVC)

Extract 3: *I think if you're promoting on merit you should be promoted on merit.* (male, VC)

Extract 4: *I would hate to think we are making decisions on something other than merit.* (male, governing member)

Extract 5: *...I was hired because I was the right fit for the role.* (male, Dean)

The presentation of meritocracy as a standard 'truth' was often done in this way, where participants referred to it with an underlying assumption that it would always be presented as a 'matter of fact.' This can be seen in Extract 1 with the simple and straightforward use of *'you know, it's a meritocracy.'* These extracts are examples of ways in which participants assumed a belief in the system that allows for meritocracy to prevail. This belief was weaved throughout the conversations, where despite problematizing meritocracy (as will be seen in the next repertoire), the majority of participants used similar phrases to the ones above, pulling from this 'belief' that despite unfair practices, their institution is meritocratic.

To theoretically explain the positive accounts of merit, it is important to examine the interactional context and consider the relevance of the discourse practice level of analysis (Fairclough, 1992). The discourse constructed here illustrates the dimension of *discursive practice* (Fairclough, 1992). Specifically, both male and female participants attribute their own and others' success to hard work. As an example, in Extract 1, we see that the participant is constructing an account where their success, with a leading role in a university, is due to them '*cracking on*' and '*just working hard*'. Extract 2 explicitly presents the idea of '*may the best person win.*'

Based on the information I initially provided about my research, which explicitly said I was exploring women's inequality in the labour market and specifically women's

underrepresentation in leadership in HEIs, participants were understandably working to create a particular view of themselves and their institutions in regards to their own approach to equality and diversity management. It is likely that participants wanted to maintain the legitimacy of their own achievements and the achievements of others. Considering the nature of the exchange, it becomes important for the participants to ensure their own abilities and rewards are not in question (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). They thus enforced the view that positions are granted based on objective and fair criteria; they are earned through merit.

The interactional context for this study also presents challenges that differ to the typical interview exchange. That is, while academic researchers are often likely to be positioned as the more powerful party in the interaction, as a PhD student researching senior academics, the power dynamics are reversed (Davey & Liefooghe, 2004). Specifically, the leaders interviewed are able to adopt and must manage a range of identities; they are powerful in their roles as senior leaders and hierarchically 'superior' to me as a PhD scholar, and they are also however discussing a topic of which I am heavily informed (gender inequality). Through the interactional context, they are theoretically expected to manage tensions between their role as leaders and my exploration of inequality in senior roles. Their use of merit to explain theirs and others success is therefore expected, with merit having been identified as a tool for those in leadership positions to legitimize the status quo and avoid resistance to their own perceptions (Castilla & Benard, 2010; McCoy & Major, 2007).

An additional component that must be considered here is that not only did participants express the meritocratic nature of their institutions as being a 'taken for granted truth claim,' but they did not work to explicitly define their interpretation of merit or assume that I may have a different definition of what merit entails. As has been found in much of the literature and can be seen in extracts throughout this thesis, merit was often portrayed as something that 'simply exists' within organizations, rather than something that might need to be defined and conceptualised further.

Thus, although a meritocratic organization is arguably the 'end goal,' there was little that demonstrated leaders' attempts to operationalise or conceptualise what this

means. This corresponds with an argument by Castilla and Ranganathan (2018), who state that literature thus far has largely created a dichotomy of 'meritocratic' or 'unmeritocratic' without actively demonstrating how actors interpret and understand these concepts. This will be further discussed towards the end of the chapter, after discussing the way participants confronted meritocratic principles by *disengaging*.

5.1.2 Disengaging

The discursive strategy of *disengaging* presents a more complex picture of how participants constructed the view that meritocracy is 'the best wins.' What is important in this construction is that participants were not negating the importance of examining or improving gender equality in organizations, nor does the following make normative claims about how participants *should* engage with gender (in)equality. Rather, the following description and interpretation is formed based on the ideological and interactional effects of constructing discourse in the way identified (Fairclough, 1992).

The following analysis also adds to the argument that participants were motivated to maintain legitimacy of organizational practices, pulling from alternative arguments as to why women might be underrepresented in leadership roles. Again, this demonstrates a means in which actors promote the meritocratic nature of institutions. It specifically demonstrates that participants constructed more socially comfortable practices to account for inequalities and related outcomes, rather than discussing elements such as structural discrimination or institutional sexism.

First, discourse was mobilized to express different accounts of gender (in)equality. Specifically, some female participants stated that they had never experienced discrimination or been treated differently than their male counterparts as a result of their gender:

> **Extract 6:** *I think you're right to talk about the time difference because I do think and you can see this from all the revelations coming about it - there's two types of revelations for everything but we were in a different world 20 years ago. So really you know, it wasn't the same. We have moved on from it* [from discrimination] *actually.* (female, head of school)

Extract 7: *So I don't know whether people see me as doing things because I'm a woman or doing things because I'm from a different background. I feel I don't fit in. So I don't feel as excluded as much because I'm female I feel excluded as a result of my educational background and class.* (female, Dean)

Extract 8: *...maybe nobody believes it but there's very few occasions in my career where I think being a woman has held me back and I actually have to think really hard to think about real examples. I've had failures and I've had problems and I've had setbacks and I can remember the worst ones very vividly and I've had episodes where people have bullied me and everything else like a lot of people have when they get to a life in academia but I don't really think that any of them were because I was a woman.* (female, VC)

Extract 9: *...for myself, I don't feel like I've ever been discriminated against for my gender. (female, Deputy Dean)*

It is not to say here that these women are incorrect in their perceptions and that they have experienced discrimination, but rather used to highlight that their constructions of their own experiences work to preserve the view that institutions are meritocratic. Although participants were supportive of *ending* gender inequality, some did not present an active struggle with being marginalized in their own movement up the academic hierarchy.

The above extracts also demonstrate different subjective experiences with gender inequality and discrimination. In the first example, Extract 6, the participant is making an objective claim that we have 'moved on' from discrimination. In the next example, the participant is more subjective in arguing that the discrimination she has felt is a result of her social background, not her gender, and that discrimination has been felt as a means of 'not fitting in.' The next extract then includes the caveat that *'maybe nobody believes it,'* and goes on to state that although she has experienced problems, she does not consider these to be a result of her being a woman, but rather part of academia (as suggested through the statement *'like a lot of people have when they get to a life in academia'*). What is being demonstrated here is that gender (in)equality consists of objective and subjective experiences that are interpreted by social actors (Dick, 2013),

having implications for equality scholars and practitioners who attempt to account for these experiences.

Although these are being used as a means of demonstrating that participants construct institutions as meritocratic, it must be emphasized that the experiences of these women may have been interpreted and constructed differently by others, or by them in a different situational context, and thus the experiences outlined by some as illustrative of inequality do not always represent a shared interpretation (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Thus, while HEIs have policies and practices regarding equality, they are also susceptible to inter-institutional and inter-departmental differences in interpretations of inequality practices. Again, the implication of this is that it poses a problem for gender equality initiative development and implementation, asking the question: what (or whose) accounts of inequality are these initiatives trying to tackle?

As discussed above, while the leaders construct accounts where they have not been discriminated against for their gender, it can be reasoned that they are helping to build the idea that institutions are typically meritocratic and fair. In these cases, the participants have succeeded in the current system. The social implication of these accounts is that the existing status quo, where men dominate leadership positions, is not questioned. Challenging organizational systems, including the decisions that are not in the best interest of marginalized groups, is a necessary component in changing the existing status quo (Ezzamel et al., 2001). Gendered practices and thus gender inequality remain pervasive in subtle, everyday actions and discourses (Zanoni et al., 2010). *'Disengaging'* can therefore be considered a 'micro-process of organizing' which when utilized works to question the existence of gender inequality, leaving institutions to be perceived as 'meritocratic' (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Zanoni et al., 2010).

Disengaging did present differently for some participants. The majority of the women in the sample were categorized as *disengaging* by stating they had not experienced inequality, however the majority of male participants commented on the use of quantitative-performance metrics for gender and equality, asking if these are necessary if women are 'choosing' not to be in leadership roles. It is argued that this reflects the argument that participants are motivated to account for unequal outcomes by

refuting the means in which these outcomes occur. Specifically, some participants constructed women's underrepresentation in leadership as a result of choices and not an unjust system.

In the below extracts, it is demonstrated that participants challenged the perspective that women's underrepresentation is symbolic of inequality. In this way, *disengaging* occurred when participants stressed the responsibility of choice in women's underrepresentation:

> **Extract 10***: I read some stuff by both Mckenzie and in the Harvard business review a few years ago that actually perhaps the most difficult thing to adjust for are the choicest and expectations of women themselves.* (male, DVC)

> **Extract 11**: *I suppose my first question is - are they really underrepresented in terms of people going right through their career? We lost so many people because they decided they were going to be - look after kids or whatever - so , of those who stay the course, and I agree that we should help them I'm not suggesting we shouldn't, but of those who stay the course, are they underrepresented would be my first question?* (male, governing member)

> **Extract 12**: *I suspect there's going to be certain professions which women are drawn to and certain professions men are drawn to and provided there's no barrier to a woman or a man entering that profession. It's just a matter of 'actually these women tend to like to do this because we are different' and that's okay.* (female, Dean)

The extracts above reflect arguments of Hakim's (2000) preference theory and the 'opt out' revolution (Belkin, 2003; Stone, 2007) discussed in Chapter 3. They are reflective of the patterns discussed in the literature review, where although structural and institutional barriers have been identified, there is still the narrative that women 'choose' to opt out, rather than to '*stay the course.*' This is explicitly seen in Extract 11, where the participant associates equal opportunities, or in this sense representation of women and men in leadership roles, with '*those who stay the course,*' negating the barriers that women face in regards to looking '*after kids or whatever.*'

Additionally, the participant in Extract 10 is demonstrating that women's choices are *'difficult to adjust for'* and thus he is showing an awareness that current organizational practices might not effectively be doing this. In the interview, he continues to describe initiatives that have been successful in his institution and describes his institution as *'fair and unbiased'*. Thus, it is argued that he is legitimizing current practices by stating that overall institutions are fair, and yet women are underrepresented; which must be a result of the inability to account for women's own preferences and choices. Similarly, the participant in Extract 12, who was one of the only female participants to do so, is using the rationalisation of preference and choice for both men and women, arguing that people are drawn to different professions.

Some participants were more explicit in using choice to account for women's representation. In the below extract, the participant also regards the view of 'choice' as being gender neutral by arguing that *'we all make choices:'*

> **Extract 13**: *I suppose I would say you're making choices in your life all the time, and if you're making the choice about having kids then there's going to be consequences to that choice and that would be presumably something you'd discuss with your other half before you go into it and acknowledging that there's going to be certain changes and how do we as a family accommodate those changes.* (male, DVC)

The participant continues to construct these choices as coming down to who makes the most money:

> **Extract 14:** *I suspect there are very few senior roles where the person who's earning more stays at home following the birth of children. It really depends if you're earning 60 he's earning 50 it doesn't matter, but if you're earning 600 and he's earning 50, I don't think there's going to be a discussion. It's probably going to be into the air where you're earning very similar amounts.. who's best positioned to return to work and who - I don't know at that stage how many mothers who are no longer working are thinking 'oh, I was done out of the opportunity by my husband.'* (male, DVC)

As the initial extract (Extract 13) demonstrates, the choice to continue to work after children is constructed as one of the many choices people are making *'in your life all the time.'* This participant, along with others above, therefore did not present more critically considered additional barriers that women may face when looking to return to work after having children. They instead legitimize current practices by constructing an account where this 'decision' is gender neutral and equality initiatives do what they can to support these decisions. In the same way, as the participant continues, the amount each individual makes becomes the ultimate factor in decision making. This again has the implication of constructing 'choice' as gender neutral.

In the above, participants maintain the legitimacy of meritocracy by holding women accountable for their choices. This demonstrates that a means in which participants ensured they comply with meritocratic practices and the policies of 'equal opportunity' is by negating the barriers that women may face. They instead provide justifications that institutions are gender neutral and fair, and that they are committed to the policies of which they are accountable.

Participants referred to organizations as meritocratic at different points in the interview, and it was often implied in more subtle or 'assumed' ways; such as by using statements such as *'well, it's a meritocracy, isn't it... so - '.* This repertoire introduces how, through infiltrating dominant discourses of meritocracy with their discursive strategies of *belief in the system* and *disengaging,* participants assert the idea that institutions are meritocratic, or more specifically, they work to legitimize the belief that through current meritocratic practices we can achieve (or have achieved) gender equality and fairness.

While the above suggests that the dominant discourse would remain unchallenged, participants did engage in a discursive resistance to it, creating a contradictory narrative; stating that 'meritocracy' is not, in reality, based on fair or unbiased criteria. Participants contradicted meritocracy through a range of recurrent discursive strategies, discussed in the second repertoire: *meritocracy as an illusion.*

5.2 Meritocracy as an illusion

The second interpretative repertoire pulls from a contradictory narrative of meritocracy, presenting often indirect constructions as well as more complex views that opposed the existing discourse of 'meritocracy' that dominates organizations. Importantly, participants did not necessarily take a purposeful approach in constructing meritocracy this way, but did so in more subtle and implicit ways.

As previously mentioned, participants used reciprocal positioning in their construction of 'illusionary' elements. Reciprocal positioning is again described as a "narrative event where individuals position themselves or others in a dominant repertoire by virtue of its terms, but in reverse relation to that repertoire" (Ball & Wilson, 2000, p.245). This positioning therefore generates a form of resistance, where individuals use the terms and phrasing associated with the dominant discourse of meritocracy, but do so in a way that positions them in opposition to it (Ball & Wilson, 2000; Bryman & Bell, 2011). This occurred during many interviews, including with participants who had, either previously or later in the interview, ensured me of the importance of merit and objectivity when looking to improve gender parity.

Two discursive strategies were identified in this repertoire: *justifying unmeritocratic practices (justification* and *exception),* and *challenging meritocratic ideals (challenging).* These strategies have elements that will be examined for their similarities and differences. *Justification* and *exception* refer to the way in which participants worked to make unfair practices seem acceptable within the 'meritocratic institution,' and ways participants described unfair practices but rationalized them as being an 'exception,' often using constructions what the ideal meritocratic institution *should* look like. Both of these strategies implicitly worked to create a picture of meritocracy as illusionary. *Challenging* refers to ways participants explicitly questioned the discourse that institutions are meritocratic, therefore demonstrating their awareness of problematic practices in organizations.

5.2.1 Justifying unmeritocratic practices

While only a few participants offered examples of explicit sexism in their institutions, many discussed times they had witnessed or been a part of other unfair practices. Many of the more explicit examples were discussed as being *'in the past'* and that they *'wouldn't happen today.'* These are not included in analysis below as only two participants provided details about these events. However, there was a range of ways in which participants discursively justified the unfair practices they had experienced more recently.

It is argued that the examples below provide evidence that leaders use discretion in conforming to certain organizational practices, and utilize justifications 'in the name of equality' to maintain legitimacy and avoid reputational risk (Dick & Coule, 2017). Specifically, when participants discuss utilising unfair practices, they equally demonstrate that these practices have allowed, or will allow, for the furthering of gender equality in their institution. It is thus argued that through forms of justification, participants are implicitly constructing ways in which meritocracy is *not* currently a reality in organizations, despite other attempts to make it seem that way.

In some interviews, there was a greater sense of rapport with the participant and uncomfortable questions were more easily discussed. One participant offered the opportunity to have a follow up interview, dedicating nearly 3 hours of their time to the project. This participant discussed how they were recruited to their university. They initially constructed an account of the hiring practices of their institution as meritocratic, outlining how they personally recruit for particular positions. Later in the interview, they were asked how they were recruited:

> **Researcher:** With your current position, how were you recruited?

> **Extract 15:** *[laughter] I knew you'd get to that, really badly...* (male, VC)

Parts of the conversation have been removed to ensure anonymity; however, the participant goes on to explain how a search agent telephoned him to explain the role. After the initial phone call, he arranged to meet with the sitting chair of the board:

Extract 16*: so I met him, the chair of the board for breakfast, they flew me to* [city], *I met about 5 people and it was done. The five people included one woman. and so it was an appalling process. I've encouraged them to have a much better process.* (male, VC)

In this interview, and as can be seen towards to end of the included extract, the participant begins to justify gaining his position through non-compliance with traditionally accepted 'best practice' recruitment processes by ensuring the researcher that steps were later taken to encourage better practices for future applicants. The participant continues to describe additional initiatives he has enforced, including the refusal of male-only short lists, the appointment of more female deans, and the development of a women-focused mentoring group. This finding is particularly relevant as it provides an example of how participants in positions of authority are able to reproduce power relations through their discourse, mobilizing their accounts to justify their success through a knowingly flawed system.

The above also provides support for the argument made earlier in this section: leaders, as higher level institutional actors, are able to strategically interpret gender equality policies and initiatives by drawing on their power as decision makers, thus demonstrating discretion in the practices of which they comply. Further evidence will be provided below, however, the argument is based on the concept that participants are able to maintain legitimacy for current practices through justification in adherence to equality goals, i.e.: the unfair recruitment was acceptable because he is in a position to change it in the future and improve equality in the organization.

Support for this interpretation of participants' goals to legitimize practices has been shown by other researchers, such as Dick and Coule (2017) who draw on the influential work of Wijen (2014) to argue that it is "critical that actors are able to provide justifications for non-conformance that are likely to make sense and be acceptable to both internal and external audiences" (Dick & Coule, 2017, p.3). By utilising positive discourses of gender equality, participants are justifying their actions and doing so in a way that appears suitable and appropriate.

The following extract provides further support for this, where a participant acknowledges utilising informal recruitment practices that have historically been detrimental to women (referring to research that indicates informal recruitment practices result in men supporting other men), and instead using this practice to specifically hire a woman he wanted for the position:

> **Extract 17:** *We ask* [head-hunters] *to make sure that we've got a good broad field of candidates covering a range of criteria so we ask them to do that - but in this particular case this* [was a woman] *that I wanted to hire - so we did the search and did have other people but this is somebody that I really wanted to hire.* (male, VC)

In this extract and continuing in the interview, the participant indicates they specifically chose the candidate before the formal recruitment process, justifying this avoidance of formal policies because he would be actively recruiting a female colleague. When probed, it is clear that he and his team did continue with the formal recruitment as per institutional policy, however, they were already aware of the person they were going to appoint.

In line with the analytic approach, this finding highlights differences in how individuals orient themselves to larger debates on organizational biases and meritocracy. Specifically, unfair practices are in part being discursively justified by the above male candidates. Both as a result of the interactional context and as a means of legitimizing institutional practices, actors demonstrate that their means to recruit more women and improve processes is justified because it aligns with the institution's goals for improving gender equality. Additionally, the practices they use have traditionally been detrimental to women, with research indicating that men are more likely to benefit from these more informal recruitment practices (Checchi et al., 2019; Mcdonald, 2011).

Extending from this, participants are also utilising justification as a means of demonstrating that they are motivated to achieve the institutions' gender equality goals. This was made explicitly clear by one participant who stated:

Extract 18: *I suppose I'm seen as pale, male, and stale, but I've also been committed to women's activism.* (male, VC)

Thus, institutional actors in positions of leadership mobilize their discourses from positions of power to argue their commitment to equality goals while equally recognizing that some processes are inherently flawed.

An additional way in which participants used justification to construct *meritocracy as an illusion* was through rationalising unfair decisions within the organization. One participant explained his previous work and constructed an account where he struggled with his decision not to hire a black candidate because of how the candidate would be perceived by other people.

The goal of the extract below (Extract 19) is not to discuss the participant's approach to race and ethnicity, but to highlight the way in which he uses justification to legitimize an organizational system that allows for these types of decision-making processes. He draws on the dominant discourse of meritocracy to suggest that perhaps this candidate would not have been '*impressive*' if he had been hired anyway. It is argued that constructing accounts through these discourses encourages the perception of 'meritocracy' within institutions as legitimate, regardless of what specific characteristic is the basis for the use of justification:

Extract 19: *I remember thinking he's actually pretty capable but would* [colleagues] *accept this guy... I just don't think... and I remember eventually convincing myself not to hire him.* (male, governing member).

Similarly to the other participant's statement above regarding the *'appalling'* hiring practice, the participant draws on discursive resources to suggest the recruitment process allowed for him to not select this candidate when he may have been the most qualified. The participant is framing his decision as being a fault of the potential people with whom the applicant would be working. Previously in the interview, this same participant said he was '*hugely meritocratic,'* and that the system has become increasingly fairer over the years, a feat he has taken seriously and put a lot of effort into throughout his career:

Extract 20: *I fought through my life to change* [the system] *completely so we were completely enough meritocratic. You were paid according to your value.* (male, governing member)

It is important to note that the participant does articulate his feelings of guilt, but in this case, also draws on the worker experience to support his decisions by suggesting the participant '*might have been a disaster*' (Jost et al., 2003):

Extract 21: *I feel guilt - there's a guilt there. Because I'm thinking, it's a real shame because that guy, well recruiting men* [is always] *difficult because women were always way more mature, you're recruiting at 21 or something... men are basically hopeless and women are impressive.... But I still almost feel a guilt. That… that was disappointing that I didn't actually hire him. Well maybe not because we could have recruited him and it could have been a disaster. Who knows?* (male, governing member)

This provides further support for the argument that participants in positions of leadership are able to mobilize their justifications for unfair practices by utilising a rationalisation that is acceptable to both internal and external audiences (Dick & Coule, 2017). In this case, rather than pulling from a rationalisation that reflects non-compliance as justified because it resulted in more women being recruited, the participant is pulling on the discourse of the worker experience and the potential candidate's abilities. The participant suggests that hiring the candidate would have been viewed negatively by external colleagues, and thus may not have been beneficial.

As is shown, the participant made a decision based on criteria other than that required for the job, however justifies it by pulling from the rationality that the candidate might not have been successful anyway. He clarifies by stating that men at that level are often less mature than women. In this case, the participant is also ignoring his previous statement about not hiring the person because of their 'certain background' and instead suggesting that he didn't hire the person because '*men are basically hopeless.*' The inconsistency suggests the participant is trying to make amends for his decisions by drawing on the 'truth' of meritocracy within organizations (i.e.: it could have been a disaster), as well as by stating '*women are impressive*' because they are more mature at

21. This therefore appeals to the importance of increasing the number of women as an outcome; something that had been made clear during the interview process.

An additional means in which participants constructed meritocracy as an illusion was by using the justification of *exception.* This refers to the way participants expressed that they generally have fair practices and that the system does work, but there are occasions where this is not the case. Here, we begin to see the breakdown of meritocracy from something that is definite to something that 'sometimes' has exceptions:

> **Extract 22:** *I think the reason* [universities] *are not more representative is people have this view that the best way is a meritocracy and then the best will come forward. And I don't think that's always the case.* (female, DVC)

This participant is outlining that meritocracy is usually how decisions are made, but there are exceptions to this rule; *'I don't think that's always the case'*. In an additional effort to maintain legitimacy of institutions as meritocratic, participants argued that everyone has their own individual biases:

> **Extract 23:** *…it also depends where the decision was made fairly against objective criteria. One of the real difficulties of course in interviewing somebody for a role is that of course, there's unconscious bias. Of course there is - I mean you know that. Well let's take something like you hired two people. You've got two people they're both pretty well qualified. Both got good experience. They're both bright. But one might be more engaging than another or you think that 'actually I think I might get on with that person, I like their sense of humour.' That's about something a bit less tangible isn't it. And in that we're all guilty.* (male, VC)

This participant also makes it clear that *'we're all guilty'* in the unfair practices that occur due to our unconscious biases. Meritocracy is thus good in theory, but is susceptible to our own *unavoidable* biased views relating to our idea of the best candidate. The participant also draws on some of the challenges with academic recruitment practices, where current procedures allow for decisions to potentially be

made based on liking a person's *'sense of humour'* or because *'I might get on with that person.'*

One participant also provided an account of unmeritocratic behaviour that they had witnessed in their institution, which they state is *'likely to be a relatively common occurrence.*' At the request of the participant, the exact extract cannot be included but will instead be summarised. The participant explained how they were on an interview panel to hire for a new role and a male member of the panel did not support a female candidate who was *'clearly outstanding.'* Instead, the male interview panellist favoured a male candidate who was not impressive in the interview and had fewer qualifications, and when confronted, stated *'well, I know he can do the job.'* The participant, and other members of the interview panel at the time, agreed that this positive evaluation was undeserved.

In this example, the participant is constructing an account where they experienced another colleague creating an exception to the rule of meritocracy; a colleague drew on other information to strategically avoid formal compliance to recruitment policies. This other person is also described as using their knowledge of the person external to the interview, who is from their network, to justify giving them the undeserved praise. This helps to situate the participant within their own views of what is appropriate and what is not, providing the researcher with an idea of the type of practices the participant supports and those that they do not consider to be meritocratic. This leads into the next discursive strategy where candidates explicitly challenged and questioned the truth of 'meritocracy' in institutions.

5.2.2 Challenging 'meritocratic' ideals

Challenging 'meritocratic' ideals refers to the way participants explicitly questioned and challenged the meritocratic nature of institutions. In doing this, some participants were clear that they did not necessarily believe that the current system supported meritocratic outcomes. Participants' engagement with this narrative is indicative of how they formulate accounts that show their knowledge of the challenges with recruitment and

selection procedures, as well as their knowledge of gender equality research (Eustace, 1988; Özbilgin, 2009; Sattari & Sandefur, 2019):

> **Extract 24: [discussing promotion]** *when you say it's based on quantity and quality of publications, completed PhD supervision, winning money and influence of your peers, they seem reasonably objective but of course as we said if you've had a succession of maternity leave, or the funders that you're applying to have hidden bias then it may not be easy. You could adjust the criteria to be fair to everybody…* [We must] *understand where the hidden biases might be operating.* (male, VC)

> **Extract 25**: *It's mostly unconscious, but people recruit in their own image. And I remember I was able to challenge that with an interviewer once, and I know what you find is that the more seniority of the person the less they see* [unconscious bias] *because they think they have their seniority as expert judgment.* (female, Professor)

> **Extract 26**: *We clearly don't have systems or processes that on paper would be biased for women but it's possible that there are* [biased] *attitudes about the way that things are done – including me - if I'm exhibiting those kinds of behaviour and that's a really really tricky one.* (male, VC)

> **Extract 27**: *With the discussion of 'if something is a meritocracy', for me, I always think we can't assume it's a meritocracy as it stands.* (female, Dean)

> **Researcher:** what role do you think merit has then, in the equality debate?

> **Extract 28:** *Well it's never simple is it. So you have to think to yourself about how do people arrive in the room. So you know the fact that they've been on unequal ground all the way – so probably the person from the disadvantaged area of society is going to, you know, already have shown quite a lot of fortitude to get that far.* (female, VC)

In these extracts, the participants demonstrate complex accounts of how they approach and understand merit and bias. For example, in Extract 26, the participant

suggests that they might be part of the problem because of the behaviors they exhibit, explicitly stating that while they do not have processes on paper that are biased, they might be implicitly.

In Extract 28, the participant adopts an increasingly complex definition of 'merit,' making a similar argument to that outlined by Noon (2010) regarding those who are *'disadvantaged'* in society having shown *'a lot of fortitude to get that far'*. As discussed in Chapter 3, Noon (2010) argues if organizations are going to claim to be based on meritocratic principles alone, they should recognize the personal achievements of those from underprivileged backgrounds as being more meritorious than someone who had societal advantages (such as someone from a middle class or private school background; Dickens, 1994; Noon, 2010). The above extracts demonstrate a theoretical understanding of these challenges with merit-based practices.

The following are examples of times participants further demonstrated an awareness of the 'problem' or challenges with meritocracy. The following extract comes from a candidate telling a story about their colleague's ambition *'to create a hiring system with a list of objective and merit based criteria'*:

> **Extract 29:** *His idea is 'well we have to make sure that we have clear criteria and minimum qualification standards for every position and we need to make sure we hire the best qualified person based on those standards for every interview that we do'. and I said, 'well, that's in theory really good, but DO YOU REALISE THAT WHEN WE DO THAT WE'RE FAR MORE LIKELY TO BE REPRODUCING THE WHITE MALE INDIVIDUAL who has had more opportunity and privilege to gain those qualifications?' If we look at the more holistic picture as opposed to just the criteria, and not picking the best but as long as they meet the minimum standards of what we're looking for, well we need to be a little bit more creative with that.* (female, Professor) [capitals to represent an increase in volume]

The above therefore refers to a time when the participant felt that someone in their department was making light of the structural problems within the system that prevent women from advancing. The participant is pulling from the interaction with a

colleague and actively demonstrating that while she is aware of the male-dominated presentations of 'merit,' her colleague was not.

Participants also questioned the values of merit by referring specifically to women's underrepresentation. In the below extract, the participant mirrors debates of the 'opt out' revolution discussed previously (Stone, 2007). The participant questions if women leave not by choice but because it is '*so damn difficult'* if they stay:

> **Extract 30:** *I do think, you know that very fundamental thing, 59 percent of graduates are women. So how come across the whole of the UK only 23 percent of senior positions are women? Now* [it] *might be that some women choose not to go forward but is that because life is just so damn difficult if they do? So it doesn't.. it doesn't feel good to me.* (male, Professor)

This extract, as well as Extract 31 below, are exemplary of a different argument than the one presented above where participants legitimize the meritocracy of institutions. Rather, these participants demonstrate an awareness of more critical debates regarding 'choices' and explicitly challenge the idea that women are able to progress through the 'meritocratic' system:

> **Extract 31**: *I think preferences are a bit of a complex thing because I don't think it's straightforward to say 'do you prefer to be with family do you prefer to be at work' ..it's much too simplistic.* (female, Dean)

Not all examples of *challenging* were necessarily separate from the previously discussed strategies (justification and exceptions to meritocratic rules). The below extract is an example of this, where a participant outlines their process for recruitment and argues that it is meritocratic and fair. They also, however, question whether it is biased against women who have taken periods of leave. This extract is therefore included in this section of *challenging meritocratic ideals* because the participant is demonstrating a clear awareness of the problems associated with ideas of merit:

> **Extract 32:** *We've got a set of criteria* [lists criteria] *And it's important that we do because sometimes you do see evidence of bias. And then if we're comfortable with what we see we put it out to a group of assessors. And we're very careful in*

that group of assessors to get balance. Where female academics are concerned.
So the majority of the people reviewing them are female. So that you can't have
that bias. Now all of that begs the question -- have you had the equality of
opportunity to perform at that level before hand? And what we don't do at the
moment is say 'well If you were a colleague who spent considerable time out, We
haven't really made very significant adjustments to the requirements so you
might say that for instance if I were female and had taken time out to bring up
children how could I have produced 26 publications? So should we be happy
with seven or eight of high quality? But we haven't got our heads round all of
that yet. (male, VC)

An important note is that the above extract references the use of a majority of
women on the evaluation panel to ensure *'you can't have that bias.'* However, as was
discussed in the literature review, gender balanced or female-majority panels do not
necessarily benefit women. Although not intentional, the practices that the participant
constructs as beneficial has actually been found to potential disadvantage women.

Still, the participants' questioning of making adjustments for periods of leave
reflects the more critical positioning taken within the literature towards meritocracy,
with many studies investigating whether, or how, inequality continues to persist despite
the adoption of meritocratic principles (McNamee & Miller, 2004; Nielsen, 2015). In
this way, participants mobilize the faults within meritocratic arguments, drawing from
existing literature to strengthen these discourses:

> **Extract 33***: I can't give you the references, but have you seen the report from*
> *Harvard about the interviews with women for senior positions? The one that says*
> *wherever there's just one women in the short list she never gets appointed. We*
> *have men as* [DVCs]*, we have virtually no women chairs of departments. It's*
> *dreadful.* (male, Deputy Dean)

Some participants also questioned their own actions and ways of viewing the
problem of women's underrepresentation. The participant below gives an example of
something he believes to be true, that women econometricians do not see issues

differently than men, but that differs from the view of his female colleague. He is thus problematizing his own construction of gender equality, arguing that perhaps he is '*part of the problem*':

> **Extract 34**: *It seems to me to be a terrible generalization that women think differently to men. What you might do about some things - but let's take something objective like the state of the economy. Come on! You know a woman economist isn't going to approach that differently, surely!? And* [my female colleague] *said 'well maybe we do?' It's that kind of thing that I, as a leader, I just don't know whether I'm maybe part of the problem.* (male, VC)

In building these accounts of the challenges in the current system, the participants are implying that more needs to be done to ensure gender equality and/or gender parity in leadership roles. In Extract 32, the participant says '*we haven't gotten our heads around that yet*' in reference to adjusting for women taking periods of leave. In Extract 34, the participant states *'I'm maybe part of the problem'* suggesting a lack of certainty about their approaches. Thus, while participants are motivated to demonstrate they are achieving equality related goals, they are also hesitant in suggesting that equality practices are going to, or able to, achieve all of their desired outcomes.

While previous research in the study of meritocracy and merit-based systems has established critical views on meritocracy, few have identified areas where leaders, and those who are responsible for recruitment and selection decisions, manage and position themselves within this discourse (Voorspoels, 2018; Schilt, 2010). This chapter therefore adds to this literature, arguing that based on the evidence described here and the experiences constructed in the interviews, leaders and stakeholders of HEIs in the UK are demonstrating an awareness of research pertaining to gender and (in)equality. Previously, feminist scholars have argued that it is the lack of resistance to the meritocratic ideology that is partly responsible for the continued gender inequality in academia; however, as has been shown, leaders and stakeholders are increasingly resistant to the view that 'meritocracy' is finite (Connell, 2006; Linstead, 2000; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014).

To conclude, *challenging meritocratic ideals* as outlined here is one of the most promising opportunities for change. As these leaders demonstrate an awareness of equality research and the structural contradictions in the system, it is argued that we are entering a space where action against the fundamental issues of inequality can be taken. This will be further discussed in the conclusions of this thesis.

5.3 Connecting repertoires: meritocracy as conflict

The above repertoires are indicative of a complex argument within the literature relating to meritocracy. In the study, participants constructed accounts where meritocracy prevails as legitimate, while also giving examples of biased and unfair treatment. This representation of meritocracy presents ideological and interactional consequences for the dominant discourse of meritocracy and the assumed meritocratic nature of organizations (Edley & Wetherell, 2001).

Connecting these repertoires contributes to understandings of how institutional leaders mobilize their discourse to strategically maintain legitimacy for current practices that go against traditional constructions of 'merit.' It additionally shows that leaders pull from discourses of meritocracy and gender equality to justify their non-conformity to institutional 'best practice' norms.

While the majority of university websites, missions statements, and published goals outline that the processes followed are 'fair and unbiased', this thesis argues that this narrative is actually *in conflict* with the perspectives of institutional leaders, who perform actions that align with their interpretations of gender equality but that do not necessarily adhere to the formal practices within their institutions (Krefting, 2003; Messer-Davidow, 2002).

There are identifiable tensions between what participants (and arguably, media sources) say is being achieved within institutions (fairness) and what participants construct as happening (unfair recruitment practices, informal hiring choices). At the core of the discussions, the participants as leaders are motivated to actively demonstrate compliance with policies and practices deemed to promote equality, and where noncompliance was identified, they worked to provide acceptable justifications. Largely,

these justifications were reflective of the goals of gender equality, thus creating a complex situation in which adhering more closely to formalized procedures could undermine the ambitions of these less formal gender-equality based practices.

It is noteworthy that participants did not neatly fit into one of the above repertoires, but rather both bolstered and criticised the notion of merit at different times during the interview (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). For example, while the majority of participants recognized unfair and gendered practices in hiring and recruitment processes, few articulated this as an issue of meritocracy but rather offered additional justifications or explanations for why practices may not appear to be based on fair criteria. This is agued to be demonstrative of participants' motivation to ensure that they do appear fair, which is partly a result of the interactional context. The contradicting discourses of meritocracy also challenge the more 'appropriate' conception that assumes that leaders would represent institutions as being fair and unbiased. This is especially seen through the *challenging of meritocratic ideals*. This thesis argues that it is indicative of participants' ability to use discretion and to construct bespoke interpretations and presentations of 'gender equality' as well as 'merit' because of their positions of power and authority.

This leads to one of the key features of the findings; participants did not appear to share a clear definition of merit or meritocratic principles, nor did they challenge the interpretations of the researcher or their own interpretations. Similar to the literature, merit was often positioned as being 'apparent' or 'straightforward' (Castilla, 2008). In their contradictions of merit, however, the definition became more complex. One participant began to construct a definition of merit that includes *'how do people arrive in the room.'* There was also recognition that *'successions of maternity leave'* or *'hidden biases'* may influence decision making. In these extracts, the definition of merit begins to be clouded. Considering the use of justifications, we see again that while participants are building the argument of whether meritocracy exists, they are also building a case for their own definitions and evaluation of merit in a workplace context. Thus, in some hiring cases, merit begins at the 'objective' level of recruitment and qualifications, while in other cases merit begins with 'how do people arrive in the room.'

This contradictory construction of merit is a fruitful way of studying women's underrepresentation, gender inequality, and gender equality initiatives in institutions. The ambiguity of merit reflects the complicated dynamics of working to change existing organizational practices (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). The ease in which participants constructed and contradicted their organization as meritocratic indicates that the concept of 'merit' is one of many difficult to define terms that make up a part of organizational discourse and contributes to variations in the outcome of gender equality goals (Bell & Hartmann, 2007).

Specifically, some leaders appear to account for inequalities and privileges when making decisions, while others do not. Still, there is little research that aims to specifically understand how meritocracy is subjectively evaluated or institutionally defined outside of the provided job criteria (Castilla & Ranganathan, 2018). It is argued that it is the contradictions that must be understood and leveraged in order to break down existing gendered practices that render organizations to have a system with an unequal distribution of resources and rewards (including leadership roles). The discourse of *'meritocracy as conflict'* is thus composed of taken for granted claims, including the dimensions in which organizations value and employ merit as a defined concept.

5.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, the interpretative repertoires of meritocracy as *the best wins* and *as an illusion* were introduced and presented as common-sense features of language, or 'truth rules.' It was demonstrated that participants were contradictory in their accounts of this truth, presenting institutions as both fair and unfair through different strategies.

This chapter has argued that participants are able to maintain legitimacy of unmeritocratic practices by adopting justifications and exceptions that allow them to avoid strict compliance because their ultimate goals are aligned with their views of 'gender equality' (Kalev et al., 2006; Rivera & Tilcisk, 2016). Thus, these contradictions and justifications for noncompliance, while still drawing on discourses of truth, demonstrate a discursive mobilization for those in positions of power. Specifically,

leaders are able to assert their commitment to equality while also contributing to and utilising the flaws in the process for their own and others benefit.

This is theoretically explained by examining the discursive practice level of analysis, demonstrating the importance of interactional context in constructing discourse (Fairclough, 1992); participants are motivated to show the researcher that their positions and those of other actors have been earned fairly. However, this results in the status quo remaining unchallenged and unchanged (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004).

The next chapter engages further with these concepts, conceptualising how dominant discourses further penetrate the construction of organizational culture and the need for change in organizations. Specifically, the next chapter (Chapter 6) examines the ways participants discursively interpret gender (in)equality and how they construct the need for further action to achieve change. The final chapter (Chapter 7) looks further into these mechanisms, examining specific types of initiatives and how participants work to discursively resist and support them.

Chapter 6: Interpreting gender (in)equality

In this chapter, interpretations of gender (in)equality are presented and analysed. This is done by comparing specific positions on the dimensions of *causality* and *action*. In line with the analytical approach, this chapter examines discourse for how it "constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.258). Repertoires of *causality* and *action*, therefore, are considered to constitute social reality, to reproduce it, and to (potentially) contribute to transforming it (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

The objective of this chapter is to further our understanding of how participants construct gender (in)equality, why it is constructed this way, and what this construction might mean for gender equality in practice. To best achieve this objective, the repertoires are organized through the following three stages: diagnosis, prognosis, and action (Verloo, 2005). This type of framework has been used in previous research to examine dimensions of European gender policy and is therefore considered suitable to organize the findings of this chapter, in line with participant's responses and the analytical approach (Bacchi, 1999).

The following analysis will demonstrate how participants construct *causality* (diagnosis: who/what is responsible for inequality and for equality) and *action* (prognosis and action; what should be done about it?). In what follows, the repertoires and related discursive strategies are used to show how participants construct the problem of inequality (*repertoire of causality*) and how they discuss the best way to combat these challenges (*repertoire of action*).

This chapter argues that one of the major underlying challenges for scholars of gender and inequalities are differences in how gender (in)equality is defined and conceptualised and how these differences alter the courses of action that are perceived to be necessary. The interpretative repertoires and discursive strategies for this chapter are outlined below in Table 6:

Table 6 Interpreting gender (in)equality

Interpretative Repertoire	Discursive Strategies
Repertoire of causality	Assigning responsibility: culture Accepting responsibility: leaders and choice
Repertoire of action	Action at the individual level Action at institutional level

The main argument of this chapter is that the success of equality initiatives depends on leaders' interpretations and presentations of inequality as an institutional challenge and on the action that is required. The findings of this chapter indicate a contradiction between participants' constructions of what needs to be changed to achieve gender equality (institutional cultural), and the perceived efficacy of current initiatives (those that 'fix women'). Specifically, participants emphasize the need for transformative change to achieve equality yet promote initiatives that are unlikely to lead to this change. As a consequence, this causes ambiguity around the goals of equality initiatives and limits their impact. There is therefore a discursive contradiction between the constructed *causality* of inequality and perceived necessary *action.*

6.1 Repertoire of causality

The *repertoire of causality* refers to the way participants constructed aspects of responsibility, particularly how they discussed *who/what is responsible for equality,* and/or *what has caused inequality.* In this repertoire, it is shown how participants assign responsibility for inequality to organizational culture, and how, in some instances, they accept responsibility for equality.

There are important differences in the ideological outcomes of these two constructions. In *assigning responsibility*, participants make it clear that inequality is a result of institutional and cultural factors that inhibit women's progression. This is done explicitly. However, *accepting responsibility* is done implicitly, with participants discussing some of the action they have taken to 'shoulder the burden' of equality.

Additionally, it is shown how some female participants create an 'us versus them' dichotomy to demonstrate how they (women) have accepted that they must be change agents, and that 'others' (men) are not going to be held responsible for future action.

6.1.1 Assigning responsibility: culture

The following extracts are used as evidence to demonstrate how participants framed the responsibility of inequality to be about *organizational cultural* and/or *institutional policy.* These are shown together as discussions of culture often led into considerations of the role of institutions, with participants stating that '*it's all mixed up now.*'

All participants at some point during the interview attributed gender inequality to cultural factors and described them as being embedded within norms and values. Thus, in interpreting gender (in)equality, participants constructed a cohesive account of the importance of changing cultural elements that are embedded within institutional norms. These discussions, as is shown below, largely reflect the view that while progress has been made, *'we're nowhere near finished:'*

> **Extract 35:** *Years ago it was like, you had to explain why you wanted parity. Now you don't. You know the mainstream commercial press need to be talking about it, which they do, and then people take it seriously and they realize they don't look good which says something about their leadership and management style if they haven't got inclusive organizations, so that just makes people keep looking at their policies, their recruitment policies, their culture and everything else… it's all mixed up now.. so just keep the spotlight on it really.* (male, VC)

> **Extract 36**: *It would be very sad if it were purely numbers. It's about cultures, it's about behaviours, numbers play a part of it because if you say well numbers don't play any part you're in difficult space - so I think that you need to ensure that the numbers are appropriate. but I think it's more than any one element. It does take time.* (male, DVC)

Participants also discussed how culture has changed more recently, especially with the development of different initiatives:

Chapter 6: Interpreting gender (in)equality

Extract 37: *I think it - inevitably things will change. and I'm not sure we always know in what directions that will take us, and I think it will be challenging, we do a lot of, as does every organization, unconscious bias training but sometimes it doesn't go deep enough - you almost need to be really unsettled.* (female, DVC)

This participant refers to the need to be '*unsettled*' several times in their interview, discussing that organizational cultural change is something that will cause deep-rooted shifts in how we function in organizations. Participants further described recent changes in culture:

Extract 38: *It is supposed to be about supporting a cultural shift. I mean if you've moved in that direction, if you've got women in certain positions or you're doing things better, I don't think you're necessarily going to go backwards if suddenly you know the rules change. I think it's more complex. I think we've got to use whatever tools we've got to try to advance the position of women really because it's just not going happen on its own. I think it's interesting - I think there's been a change, and obviously you're a young woman, but I've sensed a change where ten years ago students were not remotely interested in in issue of feminism and those kinds of things. They didn't use it as a word, they didn't identify with it, they thought everyone was the same and I always thought once you get into the workplace you'll realize… women didn't want to call themselves feminists and I think women are now getting more politicized, and everything contributes to that, all the Hollywood stuff you know the everyday sexism movements, the bedtime stories for girls about female heroines but I feel, and I might be wrong, there's a movement now that's come back that had been lost, for a number of years.* (female, VC)

The participant in Extract 38 suggests that recent changes have resulted in women being more adept to feminist arguments and feminist movements. While the participant states that times have changed, they also suggest that *'once you get into the workplace'* others will realize that everyone might not be the same. They construct an account of a previous movement that had been lost, that is now back with the current generation. This suggests that they anticipate further changes to be made in the arena of

gender and equality. In a similar way, participants also recognized the progress still to be made:

> **Extract 39:** *The number of female vice chancellors is going up - though I would say there's a type of institution that women are getting to lead and it's not always as.. what's the right phrase.. as naturalized as people think, actually. It's quite interesting about what projects senior women are given as opposed to others. There are all sorts of little unconscious biases and…. we've got to change but therefore we've to accept a lot of turbulence.* (female, VC)

The above extracts demonstrate a recognition of the need for cultural change in order to improve equality in their institution. This relates to the literature and Acker's (1990) gendered institution, which denotes that institutional culture is largely gendered and built upon male-norms and masculine definitions of academic excellence (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). Participants were also clear that 'simply waiting' for these changes is not sufficient, because '*there's a risk that you come back in 10 years' time and it's not better, or it's a bit better but it's not as better as it should be'* (male, VC). Many participants therefore constructed the need for change by arguing that waiting was not going to solve the problems based on the progress seen in the last few years:

> **Extract 40:** *Well it is changing. I looked at a graph the other day of female world leaders. Gosh I can't remember the percent now but I think the first female world leader was in 1953. And then you know by the time that Gandhi took over in India in the late 60s I think she was the second. I think there were 17 female world leaders now in that we haven't made much fuss of Theresa May being a woman but she is the second one in the UK. I'm sure that things are better now than they were. But if we accept that then change won't go any further, will it.* (male, DVC)

> **Extract 41:** *The question then becomes now how realistic? How social change lags. Cultural change lags way behind technological change and medical changes and so on. So will this happen naturally in our life? I've got daughters. I think their environment growing up was different to my environment growing up.*

They probably had more support to make choices and so on but so will it change
naturally over 10 or 20 years? I don't know. (male, VC)

These extracts portray part of a social process, where although change has
occurred, progress must be maintained or it is unlikely to continue. Participants also
stated that these changes must start very early in a person's life, and that the issues of
women in leadership positions, although moving in the right direction, must start with
transformative change earlier in childhood:

Researcher: So, then, has the culture been changing for the better?

Extract 42: *well, I think it does take time because you can't magic up professors,*
female professors. It takes time for them to work through, I think it's, within
STEMM, it's almost about starting with the A levels and degrees that students are
taking. So you've got a huge lead time to get into that point. But. Yes. So it is. I
think it is. To answer your question: I think it is going in the right direction.
(male, Dean)

The above extract also takes into account the fact that you can't *'magic up*
professors' referring to the challenges seen in the pipeline discussed in Chapter 3. This
is referring to the idea that women leave their careers prior to achieving leadership roles
due to various different reasons. This includes difficulties with balancing work and
family life, 'opting out,' lifestyle preferences, systemic barriers, etc. The participant
below builds on these views, arguing the importance of learning stereotypically-male
skills from a young age in order to ensure there are women throughout the pipeline:

Extract 43: *I think the monitoring and asking the questions and checking in...*
Actually this is about fairness. It's not about discrimination. The issue is
nurturing that interest as a child. I read a really interesting article. I think it was
in the iMagazine or inewspaper which said about how children are influenced
from a very young age about STEMM. And so you know if they got maths
homework - the number of women who say 'you better ask your Dad about that'
you know 'I'll help you with the languages.' And that becomes ingrained. And I

once said that when people go to see their sort of prenatal classes they also should have a maths and science class alongside it. So actually when the child comes home and it's maths homework or science or physics homework the mums saying 'Well yeah I can help you at that'. And that role modelling. Is probably. Is really critical. (female, Deputy Dean)

The participants above are thus constructing gender inequality and women's underrepresentation as being a result of socialization and culture. The assumption presented here is that if women received training from a young age, there would be more women in consideration for leadership roles in the pipeline. This connects with the literature on stereotypes and demonstrates that participants are aware of the gendered nature of socialisation practices and how these might influence institutional processes later in life. It also works to legitimize existing dominant views that women are not in leadership roles because they have not been entering the relevant degree fields or earning the necessary qualifications.

In examining the question of '*who is responsible for inequality*?' some participants did construct cultural factors as being a result of human agency, recognizing that culture is built on individual choices and actions:

> **Extract 44:** *I think people are trying to improve it - and I think people are aware of it but I don't think a lot of people think about it on a daily basis like they probably need to for things to change.* (female, Dean)

> **Extract 45**: *The difficult thing in universities is culture. I think there are three groups of people. Those that perhaps just don't think about it. There are those that get it and go with it and try to influence, the nudging, and those that say 'we're going to have a different culture'. And it just depends on your personality, situation, and circumstances.* (female, deputy dean)

> **Extract 46:** *there are people in* [certain studies] *who say we've got a really male culture here and you're trying to break it down in some way.* (female, Dean)

These extracts all refer to people who are trying to improve culture (*'there are those that get it and try to influence…'*) or those who are preventing change (*'I don't*

think a lot of people think about it on a daily basis'). In the final extract, the participant is utilising their discourse to suggest that *other* people construct their culture as being 'really male.' While the participant does not give their own explicit account of this culture, they do utilize this discourse as evidence of their support for 'breaking it down,' providing further examples of practices within their institution of which they have been involved.

Recognizing that these people are part of the institutional culture and have choices in the processes that exist, this then leads into the role of the institutional processes in combatting gender inequality. In this way, participants expanded on the challenge of culture to demonstrate how some institutional factors disadvantage women:

> **Extract 47:** *We need to look at how we use our promotion criteria – where we rid ourselves of unconscious bias and notions for acceptance, how we encourage underrepresented groups to put themselves forward when they might be reluctant to, but they have as good a chance as anybody else. So that's one area of intervention. Another area is even before that that we have our recruitment practices and processes, so now we're looking almost anthropologically. We look at processes we go through to recruit new academic staff, particularly trying to work out if there are any areas in that process where we may inadvertently be deterring people that we would want to attract, or whether we could encourage people who might be reluctant to apply to put their name in the hat.* (male, DVC)

This participant makes clear reference to the idea of unconscious bias and is the clearest example of a participant recognizing that there may be challenges in *'notions for acceptance'*. The participant also uses 'we' when discussing institutional processes, thus including himself in the need to *'work out'* if there are processes that may *'inadvertently be deterring people.'* The participant continues by offering some examples of how to combat these issues:

> **Extract 47 continued**: *... so whether that's by the way we word adverts or the way we introduce new staff.. Any of that. So that's just a couple of things we're doing to target particular points of concern.* (male, VC)

This participant, although not stating it explicitly, is referring to positive action measures that are legal under the Equality Act. This falls under the ability for employers to address an underrepresentation of certain groups by changing adverts to specifically target members from that group. This was the only situation where a participant specifically referred to taking these types of measures within their institution. This indicates that, although only one participant evidenced this, these practices are both visible and, more importantly, considered legitimate within their institution.

An additional example of participants *assigning responsibility for inequality* to institutional processes can be seen in the below extract:

> **Extract 48**: *If I look at the promotions committee we regularly volunteer the data, we ensure staff have unconscious bias training, we encourage all parties of the university to come forward and to participate in these schemes. So you know we're trying, at the same time the broadest issue, most significant issue for us is the number of women at the most senior level of professor. We're not alone in that area and we're aware of that.* (male, VC)

The above extracts are therefore examples of how participants assign responsibility for inequality to culture and included within that, institutional processes. In doing so, participants made it clear that they interpret gender inequality as being something within the institution and thus something that requires deep-rooted change.

It is important to note that not all participants assigned responsibility in this way. As said previously, all participants at some point stated the importance of changing organizational culture in efforts to achieve equality. However, there were some who felt that certain aspects of inequality are not the responsibility of the institution. There were some who directly constructed oppositions to the role of institutions, specifically in regards to those who 'make choices' about periods of leave:

> **Extract 49** : *I don't think you can blame an institution for instance if people decide to have a child and then make a decision that the female part of the partnership bring up the child and then take time from work and away from work.* (male, governing member)

Extract 50: *you know we get beaten up with this quite a lot but actually it isn't about decision we've made but about decision people have made themselves about having children and periods of leave.* (male, DVC)

The above extracts demonstrate little critical evaluation of individual preferences and choices. It also shows the availability of this discourse, where participants were not 'hiding' their accounts of institutions not being responsible for personal choices. This, although implicitly, suggests a lack of dominancy of other repertoires about constraints and barriers in the discursive practices of these participants.

As has been discussed in the literature, women are argued to not have unconstrained choices, but rather to face systemic barriers throughout their lives. These impact their careers and certainly their path to upper echelons of leadership (Hakim, 2000; McRae, 2003). Thus, this demonstrates the need to discuss the relevant and appropriate *action* that should be taken: what should be done to combat the challenges participants outlined? This is discussed in the next repertoire. First, the following section further elaborates how participants contributed to the *repertoire of causality* by *accepting responsibility.*

6.1.2 Accepting responsibility: leaders

This section demonstrates how leaders construct accounts that work to *accept responsibility* for equality efforts. Examples given by participants of situations where they made specific choices to counter aspects related to inequality are provided. In a similar vein, participants also express responses that suggest that they have accepted responsibility for men not being involved in equality efforts, and have taken up further action because of this lack of male engagement. Thus, these accounts are more implicitly constructed than those in the previous section. Towards the end of the chapter, the outcomes of these accounts and the broader relation to gender inequality in academia is evaluated and discussed.

Institutional actors in leadership positions have been encouraged to help recognize and dismantle the systemic challenges women face in gaining leadership positions (Duncanson, 2015). Men in decision-making roles have especially been called

upon to make changes in this regard, with several publicly committing to improve upon some of the identified challenges (Sattari & Sandefur, 2019). The following extracts show how leaders have adsorbed and interpreted this 'call to action' by utilising discourse that connects with the acceptance of responsibility for changing aspects related to equality.

The practices outlined below are interpreted as choices and changes made by leaders that are not explicitly part of an equality initiative but are more reflective of their own individual commitment towards improving their institution's minority representation. They also demonstrate how leaders interpret gender inequality by providing examples of ways in which they counteract certain imbalances or biases.

To begin, the following excerpt is from a male Vice Chancellor and provides evidence of these practices. This participant is explaining a rule he has in place for those responsible for recruitment in his institution: they must come to him and explain their choices if they do not appoint the candidate from a marginalized group.

> **Extract 51**: …*you must make sure that you don't influence selection processes.. and that's, for me that's the critical piece is when you say that - you need to be scrupulously clear that you're not bringing personal bias into the situation, so the only way that I think you can do that is for someone to say you must have group x more than x1 represented in your short list. and you must then argue why the marginalized group that you've identified, candidate or candidates, are not as good as the one you are choosing.* (male, VC)

The above extract is utilising an example of a policy outside of the 'official' policy to construct an account of *accepting responsibility* because, although implicitly, the participant is adopting these practices without it being a formal requirement. An additional participant was clear about their university policies as well as about their own goals and objectives when asked about his approach to short lists and approving candidates for positions. The participant gave an example of a time he rejected an all-white and all-male shortlist. Although he discusses an example of race, he used this example after being asked about gender equality and said that it functions similarly

when it comes to all-male panels and lists. Using a story format, he explained the situation with the search firm:

> **Extract 52:** *I said 'there must be at least two black people in your short list. If you can then choose a white one over the top of that, and you can justify it, I will accept it. but you must have two black people.' They said 'no impossible, there are no such things we cannot do this, we will not do this'*
> *'Fine. Then you don't fill the position, no problem.'*
> *Now, they had a shortlist that had two - one black man and one black woman, and they came back and said they can't choose between the two black people so I said 'you will appoint both.'* (male, VC)

These participants are utilising examples of informal practices to construct an account where they have accepted responsibility for equality and have thus made specific strategic choices outside of their obligation of formal interventions. The first participant (Extract 51) explains how he requires hiring managers to explain their choices when they choose not to hire minority candidates. He follows up by saying it is the best way to ensure that people in the organization consider diversity as an important feature. In Extract 52, the participant uses his example to not only demonstrate how he approaches equality practices but also to provide a positive outcome, where two people from the minority background were the best choices for the role.

In a similar way to the previous chapter in the section of *justification,* participants constructed accounts where they made decisions explicitly because of their equality related goals. In both Extracts 51 and 52, the participants argue that they do not 'allow' all male or all white short lists. Both participants acknowledge that it is technically not part of policy to have these types of stipulations. These practices, although formalised in the sense that they are being done by the VC and discussed at some faculty levels, are still voluntary practices that are not university policy or regulation. They are, however, ways in which people in positions of power are working to improve women's representation.

More critically, these participants show that they are again able to demonstrate discretion in how they approach recruitment and selection procedures, and that although

some aspects are not a part of 'formal policy' they are able to choose when and how they apply and adhere to the above practices (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). Additionally, the participants construct these ideas as obvious; recognizing that there are available women and minorities for positions, but that existing practices have, for whatever reason, prevented them from being initially put forward. Participants then act on these situations by necessitating women (and minorities) to be considered as candidates. Although these two cases are examples where women did receive the roles, the underlying structural issues are not being adequately addressed. The actions of these male leaders instead help to establish a commitment to gender equality that does not require more fair procedures but rather allows them the choice of performing activities that might counter-act biased practices.

An additional component of this was the discussion of informal mentoring. One participant stated that he had been a mentor to women. Other participants who work closely with him (without being prompted) validated these perceptions; two other participants interviewed said they consider him to be a trustworthy 'ally' for women and members of underrepresented groups, within his institution and externally.

> **Extract 53:** *I have over my career mentored more women than men. I can see many still who are now in quite senior positions. I think, this sounds arrogant, but I think women have always trusted me in the workplace.* (male, VC)

The discussion with this participant was open, and there was further exploration into his reasoning of why he felt women trusted him. We were able to discuss the current socio-political climate, referring to instances of harassment or similar gendered problems at work and the increased awareness of the MeToo (Hill, 2017) movement and other related campaigns. While the participant referenced the MeToo movement, which is based on the platform that women continue to experience sexual assault, they did not further discuss these elements. Although elusive, one interpretation of the construction of the importance that he is 'trusted,' is that there are instances in institutions where women require these trustworthy allies.

Looking further into the importance of mentoring, many female participants made it clear that part of their success was due to informal mentoring (predominantly

from men), and that these informal mentoring processes were far more valuable than any formal schemes or interventions, such as:

> **Extract 54**: *Well it's probably a combination of things I've had. I've had some great mentors, interestingly all of them men. Or not interestingly all of them men. I wouldn't say 'Oh I've had an amazing female role model that I've been pursuing' but I've had great mentors who've been very supportive of me and I think that in itself is helpful.* (female, head of school)

When asked if these were formal or informal mentors, the participant clarified that they were informal and that 'mentor' is not a term she would necessarily have used to describe them at the time.

When discussing responsibility, participants also constructed the role of others in efforts to combat gender inequality. Many examples were provided. The following two extracts provide exemplary ways in which this was articulated. Specifically, the following are extracts from a conversation that started with the question regarding why initiatives have not seen more progress, leading to an alternative discussion to that of the one above about the role of men in combatting gender inequality:

> **Extract 55:** *If you don't show men what's in it for them, they don't give a monkey, they already have all the power they don't give a damn. They aren't really engaged in this conversation so you have to drive it at the board level but you also have to drive it at the executive level* (female, governing member)

> **Extract 56:** *I have spoken in a room full of 350 people - there were 3 men. They left before Q&A. So that shows how interested they are in this conversation, it also shows how in quote 'successful' we are at engaging men.* (female, Dean)

It is argued that participants mobilise support and refute potential resistance by distinguishing between those who follow their views and those who do not. In this way, the above participants create an 'us versus them' dichotomy. Women are on the side of women, while men are '*not interested in the conversation.*' One of the key features of this strategy is the formation of in-groups and out-groups.

From the above participants, it is inferred that they have accepted that they must be the change agents by identifying the group (men) that isn't engaged in the conversation, and the 'we/you' (women) who are not successfully creating interest for men. The participant in Extract 55 provides a clear example of this by stating '*you have to drive it at the board level but you also have to drive it at the executive level.*'

van Dijk (1993b) explains this as 'ideological squaring,' defined as the way individuals align themselves and others as with or against particular phenomenon or events, therefore creating 'in-groups and out-groups' or 'us versus them' dichotomies as termed in this thesis (Wodak, 2011). Extract 55 again provides an explicit example of this where the participant states how '*they,*' as others,' '*don't give a damn*.' Likewise, the participant from Extract 56 uses sarcasm when saying how '*in quote "successful" we are.*'

From the level of discourse practice, participants' use of pronouns is of interest as they used them to create a division of 'us and them.' In Extract 56, there is the reference to 'we' which Fairclough (2005, p. 152) refers to as "slippery" because text producers can utilize it to refer to an array of different groups and actors. In this case, the participant may mean 'we' as in organizational leaders, or 'we' as in women (both the participant in this case and researcher identify as women). Regardless, the use of 'we' (or 'you' in Extract 55) works to place the onus of achieving gender equality goals on the minority group. The participants therefore see themselves in the role of driving organizational change, and being less successful because of the lack of engagement of male colleagues.

This formation of in-groups and out-groups is thought to be a way for members of a group to form solidarity with other members of that same group. However, the way in which the two participants do this differs. In the first extract, the participant constructs the out-group as difficult or unwilling, and suggests that this results in the in-group having to '*drive it at the board level.*' Alternatively, the second participant identifies the challenge to be a result of the in-groups lack of success in enforcing engagement. Thus, although the participants both effectively create solidarity with in-groups working to achieve equality and therefore accept responsibility for equality, the first creates a sense

of linguistic exclusion where the out-group simply does not *'give a damn,'* while the second implies that the fault lies with the in-group.

Looking at the influence of these strategies from the social practice level, it is argued that the strategies become part of the way we, as readers and receivers of text, may perceive people and their actions. Initiatives are therefore framed as not invoking true cultural change because men (the 'they' referred to) are not engaged in making this change happen; and women must *accept responsibility* moving forward both for true change and for additional engagement. This has the potential consequence of signaling that there are those 'in' for achieving equality, and those 'out,' reducing complex interpretations and arguments to simplistic dichotomies.

The interpretation taken of this discursive strategy is that it has a dialectical relationship with the organizational culture; the creation of in-groups and out-groups is both a product and constituent of the current climate. Thus, inequality is presented as power-laden and unavoidable due to existing hierarchies and differences between people (whether that be a result of position, gender, etc.). Additionally, by accepting features of inequality and making suitable changes, participants are utilising their power to choose the aspects of inequality that they are going to counter (by rejecting male short lists, for example). There is a subsequent creation of a dichotomy, whether it be men against women, or those passionate for change and those who are not, without recognition of various degrees on this scale and different ways individuals interpret (in)equality.

6.2 Repertoire of action

The *repertoire of action* presents participants' responses to questions about *what needs to be done?* Through their discursive practice, participants construct accounts of not only who is responsible for inequality (as above) but also *what should be done about it* and *who decides.*

This repertoire demonstrates that although participants attribute inequality to cultural and structural factors and accept responsibility in line with these elements, they construct the 'most promising' initiatives as those aimed at the individual. While some discussed flexible working patterns and the importance of making sure women can

balance work and motherhood, the majority framed this as a means of 'fixing women.' These different approaches to *action* are described below as *action at the individual level* and *action at the institutional level.*

Taken together, it is here that initial paradoxical views are seen; participants argue that culture is the largest barrier facing women (as shown above), and yet frame the most necessary initiatives as those that 'fix women' and allow them to better assimilate to the current (biased) cultural norms. In the previous repertoire, they also demonstrated how they accept responsibility by acting in ways that counter existing biased practices. There is therefore a contradiction between how participants present *what needs to be changed* and *what should be done.* These two repertoires are again theoretically connected towards the end of the chapter.

6.2.1 Action at the individual level

This section outlines the way participants promoted programs that target women's attitudes and behaviours during interviews. Although participants were talking specifically about initiatives designed for women, they often presented them as gender-neutral ways to allow people to 'grow and change' through their own agentic behaviour.

Action at the individual level therefore refers to the way participants utilized discourse to construct women as being social agents responsible for taking action for their own inequality and their own liberation. An implication of this that women's inequality is framed as being fundamentally a problem of *deficit*; women are not in leadership roles because of something inherently related to women, either through social upbringing or through their role as primary caregivers.

As discussed in Chapter 2, this is often termed the 'fixing women' debate, concerned with criticisms that 'fixing women' is not going to lead to long-standing changes or improvements (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013a). Although participants previously framed women's inequality as being a result of cultural and institutional elements, the majority framed women as being the most effective *change agents*. The extracts below are exemplary responses from participants when asked for 'best practice' in terms of initiatives that improve women's representation in leadership:

Extract 57: *Something that I was really pleased with and that I'm very happy to be involved in, is that we created* [a women's network]. *So we've got some of our own graduates and members of our board of governors and senior colleagues and other students who've agreed to mentor and provide a group to support these women. And the whole idea is this network will help, and the role models will help people deal with some of the internal difficulties that many women face in stepping forward.* (male, VC)

Extract 58: *I mean anything that helps towards building confidence, building the capability, helping them somehow acquire the skills.. them - women - to acquire the skills to go into managerial positions - I would support whole heartedly.* (male, Dean)

Extract 59: *In terms of women into the professorial –   what we've done here - Make sure everybody understands how you apply for promotion and give people mentors of the recently promoted, really encourage women to apply even though they might be nervous about…Are they ready. So create the conditions in which their confidence is boosted, support them through the application procedure, make sure that there are opportunities for part time promotions as well as full time.* (male, VC)

Extract 60: *We're thinking about putting in place a specific mentoring course to support our senior women academics and help them gain the right skills to be promoted and take up leadership roles. But these things take some time to work through.* (male, DVC)

As is shown, these participants use phrases such as '*internal difficulties,' 'helping them somehow acquire the skills'* and *'really encourage women to apply even though they might be nervous.'* These examples reflect not only the efforts deemed as important to leaders, but are also indicative of the discourses that are available to them and how they use these to construct their approach to women's inequality more broadly. These narratives also work to construct the institution as 'gender neutral,' rather than as being constituted by and constitutive of gendered practices (Acker, 1990; Bird, 2011).

Participants also discussed other initiatives; however, these were the most common and the most discussed in detail.

The participants from extracts 57 through 60 above convey the way the university is providing resources to women to ensure they feel comfortable stepping forward and have the confidence to apply for various positions. These participants are therefore making the case that the best way to ensure gender equality, something all participants value, is to ensure women are better equipped to handle organizational systems. The action that needs to be taken, and what is currently being done in institutions, is therefore aimed at the individual and thus 'fixing women'; implying that women make choices as to whether or not they become leaders, and initiatives must 'help them' feel better equipped to make these choices. An explicit example of a participant constructing women's underrepresentation as being a fault within women is below:

> **Extract 61:** *Women also, they need to take up opportunities which would support your career because actually if you allow these things to hold your career back you're not actually helping your cause.* (male, VC)

This participants argues that women cannot allow 'these things' to hold their career back, referring to lack of confidence, skills, and fewer opportunities. From a social practice perspective, Extract 57 through 61 help to (re)produce the perspective that it is those from disadvantaged groups who are lacking in a particular skill or ability (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000). The dismantling of structural, institutional, and organizational barriers that limit women's upward mobility is avoided when looking at initiatives that work to enhance women's expected psychological dispositions. The training programs and initiatives that focus on enhancing confidence, changing women's attitudes, or offering women mentors do not address the more systemic limitations to women's advancement (Bendl & Schmidt, 2010; Francis, 2017; Piscopo, 2018; Sattari & Sandefur, 2019).

Thus, by framing initiatives through *action at the individual level* it promotes the actively criticised notion that women are not in leadership positions because of something inherently incongruent between their behaviours and skills and those of

leaders, and that they have the free agency to make changes in this regard by improving upon their own abilities (such as through increasing confidence and learning about procedures; Bird, 2011). This provides evidence of support for the continued existence of Schein's (1973, 2007) think manager-think male paradigm. Although not stated explicitly, participants suggest that in order to be in senior roles women must be trained to have the characteristics associated with leadership, something that they are currently lacking. This again fails to take any transformative steps to improve the organization's structures and culture, something participants had previously problematized.

Based on the above, the argument made in this section is that understanding and acting upon the way leaders interpret and represent the issue of these individual-level initiatives is important, as is a definitive commitment to gender equality goals from male and female leaders in decision making roles. A 'definitive commitment' also requires clarifications on the ultimate 'goal' of gender equality, drawing attention to what exactly leaders are looking to achieve with the implementation of specific initiatives. In support of previous literature, it is suggested that by stressing that equality can be improved by enhancing women's agency and abilities at the individual level, participants are removing blame from institutional factors and placing it upon women.

There were participants who recognized these debates and the insufficiency of certain types of initiatives in achieving desired change. Some female participants who were looking to advance further (such as deputy deans to deans, deans to DVC's) admitted that they no longer attend women only events or functions, as they created an atmosphere where it is only women in lower ranking roles supporting other women in similar positions on the hierarchy. The participant below reflects on this to argue women only events are no longer 'progressive':

> **Extract 62:** *...I try not to attend women only events, there are women that agree, it would have been progressive for the 1980's.* (female, Dean)

There were also participants who were aware of the 'fixing women' debate and made it clear that individual-level initiatives are not doing enough to solve cultural challenges. During a discussion of the recent initiatives her organization is implementing, one participant explained the following scenario during a meeting:

Extract 63: *…when they began to go over it, it was all about how do we teach women to put together their packages in a more strong way, how do we teach them to put together better packages that highlight them better for promotion? How do we get them better training so that they are better at knowing what they need to do?… How do we mentor them so that they're doing the right kinds of things so that they're qualified?… and as they're going through the 3rd or 4th iteration of that, you basically had to hold me into my seat because, one of the things that I very clearly recognize is that they're blaming the victim. Every suggestion they had was blaming the woman for not being good enough. That we should lean in more!* (female, head of school)

The participant is aware that structures are not changing with the current focus on initiatives targeting women's behaviours and skills. The participant explicitly criticizes the common rhetoric of women 'leaning in' to achieve leadership roles, referring to a popular phrase used by Sheryl Sandberg (2013) to explain why there are fewer women in senior roles; women simply do not seize opportunities. The participant also makes it clear that current initiatives largely focus on blaming the victim (women) rather than fixing the system. These more critical discourses are thus interpreted as being available to leaders within institutions, however, were not drawn upon by many male participants.

The participant below discusses a situation during a meeting with part of her institutions executive group, including her Vice Chancellor. She explains that during an audit of her department, she found that women are given more students to supervise, are expected to manage more people, and are responsible for additional mandatory tasks that are not conducive to research outputs (the primary criteria for promotion):

Extract 64*: I brought this up at the meeting. I said one of the things that you are not accounting for is - you can train woman all day long and tell woman all day long that they're not doing a good enough job at putting themselves forward, when the fact of the matter is our systems and our structures are acting as barriers to them because they're doing all the behind the scenes leadership work, the services work, the work that's keeping this place running and bringing you*

money. Then I gave the example in hours. Immediately at the end [colleague] *and the vice chancellor come up to me and ask WHAT?* (female, Dean)

As was discussed in the literature review chapters, female academics are more likely to be asked to volunteer for service work and to perform activities outside of those required for their role, and more critically, outside of that expected for promotion evaluations (Bird, 2011). The participant in Extract 64 offers evidence of this, and demonstrates an awareness that the focus on 'fixing women' is not going to account for the additional institutional barriers women face.

Furthermore, they explain that the vice chancellor came up to them after the meeting and was 'shocked' at what she had found during the audit. This, as well as other extracts provided, builds on the discourse that there is a lack of male engagement in gender equality practices. It works to suggest that men have a lack of knowledge regarding gendered practices, and have perhaps not had to consider some of these more implicit biases such as service work because they have not directly impacted their careers. This is also seen in the lack of critical reflection on constrained choices, where men are not forced to make these choices because of societal norms about men and parenting (McRae, 2003; Zanoni & Janssens, 2018)

Taken together, the examples provided above work to construct the institution as gendered; recognizing that women face several types of challenges. This is in contrast to the participants in Extracts 57-61, who argue that women must be better equipped to fit into the current (apparently) gender neutral culture of the organization (Roos & Zanoni, 2015; Bird, 2011). Roos and Zanoni (2015) describe this as a strategic use of "de-essentializing gender identities" (p.14). This refers to the way the barriers that groups of people face are "disguised by overemphasizing the uniqueness of each individual, composed of many personality traits and identities" (Roos & Zanoni, 2015, p.14).

The statements promoting confidence-training are indicative of these patterns, where participants promote initiatives that '*help towards building confidence, building the capability*' of women, and those that '*make sure everybody understands how you apply for promotion and give people mentors of the recently promoted.*' The idea that these challenges are related to culturally established gendered stereotypes and

discrimination is ignored. This is despite the fact that other institutional actors are aware of this and, as the participants above show, are attempting to take measures to introduce these challenges in meetings and workplace practices.

Drawing again from Fairclough's (1992) CDA and the methodology for this project, this discursive strategy can be interpreted as a form of social practice whereas discourses "influence social and political reality" (De Cillia et al., 1999, p.157). Thus, by identifying the problem as requiring the need to enhance *action at the individual level* these participants are constructing the dominant liberal discourse where not only are women to blame for their own *inequality* through deficit, they are also responsible for their own equality by being the change agents and needing to elicit further engagement (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Roos & Zanoni, 2015).

The following section will continue to discuss the *repertoire of action* in relation to institutional level action. Taken together, these two levels of action are argued to be in conflict with the previously identified repertoire of causality where participants actively supported the need for cultural change. This will be discussed and evaluated towards the end of the chapter.

6.2.2 Action at institutional level

Action at the institutional level refers to discussions regarding the measures taken to improve women's access to leadership roles that are beyond those of 'fixing women.' As mentioned in *the repertoire of causality* many participants recognized that institutions do play a role in helping women achieve success in their careers. The following therefore describes the specific measures and initiatives participants discussed when asked '*what needs to be done?'*

Largely, the action taken at institutional level was based around flexible working practices for working mothers. Thus, the statements below are in response to the interview question, roughly asking '*what needs to be done to support women's progression* and *what specifically can the institution do?*

Prior to discussing the extracts, it is important to note that an argument is not being made that the practices outlined below are unimportant. Rather, there is widespread recognition that family-friendly policies, flexible working arrangements, and women-targeted events are important for the progression of women and of men. However, the following extracts are used in coherence with the statements about culture change outlined in the previous repertoire to demonstrate the conflicting statements used throughout this chapter. With support from the literature, it is shown that these types of initiatives are unlikely to support the change required and called for by leaders (Voorspoels, 2018):

Extract 65*: there's no reason why you can't be a professor if you're a point five* [employed part time]. *So on the other side just make sure we're family friendly, that we do flexible working - that we keep the women in through the period where they've got all kinds of pulls on their time and then we give them the right development opportunities to make sure that they can take on leadership roles.* (male, DVC)

Extract 66*: We know that child care and domestic duties still aren't evenly shared between men and women in our society, no matter how enlightened we think we are, so do we provide flexible employment - so if you're a man or a woman who.. well should be woman or possibly a man.. who has caring responsibilities for children. And for parents, do we make it possible for you to work and succeed or do we place barriers by insisting that people are present all of the time or they can they be flexible to care for children and parents when they need that care. so that's a huge issue I think. That's a big issue.* (female, DVC)

Extract 67: *so one of the things we've been working on here is around return to work support so to give people coming back after periods of maternity or paternity leave time to sort of get that velocity back, get that momentum back, so there's specific money and time set aside for that.* (male, VC)

Extract 68: *We've had to be more interventionalist about 'oh okay someone's come back from leave, you can't just expect them to come back and fire on all cylinders at the same way that they used to'…so it's quite complex rather than*

just 'oh well she's had a baby she's come back and she can't do it' and that tends
to be the men - because they expect you to be the same person. Well you're not
the same person, we've done quite a lot around that. (female, DVC)

These accounts of structural and institutional barriers have the shared similarity
that they focus on solutions related to periods of leave. The majority of participants
therefore relayed the perception that the largest challenge facing women is related to
gender, either through individual deficit or because of the requirements of motherhood.

The first implication of this is that it demonstrates that leaders view women's
underrepresentation to be the result of elements related to women being unable to
balance (either from their own deficit or because of structural limitations) their roles as
mothers and as leaders. Participants consistently constructed motherhood as being the
most reliable barrier facing women who wish to ascend to leadership positions. The
second implication is that participants demonstrated little critical insight into the barriers
women face regardless of whether or not they have children. Thus, the participants
largely connected *gender equality* as being a problem of *equality and motherhood,* not
discussing potential barriers and forms of discrimination women may face because of
other factors such as stereotypes, biases and discrimination, or indeed, the role of
women's partners and/or fathers in raising children.

Drawing from the work of Wijen (2014) and in coherence with Fairclough's
interactional context, this can be theoretically explained by arguing that it is a result of
institutional actors being motivated to present themselves and their institutions as
adhering to the policies and practices related to equal opportunity and flexible working.
The participants are demonstrating that they have adopted 'legitimate practices' that
support women and, equally, that they as leaders are committed to their importance.
From a social practice perspective, it is argued that this consists of and is contributory to
the legitimization of gendered differences between men and women at work; which
creates "psychological barriers impairing women's attempt to seek power in the
workplace" (Verniers & Vala, 2018, p.3).

Thus, while providing flexible working and recognizing motherhood as a
gendered experience is important for women's careers, the focus on motherhood as the

largest challenge for women also works to emphasize inevitable differences between gender groups (Williams & Chen, 2014). This then allows for implicit obscuring of other gendered practices, as the focus remains on differences that cannot as easily be accounted for, such as genuine biological differences. Research also indicates that women in academia forfeit parts of their careers to remain in positions where flexible working is accepted and supported in practice rather than only in policy, preventing them from having true choice in the positions they aim to achieve (Burkinshaw & White, 2019; Mathews, 2019). Thus, this thesis argues that the emphasis on connecting the challenges women face and motherhood does not "dismantle the culture of overwork, nor will they dislodge the deep-rooted association of women with family and men with work" (Padavic et al., 2019, p.43).

Prominently, the outcomes of the interviews reflect the arguments made in Chapter 2 when discussing the shift from equal opportunities to diversity management, with participants being reluctant to use terminology associated with equal opportunities such as sexism or discrimination. Largely, participants avoided these terms, even when used by the researcher, and instead formulated their responses in line with the dominant and comfortable discourse of diversity management. There was also little discernible discussion of the responsibility of women's partners or of fathers in taking up any aspects related to care roles. While some participants said 'parental leave,' or 'paternity leave,' there was little expansion on how fathers or caregivers could take up additional care work or their involvement in the home. It is therefore unlikely to become the accepted or appropriate way of speaking of initiatives and the challenges of inequality (van Dijk, 1993b).

Also falling under the *action at institutional level* was a discussion of the time allocated towards working on gender equality initiatives and performing related tasks. Several participants, the majority being women, argued that initiatives would not function properly until more time is allocated to developing and trialling them, something that was identified as an institutional issue. Many mentioned that time allocation and having proper working hours dedicated to diversity and gender equality goals was a concern:

Extract 69: *I think pretty much with everything we do, every initiative, the issue of time and respecting what it takes for colleagues and if we as an institution think it's a good thing then right through to executive board and council level that needs to be recognized so I think having these roles with proper time allocation, though I'm sure my colleagues in this role would say they work above and beyond their university allowed FTE.* (female, VC)

Several participants indicated that they had been recruited because of their experience in equality work, or they had gained a position on a team with equality as a focus, but did not have the workload hours necessary to dedicate themselves to these causes. In the below extract, the participant provides an explicit account of this (the term equality expert has replaced the specific title for confidentiality purposes):

Extract 70: *I was recruited as* [an equality expert]. *But I suppose I don't get to spend much time with that now.* (female, head of school)

Additionally, participants argued that it is important when the institution is playing a role that these practices are not more heavily placed upon women to complete:

Extract 71: *you can also get fatigue from it. There's little things like having a balanced interview panel, it's important and you need to be quite senior to be on an interview panel so you end up doing loads more than maybe your male colleagues.* (female, Deputy Dean)

Thus, participants constructed instances where they were being pulled to other duties and that their current position titles were not reflective of the actual work they put into gender and equality projects. This then brings the issue back to the responsibility of the institution, where more organizational members must be mobilized to tackle challenges of inequality and share the related workload.

6.3 Connecting repertoires: interpreting gender (in)equality

Taken together, the strategies in the above repertoires represent a dilemma between the work that needs to be done and the initiatives supported by leaders. This chapter has been titled *interpreting gender (in)equality* because discussions of *causality* (who is

responsible) and *action* (what should be done) provide insight into how participants interpret the challenges of gender inequality and how it should be tackled in institutions.

In the first repertoire, *repertoire of causality,* it was shown that participants recognize that organizational cultural must be changed in order to see transformative progress. Although the responsibility of institutions in creating and sustaining gender-equal cultures was contested by a small number of participants, the majority acknowledged that institutions must play a role and should be held accountable for many equality-related practices. They also then constructed accounts where they accepted responsibility, creating a dichotomy between those who are responsible for change and those who are not.

In the second repertoire, participants used individual level initiatives as examples of those that will help achieve the equality related goals of increasing women in leadership. This was contested by some participants and is also contested in the literature. Finally, participants provided accounts that connected gender inequality with motherhood, therefore furthering the view that inequality is a result of factors related specifically to women (as 'lacking confidence' or as 'mothers').

Discussions of stereotypes, implicitly or explicitly, was not common in interviews. Although there were some comments about 'being stereotypical' when giving examples, participants did not draw on stereotypes to explain or construct women's underrepresentation. Still, participants often drew on women's role as mothers to account for their underrepresentation. This suggests a form of essentialism, where women's underrepresentation was constructed as being a result of unavoidable gender differences. From a discursive and social practice perspective, this works to legitimize gender inequality in representation by emphasizing the incompatibility with women and academia and to enhance the connection between women and motherhood (Verniers & Vala, 2018). Considering the view that true organizational change requires a commitment from all organizational actors and a collectivized approach, it is suggested that the accounts shown here indicate we are a long way from achieving the transformative change that is required (Bird, 2011).

Considering this, a contradiction between what participants believe needs to be changed and the actual change initiatives they support has been identified. Specifically, while they support the need for cultural change, they promote 'fixing women' as a means of achieving gender equality. Even further, although participants perform voluntary practices outside of their official policies, therefore (implicitly or explicitly) recognizing that some practices are biased, they do not promote changes to these practices when discussing the action that needs to be taken.

This therefore presents evidence for the argument made at the opening of this chapter; the success of gender equality initiatives is at least partly dependent on the interpretations and representations of leaders, because they are able to construct the importance of culture change and promote initiatives targeting women. In doing so, participants are able to symbolically adopt the importance of change while obscuring the limited impact that implemented changes have on daily institutional practices. They do this by drawing on already legitimized discourses about equipping or 'fixing' women and flexible work, thereby demonstrating a commitment to equality and the adoption of 'legitimate' practices (Wijen, 2014).

A proposed reason for the limited success of initiatives in some institutions is therefore because leaders obstruct the identification of incongruities between the initiatives they support and the change that is required. When they do so, they also construct the goals of gender equality as ambiguous, making progress seem vague and the challenges unidentifiable. From a social practice perspective, it is argued that this creates ideological confusion towards gender equality initiatives, making them more difficult to implement, adhere to, and promote within an institution.

This obscuring can be seen with the focus on gender equality and motherhood, where women's inequality is equated with women's role as a mother. Arguably, and again from a social practice perspective, this is constitutive of and constituted by current culture, which focuses on women as caregivers. Thus, while culture adaptation is necessary, it is not yet actively challenged by institutional leaders. This brings to light the notion that achieving gender equality might not be a comfortable scenario for many institutional actors. It may instead require the recognition that the environment is not

gender neutral, as some participants argued, and that current institutional practices have been constructed in ways that favour men (Roos & Zanoni, 2015).

Although finding the differences *between* male and female leaders was not necessarily a goal of this study, the influence of gender has not been overlooked; the role of men in senior positions in the success of initiatives (or lack thereof) is recognized, and becomes apparent in the extracts provided. Many complicated factors combine to hinder women's movement in academia, and men in leadership positions are, as is demonstrated here, taking steps to improve this process. The informal practices that these participants have deployed are at least partly responsible for the success that has been seen in their institutions in regards to women's representation. At the same time, however, female participants constructed men as being less engaged, and more critically, male participants were less likely to draw upon critical discourses to construct their accounts.

Finally, this chapter has shown the importance of cultural change, however, based on current discussion, and despite valid efforts, the status quo will remain intact unless significant changes occur. Although participants problematized the underrepresentation of women and argued for a change in organizational culture, the majority of initiatives within their institutions and the ones they supported are not those that will lead to progressive change. As some participants admitted, true cultural change will require 'disruptive work' and will result in organizational actors being 'unsettled.'

6.4 Concluding remarks

In adherence to the methodology, the findings above are indicative of ways leaders develop and maintain unequal social practices. By discussing the necessary *action* and identifying important initiatives as those that change women and contrastingly creating in-groups and out-groups or dichotomies, participants relay the view that these components and related effects are legitimate. In doing so, similar to the meritocratic view of organizations, leaders are not leaving space for alternative discourses to become dominant. As speakers who hold power, therefore, the problem of inequality remains a burden for individuals alone, and cultural paradigms remain unbroken.

These findings contribute to our understanding of how meanings remain pervasive in organizations, such as equality being constructed through various aspects of accountability, including that women are responsible for their own equality and that 'out-groups' are to blame for slower than expected or desired progress. In order to accept new organizational practices related to gender equality, we must more closely examine these changes in related rhetoric to determine what these discourses are being mobilized to do, and further understand what is lost and what is gained when cultural change is constructed in these ways. In the following final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, specific gender equality initiatives are described and presented through interpretative repertoires used by participants.

Chapter 7: Understanding equality initiatives

In this chapter, the focus shifts to specific gender equality initiatives that have been created and implemented in alignment with the outcomes of diagnosis, causality, and action, responding to the question: *what has been or is currently being done, how does it work, and is it successful?* This connects with the previous chapter that focused on *causality* (who/what is/should be responsible?) and *action* (what should be done?), as well as the outline provided in the literature review chapters that shows the current individual, cultural, and structural challenges.

With this in mind, the approach taken to present the findings differs from the previous two empirical chapters. Three succinct methods to achieving gender equality in HEIs will be discussed: Athena SWAN, quotas, and targets. Although participants spoke in different ways about their institutions and how they are involved in various aspects of equality initiatives, there were several similarities that demonstrated a shared understanding. These formed the interpretative repertoires displayed in Table 7:

Table 7 Understanding equality initiatives

	Athena SWAN	**Quotas**	**Targets**
Interpretative Repertoire(s)	*The motivation repertoire*	*The invisible audience repertoire*	*The repertoire of ambiguity*
	The process repertoire	*The legitimacy repertoire*	

When initially examining the data through a critical lens, it became apparent that repertoires were not used consistently but that participants used different repertoires at different times to refer to gender equality initiatives. Unlike the previous chapters on merit and interpreting gender (in)equality, gender equality initiatives were the focus of the research and thus information about them was explicitly solicited through different interview questions. This included questions such as the following: *how much involvement do you have in your institutions Athena SWAN process?, Do you use gender*

based targets at any levels of recruitment? and *What role do you think quotas have in gender equality efforts?* (as shown in appendix A).

One difficulty that was encountered during analysis was accounting for variability in repertoires and allowing for "inconsistency between actions and repertoires, and to understand these in relation to the contexts in which they have been produced" (Duits, 2008, p.204). This refers to times participants discussed an approach in their institution that was either contrasted by other participants from the same institution or from the information available online. The information from participants is therefore presented as it was given, and analysis is used to demonstrate how and why participants may have presented information in the ways identified.

The goal of this chapter is not to demonstrate the benefits or shortfalls of one particular initiative, but to demonstrate the attitudes towards them and to show how leaders interpret the initiatives used within their own institutional and other contexts. There are few studies that examine attitudes and perceptions of initiatives in the context of HEIs, and particularly of Athena SWAN and quotas in juxtaposition with the same participant sample (Voorspoels, 2018). In comparing these accounts, the resistance and support towards specific and individual initiatives is identified and compared.

As will be argued, the perceptions, views, and positions of leaders towards gender equality initiatives present the most credible case for initiative reform, recognizing that the varying constructions of accounts are influential in how practices function within institutions (de Vries & van den Brink, 2016). The aim of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate shared and contrasting understandings of equality initiatives in order to identify areas that may be inconsistent or incongruent with gender equality goals. This also builds on the understanding of how these initiatives are perceived and shared, and likely to be perceived within the institution (Johansson, et al., 2017).

For this thesis, resistance is used to demonstrate different ways participants mobilize their discourse to discredit or refute different equality initiatives. In the diversity literature, resistance is often used to imply "that those wishing to change the status quo through diversity initiatives are 'correct' and those who, for whatever reason are opposed or indifferent to such initiatives are 'wrong'" (Dick & Cassell, 2002, p.

972). However, the main argument of this chapter is that gender equality initiatives must be examined as discursive constructions composed of contradictory accounts and ideological dilemmas. This means that rather than a binary view of 'resistance' or 'support' as 'bad/good' or 'right/wrong,' the discursive repertoires used to account for equality initiatives are considered for how they (re)produce valid and/or legitimate understandings within specific contexts. By identifying the contexts in which these discourses are constructed, we can begin to understand their "specific consequences with regard to different possibilities of change" (Nentwich, 2006, p.505).

The repertoires described below demonstrate how leaders discuss gender equality initiatives and how they positioned themselves as leaders in relation to their institutions' efforts to achieve gender parity. In order to best represent the data and relay the analysis, the following is split into three sections. The three sections independently relate to initiatives used in UK HEIs: *Athena SWAN*, *quotas*, and *targets*. A brief overview of each is provided, followed by the analysis of interpretative repertoires shown previously in table 7.

7.1 Athena SWAN

To reiterate from Chapter 2, the Athena SWAN charter recognizes the work undertaken by institutions to advance the careers of women and to address gender inequality more broadly (Advance HE, 2019b). In submitting an application for either Bronze, Silver, or Gold awards, institutions must pledge their commitment to upholding the principles of the Charter.

There are multiple departments in an institution that may hold an award, and an institution's overall award is dependent on these department level awards. Athena SWAN is considered an incentive-based program because it has been tied to different aspects of funding and can be used as a means of improving an institution's reputation through making clear equality and diversity goals (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019).

The number of member institutions has steadily grown since the Charter was founded, with institutions holding multiple awards between their faculties. Applying for an award involves the institutional unit (either university, department, research institute,

etc.) to form a self-assessment team (SAT). This team is responsible for the creation and submission of their unit's award application. The governing body, Advance HE, provides guidelines for the creation and functioning of this SAT. The majority of research on Athena SWAN focuses on STEMM subjects (where it originated). The following therefore provides a nuanced analysis of interpretations of Athena SWAN by institutional actors representing various universities and subject areas.

To begin, when Athena SWAN was first discussed in interviews, participants had similar views about the charter. The following two statements are exemplary of those expressed by participants about Athena SWAN:

> **Extract 72**: *One could be critical about some aspects of Athena SWAN but not withstanding that it stands as a very important initiative to drive equality and it certainly works in the STEM world as it moves out across all of the other subjects and one would hope that there would be similar changes and greater opportunity in other fields.* (male, VC)

> **Extract 73:** *We have national initiatives like Athena SWANN, but that in itself doesn't solve the problems that you identify.* (male, DVC)

When discussing Athena SWAN, participants had specific examples of challenges or frustrations in their institutions, some with more general anecdotes and others with success stories. Many participants appeared excited to discuss their institutions' efforts and progress through the awards, while also expressing dismay for aspects of the process itself.

The repertoires discussed below include *the motivation repertoire* and *the process repertoire*. Both were used to construct accounts that resisted and supported Athena SWAN. Whereas *the motivation repertoire* was used in making claims about why institutions submit for Athena SWAN awards, *the process repertoire* was used to demonstrate the flaws in the program and to account for why, in some cases, institutions might not be achieving awards and/or gender equality related goals.

7.1.1 The motivation repertoire

The motivation repertoire describes participants' way of speaking about *why* institutions submit for Athena SWAN awards and reasons it is important. This repertoire therefore represents 'good' and 'bad' motivation; with participants providing examples of how their institution approaches, understands, and is motivated to achieve Athena SWAN.

Related to this is participant's presentation of their institution as needing to have the 'right' motivation for achieving Athena SWAN. Participants therefore constructed the motivation repertoire and used it to suggest that others within their institution do not perform Athena SWAN related actions for reasons they deem to be appropriate, and many said that others do not align the goals of Athena SWAN with the goals of gender equality. Instead, participants stated that other actors in their institution only achieve Athena SWAN for the sake of the related incentive, badges, and/or accreditation.

The following extracts represent participants' construction of institutions having 'the wrong motive':

> **Extract 74:** *Today was much more action oriented, today it was taking the action plan that they had done for previous submission [a few] years ago, and proceeded to take no action since then, and figure out how are we going to spin this so we can get Athena SWAN bronze renewed so that we don't lose our funding. Even that narrative there tells you what they're thinking behind it is.* (female, Professor)

> **Extract 75:** *it's a very performative approach to looking at gender, and they would not, it would not be on their radar in any way shape or form if it wasn't for the certification and they're not interested in doing the work that it's going to take to actually make the change. Because Athena SWAN is specifically set up to force you, if you are shooting for performance in a system you will have performance in the short term and you will be able to achieve that but unless you embed learning you can't have sustained performance.* (female, Professor)

Extract 76: *It felt like we were doing action, but it was also really clear that they're not actually interested in learning. They're interested in performance ... they're interested in a certificate badge.* (female, Professor)

As is shown in these extracts, participants are constructing their own views about their institution's motivation for achieving an award. They are, by contrast, suggesting that there exists a proper or 'right' motive for achieving an award. Many refer to the incentive based aspect of Athena SWAN (where Dame Sally Davies tied certain funding to achieving a silver award, and other funding bodies have done similar; Donald et al., 2011). In the statements above, such as '*how are we going to spin this so we can get Athena SWAN bronze renewed*' and '*it would not be on their radar in any way shape or form if it wasn't for the certification and they're not interested in doing the work*' participants are arguing that their own leaders do not have the right motivation.

One participant acknowledged that framing motivation this way is a sign of cynicism:

Extract 77: *The* [male] *Dean has been proactive in encouraging and promoting women anyway without Athena SWAN. I think the Athena SWAN badge, business schools in particular, live in a world of rankings and accreditations and how many badges they can have. And there's always cynicism – 'You're only doing this because you want the badge'.* (female, Dean)

In doing so, the participant is suggesting an alternative explanation for the above accounts regarding leaders' motivations. Rather than the participants only being '*interested in a certificate badge,*' this participant argues they others are just being cynical, drawing on the idea that business schools '*live in a world of rankings*' to suggest that Athena SWAN is simply another one of these. This participant also states that the dean has been proactive in promoting women '*without Athena SWAN*' therefore adhering to the idea of them having the 'right' motivation because they do not need Athena SWAN to be proactive.

A beneficial aspect of the research approach for this thesis was the ability to examine the interpretation of initiatives from different perspectives. For some

institutions, interviews were conducted with Vice Chancellors, as well as someone who works closely with them (DVC, Dean, board member). Information available on public websites was also investigated, including published diversity statistics, Athena SWAN awards, staff statistical reports, etc. In examining institutions from these various perspectives, certain scenarios become clear; in two cases, Vice Chancellors who demonstrated passionate for Athena SWAN during interviews and suggested that their whole team reflected that passion had colleagues who felt differently. In one such a case, a participant described how during a general meeting those representing Athena SWAN did not consider it a priority, nor was it considered a priority by the chair:

> **Extract 78:** *He just said 'oh right, who's next? Athena SWAN. We might go over time, do you mind?' and the woman running it, my partner, just said 'oh it's us for Athena SWAN. But we won't take that long'…And I had to step in and say 'no, listen, we have to talk about this – and we have to make it a priority if we are going to claim we are making a commitment.'* (female, Professor)

This dialogue continued when talking about who should take responsibility for Athena SWAN and who should be in charge of the meetings and events. Advance HE provides a guide that states that the application should be created by teams that are representative of the institution (in terms of diversity) and states that "it is vital that the composition of the SAT does not lead to a disproportionate burden on underrepresented groups" (Advance HE, 2017, p.2). Some participants, none in Vice Chancellor roles but those lower on the hierarchy, therefore presented their own leaders as not being as committed 'for the right reasons' as they seemed.

As is shown in the extracts above (and shown in the one below), some leaders were constructed as not having the right motive, as well as not understanding the basic concepts of the Athena SWAN process:

> **Extract 79:** *… our exec thinks we should be going for gold…*[He] *was on this committee to get Athena swan* [previously]. *Bronze. Yet he thinks we should be going for silver this time. The CHAIR of the committee is the one who doesn't realize that you don't qualify to even apply for silver unless you have*

departments that also have Athena SWAN. So the basic rules for getting Athena SWAN, the chair of the former committee doesn't know the basic rules. He's now the chair of the university wide Athena SWAN committee and he's thinking that we should go for silver? So I'm like 'how successful are we going to be… if the people that are in charge... a, are white men'. Which doesn't preclude not being successful, but they're white men who aren't interested in facilitating the change and learning and getting the performance recognition as a result of learning and behaviour change… They're interested in getting the recognition and hoping that behaviour change will somehow follow. (female, Professor)

In consideration of this repertoire, participants were active in questioning whether their institution had the right motive and, more critically, whether Athena SWAN actually incentivises the right type of action:

Extract 80: *Dame Sally's pronouncement wasn't as thought through as it could be. I think that there's a risk that it changes behaviours for wrong reasons as opposed to the right reasons and that at times is dangerous… but at the same time there comes a point when one's so grumpy about something you think 'well I don't care anymore.'* (male, VC)

A participant also asked themselves (rhetorically) if their institution (framed as 'we') are doing it for the badge or for because it's *'the right thing to do:'*

Extract 81: *it's a phenomenal effort yea…. and there is a really important question to ask yourself why are we doing it? Are we doing it for the badge and therefore it opens doors and allows us to do things, or are we doing it because we think it's the right thing to do? And it should be the latter.* (male, VC)

The participant here states that doing it (achieving an Athena SWAN award) should be a result of thinking it's the right thing do to, therefore making a clear argument about what they believe to be the right motivation. It is argued that the participants here are using *motivation* in relation to Athena SWAN to express reasons for why, although gender equality is important, there has not been a more evident

change of culture. Participant in Extract 80 explicitly says that the incentive based aspect of Athena SWAN might cause behaviours for the *'wrong reasons.'*

Alternatively, a minority of participants commended the incentive-based aspect of the Charter. The below extract is an example of a participant arguing that tying Athena SWAN to funding has been beneficial because it shows that funding bodies are *'putting their back into it'*:

> **Extract 82***: I think it is working. I think particularly in STEMM. It's been incredibly influential and the reason it's been influential is because the Research Council's put their back into it. They basically said we won't receive any research council money if you don't go on the Athena SWAN journey. And that really focused the mind.* (female, DVC)

A minority of participants explicitly outlined their own motivation for being a part of Athena SWAN, although it was generally implied that they had the 'right' motivation and that others had the 'wrong' motivation. The following extract is an example of a participant providing an alternative motivation, framed as the business case:

> **[Discussing how Athena SWAN is approached at committee meetings]**

> **Extract 83:** *I'm genuinely not sure* [Athena SWAN] *will last. It is pretty* [demanding] *and you know I'm not sure that that particular model will last, I'm sure some kind of kite marking will. My hunch is that Athena SWAN needs a radical revisit. I'm also not tying the issue with the business model* [the business case]*, with the ECU it doesn't stack up. So I think there's a whole set of questions.* (female, Dean)

This participant explicitly critiques the '*business case*' for diversity. As demonstrated in the literature, the business case is contested. The empirical evidence tying women in leadership positions to enhanced performance is inconsistent (Post & Byron, 2015). As this participant shows, the business model (they later also refer to the business case) doesn't '*stack up.*' Their motivation, they imply, therefore does not lie within the economic rationales for diversity.

When asked further about why Athena SWAN might not be achieving the momentum wanted in their institution, a participant noted:

Extract 84: *it involves men giving up power. Why would they want to do that?*

Researcher: So male colleagues aren't getting involved? Can you expand on why not?

Extract 85: *well, I think Athena SWAN has done a lot because people are talking about it – and we didn't even have an accreditation committee here so I had to put together an accreditation committee. I put Athena SWAN to be discussed at an accreditation committee [meeting] as if it's just as important as our other accreditations even though we haven't got it yet. So it's normalized if you like, to make it mainstream. I think things like that are really important-- to bring to people's attention [to it]. I don't think we can do enough of that.* (female, DVC)

As can be seen, the participant above refers back to Athena SWAN and getting people involved when asked why her male colleagues are not contributing to her institution's Athena SWAN award team. The participant largely avoids further discussion of why men are not involved, and instead turns the conversation to be about what Athena SWAN has done to bring attention to gender equality.

As in the previous chapters, one could again argue that these statements were made as a result of the interactional context; it would be unprofessional for the participant to make comments about their male colleagues beyond *'it involves men giving up power.'* The participant therefore shifts the conversation to be framed positively; the socially desirable response. Thus, avoiding an answer to 'why not?' regarding men's participation in SAT's can be considered the 'acceptable' means of continuing the conversation.

However, as argued by Duits (2008), another way to interpret this would be to recognize that participants knew what the socially desirable response was, and are (re)producing a 'norm' for discussing gender equality. Participants again avoided terms such as 'sexism' or other undesirable labels. By avoiding explicit discussion of why men are not involved, or 'engaged' as it was termed in the previous chapter, there is the

(potentially unintended) consequence of avoiding more fruitful discussion about the underlying challenges facing Athena SWAN success. The 'norm' or 'appropriate' way of discussing gender equality initiatives is framed as ensuring it's for the 'right reasons' therefore disarming any potential comments regarding why colleagues might not want Athena SWAN to be successful or be less committed than necessary to equality efforts.

An additional participant used the repertoire of motivation when speaking about what needs to be considered when looking to achieve gender equality, arguing to have *'the key to it all'*:

> **Extract 86***: What we have to do is create a sort of daisy chain link between a whole series of separate cultures because of our history. Let them be cave men or whatever it is they want to be as long as they're all delivering the thing that's important. And it's taken me a long time to realize all that but that's the key to it all.* (female, governing member)

The participant states '*let them be cave men*' in reference to a previous point in the interview when discussing those that will not be a part of the change process but simply want things to stay the way they are. When probed further, the participant reasons that by 'delivering,' she is referring to delivering on equality outcomes as well as on their requirements as leaders. In this way, the participant is stating that the motivation of leaders does not actually matter; as long as they are promoting women and enhancing equality. This implies that a person's behaviour will be tolerated as long as the individual is good at their jobs. This is contradictory to other accounts of the importance of changing culture and engaging others in creating sustainable change.

The repertoire of motivation can therefore be considered as a way of accounting for the persistent underrepresentation of women despite the increased popularity of Athena SWAN. The conflicting accounts demonstrated here are indicative of different interpretations of the 'end goal' of Athena SWAN: while some accounts articulated the importance of achieving the accreditation, others argued for a bigger picture view of achieving gender equality.

7.1.2 The process repertoire

The *process repertoire* reflects on participants' discussion of pragmatic difficulties in achieving gender equality through Athena SWAN. In this repertoire, participants made it clear that the overall process of Athena SWAN makes it more heavily focused on compliance rather than gender equality.

The *process repertoire* represents a means in which participants account for and legitimize their resistance towards Athena SWAN as an equality initiative. As will be shown below, although participants embrace gender equality and want 'transformative change,' they resist this initiative due to the overall application process. This will also be connected to motivation, as participants did state that sometimes the goals 'get lost' when compliance becomes the main focus.

Many participants engaged with the discussion of Athena SWAN by highlighting that it requires a substantial effort from a variety of different academic staff. Participants thus used the process repertoire to produce directly contradictory arguments: Athena SWAN is a 'tick box' exercise, or Athena SWAN prevents 'tick box' exercises. Specifically, the majority of participants argued that Athena SWAN cannot be only a matter of ticking boxes because it is one that requires progress and continuous evaluation of effort towards goals of gender equality (hence it is a difficult process). However, a minority of participants positively framed the difficult process as a benefit because it does not allow for passive engagement; because of the onerous process, it cannot be implemented easily without requiring behaviour change or learning (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). These two uses of *the process repertoire* are discussed in turn below.

The following statements are examples of times participants explicitly used the repertoire to criticise Athena SWAN:

> **Extract 87:** *But the focus and the amount of data that has to be presented is onerous and disproportionate to the amount of analytical insight on that data... Of course you don't want just narrative. You don't want people to just be able to just tell the story and then not to reflect the reality but the data and the report rating is onerous. I think it's probably overly onerous… and I think there should be some analysis - That does the cost benefit.* (female, head of school)

Extract 88: *The bench mark is one of continuous improvement so you are forever having to do more and more and more and in part that's okay but we have some departments here which are gold, which is just great and they work their socks off, but they're forever having to do more and more and it's questionable as you start to reiterate within the goal how much more you can do before you start to do not quite too much but... before it becomes a means in its own right perhaps.* (female, DVC)

Extract 89: *It's hugely time consuming. Hugely. But it's important so I think - tis' difficult. But it costs a really significant amount of staff time and institutional resource to do that.* (male, VC)

Extract 90: *We want to use Athena SWAN to achieve an inclusive workplace. I'm supportive of Athena SWAN but there is a danger that it becomes an end in and of itself and it's quite a bureaucratically cumbersome process. We're also very conscious of the fact that it can also be an additional role that disproportionately falls on female colleagues... I do slightly worry that Athena SWAN has become ever more complex and that can be can have unintended negative consequences.* (female, Dean)

Extract 91: *There are other ways of doing quality assurance in the 21st century for some types of activities I think we haven't had that discussion about, so I'm sure there needs to be a genuine evaluation of how institutions, education institutions and schools, are doing in terms of gender. I'm not sure Athena SWAN will be the shape of things in five or ten years' time.* (female, VC)

These extracts represent shared concerns between leaders. Although expressed differently, these leaders demonstrate a shared resistance towards aspects of the Athena SWAN accreditation process. In the context of organizational change and equality initiatives, these rhetorical structures are important when looking to evaluate the potential resistance and support for equality initiatives. While participants ultimately support gender equality and efforts to achieve equality, they are resistant towards this specific incentive-based program and argue that it allows for or promotes a focus on compliance, and that this misses the overall goal of the scheme.

There were also contradictions to the above. As mentioned in the previous repertoire, a minority of participants considered the incentive-based aspect of the program to be necessary. This contradiction is important because leaders are able to influence others, as their viewpoints and concerns form salient in-group perspectives and enhance the likelihood of these narratives influencing 'followers' (for example their team and colleagues) within their institutions. This can in turn change the internal 'meaning' or intentions of Athena SWAN and related practices; to be about compliance and process rather than shared end goals for equality (Duck & Fielding, 2003; Fiske, 1998; Subašić et al., 2018).

As some of the participants mentioned, there was a lack of support for Athena SWAN, or support for the reasons that are alternative to the overall goal of the program (such as to achieve the badge, rather than to achieve further equality). Research on change programs and diversity management indicate that this type of resistance or disconnect between a programs overall processes and the goals of gender equality can have consequences for the outcome (Williamson et al., 2019). Specifically, this type of resistance can lead to a decrease in time dedicated to the program and to the likelihood of it resulting in sustainable change.

Some participants recognized this disconnect and argued that on top of not resulting in change for 'the right' reasons, the process of Athena SWAN would not result in the right type of change. Thus, in connection with constructing the right motivation and the *process repertoire,* participants such as the one below, argued that the focus on compliance and the changes brought about by Athena SWAN are not connected to the actual changes that are needed:

> **Extract 92:** *There's the question mark about whether the time and energy people put into applying for it, whether it is actually encouraging the right interventions to make the changes that are needed.* (female, VC)

The process repertoire therefore reflects participants' willingness to commit to certain types of processes and practices in their efforts to achieve gender equality. As shown above, several participants argued that the onerous Athena SWAN process is not reflective of the overall outcome. Importantly, this is argued to have different

ideological effects depending on the assumed *goal* of Athena SWAN. On one side, Athena SWAN is constructed as being an important means of achieving an accreditation/badge and certain funding. On the other side, Athena SWAN is stressed as an important means of achieving gender equality. However, in both cases, the process was constructed as not being worth the goals; the overall process of Athena SWAN was overly onerous in consideration of the overall rewards and/or outcomes (Wijen, 2014).

7.2 Quotas

The implementation of quotas remains an active debate and a topic of controversy in the UK and across Europe (Rees, 2002; Voorspoels, 2018). Only a few scholars have investigated narratives around quotas in an academic context, with the majority of studies having being conducted in parts of Europe where quotas are in place (Peterson, 2015; Voorspoels, 2018). To recap from Chapter 2, quota systems are used in political and corporate spheres, most prominently in Europe. They are also used in some aspects of academia, such as in evaluation committees, for recruitment, and for some funding bodies (Husu, 2005; Rees, 2002; Vinnicombe et al., 2015).

While several participants stated that they were not supportive of quotas, they also stated that they were in favour of transformative and disruptive change. Thus, while quotas were largely seen as undesirable, the values and regulatory nature of quotas was constructed as relatively necessary in order to achieve change. Resistance to quotas will be demonstrated through the following repertoires: *the invisible audience repertoire* and *the legitimacy repertoire*. Briefly, *the invisible audience repertoire* examines reasons for resisting quotas and who is constructed as producing this resistance. The legitimacy repertoire focuses on both resistance (de-legitimization) and support for quotas (legitimization). By connecting these discourses, quotas are problematized as not fitting into the current organizational culture, while also resisted for not working to change this culture.

7.2.1 The invisible audience repertoire

Contrary to existing literature, the majority of participants did not construct quotas as being unfair to men, but rather constructed them as being unfair to women and as

causing resentment (Johansson et al., 2017; Zanoni & Janssens, 2015). The term the 'invisible audience' is used to refer to the unidentified group participants used to resist quotas. The undesirability of quotas was framed around this group. Participants thus did not state that quotas would result in women being viewed negatively by them as individuals, but instead by 'some people.'

In the following examples, the *invisible audience* that is constructed when discussing quota implementation is mobilized to show that quotas are bad for women:

> **Extract 93:** *There could… would be… a perception that individuals have only been promoted because of the quota as opposed to the underlying quality of their research and that would be hugely unfortunate and probably more damaging to causes than having people not promoted I think. We don't have any quotas for promotions full stop.* (male, DVC)

> **Extract 94:** *definitely wouldn't have a quota because it undermines the very good people that are appointed because people start thinking 'oh they only got appointed because they're female' which is ridiculous* (female, VC)

> **Extract 95**: *I think it becomes very difficult once you say 'well we'll give preferential treatment on the basis of a quota' as opposed to giving preferential treatment because we understand this person has had two periods of maternity leave and .5 contract and therefore the amount of time they've been able to give to their career is considerably different.. and they're different things. I'm entirely comfortable with saying 'well that makes a lot of sense to me they're here for much less time their stuff has been interrupted' as opposed to saying well you get in purely because of the quota.* (male, Dean)

> **Extract 96:** *I'm nervous about quotas because I'm HUGELY meritocratic…I would hate to have a system that forces us into a position where we recruit people who are not as good as the people we could recruit because there's a quota. And I don't think women would want that - you know 'you're on the board because there's a quota. Congratulations.'* (male, governing member)

Extract 97: *As soon as you start talking about quotas it begins to look like you're making your decisions on the basis of factors that you shouldn't be making your decisions on the basis of, and then that in itself can be very damaging to women for instance if they get a job in a place that has quotas the tokenism comments that they only got the job cause of quotas- becomes a very common thought -* (female VC)

Through comments such as '*there would be a perception,*' '*it begins to look like,*' participants are demonstrating the power of the invisible 'other' in dictating how women in leadership positions would appear to those on 'the outside.' This, it is argued, is used as a form of resistance to gender quotas. There are two functions to this form of resistance.

First, an underlying function is to construct the problem of quotas as being visible in the *perceptions* of women. This is implied to then negatively impact women. None of the participants identified exactly who would perceive women as under qualified, but continued to frame their resistance around the protection of women who would be recruited or selected as a result of quotas. This resistance to quotas builds on and helps to legitimize the individual-level notion of inequality, where the issue is set as being something in control of the individual being discriminated against (Peterson, 2015; Terjesen & Sealy, 2016). In constructing resistance this way, it is argued that participants are negating the cultural systems and barriers. Critically, it is argued that by negotiating quotas as effectively unfair to women the participants maintain the benefits of being seen as committed to women's equality, without actively questioning or challenging the status quo (Johansson et al., 2017; Pleasants, 2011).

The second function of this form of resistance is that it suggests that those who currently hold positions are the best qualified for their particular role. This contrasts with Chapter 5, where participants presented contradictory views on merit; understanding that the system is not entirely objective, fair, or without bias. Instead, the above brings to light an uncomfortable narrative that questions the legitimacy of those currently occupying leadership positions (including the participants interviewed for this study). This is a common characteristic of the quota debate, where changes to the current status

quo are resisted due to the implicit challenging of the efficacy of the current system (Freidenvall & Krook, 2011; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013).

An additional formulation of this invisible audience is demonstrated through statements about quotas causing resentment. Again, participants did not say who would feel resentment but rather implied that it would simply exist as a result of being forced to achieve gender parity. The majority of participants who constructed resistance this way were women:

> **Extract 98**: *I'm really anti quotas because if you force people to do things they'll do it but resentfully. You know they won't do it properly. They'll grab someone to stick them on the boards.* (female, Dean)

> **Extract 99:** *The reason I posited that I think we shouldn't have quotas - I've been doing work in diversity for years and you can't just order it... [] but we can't have quotas they'll just shove any warm body in the place to get the bonus - they won't actually believe it. So although it's frustrating, taking a long time, I think by taking longer you actually win people's hearts and minds and they're doing it for a reason because they can see it's commercially good. It makes sense. But if you're just told to do it, forced to do it, they'll do it but then - you know - you could bounce back.* (female, governing body)

> **Extract 100***: I think the longer we take the more it's because people want it to happen and not because they're being forced into it and then they'll just lapse as soon as they can.* (female, Professor).

This also relates to the above repertoire of motivation, where quotas are resisted at least in part because they would entice the 'invisible other' to achieve gender equality for the *wrong* motive. The participants did not frame the resentment above or resistance to quotas as being because of other dominant arguments, such as potential tokenism or available women, but rather as an issue of *felt resentment* towards the process and outcome.

Participants did not discuss the benefits or failures related to quota implementation, but rather formulated an argument that leaders and decision makers

would *resent* government regulation and thus would not be '*hiring women for the right reasons.*' As in shown in the above extracts, participants made references such as '*they'll grab someone to stick them on the boards..*' (Extract 98) without providing further detail as to the 'they' being referenced. Resentment was therefore not specified, but rather suggested to simply be a result of quota implementation more widely. In this form of resistance, the participants (for example in Extract 99) value a system that allows for changes to be organic, rather than regulated.

The use of CDA to analyse this is particularly useful as it allows for interpretations of what the discourse is being utilized *to do*, not just what the discourse *is.* By constructing quotas through a form of resistance that acknowledges and draws upon an invisible other, participants are effectively constructing quotas as not fitting into the current culture through rhetoric that is dominant and exists within this very culture. It is therefore argued that through this repertoire, participants build discursive barriers that prevent changes to cultural aspects of gender inequality. They instead mobilize their discourses of support to focus on fitting initiatives into the current practices and system; resisting quotas because they do not fit within the current system, while at the same time problematizing other initiatives (Athena SWAN) for not actively changing this system.

7.2.2 The legitimacy repertoire

The *legitimacy repertoire* was used both positively and negatively by participants; it was used to actively resist quotas through de-legitimization and to support them by arguing they are the most legitimate means of achieving gender equality.

The majority of participants constructed arguments to delegitimize quotas. In the above analysis, quotas were positioned as 'bad for women' and as leading to 'increased resentment' within organizations through an invisible audience. These arguments reason that although quotas intend to improve gender equality, they would have other undesirable outcomes. In this way, participants make it clear that they support women's movement up the hierarchy but that they do not want imposed regulation.

In the following analysis, ways in which participants de-legitimize quotas as a means to achieve gender equality is shown. These arguments were less consistent

between interviews, although they all worked to argue the same point: quotas are inherently flawed and not a legitimate way to improve gender equality in HEIs.

In some instances, participants resist quotas by questioning their logistical reality, questioning whether there are enough potential women within the hierarchy:

> **Extract 101:** *I know there'd be arguments, you know if you have quotas - then* [speaking to himself] *'you've sort of got to try harder because you're going to be forced into this situation.' So... 'You're going to have to really try a lot harder to find the people.' Yea. Okay. but CAN I actually find them? Even if I am trying harder, I suppose is the question. So I would be nervous* [about quotas]. (male, governing member)

> **Extract 102***: Do we have lots of magic answers that are going to correct this in a 6 month period? No. One needs to be realistic about it. I think at the same time we measure very carefully and we look at the data and think about the implications of the data and I think in so doing it helps because it ensures that at a regular level, the university board and governing bodies, are forced to confront these issues and think about ways forward. We're using different instruments to try and ensure as great equality as possible…we're resisting quotas... we're not putting in place quotas for different grades.* (male, VC)

The arguments presented above by participants reflect debates on the availability of qualified female candidates. As found in the literature, this perspective often fails to take into account male-dominated norms of what it means to qualify for these positions and what it means to be 'the ideal academic' (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a). In Extract 101, the participant is clear that his institution works to ensure equality, however questions the talent pipeline. He employs a hypothetical narrative where, should quotas be put in place and he is forced to find more women, he is not sure he'd be able to find them; *'CAN I actually find them, even if I am trying harder, I suppose is the question'.* As demonstrated in the literature review, more recent studies indicate that there are women who are ambitious and qualified for leadership roles; however, it would require a weakening of stereotypes and possibly a change of criteria for them to be recognized because these elements currently reflect male dominated norms and values (Bertrand et

al., 2019; van den Brink et al., 2010). There is therefore a need for increasingly critical notions of supposedly neutral qualifications that question the male norms that build the current conceptualisations of merit (Wallon et al., 2015). Participants themselves did this in the previous chapter when constructing change as being required at the cultural level.

In some interviews, female participants presented accounts where 'some men' were considered to be likely to argue there are not enough available women. One female participant refuted this availability argument by stating that many qualified women are overlooked, while another perceived the lack of qualified women as actually being a result of poor search firms:

> **Extract 103:** *I think the other really key dependent are the search firms because they are used now, quite rightly, for most appointments - they really do have to change. I don't think they are, some of them are good, some of them really lazy and they just send out the same old lists every time and they need to get better. 'I don't find good women' and there's lots and lots of good women around. I was in one search process and they really produced some inappropriate women because they hadn't looked properly and that was bad. Fortunately the rest of the nominations committee also realized they just produced people that haven't got the right brief, haven't got the right skills. It was daft. They produced one woman in particular who should never have been put forward but it was because they were lazy and weren't doing the research properly because we found - without them - a whole load of better women in the process.* (female, governing member)

The above extract also represents a movement away from gender and individual perceptions of inequality, with the participant constructing an alternative account of why women are underrepresented. It also provides some identification of the previously identified 'invisible other;' with search firms being identified as an important factor in gender equality. The participant explicitly argues that search firms are a major component. This is also discussed in the literature, specifically studies related to academic gatekeepers. Search agents are therefore recognized as important catalysts for

achieving diversity related goals, but are often not held to the necessary standards as far as gender equality guidelines (Doldor et al., 2016).

An additional way in which quotas were de-legitimized was through the questioning of the snow ball effect, referring to quotas starting small with gender and gaining traction with other characteristics. Several participants mentioned this concept, with statements such as *'with quotas it's a snow ball effect – when do you stop?'* Participants were implying that once there are gender quotas, there are bigger questions around quotas for other characteristics such as race and sexual orientation. The extracts below provide a clear and explicit way in which this was articulated:

> **Extract 104:** *one would hope always that they are making the best judgments. So for instance if we look at our recent promotion criteria, we didn't have quotas. And in proportion to the applicants that we had - We got a fair, non-discriminatory outcome I think. Whether or not we got enough applications overall from women is another issue that might have been something we should have looked at. I've always preferred not to go down the kind of quota route. I mean you can apply that to all kinds of things. It may be it's the only way to deal with race bias. But. What if we were to have a quota for instance based on sexuality? I'd hope that we'd make judgments about people without actually perhaps knowing what their sexuality was. But I'm old fashioned about that. I mean I'd hate to think there would be bias but... I'm also not convinced that it's helpful in the workplace for people to declare themselves. Personally I don't want anybody knowing anything about my private life and most people here won't know anything about my family or anything else because I don't want them to. I think it's irrelevant.* (male, VC)

> **Extract 105:** *If you do have quotas than how does it work? Do you purely get into the quota because you're a woman, because you're black, because you're Asian? And then if that were true how do you deal with someone from such a group who's had no periods of maternity leave, been working full time for exactly the same period as a for example male colleague who's had a number of career disruptions? And that becomes difficult and potentially discriminatory and I*

think there's lots of reasons to explore this space and to be cautious. If I'm honest one of the big issues is also the 'at what point do you stop' and as you go through all of these elements it becomes more and more difficult especially as the numbers go down, and how do you set the quota, and would it drive parity? Probably not. You know in reality, in certain areas, as we were saying earlier the population of certain groups is so small, they're disproportionately small so that wouldn't help you necessarily. (male, DVC)

Quotas were also made to seem like an illegitimate way to achieve gender equality by discussing them in terms of female dominated contexts. Although gender quotas refer to both genders and are designed to ensure adequate representation in all fields, some participants argued this would be a criticism of quotas:

Extract 106: *I don't feel particularly supportive of quotas. I am going to be really stereotyping, but we take something like human resources. And I think human resources is probably possibly something that that women are quite drawn to. And you wouldn't want to say 'well we've got enough women in human resources. So I'm sorry. You might be brilliant but actually I need to appoint this man because I've got to meet my quota. We've got to you know'. And so equally if you've got in, ideally again let's be really stereotyped and say something like civil engineering, you know equally if you've got men that that outstrip women in terms of qualification and expertise you know you have to be fair to them too. So I'm not I'm not particularly supportive of quotas*. (female, Dean)

By resisting quotas, participants are also situating themselves and their institutions within the broader gender equality debate. In their discursive constructions, they are recognizing that gender inequality may exist but that their institutions, and the interventions they currently employ, are able to overcome existing problems without formal regulation. Although some of the arguments posed above resemble that of existing literature, there were some nuanced discussions that move away from current debates and demonstrate the existence of new or alternative discursive practices.

When looking at the differences in how the majority of male participants resisted quotas (as being bad for women) and how the majority of women resisted quotas (as causing resentment), it demonstrates differences in the discourses made visible and available by these leaders. At the same time, the above analysis demonstrates an adherence to individual level or 'fixing women' related initiatives because quotas are de-legitimized. This works to maintain the view that gender equality is a top priority without working to question or change existing cultures or without committing to the transformative change that participants constructed as necessary.

Notably, only one participant (female, Dean), discussed or questioned more nuanced elements or definitions of quotas, recognizing that there are different ways in which a quota-based system may work in HEIs. This included questions about where during the appointment process quotas might be implemented. The participant noted that there are different types of action that can be taken in relation to quotas, and while she opposes some, there are others that could be effective. No other participants made note of differing forms of quotas or regulation but rather assumed them to be for final number outcomes, therefore adopting a 'head counting' method to interpret and understand quotas. The participant also stated that she would not be surprised if *'quotas, only not called that,'* (female, Dean) were implemented in academia soon. This reflects the demonstrative *legitimacy* of quotas.

Although still contentious, the quota debate is on-going and evolving. The legitimacy repertoire therefore represents an evolving discursive process. As discussed in Chapter 2, an analysis of available online policy books and resources indicates a changing discourse in the UK regarding quotas from policy makers in corporate sectors. In previous years, UK policy makers and some scholars have strongly recommended against the use of quotas (Terjesen & Sealy, 2016; Women on Boards, 2011). By 2018, however, different views were being presented in the same outlets, with authors demonstrating less of a resistance and a more subtle suggestion that quotas may be necessary for further progress (Vinnicombe et al., 2018).

Many participants drew from this evolving discourse to construct quotas as something that is likely to occur or inevitable; recognizing that the on-going quota

conversation requires substantial reflective thought. Participants articulated this mostly in passing, through statements such as *'who knows, quotas may become reality.'* Others were more open to the possibility of regulated quotas, or at least to revisiting the debates surrounding them:

> **Extract 107:** *I suspect it will come if I'm honest. I would be surprised if it is, well if it's called quotas. It's a slightly loaded term and I suspect that wouldn't be the word which is used. So I think there will be a change of language but there will be something that looks an awful lot like quotas. and I think that would be perfectly acceptable as* [public figure] *always said when she had a gender balanced cabinet she got loads and loads of emails asking how she could be confident all the women cabinet secretaries were competent.. and not a single email asking how she knew that about the male colleagues. So I think quotas in that language is still quite a hot potato. I think in 3 years' time something not called quotas but very much in the same line will be in operation in different arenas. Non voluntary targets perhaps.* (female, pro VC)

The above participant therefore uses this line of argument to suggest that existing debates about quotas might result in them being called something else because they are currently considered a 'loaded term.' The findings of this thesis also support this speculation, as the resistance towards quotas is largely regarding what they represent, and not necessarily what they could achieve. The strongest support for quotas from any participant came from a female vice chancellor:

> **Extract 108:** *I'm a big fan of quotas. I'd like quotas but that's an unpopular admittance. I talk to senior women who are now older than me and they've been waiting a long time and a lot of them will say to me you know when I was young I was just like 'No I don't want tokenism, I want to be there on my merits, I don't want quotas.. but now I'm sick of waiting, I want quotas.' Speed it along.* (female, VC)

This support for quotas was echoed by other women who said that perhaps when they're more senior they will *'recognize the absolute need for a quota system'* (female, Professor). This works to support the existence of an alternative experience for women

in academia than that which they might expect. In these accounts, the participants are arguing that once they have worked through the system, there is a 'truth' that will help them recognize the need for this type of intervention.

These alternative and evolving discourses demonstrate a need for critical reinterpretation of existing policy and related literature. As the social, political, and economic landscapes are changing, so are the interpretations and contexts surrounding gender and equality and relevant practices. Even more pertinently, more fruitful identification of the 'invisible audience' and their resistance to quotas is needed in order to move forward in understanding relevant debates and to achieve further progress. By identifying the conflicting views and statements of leaders, we can begin to examine the specific contexts that produce these accounts and facilitate reflection, allowing for dominant discourses to be altered and for alternative realities to be produced (Nentwich, 2006; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007).

7.3 Voluntary targets

Voluntary targets are different than Athena SWAN and quotas as there is no definitive definition or established 'best practice' academic example of how targets could be conceptualised for HEI leadership. While participants had clear (although sometimes contradictory) ideas about what Athena SWAN and quotas involve, participants often discussed targets as ambiguous goals within their institution, without being able to give a specific definition or supply a numeric value for their practice of target setting.

In general, targets were less explicitly discussed than quotas or the Athena SWAN Charter. The ambiguity of targets is partly because they can take a variety of different forms depending on the institution and context. In some cases, participants slipped back and forth between using the terms targets and quotas when talking about regulation. In others, participants made conflicting statements such as '*we do not have targets, we have a number we aim to hit when making recruitment choices,*' arguably defining targets while outlining their process. This makes the discussion of targets complex, and in the end, highly ambiguous.

It is argued that, in some cases, the vague representation of targets was intentional. This is because participants were hesitant to say they follow a specific 'number target' but also did not want to seem flippant in regards to their approach to diversity and increasing their female representation. This is attributed to the interactional context, where participants were reluctant to share specific details about their institution, however, also rendered their own approaches as legitimate by supporting the need for further action.

Thus, targets became a form of 'middle ground' between incentive-based initiatives such as Athena SWAN and the more regulatory notion of quotas. The *repertoire of ambiguity* was therefore used by participants to designate a way of speaking about equality initiatives (targets) that would allow participants to seem dedicated and committed to equality without formally tying them to one specific approach. This, it is argued, demonstrates the connection between discursive and social practice; HEIs in the UK, although committed to equality and diversity in their rhetoric and action plans, are more ambiguous about connecting these goals with specific outcomes. The following section will outline how targets were constructed and what consequences these discussions have from a discursive and social practice perspective.

7.3.1 The repertoire of ambiguity

'Ambiguity' as means of constructing subjectivity, is both problematic and highly complex. The different means of conceptualising gender equality initiatives and gender (in)equality could all be considered ambiguous. As is reflected throughout this thesis, although there were patterns of shared knowledge, constructions were often contradictory and conflicting. However, the *repertoire of ambiguity* was identified and is particularly salient for discourses of targets. This is because, unlike other initiatives, participants did not work to position themselves as having particular knowledge or experience with targets, thus using the ambiguity for a particular purpose; to appear both committed to equality and refrain from being held accountable.

In terms of voluntary targets and gender equality initiatives more generally, ambiguous interpretations prevent clarity in procedure, and it is suggested, in outcome.

It is therefore argued that participants used the *repertoire of ambiguity* when discussing targets as a way of speaking to avoid a commitment to formal policy while still maintaining the legitimacy of their own approaches to gender equality goals. This means that participants utilize targets ambiguously to de-legitimize accounts where they (1) lack commitment to gender equality and (2) are supportive of regulating intervention.

From the discourse practice level, this is likely to again be a result of participants orienting themselves to a specific goal; they are motivated to present themselves and their institutions as committed to gender equality. The following extracts demonstrate how participants confirm their commitment to gender equality and to making progress, without explicitly providing information as to how this is done. From a social practice perspective, it is argued that this ambiguity achieves the status of common-sense; the use of targets is not questioned because it is seen as a socially acceptable 'middle ground' between formal legislation and a lack of commitment.

Unlike the previous two initiatives, targets were often mentioned without being prompted by the researcher. They were instead discussed as a rebuttal to the use of quotas:

> **Extract 109:** *I think most people I know are not keen on quotas. Targets are different because if you're setting a target, you're setting an aspiration and you then have to consider what interventions you need to make that aspiration but that's a much more positive way of dealing with it. If you have targets and you say we're not happy with our gender balance and we are really keen to improve it and we are aiming to get up to a certain percentage figure by X date and here are the things we're doing to achieve that… some of which might be again 'we're not going to have single gender short list etc.' and I think people are generally quite positive about that, I haven't felt, well maybe they're a lot more negative than I think.* (female, DVC).

> **Extract 110**: *I think having targets and saying 'look you know if you don't get your act together we'll legislate' is a much better way because you know it's serious, there's a consequence, they'll do it but they're not quite up against a sort of brick wall in the timing where they've got to do it and so that's why I think the*

approach we followed is better, but there's nothing wrong with having a target.. (female, Dean)

These extracts are exemplary of the common sense elements related to targets; participants construct them as being logical ways of dealing with gender equality if they are *'not happy with our gender balance.'* However, the participant in Extract 110 also presents a contradiction regarding the use of targets and quotas. While she argues that the threat of quotas if institutions do not *'get* [their] *act together'* is sufficient in ensuring that institutions improve their practices, later in the interview she argues that *'there is not enough being done to achieve our equality goals.'* The challenge therefore lies in the question of when or if legislation will move from threat to reality. Arguably, discussions of quotas have been happening for over a decade in public and private institutions, which questions how successful the threat has been with little follow up or implications for low commitment (Terjesen et al., 2015).

Even further, the participant in Extract 110 also says *'that's why the approach we followed is better.'* Several participants also used this type of language tense, representing their approaches as finite rather than on-going processes. This is constructed as a definitive claim about the appropriateness of the institutions' approach to equality, despite the participant not being able to provide a definitive account of the target their institution uses, stating that it is not something *'written down or mandated.'* Thus, although they argue that *'nothing is wrong with having a target'* actual examples of how targets are used or have helped in their institutions could not be given explicitly.

The participants below in Extracts 111 and 112 state that people are 'uncomfortable' with targets. In this way, the targets are largely resisted for some of the same reasons as quotas, while also supported because they do not require formal legislation. This adds to the discourse that targets are ambiguous, despite being supported (in theory) by the majority of participants:

Extract 111: *I like the idea of targets. Not so sure about quotas because quotas lead to resistance and we don't have a culture of quotas in the UK. Whereas there is some in North America and Norway. I think it's interesting the impact that board legislation has had you know in Norway and things like that. I think*

there's some good examples from elsewhere in the world about quotas and targets. I think in Universities we're really not very good at that. So I think people will be resistant. I think targets - we should have targets because lots of corporate bodies are used to having targets. But that is a bit more controversial at universities. I think in that way we're a bit backward. (female, Dean)

Extract 112: *I do think there are times when quotas and targets are important. I am a strong believer that if you don't have some kind of target even if you don't go as far as quotas, if you don't have targets, even if they're soft targets, you don't know what you're aiming for, and so I think they can be very valuable… a lot of people are uncomfortable with them.* (female, governing member)

Extract 112 provides a clear example of a participant referring to both targets and quotas, stating '*I do think there are times when quotas and targets are important.*' The participant then refers to potential 'soft targets.' The participant is providing alternative to 'hard' quotas, referring to the need for more objective 'aims.' At the same time however, they conflate targets and quotas and then identify them distinctly within the same discourse.

Targets and quotas are both 'important' at times, however, targets can be used without going 'as far as quotas.' This conflation of terms, it is argued, weakens the meaning behind them by creating confusion and conflict. Additionally, some participant's explicitly resisted targets and quotas for the same reason, structuring them around support for alternative initiatives such as '*those that build confidence:*'

Extract 113: *I sat in on the interview, and there were 5 people shortlisted, 2 of which were worth-while and 3 of which were really a waste of time and 3 were women. and you think 'well have they just been put on the list because..' - and then you think 'well that's just ridiculous - cause you read the cv.' Well no. I just sort of said 'this is disappointing that we're not being given a great deal of choice out of the final candidates.' But again if we are feeling we have to put people on because we have to do it then that can't be right. I don't know how we get round that, but doesn't do anybody any good. Because they come to the interview, we then reject them, they feel rejected, and that confidence.. and if*

confidence is an issue. They're knocked down one. I don't think the university has targets, but if it has an almost implicit, 'we have to have women on the list', then they're actually doing more damage - in my view - doing more damage than good because actually we're knocking the confidence of these people where we should be trying to build up the confidence. (male, DVC).

The above participant is therefore arguing that having women on the list because they are women *'doesn't do anybody any good.'* This could also relate to what was discussed previously by another participant, who argued that search firms play a large role in accessing appropriate women for roles and making sure that women are taken seriously as potential candidates. As has been shown in the literature, head-hunters are an important aspect of achieving equality and diversity goals. As this participant is demonstrating, it is not necessarily considered to be a fault of the search process when candidates are ill-qualified, rather, this participant is generalising that women are put on lists for reasons other than fitting the job criteria (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a).

Additional participants said that they believe targets are viewed negatively by their institution:

Researcher: right and there's no target?

Extract 114: *no we don't have any targets at all for so many women or whatever*

Researcher: is that something to be considered, do you think?

Extract 115: *I think people see that in a negative way. I think it's something we have to do informally. I mean we're quite, for example, this year the people we've put forward for promotions are nearly all men. They are ethnically diverse, but they're nearly all men. So what I've said is we're going to have a special reconvene of the school promotion committee where every head of department has got to look at every woman in their school and look at where she is and so to make sure we're not missing anybody out when we go forward next year. But that's something I've said we need to do because I think it's important. We do have a* [equality and diversity group] *and that kind of thing but I think it often*

depends on individual managers whether they actually happen or not. (female, Dean)

This participant therefore draws on of targets by arguing that they are the responsibility of managers and thus might not always be implemented. Participants also discussed how targets in their organization would work should they be implemented:

Researcher: How would targets work then?

Extract 116: *well that's really interesting because how it would work here is HR would come up with something and everybody would have to do it basically. How it should work is that vice chancellor should say 'I want so many % of women in these jobs by this time, get out there and do it'. and I think that would be a lot more effective actually. It needs leadership from the top. One of the things I liked about [University] was that the vice chancellor chaired the equality and diversity committee and all the teams were on it. and that feels really absent here. and I know our main interactions with the person is very positive...he wants to develop women... all those kinds of things... but to stand there at the top and say 'Right this is one of the most important issues at our university, I'm going to chair this committee'* (female, Deputy Dean)

As the participant in Extract 116 explains, the most beneficial form of targets might be those that come from the Vice Chancellor, rather than those that come from human resource departments. This demonstrates participants' view that initiatives must come from the top in order to signal true commitment and engage other organizational actors.

The following extract is an example of a time a participant discussed an argument typically associated with quotas to discuss targets. The participant is in favour of their use, and notes that the worry that underqualified women will be appointed should not be a concern:

Extract 117: *I believe so many highly qualified women are often overlooked. I don't see this as... in fact I heard this great thing when I went to the* [name of event]. *A couple of comments stuck out and it came from actually a private*

sector, she was a head of HR for a major corporation and she said 'I don't know why men are so concerned that targets will result in underqualified people occupying these jobs, that's been going on for decades since they were only hiring men.' It was an amazing turnabout. The end of the mediocre male.
(female, VC)

In the example above, targets would put an end to 'the mediocre male,' something that this participant explains as being difficult for those in positions of power to accept. Targets are therefore variably operationalized and used within institutions. What was common was the sense that targets represent an ambiguous form of gender equality that was constructed with moderately consistent support. In other words, the majority of participants supported the use of targets while not being able to provide clear definitions on how they do or should function within an institution.

This section demonstrates that there is a lack of uniform interpretation of what targets in institutions entail. One of the key features that emerged from conversations is that some participants adopted and used strategies that made them appear hesitant to admit that they use targets, while others wanted to explain that they incorporate them but they have not suitably changed the outcome of recruitment and promotion decisions. Through their discursive practice, participants constructed targets as something to be avoided, except when referencing quotas, where targets represented a more positively viewed alternative.

It is argued that the *repertoire of ambiguity* is furthered by a sense of ambivalence that is influenced by the very nature of voluntary or informal processes. It is difficult to provide a formal definition or conceptualisation of 'targets' and this is reflected in participants ambiguous and sometimes conflicting interpretations (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). It is therefore argued that although participants are motivated to demonstrate a commitment to gender equality and recognize the need for substantial change (as shown in previous chapters), they construct a *repertoire of ambiguity* to avoid the production of alternative knowledge that might point in the direction of support for quotas (the unpopular opinion) or a lack of commitment to gender equality.

7.4 Connecting repertoires: interpreting equality initiatives

Through their discursive practice, participants provided an underlying assertion that current gender equality initiatives are not sufficient to achieve gender equality goals. When resisting initiatives, participants used discourses that have, in the past, been pervasive and accepted as truth. This includes resisting quotas because they are bad for women, and resisting Athena SWAN because it causes 'more work' for institutional actors. In leveraging these familiar arguments, participants are problematizing gender equality without upsetting the status quo or the natural (gendered) order. The restrictions that would be posed by quotas, or that which are required for targets to measure success (as in the cumbersome Athena SWAN process), threaten the reigning rules, practices, and norms that have thus far promoted the success of men and only certain women.

One of the more striking aspects of these repertoires was the use of the invisible audience to construct resistance, and how this was done in different ways by male and female participants. Male participants reinforced the individualist notion of inequality, arguing that quotas are 'bad for women' because individual women promoted through a quota system would be perceived as lacking in ability. Female participants resisted quotas largely because of the feelings of resentment they would produce. However, these all relayed the idea that there is a resistant 'invisible audience' that participants did not identify. By not questioning 'who' or 'what systems' would be perceiving women this way or be feeling resentment, the leaders in this study are problematizing gender inequality without questioning how these outcomes are a result of the existing gendered culture (Krook, 2016).

These dominant discourses, however, are also bending the goals and objectives of gender equality initiatives to not upset this status quo, contributing to incorrect assumptions that remain pervasive. An example of this is in the contradictions between male and female participants and the argument of 'available women.' Where male participants argued they would not be able to find women, the female participants contested that this was more of a problem with the system than a problem with women. However, participants still constructed arguments to delegitimize quotas in ways that are

not fully supported by evidence (such as the snowball effect and lack of available women).

Athena SWAN was also perceived differently by participants in various positions of the hierarchy, with those in positions lower on the hierarchy generally seeing more significant problems than those higher in the hierarchy. It is argued that in order to see cultural changes, differences in interpretation must be better understood and potentially combatted. Specifically, it is argued that the contradictions shown above demonstrate differences in how participants approach and interpret the overall 'goal' of gender equality, and differences in how participants recognize the current challenges facing women in academia. This includes contradictory accounts of the 'right' motivation for achieving equality.

The recognition of both the *lack of* and *need for* true cultural change in organizations was consistent throughout discussions of incentive-based programs and formal regulation. This is explicitly seen in participants questioning the motivation of Athena SWAN and whether it leads to the changes that are needed. It is also seen in participants' constructions of quotas as causing changes but with corresponding resentment. Targets however were constructed ambiguously, therefore representing a more positive alternative to quotas and accreditations, however, these were used as a 'middle ground' and not explicitly defined. Through this ambiguity, leaders are able to appear committed to gender equality without adhering to substantive change.

Thus, this chapter demonstrates that participants are maintaining the existing system that promotes male dominated institutions by not questioning the processes implemented or the elements of inequality that these practices intend to resolve. They instead (re)produce contradictory but interrelated elements relating to the goals of equality schemes and programs. Despite valid efforts, the contradictory narratives (re)produced in discussions of equality initiatives work to substantiate existing discourses and prevent the status quo from being questioned.

7.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has explored the discursive tools employed by institutional actors to construct gender equality initiatives. There were conflicting accounts of all initiatives, and while all participants supported action in a general sense, none were completely supportive of current practice. They therefore constructed *resistance* for Athena SWAN, quotas, and targets at various points during interviews.

Analysis revealed that participants resisted quotas for what they *represent*, rather than for what they do. They also turned to supporting targets as a means of refuting the use of quotas, without being able to provide clear strategic plans regarding their use. At the level of social practice, this once again has ideological consequences for how initiatives are considered legitimate and appropriate within institutions. It is thus argued that the importance of further initiative implementation is obscured by participants, who both demonstrate a need for change and argue that structures are in place (although ambiguous) and systems are working (although the initiatives they promote are not necessarily aligned with equality goals).

This chapter has thus pulled together constructions of gender initiatives to better conceptualise leaders' use of language in resisting and supporting specific initiatives. The chapter draws on the shared resistance and solidarity of leaders to conceptualise the extent to which leaders these discourses might foster equally shared feelings in their organization. Specifically, the chapter recognizes the importance of mobilizing men and women in leadership positions as a collective group to determine how best to move forward in the efforts to improve gender parity, and how the leveraging of dominant discourses can be used to achieve these changes.

By finding where contradictions exist between the change leaders feel is required and the initiatives they support, we leave room for "the individual agency of women (and men) reproducing as well as challenging and changing gender relations and practices in organizations." This allows for a deeper reflection on current perceptions and reasons for such contradictory and/or ambiguous views (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014, p. 172).

Chapter 8: Discussion

The overarching goal of this thesis was to better understand women's persistent underrepresentation in leadership roles of higher education institutions. Recognizing the importance of discursive constructions in the maintenance of social practice, the goal of the study was to explore how leaders and stakeholders in HEIs interpret gender equality initiatives, how this interpretation is constituted through discourse, and how these discourses might influence workplace practices. Responses to these questions and their significance are presented throughout this chapter.

The empirical chapters provided an in-depth analysis of the research data and a discussion of existing literature in order to relate the findings to previous studies. The findings help respond to the research questions by addressing how gender equality initiatives are constituted through the discourse of leaders and stakeholders. When taken together, I argue that the thesis has theoretical contributions that help explain women's underrepresentation despite decades of supportive policies and measures.

8.1 Thesis contributions

By analyzing the discourses of leaders and stakeholders in higher education institutions, this thesis contributes a new perspective to view the continued underrepresentation of women in senior roles. The central contribution of this thesis is thus to the gender equality and policy literature by providing theoretical insights into how leaders mobilize their discourse in a way that promotes the adoption of progressive change without commitment to the necessary policies and practices to achieve this change. The study therefore advances theoretical discussion on how the discursive commitment to gender parity in leadership has not resulted in consistent increases in women's representation.

This central contribution is built through two additional unique contributions to the literature. I will summarize these briefly here, before discussing them in further detail in the subsequent sections.

The first contribution is to current debates on the value of 'merit' in higher education decision making by demonstrating that there are differences in how leaders

conceptualize and confront 'meritocracy' in their organizations. Merit is shown to be a key value that underpins debates on equality initiatives and an instigator of resistance to them (White & Burkinshaw, 2019; Voorspoels, 2018). I therefore argue that the identification of these conflicting and contradictory accounts provides a means of understanding how leaders may come to understand and evaluate equality practices. These findings go beyond previous research to show that leaders differ not only in how they define merit but also in how they use discourses of meritocracy to account for unmeritocratic practices. They then also use these discourses to legitimize women's underrepresentation as being a result of preferences and choice.

A second, empirical contribution, to gender (in)equality literature in the context of HEIs is then shown. It is argued that leaders mobilize comfortable pre-existing discourses to reaffirm their voice as leaders and the practices deployed within their institutions. This is shown in two parts. First, I identify a disconnect in leaders' discursive practices, where there is a discrepancy between the change that leaders construct as required (cultural) and the initiatives they support (those that fix women). Next, I demonstrate how this discrepancy is obstructed or hidden by leaders' use of pre-existing dominant discourses related to gender (in)equality debates on 'fixing women.' This shows how institutional actors in leadership roles select and appropriate certain discourses, allowing them to make sense of and legitimize institutional practices.

The following two sections will describe the above contributions in further detail, referring back to the findings and previous literature. These elements are then brought together and interpreted as creating an *intervention paradox.* This intervention paradox adds value to existing literature on gender and (in)equality by providing a new perspective to understand women's continued underrepresentation and the way equality policies are interpreted in practice. Finally, a theoretical contribution, underpinned by this paradox, is introduced; situating the thesis within wider academic work on *means-ends decoupling* (Bromley & Powell, 2012). The subsequent conclusion chapter, Chapter 9, further outlines the implications for research and practice, laying out limitations, recommendations for further study, and final comments on the research project.

8.1.1 Defining the values underpinning equality initiatives

This thesis reveals that leaders in HEIs utilize dominant discourses of meritocracy to construct gender (in)equality and related institutional practices. However, there were contradictory narratives produced by participants regarding 'merit-based' practices, despite the strong dominant discourse in the literature that institutions are fair and unbiased (Scully, 2002). The way leaders come to understand, evaluate, and present meritocracy is thus problematized. While meritocracy was conflicted in some accounts, both implicitly and explicitly, participants also utilized discourses to support the existence and maintain the ideals of a merit-based system.

These findings build on existing research by identifying how individuals with senior roles interpret and conceptualise merit in the context of HEI leadership. In accordance with the literature, the majority of participants recognize that merit is an important aspect of decision making in organizations and that this value underpins equality initiatives (Castilla, 2017; Noon, 2010). More strikingly, however, is that participants recognized conflicting discourses about the objectivity and neutrality of institutions, and many explicitly challenged the legitimacy of more 'objective' discourses. This demonstrates an increased awareness of the tensions between equality goals and claims of merit.

As demonstrated in the literature review chapters, merit as a concept has no agreed upon definition. Although there is a long history of scholars defining and conceptualising merit, from fixed attributes (Castilla, 2017; Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008) to a broad 'dominant ideology' (Scully, 1997) there is little investigation into individual leaders' interpretations, conceptualisations, and applications of merit-based practices, with even less investigation in the context of academic leaders (Castilla & Ranganathan, 2018). In one of the few and more recent studies in the private sphere, Castilla and Ranganathan (2018) argue for more descriptions of "*how* merit is assessed, *who* the unit of analysis is, and *what* constitutes merit in particular organizations" (p.33, emphasis in original).

This thesis therefore contributes to this literature by revealing heterogeneous discursive constructions of where merit *begins,* with participants demonstrating

conflicting accounts of whether merit should recognize the difficulties some individuals face or whether it should be based only on matching job criteria. As was shown, some participants pulled from similar arguments to Noon (2007), who states that the path for disadvantaged groups has often been more difficult and should be recognized as such. When those from disadvantaged groups reach certain levels of leadership, they have had to work much harder than privileged individuals to get to the same level. Other participants, however, constructed alternative accounts by drawing on the 'official' discourse of merit to argue that decisions were made based on a candidate's fit with the job criteria. Some participants also acknowledged the disadvantages facing candidates who had taken periods of leave and might not have the same uninterrupted publication profile as someone who had not, and that academia had not yet found a way to account for this in decision making.

Taking this argument further, the thesis shows differences not only in what leaders construct as *constituting* merit, but also in how they actively construct and legitimize merit within HEIs when faced with unmeritocratic practices. One aspect of this can be seen in participants' continued use of strategic devices such as justification and exception, implicitly and/or explicitly constructing accounts where the underrepresentation of women must be a result of choices that are difficult to adjust for, including those relating to motherhood.

The power of dominant repertoires is shown here. Despite problematizing practices in institutions, the majority of participants continuously pulled from dominant discourses of meritocracy to account for and justify women's underrepresentation. In their discursive practice, leaders inscribed discourses of women's equality with that of meritocracy, making it more easily recognizable. By aligning their approaches to the 'appropriate' discourse of meritocracy (despite having put forward contradicting discourses) leaders are able to produce a meaning of equality "from positions of authority, which is likely to become dominant in specific settings" (Zanoni & Janssens, 2018, p.186). Through the use of CDA, this finding advances our understanding of how equality and power become interconnected in organizations through discourse: common sense claims about the 'meritocratic' institution are mobilized to sustain the

rationalisation that women are underrepresented and that this must be a result of something other than 'unfairness' (e.g. confidence, preferences).

Expanding on this, participants positioned themselves as individuals who will aid towards efforts in achieving equality, using this position to present a form of justification for potentially unfair or biased practices. This thesis therefore demonstrates the pervasiveness of pre-existing discourses about meritocracy and 'gender equality', allowing leaders to strategically deploy them to construct outcomes that are socially recognizable, comfortable and legitimate, maintaining the view that institutions are gender neutral and fair (Zanoni et al., 2010). Participants aligned even anti-meritocratic behaviours with the institutions' gender equality goals through their discursive practice. In doing so, participants are demonstrating their ability to use their positions to simultaneously promote equality related goals and, implicitly, undermine them.

This finding furthers the conversation about equality practices by highlighting that behaviour previously associated with disadvantaging women was instead constructed as actively supporting them. Participants leveraged more 'subjective' practices and justified them as supporting women with their careers. These previously negatively-framed practices relate to arguments regarding the old boys' networks, biases in recruitment, and male-driven criteria (Cross & Armstrong, 2008; Nielsen, 2016). Although they have historically been used to provide implicit advantages to men (Heilman, 2001; van den Brink & Benschop, 2012a), I suggest in this thesis that male participants are utilising discretion to promote practices that go against the accepted policy 'norms' and are able to justify them by drawing on discourses in support of gender equality. This shows how participants use their positions of power to mobilize positive discourses of equality and thus benefit from the outcome without actively changing the biased practices.

While this confirms the important relationship between leadership roles and mentor/sponsor relationships as found in the literature (Baumgarten, 2019), it also poses problems when examining the formality of some gender equality initiatives. First, I argue that some of the progress seen in women's representation can be attributed to institutional actors using practices that traditionally supported men to instead support

women. The argument extended here is not that these practices should continue in order to see further progress, but rather that existing equality initiatives may not be entirely accountable for the success seen thus far. Second, and more critically, it also demonstrates that despite increased attempts to formalise procedures and promote more objective decision making (Bryant et al., 2017), institutional actors in positions of power continue to be able to use these positions to exhibit discretion in the practices of which they conform and the meritocratic procedures of which they adhere.

Based on the above, I argue that 'merit' as an underlying value for gender equality initiatives is susceptible to interpretation and these interpretations are malleable depending on the context, with institutional leaders being able to control when and how discourses of meritocracy are used. While at their core institutions were constructed simultaneously as merit based and inherently flawed, those in positions of power are able to use their roles to define and project how 'meritocratic' their organization is going to be and how they are going to comply with meritocratic norms. In a broad sense, this demonstrates how values of opportunity, fairness, and objectivity are widely accepted as already existing in formal organizational structures. However, this contributes to the literature on equality and diversity by demonstrating how leaders in HEIs navigate pre-existing discourses by using them to (re)produce social practice, ensuring that organizations remain as they are; with women working to fit into pre-defined male perceptions of 'merit.'

8.1.2 Mobilizing 'comfortable' discourses

An additional contribution of this thesis is shown through a discussion of the performative effects of discourse, where I demonstrate how leaders imbue their constructions of gender (in)equality and equality initiatives with pre-existing dominant discourses about inequality and women's underrepresentation. This works to legitimize their own voices and approaches as authoritative speakers in organizations. This is supported by a de-gendering of the 'invisible audience' and the gendering of initiatives to 'target women.'

I argue that this contributes to understandings of how discourses are mobilized to maintain the perspective that 'fixing women' is an appropriate means of achieving cultural change, despite the lack of empirical evidence to support this perspective. This therefore contributes to the debates on 'fixing women' by providing an explanation for how these practices are able to maintain legitimacy within higher education institutions, despite substantial criticism from scholars of gender and inequalities, policy makers, and institutional actors (White & Burkinshaw, 2019). This is a particularly important contribution for the context of HEIs; they are institutions with strategic goals tied to social good, and with institutional actors actively producing knowledge to counter these dominant perspectives, yet they remain pervasive through text and talk.

Below, I draw from the findings to argue that leaders' use of pre-existing discourses to construct women's underrepresentation as gendered, either through motherhood or fixing women, and their de-gendering of resistance, legitimizes their voices and approaches to gender equality. I will then use this to theoretically account for why the focus on gender equality in institutions has translated to (and is accepted to be) a focus on *fixing women,* despite the recognition by participants, research, and social actors that cultural elements contribute to women's inequality and underrepresentation.

First, when constructing women's underrepresentation, participants drew from strong existing discourses about women as 'needing to be altered' and women as mothers. This includes discourses about women's lack of confidence and need to obtain necessary leadership skills (Guillén et al., 2018). Discourses of motherhood were also used by participants, connecting with literature that argues that "both motherhood and academic work are 'greedy institutions,' demanding total commitment and dedication" (Burkinshaw & White, 2017, p.2). When constructing the role of institutions in providing resources for women, participants acknowledged the importance of flexible working arrangements and providing resources to reconcile work and home life.

I argue that by consistently pulling from these discourses to construct women's underrepresentation, participants were emphasizing the justifying function of motherhood myths. 'Motherhood myths' include assumptions about women and their natural endowment with parenting abilities and that "women pursuing a career threatens

the wellbeing of the family" (Verniers & Vala, 2018, p.3; Day et al., 2011). The participants in this thesis therefore supported the existing and dominant view that the nature of academia makes it difficult for true balance between home and work, and drew on this to account for women's underrepresentation (Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013).

When paired with the de-gendering of resistance, I argue that this offers a 'comfortable' discourse for participants to use when confronted with unequal practices. By de-gendering resistance, I am referring to the collectively formed 'invisible audience.' Existing literature has highlighted the importance of men's involvement in gender equality interventions while also demonstrating the role that women must continue to play in efforts towards gender parity (Connell, 2003). However, this thesis uncovers the existence of a de-gendered 'invisible other' who is constructed as a reason there cannot be more progressive change. This 'other' is drawn upon to account for why there would not be change for the 'right' reasons should quotas or more definitive initiatives be implemented. This further responds to the research questions by outlining how leaders, through their discursive practice, construct gender equality initiatives as being *resisted* by something or someone 'else.' This is then accepted because it is done by drawing upon already established discourses about supporting women through development as well as narratives of merit.

While the 'invisible audience' was constructed as an 'other' with no discernible identity, the initiatives targeting women were gendered in the sense that they (1) intend to equip women with 'masculine' skills and (2) associate women's key challenges with those of motherhood. I argue that this demonstrates how, through their discursive practice, leaders are able to not only (re)produce inaccurate or misconstrued discourses about equality initiatives but also reproduce and reaffirm their power in creating and sustaining existing ideas about women's persistent inequality and the 'gendered' institution (Acker, 1990).

On this basis, this contributes to the conversation of how women-focused initiatives are discursively constituted as legitimate and necessary: they are constructed as suitable based on unavoidable gendered differences between men and women, while more progressive initiatives are projected as illegitimate from an organizational

perspective, rather than a gendered one. This, I argue, allows for the focus to remain on women, rather than (potentially less-cooperative) invisible 'other' parties.

The above therefore demonstrates the performativity of leaders' discursive practices, demonstrating not only that leader's draw on pre-existing discourses, but also how they *use* them to (re)produce existing social practice. By adhering to historically legitimized and comfortable discourses to show their support for flexible working and women focused initiatives, while simultaneously resisting other initiatives, participants are able to demonstrate effective commitment to equality, thus legitimizing their own voice as leaders (who support practices) and their institutions approaches to achieving gender parity. However, I will also provide an explanation below as to how leaders are able to construct this support and resistance without requiring, or needing to demonstrate themselves, the link between the supported practices and desired outcomes.

The majority of participants argued that organizational culture was the primary challenge to achieving gender equality, however, proceeded to argue that the greatest way to support women was to provide them with additional resources to *fit into* this culture. Thus, there is an inconsistency or disconnect between what is constructed as *challenging* and what is presented as being *fixed*. I argue that the legitimacy created and maintained in their discursive constructions, by imbuing them with pre-existing discourses, helps to obscure the existence of this discrepancy.

Drawing attention to the analytical technique of CDA, I argue that leaders are both drawing on and creating a shared social consensus about the best way to tackle inequality, and that this consensus is unlikely to be altered due to its embeddedness within meanings given to women's inequality. The meanings given to gender (in)equality are thus embedded within social practices; women's underrepresentation remains fused with discourses of 'fixing women' as well as 'flexible work,' and by legitimizing these and preventing other discourses from evolving, leaders are creating the conditions for which specific orders of discourse might become available (or unavailable) for other social actors.

This means that dominant repertoires are unlikely to be changed because of how leaders maintain discursive and social practice through the use of pre-existing dominant

discourses. The disconnect between 'fixing women' and identified cultural change, thus, is also unlikely to be realised unless given discursive power. These accounts, when paired with the conflict seen in the definitions of merit and the resistance and support outlined in Chapter 7, produce what I have termed an *intervention paradox.*

8.2 The intervention paradox

This thesis has identified contradictory narratives produced by leaders that are conceptually connected to the variations in adoption, support, and success of gender equality-based initiatives. These contradictions are related to conceptualisations of merit and the values underpinning equality initiatives, to the connections between the challenges of gender (in)equality and proposed resolutions, and to how formal equality initiatives are resisted and supported.

Collectively, the thesis demonstrates that leaders construct the need for cultural change while revealing discursive support for initiatives that do not upset existing cultural practices. I have termed this the *intervention paradox*, and it is ultimately the result of these mixed and contradictory views and values. The below description of paradox is adopted to support the following arguments:

> Many paradoxes are caused by the hangover of one set of assumptions or beliefs into a new age or environment and proliferate when change is dramatic or rapid. Paradoxes emerge when beliefs or assumptions fail to keep up with external changes (Cannon, 1996, p.110).

Considering this definition, I argue that the constructions of women's underrepresentation have not kept up with institutional reality, and while some practices may have connected to institutional goals previously, these goals have now shifted. Thus, the *intervention paradox* is underpinned by the discursive support for cultural change and the recognition that this change is vital for success, paired with the enacted support for initiatives that 'fix women' and the legitimization of gendered differences.

Additionally, while participants constructed practices as not always being representative of a meritocracy, and implicitly accounted for some of these practices,

they did not put forward initiatives to formally counteract the causes of the underlying biases. This is therefore illustrative of seemingly contradictory narratives existing at the same time; institutional actors discursively support gender equality practices while simultaneously undermining the need for them. Thus, the interpretations of equality and the conflicting accounts related to interventions are argued to culminate with a logically unacceptable conclusion; institutional actors want a form of equality intervention that will help in changing the organizational culture but not be disruptive to institutional practices. This highlights that although there are official programs and schemes in institutions, they are a part of a larger contradictory and ambiguous story regarding gender equality, culture, and the want for change (Kelan, 2009).

When examining the disconnect between the challenges and the solutions as illustrative of a paradox, it allows for us to reflect on existing practices, question implicit rules, and to behave otherwise (Bartunek, 1988; van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). I argue that one of the first steps in breaking down this paradox is to recognize that the initiatives most heavily supported, those that fix women or targets, allow for the 'gendering' of institutions to remain hidden at best and ignored at worst. It also allows for deeper critical reflection of the actual *goals* of equality initiatives and for discursive and social alignment of goals with practices.

Much of the EDI literature has focused on the dilemmas of equality policy, examining specific equal opportunity discourses in opposition to merit-based arguments (Deem, 2007), however the perspective of a paradox aids in providing an alternative way to describe the limitations and challenges facing not only women but also equality scholars, institutional actors, and policy makers by "creat[ing] awareness of blind spots, as well as ways in which it can be reframed" (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014, p.166). Through demonstrating how discursive constructions of gender equality initiatives are demonstrative of a paradox and how this paradox is inscribed with discourses of merit as well as conflicting or ambiguous interpretations of gender (in)equality, we can begin to develop tools to actively reveal and counter the contradictions of which the paradox is composed.

Considering this, the use of the term 'paradox' is important and significant. By definition, a paradox allows for two seemingly opposing claims to exist at once. Contradictory elements exist simultaneously and appear illogical but would otherwise be considered rational when in isolation (Lewis, 2000). Initiatives have been examined for how they produce resistance, as well as the effects of this resistance (Johansson et al., 2017; Manfredi, 2017), however, I argue that the contribution of an identified *intervention paradox* allows for a re-theorizing of this resistance. Institutional actors in positions of leadership can be examined as both supportive of changing institutional culture while also wanting to maintain the culture as it currently exists. This prevents the creation of a further dichotomy that was constructed by participants and is seen in existing literature, reducing existing tensions between those who have, until now, been considered to be 'right' or 'wrong' in their approaches to gender equality (Dick, 2004b). Rather than existing as a polarized phenomenon of 'us and them,' 'in-groups and outgroups' or 'resit or support,' discourses of gender equality initiatives and their success can be broken down into their subsequent parts.

This allows for reflection in the hopes of deconstructing the social practices that produce this paradox, allowing for discursive tools that increase awareness about the likelihood of instilling culture change with the currently promoted initiatives. It can further allow for the breakdown of organizational habits that prevent further change, as well as work to create novel dominant discourses; confronting existing repertoires with those that are indicative of a gendered organizational reality. At the same time, it acknowledges that this paradox exists in an organizational social reality in which leaders must confront and adapt to popular opinion and other organizational pressures and practices.

To conclude this section, the *intervention paradox* stems from conflicting discourses; one that supports progressive change for gender equality, and one that resists gender equality practices that may upset or result in this change. The mobilization of these discourses that underpin the paradox, I argue, helps to reconcile contradictory accounts of gender equality and equality initiatives. In doing so, this paradox contributes to a discursive gap between the policies that participant's support and the overall goals

emphasized by participants. I theorize this as being a result of a process called *means-ends decoupling*. This process, as well as how it contributes to literature, will be discussed in the following section.

8.3 Means-ends decoupling

Taking the above into account, I lead into the final argument of this thesis which aims to theoretically account for the theorized disconnect or gap between institutional goals and concrete institutional practices. The following represents a theoretical contribution of the thesis, as well as an explanation as to why constructions about how best to *achieve* gender equality and the identified and articulated *reasons* for gender equality are not aligned, along with consequences of this misalignment. I argue that this represents, and contributes to, a process of means-ends decoupling (Bromley & Powell, 2012). I further describe and situate this contribution below. First, however, I will provide some insight into how this process has been identified and why it is important for scholars of gender and inequalities in higher education leadership.

Gender inequality is far from being the only social challenge facing scholars or policy makers. There are increasingly more initiatives and movements designed with the intention to combat challenges such as climate change, racial discrimination, and sexual harassment (only a few of many, many examples). Many of the initiatives designed also struggle with achieving the desired progress, and scholars have turned to attempts to try and explain why initiatives and policies might not be achieving their predicted outcomes (Grodal & O'Mahony, 2015). In this thesis, I have contributed to literature about why gender equality initiatives in HEIs may not achieve their desired outcomes, including: (1) contradictory conceptualisations of the values underpinning initiatives, (2) the (re)production of social practices that maintain legitimacy and 'comfort' of individual level practices, and finally how this results in (3) the existence of a paradox; where cultural change is discursively supported, however, initiatives that are likely to lead to this change are discursively resisted.

Moving forward, I argue that *means-ends decoupling* provides a theoretical basis for understanding why and how initiatives become integrated into organizational

practices when there is little evidence to suggest they will achieve the desired outcomes. Thus, while I have already demonstrated how participants interpret gender equality initiatives, and how these interpretations may influence social practice, I turn to the process of means-ends decoupling to theoretically account for why practices continue to be discursively supported and implemented. The identified support for the 'means' (initiatives) as well as the 'ends' (goals) also helps to explain the underlying reasons for the *intervention paradox,* where both means and ends are supported, despite their lack of clear connection.

To situate the above contribution, I will first define terms and provide theoretical descriptions of 'means-ends decoupling' (Bromley & Powell, 2012). I will then propose why it is helpful to examine gender quality initiatives in HEIs through this decoupling. I then argue that this perspective provides a theoretically grounded explanation for why gender equality initiatives are not always conducive of broader gender equality goals yet continue to be implemented. This therefore connects critically-oriented approaches to reality construction with the institutionalisation of social practices. Overall, this contributes a deeper understanding of how discursive and social practices, and the dialectical relationship between them, become fixed within complex institutional settings (Fairclough, 1992; Maguire & Hardy, 2009).

8.3.1 Gender equality initiatives and means-ends decoupling

Within the literature on institutional decoupling, Bromley and Powell (2012) have examined previous arguments to produce a rich understanding of how, when, and why gaps between policies and practices occur in modern organizations, identifying a process called 'means-ends decoupling.' This process is particularly suitable for the aims of this thesis, as it can be applied to explore the discursive mis/alignment of gender equality measures and strategic aims of equality, diversity, and inclusion in institutions (Edelman, 1992). It is thus argued that institutional discourses contribute to and are constitutive of this process of means-ends decoupling, helping to theoretically explain why institutions focus on, and commit resources to, initiatives that are not connected with overall EDI goals (Kalev et al., 2006).

Means-ends decoupling represents a situation where "policies are implemented but the link between formal policies and the intended outcome is opaque" (Bromley & Powell, 2012, p.7). 'Means' are likely to be decoupled from 'ends' in certain settings, including:

> In settings where formal structures have real organizational consequences, work activities are altered, and policies are implemented and evaluated, but where scant evidence exists to show that these activities are linked to organizational effectiveness or outcomes (Bromley & Powell, 2012, p.14)

HEIs are considered to be highly susceptible to means-ends decoupling because of their social goals, often relating to elements such as equal opportunity, justice, accountability, student-staff relations, research impact, knowledge production, etc. These elements or 'products' are difficult to measure, and obscure goals are, in modern universities, broken down into measurable and testable components, with these components often only loosely linked to the original elements. In other words; these elements are difficult to measure, and attempts to do so are likely to lead to measurement of other or more simple and less 'abstract' outcomes (such as a head counting perspective for women in leadership; Kalev et al., 2006).

Gender equality initiatives in HEIs therefore offer a useful example of this process, where support is constructed for initiatives that do not necessarily connect with institutional goals, however, equality practices themselves are implemented. This is seen in the popularity of Athena SWAN and in the development of many equality and diversity officers, managers, teams, and related events and initiatives. Still, however, as has been argued in the literature, there is little evidence to suggest that these practices are linked to the goals of achieving gender parity within institutions (Gregory-Smith, 2018).

The 'head counting' method of measuring initiative efficacy is a useful example for outlining a potentially "loosely coupled" means-ends pairing (Clark, 1983). Although increasing the number of women is a goal of those trying to achieve more women in leadership, broader goals of gender parity and gender equality reflect more abstract 'ends.' In the case of 'head counting,' although the number of women might

increase, this says little about whether organizational culture, the lives of working men and women, or working practices more generally are actually experiencing substantial changes (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Sauder & Espeland, 2009).

Drawing on both means-ends decoupling literature and Fairclough's CDA, I argue that leaders' discursive commitment and legitimization of initiatives that offer 'scant evidence' to overall goals is partly explained through the connection between discourse and social practice. An increased focus on regulation, audit, assessment, and testing in HEIs has resulted in a discursive alignment between these and similar testing methods for equality, diversity, and inclusion despite not having clear, succinct, operationalized goals in these areas (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Rowan (2006) refers to these as new 'myths' that celebrate 'testing', even when related assessments have only a weak relationship to learning. Thus, I argue that the focus on women-only development, conferences, and similar initiatives, despite opposition from the literature as well as some leaders, offers an example of this weak relationship between policy (means) and outcome (ends). This then results in institutional resources being directed towards practices that are disconnected from goals; the 'initiative' or conforming with the initiative, has become the 'ends' to and of itself.

While the literature provides several instances where means-ends decoupling may occur that can relate to HEIs, as well as many reasons why it occurs, I am going to further the discussion on the *consequences* of means-ends decoupling in terms of gender equality initiatives and women's underrepresentation. The major consequence of means-ends decoupling that is evidenced in this thesis is that of *diverting resources.* Bromley and Powell (2012) outline this consequence to demonstrate how means-ends decoupling diverts resources from *core organizational activities.* I argue that this consequence of means ends decoupling was constructed and supported by participants in their interpretation of Athena SWAN.

Athena SWAN was constructed as utilising an onerous process and focusing heavily on compliance. The participants also expressed concerns about the *right motive,* indicating that some institutional actors perceive leaders as focusing more on compliance and incentives (means) than they do with the ultimate goals of the policy

(ends). This led to some participants also rationalising why women were found to do a disproportionate amount of work on Athena SWAN, despite guidelines from Advance HE. The focus on achieving the incentive was strengthened as the 'goal,' rather than achieving gender equality.

Means-ends decoupling described by Bromley and Powell (2012) provides a useful tool for examining why participants support 'means' and 'ends' that have little connection. An important element is that this decoupling is likely to occur when 'ends' are ambiguous or poorly designed. I thus argue that by constructing the goal as 'changing culture' leaders are discursively contributing to this ambiguity, helping to further enact this process of means-ends decoupling. Decoupling is often unintentional, however, by situating means-ends decoupling within a critically-oriented approach to discourse analysis, I have provided insight into how discourses that contribute to decoupling may be produced and reproduced within complex organizations.

By utilising means-ends decoupling, where both means and ends are supported despite being part of separate realities (the intervention paradox), I have provided an explanation as to why institutions dedicate time and resources to practices that do not have a strong empirical relationship to their ultimate intended goal; cultural change and an increase of women in leadership. It therefore offers an alternative explanation for why the focus on gender equality has translated into initiatives that focus on fixing women, contributing to existing literature by theoretically identifying the effect of leaders' interpretations of the 'goals' of gender equality initiatives and how they might connect these with broader equality practices.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

I have argued in this thesis that gender is embedded within organizational practices and processes; it is constitutive of and constituted by institutions and their actors (Acker, 1990). Gender inequality is thus managed and practiced within these gendered institutions, produced and reproduced by gendered power dynamics, represented through actors' text and talk (Fairclough, 1992). Leaders and stakeholders, therefore, as decision makers are an important element in managing the breakdown of gendered practices and behaviours, as well in the success of gender equality initiatives.

Although there is a substantial body of literature on women's underrepresentation in leadership roles, this thesis set out to further advance discussion on gender equality initiatives in HEIs by examining how they are discursively constructed. Dominant discourses were identified through a critical linguistic lens, borrowing from Fairclough's (1992) social theory of discourse to understand how they change or maintain existing social practice.

By drawing on discourse as social practice to better theorize the relationship between leaders' text and talk and women's underrepresentation, this thesis contributes new insight into how leaders and stakeholders construct gender equality initiatives, the values of which they are underpinned, and gender equality within HEIs. It also provides a new perspective for examining why efforts to achieve gender equality have often translated to rhetoric and initiatives that support 'fixing women.'

This thesis outlines the discursive practices used to construct gender equality initiatives and the social practices of which they are part. Contradictory and conflicting accounts were highlighted, demonstrating the complex connections embedded within gender (in)equality, discourse, and institutional leadership (Grant et al., 2004). There was not one accepted meaning of gender (in)equality, nor an accepted definition of the values that do (or should) underpin equality initiatives. An intervention paradox was identified and it is argued that this intervention paradox contributes to a form of means-ends decoupling.

Taken together, this responds to the aims and objectives of the thesis by arguing that leaders and stakeholders mobilize their discourse to construct gender equality initiatives in a way that promotes progressive cultural change and adheres to the overall goals of 'gender equality' in institutions, while simultaneously employing discursive strategies that work to maintain and reproduce the existing status quo.

In this final chapter, implications of the research are presented. Recommendations for future research are addressed through a discussion of the limitations of this project and potential future avenues of inquiry. I then make final comments on women's underrepresentation in higher education leadership.

9.1 Implications for research

By identifying a paradox as well as a process of means-ends decoupling, this thesis has begun to demonstrate how leaders in HEIs build constructs that accommodate contradictions. Put simply, the theoretical contributions of this thesis help to explain why institutions "devote extensive resources to enacting and evaluating practices that are only loosely related to their core goals" (Bromley & Powell, 2012, p. 36). This has several implications for research.

First, viewing the connection (or disconnect) between women's representation and gender equality initiatives as a paradox allows for the inclusion of multiple dimensions of (in)equality and organizational goals to exist at once. A paradox is distinguished from a dilemma because a paradox allows for the "simultaneous existence of two inconsistent states" where a choice does not need to be made between the contradictions of which it is composed (Eisenhardt, 2000 cited in van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014, p.165). Thus, rather than framing leaders as *resistant* to equality initiatives or to change, it allows for the recognition of competing tensions that exist at once (Lewis, 2000).

A paradox, therefore, allows for inequality scholars as well as policy makers and practitioners to move beyond a view of resistance to examine more implicit features of equal opportunity and diversity management discourses. Resistance in the diversity management literature has largely been framed as negative, with it considering that those

who "'resist' such initiatives [to be] racist, sexist, or in some other way, 'incorrect'" (Dick, 2004b, p.55). The findings of this thesis thus have implications for research as they support the need for the re-theorizing of resistance to equality initiatives. Rather than focusing on one element of the paradox, the findings invite scholars to recognize that leaders can both hope for gender equality and/or parity while resisting transformative and disruptive change, thus also supporting different interpretations of 'means' and 'ends.' Considering this, we can begin to understand the underlying elements individuals resist, and possibly more importantly, the elements they support.

As an implication for research, I argue that the identification of a paradox allows for the breakdown of existing views, which may help to further understanding of how best to move forward in research with the intention of changing existing male-dominated cultures. While feminist scholars have worked tirelessly to produce positive changes to the gendered institution (Acker, 1990; Connell, 2003), I posit that in modern HEIs, the use of a paradox perspective as an instrument to de-construct opposition to initiatives, rather than resistance, provides potential. This may include an explicit questioning, for example, of the identity of the 'invisible audience' seen in discussions of quotas. Rather than accepting this resistance as 'simply as things are,' this has the implication of allowing researchers to instead question; why is this opposing audience being constructed, and who does the opposing audience consist of? The existence of means-ends decoupling as well as existing tensions or disconnects that produce these effects also offers implications, providing guidance to respond to questions of "what tensions exist, why they may fuel reinforcing cycles, and how actors may manage paradoxes to foster change and understanding" (Lewis, 2000, p.774).

A final implication for research addressed here comes from the identification of a form of knowledge transfer, or an increased awareness of academic leaders and stakeholders. In 2015, van den Brink argued, "little is known about how feminist knowledge *an sich* is received within the academic community" (p. 485; emphasis in original). The findings of this thesis demonstrate that leaders in HEIs have an awareness of certain equality related debates and practices. I specifically argue that, although a paradox was identified, participants demonstrated interest and involvement with gender

equality initiatives within their institutions. With the use of the intervention paradox or by further theorizing means-ends decoupling, I argue that researchers and policy makers can begin constructing feminist accounts of research that help to re-couple 'means' and 'ends' or help to better understand the elements underpinning the paradox.

At the foundation of this knowledge transfer is that many institutional actors are motivated to achieve their gender equality related goals, however, are largely unwilling to explicitly challenge the view that universities are meritocratic institutions. This being said, around half the participants held views about EDI literature that are empirically inaccurate while simultaneously recognizing that women do face barriers (regardless of whether their perceived barriers are still supported by equality literature). Female leaders in the study especially criticized others for their misconstrued ideas about why women are underrepresented. I thus argue that the 'awareness' goals that are presented in much of the equality literature are not penetrating the dominant discourses that exist within HEIs. By examining this challenge as a discursive one, we can begin to dismantle dominant repertoires that are inaccurate and not conducive to achieving equality, thus beginning to construct accounts that more accurately display what is happening to women looking to achieve leadership roles.

9.2 Implications for policy and practice

This research has potential implications for policy, practice, and social change. While the initiatives in the corporate sector such as the target set by Lord Davies saw substantial change in the number of women in executive and non-executive positions, there is less measurable progress for women in academic leadership. Still, the number of women in professor roles up through to vice chancellor positions has increased or maintained a similar trajectory in the last decade.

However, the findings of this thesis challenge the position that existing initiatives are successfully aligning with intended change and the change deemed to be needed by institutional actors. Rather, it is argued that pre-existing dominant discourses about meritocratic institutions, women as 'lack,' and culture change as a goal have obscured other less dominant repertoires. This demonstrates how institutional inequality persists

in our everyday text and talk. Considering this, further suggestions for policy and practice are summarised as follows:

- Recognize and confront ambiguities through continued knowledge transfer
- Re-interpret and re-establish explicit goals of equality initiatives in order to 'recouple' decoupled means and ends

Recognizing and confronting ambiguities requires persistent and consistent institutional learning. As evidenced in this thesis, some research on equality is being absorbed and distributed by leaders, and continuing this process of learning-transfer is an important step in confronting and dismantling ambiguities and contradictions about women's underrepresentation. Based on the findings of the study and with support from previous literature, I raise questions about the persistence of dominant repertoires and how these are being maintained and used to counter alternative discourses. This challenges some of the implicit assumptions about the 'success' of gender equality initiatives seen thus far.

The identification of varying constructions of meritocracy also offers a point of departure for policy and practitioners. Although already established as controversial in the literature, discourses of meritocracy have further practical implications based on how it is assessed, measured and evaluated in organizations and by its' leaders (Castilla & Benard, 2010). The different representations of merit shape how individuals perceive and present different practices relating to gender and equality. In order to understand how and why equality schemes are to be successful, we must acknowledge the underlying conflicting meanings that surround them. The goal of this is not to inspire a universal definition of merit, but rather to recognize these contradictions and variations in understandings in order to appropriately refine and promote suitable behaviour and cultural changes that evoke progress towards gender equality.

Recognizing and understanding these contradictions, therefore, not as something to prevent but as instruments for intervention, "allow us to reflect on current practices and to begin the process of questioning certain tacit rules and acting otherwise" (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014, p. 172). Through understanding these contradicting discourses and the discursive strategies of which they are based, the relatively ambiguous patterns

of equality initiative success are discursively situated. Bringing this into policy and practice is by no means a simple task. However, I argue that by recognizing the above paradox, and using this to understand why/how the means (initiatives) become decoupled from the ends (goals), policy makers can adapt their approach to equality initiatives.

The identification of a paradox intertwined with dominant discourses provides an avenue for new discourses to be brought into discussion. Although Advance HE, through programs such as Athena SWAN, provides substantial best practice advice for creating an SAT and performing relevant tasks, the participants in this study construct opposing accounts regarding these teams, where they feel Athena SWAN teams are not living up to the required standards, yet proceed anyway. In identifying these challenges, I argue that policy makers could, in connection with the above, use the conflicting discourses of Athena SWAN and means-ends decoupling to create counter-discourses and confront misconstrued or misapplied aims and objectives.

Finally, the findings of the thesis suggest that establishing outcome measures beyond 'head-counting' may bring about changes if these are explicit goals (ends) that are coupled with means (initiatives). This would involve implicit connections between the initiatives implemented (whether targets, quotas, etc.) and the form of structural inequality they are intended to improve upon. Policy makers and practitioners must thus identify and embrace the different ways leaders construct equality initiatives, and work to align these perceptions with the goals of equality interventions. Outcome measures that provide baselines for gender equality could include re-conceptualisations of merit and other values deemed to underpin equality policies. This, unequivocally, would involve explicit, clear definitions and outcome goals. The ambiguous and sometimes conflicting accounts of quotas and targets identified in this thesis are symbolic of the lack of clear consensus on certain initiatives, and I argue that the next strategic step to be taken by policy makers is to work to better understand these ambiguities and conflictions as constructed by leaders and to respond to them through explicit definitions and strategic goals in HEIs.

9.3 CDA and gender equality scholarship

This study has utilized discourses of the 'institutional elite' to demonstrate how leaders and stakeholders in HEIs combine discursive elements of meritocracy and gender equality into their discussions of inequality and women's underrepresentation. It has also shown how leaders use their positions of power to create discourses that are recognizable and comfortable. Using interpretative repertoires, the findings demonstrate how existing patterns of language use are mobilized by those in positions of authority. Through the use of CDA, the relationship between these identified discursive practices and social reality is theorized.

Considering this, a methodological implication of this study responds to what Zanoni and Janssens (2018, p.186) refer to as "unexplored possibilities for using CDA to advance our understanding of how diversity and power are articulated in contemporary organizations." The study uses CDA to demonstrate that paradoxical accounts of gender inequality in HEIs underpin discussions of gender equality initiatives. It further shows that this paradox is illustrative of the existence of means-ends decoupling, where the collective 'ends' of HEIs are ambiguous and difficult to measure, leading to a disconnect between means and overall goals. I have argued that this decoupling contributes to fewer women in leadership by (1) obfuscating this as an end goal, making alternative 'ends,' such as increasing confidence or flexible work a larger focus and (2) obscuring the lack of connection between existing practices and an increase of women in leadership.

From a methodological perspective, this uses CDA to demonstrate how discourses not only reproduce inequality through language but also how the theorized relationship between discourse and social reality allows for conclusions beyond the discursive. This means that conclusions can be drawn on how discourses influence selection, promotion, equality initiatives, and ultimately women's representation (Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Zanoni, 2011). Although there are limitations to the extent of these conclusions, they do allow for new focuses and new evaluations of current equality literature, discourses, and practices. As the thesis shows, a CDA approach allows for the identification of contradictions and ambiguities, opening space for the introduction of discursive practices that better align with the goals of gender equality initiatives.

9.4 Recommendations for further study

While this thesis makes key contributions to the gender and equality literature through a deeper conceptual and theoretical understanding of gender equality discourses, there are limitations that must be evaluated. The following discusses limitations of the study as well as recommendations to extend the project and further the impact of the research findings.

The conclusions drawn from this thesis were based on interviews done at one point in time with the participant sample. While this captured their discursive constructions while they were already in leadership roles, an extension of this project would be to add a longitudinal element or a comparative one that examines changes in perceptions and attitudes over the life course. Although leaders were the focus of this study, a comparative analysis that looks at changes over an individual's career may give insight into how and why different views towards gender equality initiatives are produced. This could either include different interviews over a longer period, or alternatively involve comparative interviews with members at different levels of the hierarchy. This would give insight into the concept of an intervention paradox introduced in this thesis, recognizing not only how this paradox is constructed, but also why and how it is produced over time. This may help to further explain some of the findings of this thesis, where women in top leadership roles (Vice Chancellor positions) were less resistant to quotas than those lower in the hierarchy. This may also help to contribute to understanding the valuation of merit, utilising and measuring changes in the life course that may influence what an individual deems to be fair and legitimate.

The study and findings also involved participants from a relatively homogenous group. A study of cultural comparisons may bring to light additional perceptions and attitudes towards gender equality initiatives. This would be most applicable in comparing individuals from institutions that have gender quotas and those that employ voluntary practices. This would offer an approach that examines and compares the ideological and social-practice consequences of these perceptions, with the measurable differences in women's representation at various hierarchical levels of institutions. It might also give insight into whether the contradictory narratives found in this thesis exist

or are altered once specific initiatives are in place. A question to be asked of this type of research would be whether discourses continue to be ambiguous and contradictory once regulation-based quotas are implemented.

Significantly, while a key argument of this thesis is that there exists a paradox and process of means-ends decoupling, the study does not provide tangible outcomes of this decoupling. It also did not set out to identify or explore practices of decoupling, meaning that there exists space to further examine the theoretical relevance. Importantly, there is space to add to emergent literature by identifying not only how gender equality initiatives have been misunderstood or understood ambiguously, but also how they have been misapplied. This would also add to emerging theory on means-ends decoupling by identifying the practical outcomes of this decoupling, identifying the ultimate effect it has on women's representation in leadership.

Finally, as this thesis identified several areas of contradiction and contention relating to gender equality initiatives, in depth analysis of these specific contradictions and their effects on outcomes is needed. This would, most promisingly, include a study that explicitly examines contrasting definitions of merit. This could provide practitioners with useful insight into how to manage underlying contradictions, and how they might be leveraged to help improve the perceptions of initiatives rather than undermine them. This would also offer insight into the process of transformative change, helping to understand how the dialectical relationship between discourse and social practice can work to alter organizational culture in a way that positively impacts gender equality initiatives.

9.5 Closing remarks

This doctoral thesis set out to examine the discursive practices of leaders and decision makers in higher education institutions in order to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between leadership roles, the success of gender equality initiatives, and women's underrepresentation in the academic hierarchy.

The project was designed with the assumption that those who hold leadership roles, both men and women, are central in setting the standards of what is acceptable and

legitimate for processes of recruitment, selection, and promotion as well as for what is deemed to be fair, objective, and normative. Seen in this light, leaders and stakeholders also play a role in the success of gender equality initiatives, where they once again represent the norms and standards for excellence that govern how these processes are developed, implemented, and sustained (Nugent et al., 2013; van den Brink, 2015; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004).

The development of gender equality initiatives is complex and there are several constraints to developing programs and schemes to suit the complexities surrounding gender inequality and leadership roles (Acker, 2000). There is variation in how 'successful' equality initiatives are, with the majority of research thus far focusing on the outcome of the initiatives in terms of women's representation, or a 'head-counting' method (Connell, 2006; Vinnicombe et al., 2015). This thesis therefore offers a timely and in-depth view into how leaders' discursive constructions, recognizing these constructions as being part of a wider set of social practices that are reflective of persistent (in)equality.

To conclude, gender parity will not be achieved in leadership positions without clear commitment and collaboration from a range of organizational actors and stakeholders. Despite the scepticism and deep-rooted biases that exist, this thesis has shed light on more optimistic aspects of recent efforts, arguing that viewing gender equality initiatives as a paradox allows for multiple realities to exist, and for the values and elements that underpin these realties to be further broken down, examined, and revaluated. As this thesis has demonstrated, leaders and stakeholders mobilize their discourses in positions of power to construct ambiguous and contradictory accounts of gender equality initiatives. The thesis therefore builds on the research of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles by placing discourses of gender equality initiatives within wider social practice, thus revealing discursive barriers to initiative success.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions skeleton guide

Their Career path

What is your current role?

How does this relate, if it does, to diversity, inclusion, and equality?

Do you think your gender has impacted on your experiences of work? If so, how?

>> What opportunities or challenges has your gender posed?

>> Have you ever thought about it from the point of view as a male/female

>> How has this differed between your institutions or roles?

"Diversity Management" (my term)

Can you describe your view of gender imbalance in top positions in Universities?

Would you consider your institution to have taken steps for diversity management?

What can the institution do to support women's progression?

Why aren't initiatives seeing more success?

Can you describe current programs being used by other institutions to combat the issue of gender imbalance?

Can you describe steps taken by organizations or at industry level?

How often do gender diversity strategies or inequalities get discussed at meetings or events you attend?

Have you seen any recent media covering gender imbalance in organizations or institutions?

Do you think gender diversity is becoming more spoken about?

How much involvement do you have in your institutions Athena SWAN process?

Do you use gender based targets at any levels of recruitment?

What role do you think quotas have in gender equality efforts?

Hiring and Appointment Processes -> this will largely depend on their role

Can you describe issues relating to promotion, recruitment, and attrition that might be impacting the gender balance of leadership positions?

Are institutions doing enough for flexible working?

How might these issues be resolved?

In your view, what makes for a strong board member/governance (based on role)?

In your opinion, is diversity made a priority when looking to appoint for governance/board positions?

You have achieved a great deal in your career. To what do you attribute your success?

What role do you think institutions have in gender and equality efforts?

Has organizational culture towards equality changed over the last few years? How?

Have recent events made progress better or worse (trump, brexit)

When, if ever, will quotas be necessary?

What might be some issues with gender or other quotas?

Appendix B: Request to participate email

Dear INSERT NAME,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Cheryl Hurst. I am a PhD researcher at the University of Leeds.

I am emailing to request your participation in my research based on your current position and the many achievements of your career.

My research explores gender representation and diversity initiatives. I am focusing on how those in leadership positions experience, contextualise, and represent different initiatives and diversity strategies. Interviews will be used to get first-hand accounts of the experiences of those in leadership and stakeholder positions in academia. I am interviewing University leaders across the UK and your perspective would be a valuable addition. I have attached a consent form and information sheet that outlines a bit more about my research focus. Interview questions will be open and broad, asking about your own experiences and reflections. You or your institution will not be directly identified within the research project.

I am hoping to arrange interviews between DATE and DATE however I am flexible on dates and times.
 If you have any availability in your calendar for a one hour interview during those weeks, please get in touch.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions, concerns and/or available dates.

Kindest Regards,
Cheryl Hurst

University of Leeds Business School
Post Graduate Researcher
Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change

Appendix C: Consent to Take Part

The objective of this study is to reinterpret the initiatives, programs, and strategies implemented within higher education institutions (HEIs) intended to increase women's representation in leadership positions, and to examine them through a discursive lens.

Do I have to take part?
Taking part is up to you and completely optional. If you do agree to be interviewed, please sign this consent form. An information sheet will be brought to you at the interview.

What do I have to do?
The in-person interview will be informal and consist of a variety of questions in order to gain insight into your perspective based on your position, experiences, and expertise. The questions are designed to gain insight into your career, previous experiences, and experience with diversity. The location of the interview can be wherever is convenient for you. Interviews are no more than 1 hour, but can be shorter if needed.

Will information be kept confidential?
Yes, all information will be kept confidential and all measures will be taken to prevent identification in reports or publications. The results and discussions are to be used in a final PhD Thesis and possibly other related research or journal articles in the future.

Will I be recorded?
Audio recording will be used to allow the researcher to listen back and have an accurate record of the conversation. The recordings will be transcribed and can be made available to you. No one outside of the project will have access to recordings or transcription. The transcriptions will be used for analysis for this thesis, and in reports, publications, or conference presentations.

What's the goal?
The research is exploratory, and hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how gender diversity strategies function in practice. We can then begin to apply knowledge to bridge the gap between what we know about gender diversity in top positions and the diversity strategies we implement.

Thank you for your participation. Your contribution is valuable to this research.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. By signing below I agree to the above statements and to be interviewed and recorded for the purpose of this research.	
Participants Name	
Sign and Date	
Researchers Name	Cheryl Hurst
Sign and Date	

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Reinterpreting gender diversity in higher education

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project for my PhD thesis. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Contact me through the details provided if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the project?

This research hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how gender diversity strategies function in practice. My research looks specifically at the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Through this type of study, we can begin to apply knowledge and bridge the gap between what we know about gender parity in top positions and the diversity strategies we implement. These interviews are part of a 3 year PhD research project.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to participate based on your position within your institution and experience of the sector and your own and others' progression within it. Other participants are being identified with similar characteristics, based on their senior positions/roles within institutions and organizations across the U.K.

What will participation involve?

For this research you are asked to participate in an interview with the lead researcher. The interview will be informal and consist of a variety of questions in order to gain insight into your perspective based on your position, experiences, and expertise. The questions are designed to gain insight into your sector experience, conceptualisation of various aspects of work, facilitators and challenges to career progression, diversity strategies, and outlook on gender parity. The questions are designed to be open and allow you to go in as much depth as you wish. Interviews will aim to be roughly one hour in length.

Is taking part voluntary?

Taking part is completely voluntary. If you do agree to be interviewed you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You have the right to withdraw at any point before, during, or right after the interview. Should you decide you do not want your contribution to be used you may request all data collected to be destroyed up to 2 weeks after the interview takes place. You do not have to give a reason for choosing to withdraw.

Will I be recorded?

Audio recording will be used to allow the lead researcher to listen back and have an accurate record of the conversation. The recordings will be transcribed and can be made available to you. No one outside of the project will have access to recordings or transcription. The transcriptions will be used for analysis for this thesis, and in reports, publications, or conference presentations thereafter.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

Interview questions are not intended to cause harm, however, they are designed to ask about your career path and experiences, which may cause discomfort for some people. If you feel discomfort during the interview, you are able to pause, stop, or withdraw from the interview. Anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for this study, which may pose a risk for those wishing to remain entirely unidentified. More details regarding anonymity and confidentiality are outlined below.

Will my participation be kept confidential and anonymous?

Any personal information collected, such as your name and institution, will be anonymised prior to being used for any research project purposes. The nature of the study allows for anonymity of information that may directly identify you, however, complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Where applicable, direct quotations may be used as well as details regarding age, role/position, length of time in your field, family composition, etc. The aggregation of such data could lead to personal identification, however, this is neither an intention nor a goal of the research. Your

participation in the study will not be shared with anyone outside the study, unless done so by your personal choice (through a personal assistant/secretary/colleague). If you have any questions or concerns regarding the use of your information do not hesitate to contact me. I am happy to discuss concerns with you and to provide any details regarding university policy or other regulations.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

This research project aims to be completed no later than September 2020. Once completed, a copy of the completed work can be made available to you. Prior to completion of the PhD thesis, information collected through interviews may be used for the purpose of publication in academic journals, conference papers, or other subsequent research. The same level of confidentiality and anonymity will be held throughout any subsequent research or publication.

What's the goal of the research?

This study moves beyond the extensive and significant empirical research on the effects of gender diversity, moving instead towards advancing our understanding of the role of gender diversity discourses in soliciting change within organizations and the social practices of which they are part.

Contact for Further Information

Contact details for the lead researcher are below and may be used at any time for questions, comments, or concerns:

Cheryl Hurst
University of Leeds Business School
bn15c2h@leeds.ac.uk

This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee on *February 13th, 2018.*

Thank you for taking the time to read through this information sheet and related consent forms. Copies can be made available to you.

Appendix E: Linguistic Analysis Rubric

Linguistic Feature	Explanation	Notes
Lexicalisation Overlexicalisation Relexicalisation Lexical cohesion Metaphor Euphemism	The selection/choice of wordings. Different words construct the same idea differently. Many words for the same phenomenon. Renaming Created by synonymy, antonymy, repetition, collocation. Used for yoking ideas together and for the discursive construction of new ideas. Hides negative actions or implications.	
Transivity	Processes in verbs: are they verbs of: • *doing*: material process • *being or having*: relational processes • *thinking/feeling/perceiving*: mental • *saying*: verbal processes • *physiological*: behavioural processes • *existential*	
Voice	Active and passive voice constructs participants as *doers* or as *done-to's*. Passive voice allows for the deletion of the agent.	
Nominalisation	A process is turned into a thing or an event without participants or tense or modality. Central mechanism for reification.	
Quoted speech Direct speech (DS) Indirect speech (IS) Free indirect speech (FIS). This is a mixture of direct and indirect speech features. Scare quotes or "so-called"	• Who is quoted in DS/IS/FIS? • Who is quoted first/last/most? • Who is not quoted? •Has someone been misquoted or quoted out of context? • What reporting verb was chosen? • What is the effect of scare quotes?	
Turn-taking	• Who gets the floor? How many turns do different participants get? • Who is silent/ silenced? • Who interrupts?	

• Who gets heard? Whose points are followed through?
• Whose rules for turn taking are being used given that they are different in different cultures?
• Who controls the topic?

Mood	Is the clause a statement, question, offer or command?
Polarity and Tense	Positive polarity (definitely yes) Negative polarity (definitely no) Polarity is tied to the use of tense. Tense sets up the definiteness of events occurring in time. The present tense is used for timeless truths and absolute certainty.
Modality Degrees of uncertainty	Logical possibility/probability Social authority Modality created by modals (may, might, could will), adverbs (possibly, certainly, hopefully) intonation, tag questions.
Pronouns	Inclusive we/exclusive we/you Us and them: othering pronouns Sexist/non sexist pronouns: generic "he" The choice of first/ second/ third person.
Define article ('the') Indefinite article ('a')	*The* is used for shared information – to refer to something mentioned before or that the addressee can be assumed to know about. Reveals textual presuppositions.
Thematisation – syntax; the first bit of the clause is called the theme	The theme is the launch pad for the clause. Look for patterns of what is foregrounded in the clause by being in theme position.
Rheme – syntax; the last bit of the clause is called the rheme	In written English the new information is usually at the end of the clause. In spoken English it is indicated by tone.
Sequencing of information	Sequence sets up cause and effect.
Logical connectors – conjunctions set up the logic of the argument	Conjunctions are: • *Additive*: and, in addition • *Causal*: because, so, therefore • *Adversative*: although, yet • *Temporal*: when, while, after, before