

## *Women in Top Managerial Positions*

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this project, the author attempts to answer the question of how the perception of leaders change depending on the gender of the leader and how this perception influences the employability of women in higher positions. An experiment was conducted to find out whether there are differences in recruitment and gender-based biases. This study based the experiment on the random distribution of the curriculum vitae (CV) of a male and a female. All gender identifiers were removed from the CVs. The CVs were presented to MBA students who are managers that specialize in recruitment. The results showed that the female CV was received differently compared to that of the male CV. Among the barriers a female face within organizations, the experiment revealed that gender inequality appears at the phase of recruitment for higher positions.

That obstacle contributes to the underrepresentation of women in the ranks of the corporate elite all over the world. Additionally, they earn (in Europe), on average 20% less in than men in the same position. Despite claims that the glass ceiling has been broken, women still face a labyrinth of barriers that prevent them from reaching higher positions, higher incomes, and more prestigious jobs.

Gender inequalities are visible throughout the different spheres of life, from social roles, norms, to the labor market, including wage gaps, promotion time and representation in given positions.

A range of studies stressed that stereotypes and traditions which influence our perception of the role of women in society are so deeply culturally embedded that we perceive it as something normal and natural. The 'Lack of Fit' theory states that women who are stereotypically seen as communal, when put in the leadership position, represent behaviors that are typically ascribed to men. That, in turn, results in a non-coherent picture of them and they are as a consequence seen less favorably. Thus, women leaders are faced with a different perception than men. Therefore, women may have different opportunities in reaching more powerful and prestigious jobs.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, management has always been dominated by men. The idea of a good manager has been associated with masculine traits and influenced by the stereotypes, traditions, norms and prejudices about gender (A. Eagly, 2002). In, *Through the Labyrinth*, Eagly states, "The best leadership is found by choosing leaders from the largest pool of talent, and that includes women." Thus it is crucial to understand why women are underrepresented in the leadership positions in order to allocate human resources in an optimal way.

The stereotypical explanation for why there so few women in the top management say that women take themselves out of the market to focus on family life, taking care of the

household and childrearing (A. Eagly, 2001).

Additionally, society believes that women are inferior leaders compared to men and people, therefore, got used to the masculine management and see it as a norm. Despite several studies proving that women are by no means worse leaders, the 'think leader, think male' bias still exists (see A. Eagly, L. Carli, G.N Powell, D.A. Butterfield).

The gender stereotype, the social role of women and deeply embedded norms towards gender have an effect on the perception of female managers, which corresponds to their self-efficacy and directly correlates to the situation on the labor market (A. Mazurkiewicz-Zachorowska, 2006).

Research proves that underrepresentation in the top managerial positions is not caused by the fact that women themselves do not want to work in senior leadership positions (G. N. Powell, D. A. Butterfield, 2013). Various factors influence women themselves, decision makers and society, which leads to this unfortunate situation. Among those factors are self-efficacy, stereotypes, history, and a division of the traditional role of men and women in society.

Gender inequalities are visible throughout different spheres of life, from the social role, norms, to labor market, including wage gap, promoting time, etc.

The stereotypes and traditions which influence our perception of the role of women in society are so deeply embedded that we perceive it as something normal and natural. People may not even be fully aware of how gender affects their perception and requirements of a person. This situation is typically visible in the labor market, where employers have a different perception of the working women, starting from the recruitment process, income, possibility of promotion, up to the perception of women's abilities, all influenced by views on gender.

Despite the fact that in Europe, women have equal rights and equal availability to education, norms and roles regarding women are still different from that of men, which influences the perception of women (A. Mazurkiewicz- Zachorowska). Society may also be a factor that prevents women from reaching higher positions, by putting her in the role of a person who is ready for sacrifices for a husband, children, household. A woman may, as a result, put herself, her career in the second, third, or even fourth place. It is the society that puts pressure on women to start a family, to take good care of the household, while this kind of pressure is not visible in the case of men. Additionally, society believes that a woman is a

better mother, implicitly putting her in the position where she should sacrifice her career for good care of the children.

Gender stereotypes significantly affect society; even those who claim they are free of stereotypes are, on some level, influenced by their perception of what a woman should or should not do, the role she should have in society and norms she should follow.

The wage gap, fewer women in the labor market, and a small percentage of women in top management positions or boards of directors, is the result. The question is whether men and women have the same opportunities regarding access to better-paid jobs and promotions based on how they are perceived. Thus, this paper will focus not only on the results, but most importantly, it will research whether women have the same possibilities in getting a job and earning the same amount as men do when having the same skills, education, and background. The author addressed these issues by conducting an experiment to investigate how the perception changes for men and women when being put in the role of the candidate in the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) position.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Historical Situation of Women in the World***

The division between the genders has been present since the beginning of the early civilizations, although in primitive tribes, those differences were not as significant (A. Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2006). Discrepancies between gender had increased when the physical and psychological characteristics started to arise, ascribing a social role to gender, which was mainly connected with the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, where stronger men hunted and provided food for the tribe. Men were associated with power, aggression, violence, and bravery. Therefore the socio-economic role of a male was to kill, destroy competitors and enslave all dangerous, foreign tribes (T. Veblen, 1998). In a slavery system, conquered tribes were becoming slaves of the winner, along with the wives of the conquerors, women were treated as objects and depending on the standards of the given society, they were perceived as a more valuable slave (A. Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2006).

For centuries, seen as a precious good, women were idealized in literature, while in reality, she was isolated from the outside world; from politics, social processes and access to education. This was the general profile of women in ancient Greece, Rome and the south of the United States before the civil war (H.J. Sherman, 1996). In the early period of the development of the production, the utility of services provided by slaves was the primary

goal in possessing goods. Both women and slaves were seen as evidence of wealth (T. Veblen, 1998).

The majority of philosophers from ancient Greece up until the Age of Enlightenment believed that the capacity of women to give birth gave them adaptability better suited to take care of children, family, and home. However, it also deprived them of the ability to work outside the house. Additionally, reproductive work of women was considered less valuable than the productive work of men, ascribing males a higher status. Moreover, unlike the stereotypical emotional and irrational women, men were seen as more suited for jobs with high prestige in trade and politics. Thus, Western civilizations divided society into female and male spheres, putting women in the lower position and underestimated her work (V.S. Peterson, A.S. Runyan, 1993). The central status of male domination over females in the patriarchal family, where values, beliefs, and norms, put men as the head of the family translated into social life. The role of women as mother and wife, dependent on her husband, gave women the role of an inferior employee, therefore forcing her to accept lower remuneration and less prestigious jobs.

Discrimination of women in the labor market assumed various forms:

- a) women earn less in the same positions
- b) have fewer promotion possibilities
- c) have a higher unemployment rate
- d) face with longer time for advancement in the same position
- e) have a longer time between the rotation of jobs (A. Zachorowska- Mazurkiewicz).

The situation of women changed drastically in the 20th century, through the entrance of women in the labor market. This placed women as a competitor and decreased males' position as the only financial supporter of the family. However, multi-employment (taking care of the house, role of a mother, wife, and an employee) put an even greater responsibility on women. Education also started to play a larger role in the labor market, while women were still not as well educated as men. Moreover, in the case where women were better-educated, it did not assure better incomes or positions for women. Higher education of women exposed even higher discrepancies between wages and employment (M. Castellás, 1997).

Currently, the situation has changed for women who have an equally good education as men and who are as ambitious, but still, women are facing the same barriers as before; wage gaps, longer promotion time, and underrepresentation in prestigious positions. An understanding of leadership and management clarifies the reasons there are fewer women

managers in higher positions.

## **DEFINING LEADERSHIP**

Leadership means being in charge of other people in various ways, including motivation, organization, and inspiration of followers. The manager has a formal power over subordinates, while leader not necessarily (A. Eagly, L. Carli, 2003). Scholars distinguish between leadership and management by describing managers as organizing and controlling work in an organization, while leaders set new directions, inspire people and adapt to changes.

For this study, the terms, leader, and manager are used interchangeably in discussing the organizational leadership, as both of those activities are entangled in organizations (A. Eagly, L. Carli, 2003). There are various approaches to what creates a good leader, as well as theories about whether a leader is 'born' or 'made.' The trait approach to leadership is necessary when evaluating the differences among male and female leaders, as it assumes that there are some common traits for leaders, suggesting there are also different traits, common for male and female leaders. Besides the 'trait approach,' other leadership theories were developed in the 20th century, namely the behavioral, situational, relational and 'new leadership' approaches.

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LEADERSHIP**

Gender affects leadership in many ways and whether men and women lead in a differently is still a highly debated issue, but one clear issue regarding gender and leadership is that women are perceived differently as leaders. Also, women are presumed to be less competent and less worthy to hold leadership positions (A. Eagly, 2001).

Leadership style depends on various factors, including education, experience, culture, work experience and personality, but it is not yet clear to what extent gender influences the way of leading. Additionally, leaders adapt to the expectation based on people's categorization of them as male and female (A. Eagly, M.C Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Those expectancies derived from the traditional gender roles as a position in the society, in the family and paid employment (E. Eagly et al., 2000). By organizational behavior theories, men and women who occupy the same leadership role should behave similarly (R.M. Katner, 1977) when gender roles actually influence the behavior causing differences in the behavior of the female leader and male leader (A. Eagly, M.C Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Accordingly, Gutek and Morasch (1982) maintained that gender role affects the organizations

and create a 'background' identity in the workplace (C.L. Ridgeway, 1997). Research by Alice Eagly (2000) suggests that even though some gender-stereotypic differences diminish under the influence of the organizational role, others do not and remain strong.

On the other hand, some research minimizes the importance of those differences and claims that gender does not indicate any (G.N. Powell, 1990). Andersen and Hansson's research from 2011, stated that the only difference between gender in leadership lies in the decision-making process. In other aspects, such as task vs. relationship orientation, motivation, and leadership style, there were no significant discrepancies between males and females (J.A. Andersen, P.H. Hansson, 2001). Similarly, Kent and Schuele's research showed no distinction between gender in the transformational and transactional leadership (T.W. Kent, U. Schuele, 2010). It is hard to state to which extent gender affects how people lead, but the fact that men and women are different in perception, communication, self-efficacy, attitude towards success, relationships, and morale is unquestionable (see, e.g. Carol Gilligan, Alice Eagly, Linda Carli, Anna Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz). This directly influences how people relate to each other and how they manage relationships in the work environment.

Sex differences and similarities may vary with social context, but generally, women are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative and more oriented towards relationships (A. Eagly, 2004). Accordingly, there are also differences in the type of leadership style, where women tend to be more relationship-oriented, while men focus on completion of the goal (A. Eagly et al., 2000). Women intuitively notice which employees need extra support, and they show more understanding than men do.

Similar differences occur in the autocratic vs. democratic leadership (or directive vs. participative), which relates to gender role, as men are relatively more dominant and controlling (autocratic) than women (A. Eagly, M.C. Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Additionally, women show more trust towards their employees, giving them the ability to develop.

Parallel discrepancies were visible in the transactional and transformational leadership style, where experts agree that the second is more optimal in contemporary management (A. Eagly, 2001). Transformational leaders set high standards for behavior and act as role models for subordinates, through gaining trust and confidence from their followers; such leadership elicits full potential from the employees. In contrast, transactional leaders establish an exchange relationship with the subordinates; they manage by setting clear duties, monitoring,

punishments, and rewards.

According to Eagly (et al., 2001), women act more as transformational leaders, while men act as transactional leaders. Additionally, her research suggested that males were dominant in passive management and laissez-faire style. The results indicated women scored significantly higher on the scale of perceived effectiveness. The results may be interpreted as women have to meet higher standards than men to attain leadership roles. Therefore they have to maintain better performance to retain the position (A. Eagly, M.C Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Women and men also differ in the motivation of their subordinates, where women use punishments and rewards more often as a motivator in comparison to men (A. Eagly 2004). Also, they are more likely to use rewards, while men prefer punishment (A. Eagly, 2004).

It is not possible to state whether men or women are better managers, but research shows that women's skills in management are far more optimal and efficient in contemporary management than those of men. Thus stating that women are worse leaders than men has no empirical justification and is a result of the stereotype of 'think leader- think men. Most importantly, women look at the company from a wider perspective, in the social context and long-term achievement.

In the context of the aforementioned research, this tends to be true "after years of analyzing what makes leaders most effective and figuring out who's got the 'Right Stuff,' management gurus now know how to boost the odds of getting a great executive: Hire a female" - Sharpe, Business Week, 2000.

## **STAGES OF WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP**

Women's access to leadership is relatively new in Western culture. Women had restricted access to managerial positions for decades. They still face difficulties in their career path that men do not.

Three types of barriers describe women's limited access to leadership positions throughout the years.

### ***The Concrete Wall***

For most of human history, women's paths towards leadership have been blocked with absolute barriers with explicit rules and norms. As late as the 20th century, women were confronted with a lack of legal and political equality, not having the right to vote, and thus they did not even dream of becoming leaders.

Even after women gained the right to vote, there were still absolute limitations for women, such as access to higher education and, thus better job positions. In the United States, until the 1960s, women were denied access to many universities. The restriction of women to higher positions was official and considered the norm. Even President Nixon shared the belief that women should not hold a prestigious position "I do not think women should be in any government job whatsoever (...) because they are erratic and emotional" (A. Clymer, 2001). Similar opinions were shared in society, keeping women from a successful professional career. Even in the 1970s, women were excluded from being interviewed for managerial positions (A. Eagly, L. Carli, 2003).

The concrete wall is based on a division: men should be breadwinners and women should be homemakers. As a result, women were denied entry to successful career paths as they were assumed to take care of the household (A. Eagly, L. Carli, 2003).

Until the 1970s, the concrete wall was still standing, but with time total exclusion of females from higher level positions has been eroding.

### ***The Glass Ceiling***

The glass ceiling metaphor was first used in 1986 in *The Wall Street Journal*, leaving the concrete wall behind as a history (C. Hymowitz, T. Schellhardt, 1986). The article noted that women who had reached a certain level on the career ladder crashed into an invisible barrier, no matter how skillful and educated they were. Their male colleagues were the ones who continued to be promoted (C. Hymowitz, T. Schellhardt, 1986).

The glass ceiling was a less obvious obstacle keeping women from the managerial positions, but still, it suggested that the barrier is absolute, without the possibility to conquer it. In 1996, United States Congress reported that discrimination against women arises from the beliefs and stereotypes of women's role in society, with emphasis on their family lives (A. Eagly, L. Carli, 2003).

Although women were increasingly attaining lower-level positions, they were practically excluded from the majority of higher level positions, and the most popular justification was that women might leave the company for maternity leave.

But, in 2004, the same authors who first used the glass ceiling metaphor claimed that the glass ceiling has shattered, giving as an example, 50 successful and powerful females as CEOs of big companies. Despite the increase of women in higher level positions, it does not mean that women now have the same opportunities and access to top managerial positions as



men. Even though the glass ceiling was broken, women were still facing obstacles within organizations in reaching top level positions. Those barriers became subtle and difficult to identify, and the new metaphor used to describe it is 'labyrinth.'

### *The Labyrinth*

"The labyrinth contains numerous barriers, some subtle and others quite obvious, such as the expectation that mothers will provide the lion's share of childcare (A. Eagly, *Through the Labyrinth*). It is the most simple yet adequate explanation of what ambitious women are facing nowadays. There is not one absolute barrier that prevents women from reaching leadership positions anymore. Instead, there are multiple and complex obstacles, which are subtle and difficult to detect, for example, the perception of a female leader, the bias that males are natural leaders as well as the stereotypical perception regarding the division of roles between genders. Furthermore, what limits women's equal access to leadership positions is that women are presumed to be less competent and less worthy to hold these posts (A. Eagly, 2001).

### **PERCEPTION OF WOMEN MANAGERS**

"Probably the single most important hurdle for women in management in all industrialized countries is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male" (Berthoin Antal and Izraeli, 1993).

Women's discrimination in managerial positions goes beyond barriers to entering higher positions. Women are perceived as worse leaders due to the long-standing domination of this post by men, which have defined the style to which people have been used to. Therefore traits that are associated with the right leader are typically masculine (A. Eagly, M. Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). This belief fosters the situation in which men exercise more leadership (A. Eagly, L. Carli, 2001), as being a leader by default. 'Think manager- think male' is still an existing belief and may foster "bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion and training decisions" (V.E. Schein, 2007)

Additionally, what creates an even more negative perception of the female leader is the Lack of Fit theory, according to which: "People have similar beliefs about leaders and men, but dissimilar beliefs about leaders and women" (A. Eagly, 2001). The theory states that stereotypically women are seen as communal (warm, helpful, collaborative), while men as agentic (direct, assertive and competent). Leaders are similarly perceived leaders- in an agentic way.

Women are traditionally seen as caring, people oriented, warm and nice, while leaders have to be assertive, tough, result oriented, and confident. This creates a situation where those two characteristics combined create a mismatch. The typical leader should impose masculine traits, while women are feminine, and this creates an incoherent picture of the person.

Thus, when communal women, are put in an agentic position; as a result, there is a lack of fit where women are less favorably evaluated, and her leadership resisted (A. Eagly, 2001).

Additionally, the negative performance expectation is created, which leads to a biased evaluation of the performance and the negative attitude towards a person (A. Eagly, 2008).

Moreover, there are double standards for female and male leadership, which are visible through prejudices, assumptions, and evaluations. The consequence of the biases is people diminish the work of women managers (M. E. Heilman, 2007). Moreover, in situations where it is not possible to deny the value of the work, people attribute success to external factors rather than women's abilities. When that is not an option, the female manager is disliked, rejected and seen as negative (M.E. Heilman, 2007).

The acceptance of the behavior is also different for female and male managers; the assertiveness dilemma is an example of such a situation. If a female leader acts in a 'too assertive way,' it is seen negatively and associated with aggression. On the other hand, if women are 'too collaborative,' it is viewed as inadequate for the leadership position and not being 'tough enough.' Again this situation creates an incoherent image of women managers. When they are acting consistently with the gender stereotype they are viewed as not competent enough- too soft, while when women act inconsistent with the stereotype, they are perceived as unfeminine- too tough (B. Kellerman, D. Rhode, 2009).

There is also an apparent dichotomy in the attitude towards the authoritarian female manager and authoritarian male manager, as there is more acceptance for men to be authoritarian than for women (A. Eagly, 2004).

An experiment at Harvard Business School by Cameron Anderson and Frank Flynn showed how gender might encourage different attitudes towards successful individuals. Students were given the case study with the history of the successful female entrepreneur Heidi Rozen. Half of the respondents got the case with a real name, while the other half were given cases with a fake male name, Howard. Even though the evaluation of the competencies did not change concerning the gender of the entrepreneur, the attitude changed significantly.

Respondents considered Howard to be more likable and an appealing colleague. At the same time, Heidi was seen as selfish and "not a type of person you would want to hire or work for" (F. Flynn, C. Anderson, 2003). This experiment proves women are either successful and competent or likable, but rarely both (S. Sandberg, 2013). Sheryl Sandberg's quote seems to be highly adequate for this situation: "Success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women" (S. Sandberg, 2013).

Stereotypes greatly influence the perception of the employees and society about female managers. This difference in perception affects attitude, evaluation, promotion and job attainment. Additionally, prejudice against female leaders is especially visible in male-dominated roles, which are traditionally top management positions. (A. Eagly, S. Karau, 1999).

Persistence of gender stereotypes led organizations to allocate women within management to a function that is strongly linked to female stereotypes. In this respect, assigning women to Human Resource Management (HRM) offered a solution for organizations to deal with growing demands for enhancing diversity within management without giving up the traditional classification of female and male work (A. Reichel, J. Brandl, W. Mayrhofer, 2005). Therefore women managers are dominating HRM departments, while there are still more male managers as CEOs.

From the following information, it can be stated that the unequal position of the women in the labor market is not an effect of the characteristics concerned with the productivity, education, or qualifications, but the indicator of the woman's position on the market is gender. Moreover, gender, apart from the wage gap and possibilities of promotion, influences the level of employment and the duration of unemployment too. From the theoretical review, it can be stated that women and men do not vary significantly in the leadership style or management (if differences exist, they are in favor of women), but still, there is a negative attitude and perception of the female manager. To find out the extent to which society discriminated against women leaders based on gender only, an analysis of the attitude and perception was conducted.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present study sought to test for differences in perception and treatment of equally qualified men and women, which are candidates for top managerial positions within the company. Two versions of the CV and background was prepared. One of a male and one of a

female, apart from the gender difference, the CVs and backgrounds were identical.

The experiment consisted of 3 parts;

- (a) a fictional history of a company, including CEO job description, current duties of a male or female applicant and opinion of the applicant from the colleagues
- (b) male or female CV
- (c) questionnaire.

The experiment was conducted in the native language of the participants to minimize errors in the answers and not influence the results. The questionnaire was divided into four parts;

- a) hireability,
- b) offered income
- c) likeability
- d) comments.

The participants in this experiment were 52 MBA students from Koźmiński University in Warsaw. Among the respondents, there were 42 males and ten females.

All of the participants have managerial experience. Thus they were familiar with the recruitment process in the companies. The CV of either male or female candidate was distributed randomly among MBA students.

During the analysis of the questionnaires, two of them were not valid, as the questionnaire was not filled in full. Therefore, the final participant's pool consisted of 40 males and ten females, with 25 male CVs and 25 female version of CV distributed. To avoid gender-conscious response, the question regarding the gender of the participant was asked as the last question; after all the data were applied to the survey.

Both survey and CV was compiled after consultation with the faculty doctor in Psychology to limit the possibility of bias and to ensure that the presented scenario and CV were realistic.

## **RESULTS**

A sample of 52 respondents evaluated the application materials of a candidate for a CEO position. All participants received the same materials, which were randomly assigned either with a male (n=26) or female (n=26) candidate. The gender of the candidate was the only variable that differed between the conditions. Nineteen questions regarding the gender of the candidate for the CEO position were analyzed. Out of all the questions, 8 had statistically significant differences ( $p < 0,05$ ). To establish whether results between a male and female

candidate for the CEO positions are significant, a student t-test was conducted.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts for the simplification of the analysis.

## ***Part 1:***

In part 1 participants rated a candidate's employability, adequacy for the position, ability to cope with the position, a chance for success and recommendation of the candidate to the company owner, on the scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 stated for NO and 5 for YES). Out of six questions, one was statistically significant ( $p < 0,05$ ), regarding becoming friends with the candidate.

On average, the male candidate was rated on this question 17% more favorably in comparison to women ( $p < 0,05$ ). Additionally, the number of respondents that have rated a candidate above 3 (rather yes and yes) was two times higher for a male candidate in comparison to a female candidate. The least likely chosen response in the case of a male candidate was 1(no), while in the case of a female candidate least chosen was 5 (yes).

Moreover, the results indicated a strong negative correlation between the gender of the candidate and making friends with the candidate ( $\text{corr.} = -0.23$ ), which points out that desire to make friends is positively correlated for men and negatively for women. Thus male is seen as a better friend material, while at the same time, the female rating was decreasing.

## ***Part 2:***

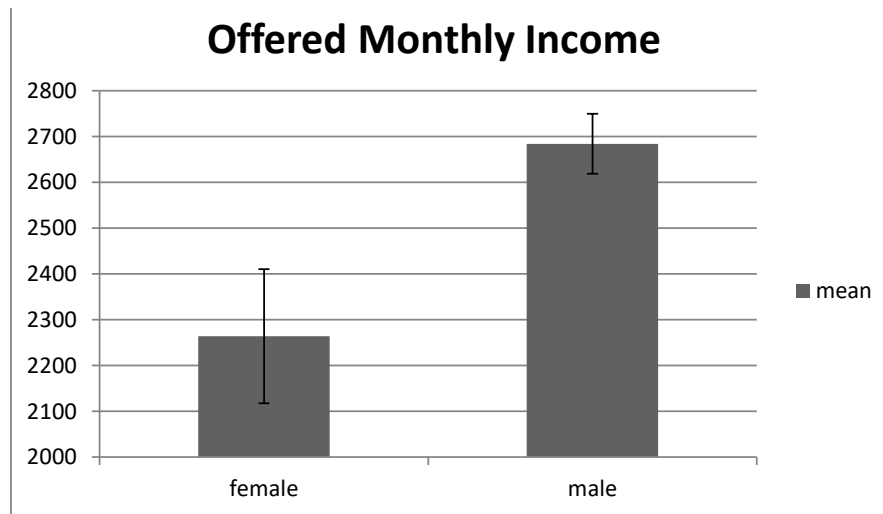
The second part of the questionnaire asks respondents about the amount of money that they would offer a male or a female candidate for the CEO position. To minimize personal bias and attitudes, the fictional currency X was used in the description.

To standardize data and give participants a reference point, they were provided with additional information. Respondents knew that his and her current position the male or female candidate earns 1500 x monthly, while the owner of the company is considering an offer between 2500 x and 3500 x monthly, depending on the candidate's qualifications, skills, and experience.

The following part of the questionnaire has indicated statistically significant results ( $p < 0.05$ ) about the gender of the candidate. The gender of the respondents and their age did not have any significant effect on the results ( $p > 0.05$ ).

The graph below presents the results of the following part (Graph1):

Graph 1: Average offered income for a candidate, with regard to the gender of the candidate. Candidates' gender differences are significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). The scale ranges from 0 x to 3500 x. Error bars represent SEs.  $n_{male\ candidate\ condition} = 25$   $n_{female\ candidate\ condition} = 25$



The gender of the candidate significantly influenced the CEO candidate's compensation offer in favor of the male candidate. On average female candidate was offered 2264 x, while male candidate 2684 x ( $p < 0.05$ ), which is on average a 16% difference. Additionally, on average female candidate was offered less income than minimum predicted income stated in the story, while male candidate more than a minimum predicted income. Overall, the difference in monthly income for a female candidate was 420 x lower than for a male candidate.

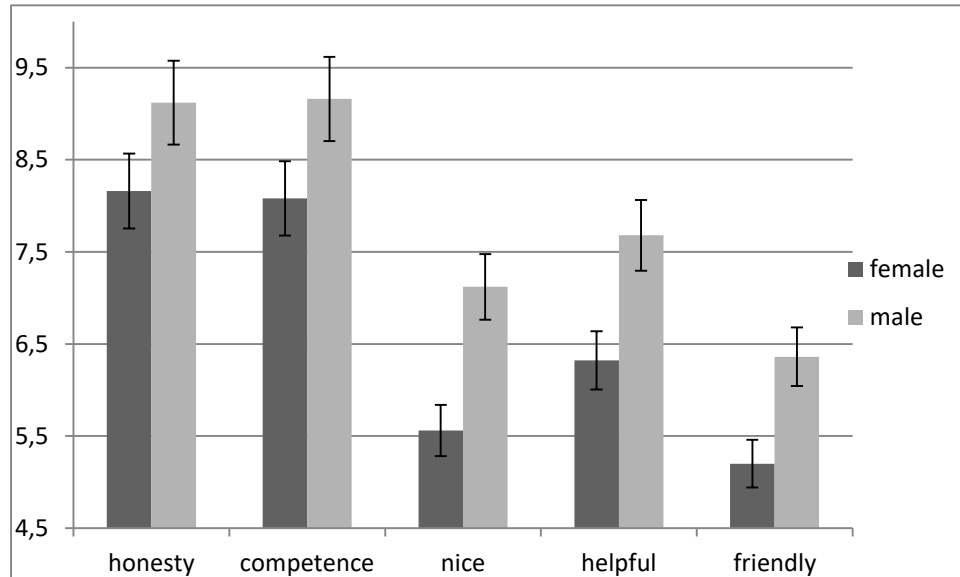
### **Part 3:**

In the third part, respondents were asked to choose the blank scale amount to which they rate the candidate as likable. Questions in this section were constructed with positive and negative adjectives on the opposite sides of the scale attitude. The middle value on the scale was 6. Thus results below 6 indicate a negative attitude, while above 6 showed positive attitudes towards a candidate. In the following part, there were 11 questions, out of which on 5, the gender of the candidate had a statistically significant effect ( $p < 0,05$ ).

In the following part, the candidate's gender had a significant effect on being viewed as nice, competent, friendly, honest and helpful (all  $p < 0,05$ ). However, the candidate's gender had no impact on being perceived as interesting, intelligent, moral. Neither did it have a bearing on the candidate's, conflicting nature, career orientation and support (all  $p > 0,05$ ). The gender and age of the respondents do not have any significant effect on the results.

Graph 2, below, presents a summary of the part 3 differences in average concerning gender of the candidate.

Graph 2: Average rating of a candidate of his/her perceived honesty, competence, niceness, helpfulness and friendliness with regard to the gender of the candidate. Candidates' gender differences are significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). Scale range from 1 to 10, with 6 as middle value. Higher value reflects greater perceived honesty, competence, helpfulness and friendliness of the candidate. Error bars represent SEs.  $n_{\text{male candidate condition}} = 25$   $n_{\text{female candidate condition}} = 25$



All of the statistically significant differences between perceived 'likeability' of the candidate about candidates' gender were in favor of males.

The highest discrepancy and significance was observed in the perception on the niceness of candidates, where women were evaluated as not nice (average 5,56) in comparison to male assessed as nice (average 7,12) ( $p < 0.0001$ ). Additionally, no respondent evaluated the female candidate above 8, while the male candidate got 16% of all responses above 8. Ninety-two percent of all negative responses (below 6) regarding perceived niceness was ascribed to the female candidate, which was in the majority (52%) assessed as not nice (below 6), In comparison, the male candidate got only one negative niceness evaluation. On average, the female candidate was perceived 1,56 points less nice on a 10 point scale.

In the case of perceived competence, the male candidate did not receive any negative responses, in comparison to 8% of negative respondents on female's candidacy. Moreover, 56% of respondents rated the male candidate with the highest mark (10), while the female's CV was allocated only 16% of the highest mark. That us a is a 40 percentage point difference in favor of the male candidate.

In the honesty evaluation, the male candidate did not arouse any negative attitudes, in comparison to 12% of respondents who analyzed female CV. Reversely, the situation of allocation of points was in the highest mark distribution, where 48% of participants graded a

male candidate on the level of 10 in perceived honesty, while female CV received only 24% of the highest evaluation. The female candidate was also evaluated less favorably in helpfulness perception when compared to the male candidate. Even though, on average, still male and female candidate's helpfulness was perceived in a positive way (average above 6), female CV indicated 44% of negative responses, while in the male CV, 12% of replies were below 6.

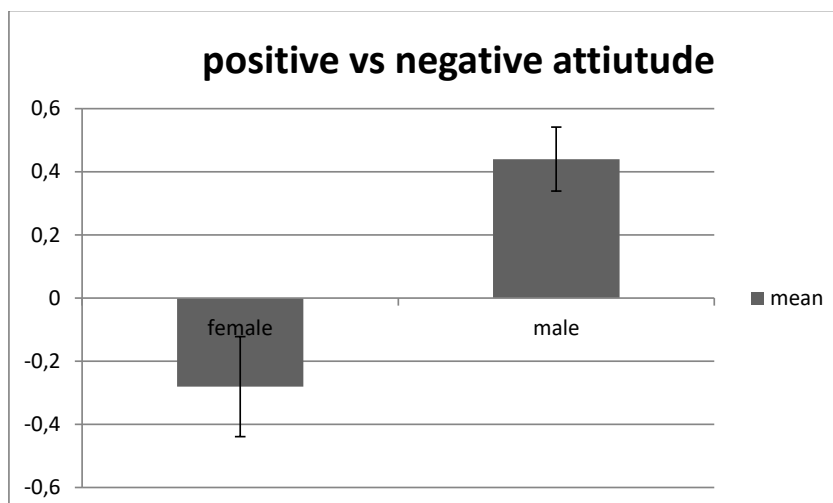
In all, statistically significant differences reported by the gender of the candidate (honesty, competence, niceness, helpfulness, and friendliness) female were perceived as less favorably.

#### **Part 4:**

The last part of the questionnaire gave the possibility for respondents to verbalize their attitude and opinion towards an evaluated candidate. Each opinion was analyzed and assessed as positive (1), negative (-1), or neutral (0).

Results indicated a high significance value ( $p < 0.001$ ), which means that the gender of a candidate had a significant effect on the negative or positive attitude towards a candidate. The graph below presents the average results in the bias towards either male or female candidates (graph 3).

Graph 3: Average attitude towards a candidate concerning the gender of the candidate. Candidates' gender differences are significant ( $P < 0.001$ ). The scale ranges from -1 to 1. Error bars represent SEs.  $n_{\text{male candidate condition}} = 25$   $n_{\text{female candidate condition}} = 25$



Results from the analyzed comments of the participants indicated significant differences towards candidates concerning the candidate's gender. A female candidate ( $n=25$ ) has elicited a negative attitude, while a male was positive. On average, the male candidate



had a more positive attitude from the participants by 36%. Moreover, the female candidate was evaluated in a negative way in 48% of the cases; in comparison, the male had a non-negative comment. Similarly, 44% of observations towards males were positive, while for females only 20%. The majority of evaluations in the case of the male candidate were neutral, while in the case of the female candidate- negative.

When looking at comments which were given to the male and the female candidate, it was clear that the female candidacy for the CEO position has aroused more emotional responses than the male's candidacy.

When it comes to the description of each candidate, males and females were evaluated from different perspectives. Therefore, when the female candidate was positively evaluated, she was described as *loyal, hardworking and experienced*, while when the male candidate received positive responses, he was described as *intelligent, skillful, professional, competent, nice and trustworthy*. Thus, the female candidate was appreciated for things that are easily measurable: *loyalty* and *experience* (amount of time spent in one company) and *hard work* (characteristics that can be measured and evaluated), while the male candidate was appreciated for soft issues, difficult to measure and analyze.

When it comes to a negative attitude, the male candidate did not receive any strictly negative response, they were either mixed with positive or neutral. Among negative characteristics allocated to the male candidate, there was: *indistinct, gray, fuzzy, without personality*. Thus all negativity was built around his lack of personality. In the case of a female candidate, respondents were less sympathetic, describing her as: *not nice, no potential, no authority, closed, introvert, not a leader*. In comparison to a fuzzy picture of the male candidate, female candidacy gave a bright, negative picture of a female, where respondents were more judgmental towards her. The female candidacy has aroused not only a more negative attitude but, most importantly, strong emotions between the respondents.

### **DISCUSSION**

As a controlled experiment, this research fills the gap in existing literature, which consisted of experiments conducted by professors or students. The present study is unique in investigating subtle gender bias on the part of MBA students with experience in the field of management. It, therefore, imitates the real life situation of the recruitment process for a leadership position. The fact that all of the participants were MBA students minimizes cultural differences and work experience among respondents. Thus other variables than the

gender of the analyzed candidate for the CEO position were limited.

Results revealed that with no regard to the gender of the participant, respondents judged female candidates less favorably. In 19 evaluated features, eight were significantly affected by the sex of the studied candidate in favor of a male candidate. Research points out that females may be judged less favorably as CEO candidates, be offered less income and overall arouse negative attitudes. Thus, the result suggests that gender bias against women in the CEO position prevails and may affect the underrepresentation of females in higher posts in a non-laboratory environment.

It should be emphasized that female respondents were just as likely as male respondents to favor a male candidate. Thus it suggests that bias against a female candidate was likely to be unintentional, generated from the stereotypical perception of the CEO, not hostility.

The research does not imply that participants demonstrate hostile sexism, which is a negative evaluation of women and the desire to limit women's progress. Its aim is to show that subtle gender biases, which may arise from culture and traditions, may have a significant impact on the perception of a female leader. The prejudices against women are not so direct anymore, but they still exist in the form of unconscious attitudes and ascribed norms and roles that people have for men and women. The results of the present study show that cultural messages may have an influence on how people perceive women in a CEO position.

Results from the research imply that as far as emotional attitudes towards the female candidate for a CEO position is concerned, women are evaluated less favorably. In the case of employability, being suitable for the position and chances for success (questions from part 1), any differences with respect to the candidate's gender did not arise. Perhaps, to evaluate those features, one needs hard data, while in deciding on potential friendship, people put more emphasis on soft issues, which are non-measurable. Thus, women as candidates for CEO positions may be evaluated less favorably in an emotional context (based on non-measurable issues).

Also, the female candidate was seen as less honest, less competent, less nice, less helpful and less friendly, when compared to a male candidate. The highest discrepancy was observed in the perception of the niceness of a candidate, where women, on average, were evaluated as overall not nice, while male candidates as overall nice. Furthermore, 92% of all negative responses regarding *niceness* were ascribed to a female candidate.

The research experiment also revealed a statistically significant difference in perception of competence with respect to the gender of the candidate (in a Harvard experiment on students, there were no differences regarding competence). Although the difference in perceived competence was not as impressive as in the case of the range of scores of *niceness*, it confirms how the gender of the candidate may affect the judgment of competence.

As mentioned, the difference in attitude towards the male and the female candidate did not influence the female's employability, perceived intelligence, or the chance for success, but it had a significant effect on the offered monthly income, which was 16% lower than the one provided to the male candidate. Moreover, income offered to females was, on average, below the minimum wage proposed in the given fictional story for the CEO. The study's results regarding the compensation offer reflect the situation all over the world, where women earn, on average, 20% less than men in the same position.

The female candidate was evaluated significantly less favorably in terms of likeability, competence and offered income, which in reality could influence whether a candidate would be offered a job.

Negative vs. positive attitude towards a female and male candidate indicated significant differences. With a high significance level, the female candidate was evaluated negatively and more emotionally, in comparison to the neutral evaluation of the male. This result may indicate that the female candidate for the CEO position still arouses high emotions because society is not used to such a role for women. The male candidacy for the CEO position did not arouse any negative feelings, and those positive were still not as strong as the ones endowed for the women. The male candidate was in the majority of cases described as gray and with no personality, while in the case of a female candidate, respondents did not perceive her in such a way. Instead, she provoked strong emotions, both positive and negative. Thus, respondents had an emotional attitude towards the female. It seems as respondents did not make up their minds about a male candidate, but had a strong (mainly negative) opinion about the female candidate.

Results suggest that gender bias against women, working on reaching top managerial positions are at a disadvantage in the judgment, treatment, and attitude towards them.

As a result, female CEOs may face less respect and less authority from subordinates or co-workers.

The results, corresponds with the mismatch theory, where women in a leadership position, may perform poorer given more negative attitudes from the employees. She may, as a result, also doubt her own abilities. This is an example of a confirmation bias, where an individual has poorer performance, as he/she is expected to do so (R. Dobelli, 2013).

Another theory that explains such results is the lack-of-fit formulation, which suggests that in more senior jobs, which yield higher status and wages, depending on the sex which dominated the position, the other sex is discriminated against (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Thus, as CEO positions are highly dominated by males (both historically and presently), lack-of-fit may explain why a female candidate in the experiment faced discrimination regarding offered income and attitude.

Furthermore, the study has presented similar results to experiment which evaluated the attitude towards successful female entrepreneur in Harvard University (F. Flynn, C. Anderson, 2003), it has similarly presented that female on a higher position faces less positive attitude and is judged as a '*non-friend material*' while males do not have to deal with such issue. The present study differs from the Harvard experiment in the evaluation of competence. As in the case of Harvard, there were no differences in perceived competence between a male and female entrepreneur, while in the present study, the female was evaluated as significantly less competent. Differences in results may arise from different factors, starting from the fact that at Harvard, an entrepreneur was analyzed, up to the respondent's profile- which was undergraduate students in the previous study.

Another study that was evaluating gender bias in the recruitment process was conducted in 2012 by C.A. Moss- Racusin et al., which has also presented results which suggest that males are favored in regard of hireability, competence perception and offered income. The study was conducted by professors from the research-intensive Universities, who were to decide on the hireability, competence, offered income and mentoring of either a male or female candidate based on the randomly assigned CV. Similarly to present study, as a result, the female candidate was discriminated in all sections, with no regard to the gender of the respondents. The previous works presented that women are perceived differently and less favorably in professional settings, but none of those studies have evaluated female as candidates for CEO positions among managers. By providing this investigation of a bias against women for CEO positions, the present study extends past work by looking and female candidates for higher managerial positions.

Presented findings raise concerns about the situation of women as CEO; although gender does not affect the employability rate, females are still judged less favorably. As a result, when a leader arouses negative attitudes, it leads to poorer overall performance, less authority over the subordinates, and reluctance towards her leadership. This finding raises the possibility that women opt out of top management careers in part because of the negative attitude toward her, among others, due to diminished competence evaluation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The underrepresentation of women in top managerial positions reflects a wasted opportunity to benefit from the capabilities of best professionals, with no regard whether male or female.

Even though the glass ceiling in Europe and the United States is believed to be long broken, women still face various barriers in reaching top managerial positions in organizations. Despite the fact that women are better educated nowadays and are as ambitious as men are, there are still only a few of them in prestigious and powerful positions in organizations. Moreover, women still face discrimination in the labor market, visible through the wage gap, longer promotion time and double standards.

Behind this situation may be various causes. Women are proven to be less confident in professional settings in comparison to men. Lower self-efficacy of women may be a factor influencing women's position in the labor market, starting from the undervaluing her previous achievements (poorer CV), through rejecting promotion, because of the belief of not being ready for the given position, up to not setting high goals and anxiety connected with the success. Another factor that limits women from reaching top positions is the perception of females. As in 1996, Congress of the United States reported that discrimination of women arises due to the beliefs and stereotypes of a women's role in society. Thus perception is an important indicator of women's situation and position in society, family, and organization.

Moreover, women are faced with norms and rules which exist in society and which do not make it easier for them to become managers. Stereotypes divide men and women into roles, the home being a natural domain of women and the company than of men.

The present study revealed that society's perception of women affects the way women are evaluated as potential employees. As society may not be used to female CEO, the responses of participants towards female candidates aroused high (in majority negative) emotions. The fact that the gender of the participants in the experiment did not indicate the attitude toward a female candidate proves that discrimination may not be intentional. In fact,

respondents may not even be aware of the fact that their evaluation differs with regard to the gender of the candidate.

The fact that people are used to the male leadership and have a fixed perception of women may influence the negative attitude towards female CEOs (explained by the lack of fit theory).

It may be the reason why the female candidate in this study was evaluated as less competent, less nice, honest etc. The perception of a leader, whether he/she is liked and accepted, directly influences how effective his/her work is.

As a consequence, subordinates may refuse females leadership, which will decrease the effectiveness, resulting in women themselves doubting their abilities.

The wage gap, fewer women in the labor market, and a small percentage of women in top management positions or boards of directors are the result of the distorted perception of the female role in the society. To limit the discrimination of women in the labor market, the perception of women has to change, and the only way to do that is to make employers, recruiters, subordinates and the whole society be aware of this hurtful bias.

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