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## **Female leadership: a systematic literature review of academic debates in the last decades.**

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Anno Accademico 2019/2020

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is still one among the most relevant topics investigated by the management literature. Historically, the discussion about leadership has been firstly started by Machiavelli in the sixteenth century (Smith et al., 1989), who, on the one hand contributed to the creation of the contingency theory of leadership stating that the leader should approach to meet specific demands, and on the other highlighted the importance of trust between leaders and their followers (Cosans and Reina, 2018) . However, scholars date the origin of a more systematic analysis of leadership earlier in the last century (Aalateeg, 2017). Max Weber (1946), who is recognized by Smith and colleagues (1989) as the first leadership scholar and beginner of a systematic study about leadership, identified three “ideal types” of authorities, namely charismatic authority, traditional authority and legal authority as sources of leadership.

Specifically, charismatic authority reflected personal characteristics and is the leader who is supposed to display them, traditional authority referred to norms and forms of conduct followed by the leaders (Spencer, 1970) and legal authority resulted from functional “duty of office” (Weber, 1946).

Since Weber, different definitions of leadership have been provided, and Stogdill (1974) concluded that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define this concept. Indeed, Yuki (2002) observed that leadership has been defined in different terms, considering traits, behavior, influence, interaction patterns, role relationship and administrative positions. The richest definition, in terms of a broader range of features included, could be identified by the one provided by Antonakis and colleagues (2004:5):

“Leadership can be defined as the nature of the influencing process – and its resultant outcomes – that occurs between a leader and followers and how this influencing process is explained by the leader’s dispositional characteristics, and behaviors, follower perceptions and attributions of the leader, and the context in which the influencing process occurs”.

Therefore, the role of influencing others, the context, and the relation between them are core features of a good leader.

This thesis takes a distinctive angle and considers how the literature has discussed about female leadership in the last decades. Despite the increasing number of women occupying leading roles, likewise in business and political spheres, our attention is focused on the analysis of the literature that has investigated the mentioned topic. Despite noteworthy reviews about female leadership have been published (e.g. Cocchio, 2009; Dekker, 2013), this thesis aims to provide a timely and updated review of the topic.

Additionally, recent events also contribute to demonstrate the need for women to be legitimized as leaders in order to disrupt stereotyped practices, which affect their mandate within and outside the organizational borders. Hence, we conduct a systematic literature review in order to investigate how prior literature has described the presence of women in leadership in the decades from 1991 to 2020 and further to highlight opportunities for future researches.

The thesis is organized as follows. First, we briefly present the main leadership theories in this literature. Second, the research design is presented, in which we explain the steps adopted to conduct our systematization. This leads us to the selection of the articles that represent our analyzed sample and its relative coding. Third, the results will be presented and, future lines and suggestions for further researches are provided.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: A BRIEF OVERVIEW ON LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Since leadership is one of the most discussed topic in management literature, scholars have developed different theories about it. Among these the most influent ones relate to leadership traits, behaviors and contingencies.

Historically in management literature, scholars analyzed leadership as based on the hereditary attributes (Bass, 1990) of those performing power roles in politics, comparing leaders traits with those of followers. This approach emphasized physiological factors, coming and assured by noble heritage, such as age, height, weight, physique, health, and appearance; ability factors such as fluency of speech, tone of voice, academic performance, intelligence, judgment and decision, insight, and initiative; and personality features such as integrity, emotional control, self-confidence, and popularity (Bass, 1990a; Bryman, 1986). According to this theory, an individual must possess these traits or characteristics in order to assume leadership (Aalateeg, 2017). However, as claimed by Stogdill (1974) leadership studies should not focus only on people characteristics but also on the situations and the events they confront. The shortcomings of trait theories of leadership, which emerged during World War II because traits failed to explain leaders' effectiveness (Bryman, 1986), drove to the further research analyzing behavioral styles of leadership. Behavioral theories assume that leaders' behaviors have an impact on work and followers' effectiveness (Aalateeg, 2017) and try to identify the best way to lead. Scholars of behavioral theories identified three leadership styles: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire (Bryman, 1986). Autocratic leaders tend to centralize authority and derive power from their position whereas democratic leaders delegate authority, they are more participative and rely on subordinates' knowledge to get things done (Daft, 1999). Further, according to Bass (1990) laissez-faire identifies that leadership style displayed in absence or avoidance of leadership and it has been judged as ineffective. Following this stream, Transformational and Charismatic Leadership Theory (Avolio and Bass, 1991) are presented. Authors present transformational leadership as the opposite of transactional behavior, which is more directed to control employees and reward their efficiency. In fact, transformational leaders focus their attention on people, relationships and adopt a participative style (Avolio and Bass, 1991).

Lastly, answering to the call of considering the environment and context in which the leaders operate, contingencies theories attempted to predict which types of leadership styles would be the most effective in different types of situations (Holda, 1995). This approach assumes that there is no universally applicable style of leadership that could be applied to ensure effectiveness because discrete factors characterizing the situation do influence leadership and its effects. Most recently, authors embrace authentic leadership view (Avolio, 2004) claiming that leaders are required to display authenticity in order to build up their relationship with followers, which are assumed to be based on trust and ethic. Particularly, authentic leadership distinguish itself from the outset with claims to a strong moral component. Hence, authentic leaders are identified by those who know and trust their own thoughts, feelings, motives, and values (Kernis, 2003) and possess a balanced perception of their strengths and weaknesses (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This style of leadership has been used

to explain and analyze some traits of female leadership, since it has been considered a distinctive trait of women (Liu, Cutcher and Grant, 2015).

In sum, if the literature has extensively studied the leadership, providing a common definition of what a leader is, there is still a lack of a common definition for female leadership. Therefore, the current thesis draws on the definition stemming from the professional and practitioner sphere. After a rich examination of the descriptions provided by well-known leaders, we found that the analysis provided by Suzanne Fallender, director of the Global Girls & Women Initiative for Intel, was the most pertinent and inclusive one:

“To me, – women’s leadership in 2015 – means continuing to advocate for and invest in changes that support advancement of women within their organizations and industries, by addressing issues of unconscious bias and enlisting the support of both women and men in developing solutions” (Fallender, 2015)<sup>1</sup>

Her definition of leadership, and in particular female leadership, indeed, emphasized the need to further support women career advancement, which is translated in investments that organizations and, broadly, institutions are required to do in order to overcome the issues still affecting female career patterns. As our review shows, career advancement, unconscious bias, and stereotypes are still obstacles to reach senior positions. We then provide a systematization of the literature, attempting to cluster it according to its main topics. To do so, we included the articles of 12 top tiers journals that explore issues related to the business and management domains.

## **1.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In order to answer to the main research question, which investigates how the literature have elaborated and framed female leadership in the latest decades, we chose to conduct a systematic literature review (Short, 2009; Callahan, 2014). This work consists of systematically search for, appraise and synthesis research evidence, adhering to guidelines on how the conduct of a review (Grant et al., 2009).

### **1.2.1 DATA COLLECTION**

In this study, we draw on SCOPUS as database<sup>2</sup>. In order to incorporate articles published by top tiers journals, we used SCIMAGO 2019 rank list of journals published within “Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management” and “Strategy and Management”. To include articles published by the most relevant journals, we decided to take into consideration just the fifty journals listed in each category. After checking overlapping journals, our final list was represented by 46 journals. The first search aimed at including all articles containing at least one of the following word roots (GENDER\* OR LEADER\*) in their title, abstract, or keywords that were published within the disciplinary area of Business and Economics. This search led to 1658 articles. To restrict our sample, we included the articles that have produced debates and were resonant among scholars (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Glass and Cook, 2016). Therefore, we excluded all the articles that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.triplepundit.com/story/2015/what-does-womens-leadership-mean-2015/58006>

<sup>2</sup> We also checked for other databases, namely Web of Science and EBSCO, and any relevant differences were found.

have not received any citation published before 2015. We obtained a number of 328 articles and we decided to focus our analysis on 16 journals only, belonging to the ABS list or rated as A or A\*. In this way, we obtained a catalogue of 180 articles. We read all the remaining articles' abstracts in order to consider whether they really were pertinent to our research topic. The analysis led us to delete twelve articles that fall outside the scope of our analysis, such as transgender or race issues within the workplace, or that had no related implications to leadership.

The final step of analysis led us to 166 articles published by twelve top journals. The following table summarizes the journals and related articles from 1991 to 2020.

<b>Journals</b>	<b>n. of articles</b>	<b>Most relevant articles</b>
Leadership Quarterly	68	Druskat, 1994; Haslam and Ryan, 2008; Glass and Cook, 2016
Gender Work and Organization	35	Ruthenford, 2001; Sinclair, 2009; Vroman and Danko, 2020
Human Relations	14	Javidan, Bemmels, Devine and Datsmalchian, 1995; Mavin and Grandy, 2015; Liu, Cutcher and Grant, 2017 <sup>3</sup>
Journal of Vocational Behavior	10	Lindley and Borgen, 2000; Ronen and Zuroff, 2017
Personnel Psychology	10	Duehr and Bono, 2006; Lemoine and Blum, 2019
Academy of Management Journal	9	Bauer and Green, 1996; Dwivedi, Joshi and Misangyi, 2018
Strategic Management Journal	8	Kulich, Trojanowski, Ryan, Haslam and Renneboog, 2011; Lyngsie and Foss, 2017
Human Resource Management Review	3	Miao, Qian, Banks and Seers, 2020
Organization Science	3	Brands, Menges and Kilduff, 2015; Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan, 2019
Organization Studies	3	Pelled and Xin, 2000;
Academy of Management Perspectives	2	Arnold and Loughlin, 2019
Academy of Management Review	1	Ryan and Haslam, 2017
Total number of articles	166	

Table 1

<sup>3</sup> Despite Liu et al, 2017 did not result from our search within the mentioned database, namely SCOPUS, we decided to include it in our dataset because of the relevance of its main topic, which regards the concept of authentic leadership during the financial crisis.



### 1.2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

The first step of analysis was meant to have a preliminary understanding of the literature. We therefore systematized our data according to the following topics: (i) research question, (ii) methods, (iii) theoretical framework, (iv) main findings and contributions. Subsequent in-depth reading of papers served to supplement and validate the emerging coding themes that enabled us to organize and navigate the literature. After several rounds of coding, we identified seven topics around which the literature could be clustered and that are representative of the literature:

1. Trait: it comprises all the articles where the main focus is the impact of demographics such as age, gender or generally, personality traits such as emotional intelligence.
2. Career: it comprises all the articles that highlight results for individuals' careers as well as organizational performances or other outcomes.
3. Representations: it comprises all the articles mainly focused on stereotypes or biases coming from past theories or practice.
4. Discrimination: it comprises all the articles investigating the various and different obstacles and barriers faced by women in management.
5. Leadership style: it comprises all the articles mainly focused on different styles coming from different individuals' demographics or characteristics.
6. Leadership identity: it comprises all the articles that describe how a leader is.
7. Environment and Contingencies: it comprises all the articles focused on the investigation of those factors shaping managerial experiences for women.

Following, Figure 1 displays the steps conducted in our analysis.

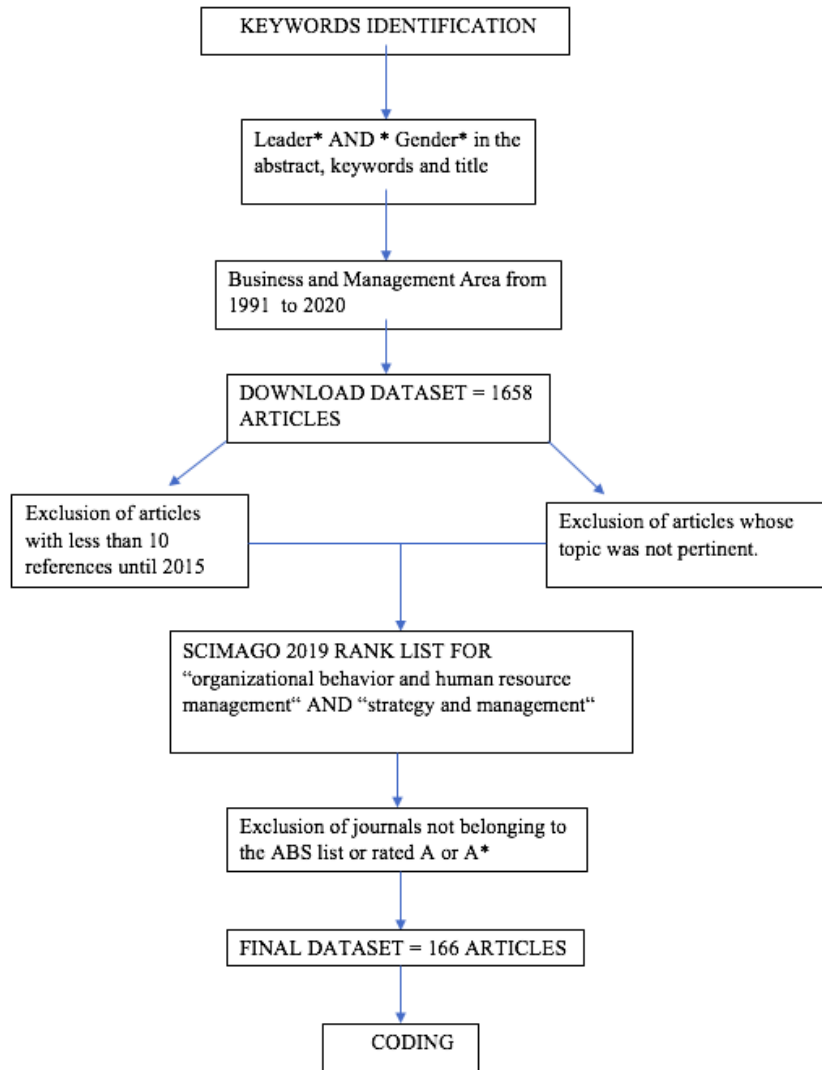


Figure 1: Steps of the Analysis

Results will be presented in the next section.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 FINDINGS: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE LITERATURE

The following section provides the descriptive statistics emerging from our analysis.

#### 2.1.1 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS

First, our analysis shows that the majority of the studies are quantitative oriented (49%), followed by qualitative researches (27%) and conceptual papers (14%). Lastly, a minority of the articles are mixed researches (10%), as represented in Figure 2.

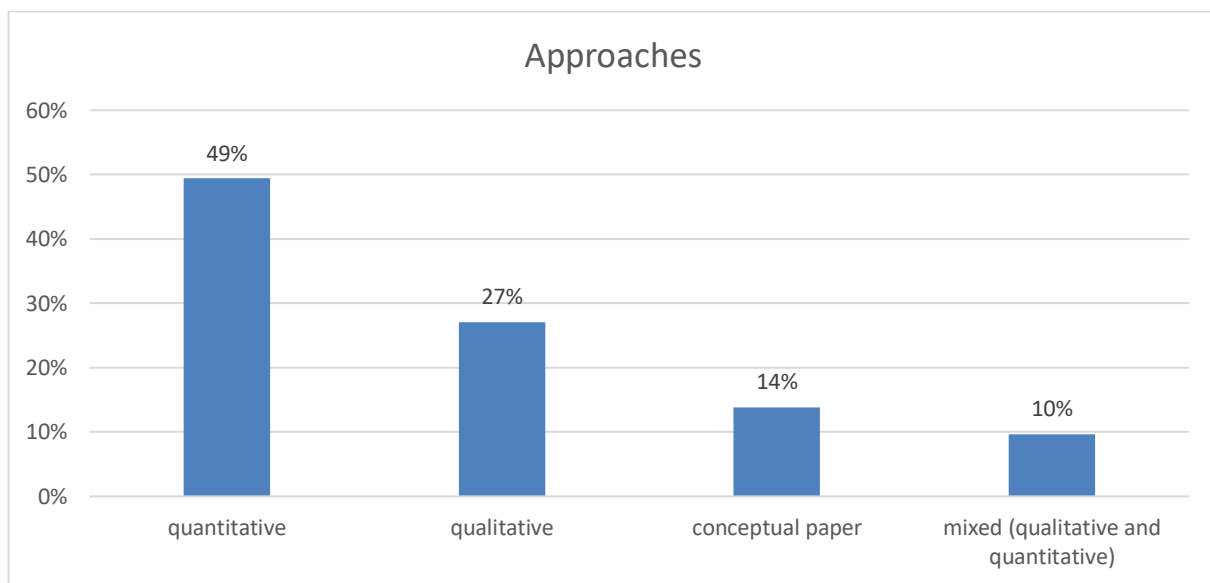


Figure 2: Approaches.

Among the most relevant articles, emerging from the analysis of the approaches, we found that Pelled and Xin (2000), who investigated the effect of demographic similarities on the relationship between leader and followers, and Chen and Houser (2019), who analyzed the effects of group's gender similarities on women's willingness to lead, are conducted through quantitative approach. Following, Hooijberg (1996) and Vecchio (2002) represents qualitative studies, while we found Brescoll (2016) and Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan (2019), which respectively investigated gender differences coming from emotional display and from the employment market, as representative of conceptual papers. Last, Doldor et al. (2019) is an example of mixed method approach to the investigation of the impact of different feedback on employees of different genders.

Second, when analyzing qualitative researches, we dedicated some extra effort to identify what kind of qualitative methods authors decided to apply throughout their studies. Recalling the most traditional qualitative approaches, we differentiated ethnographies from interviews, case studies (single or multiples) and

reviews; we found that the majority of the qualitative articles within our sample have been conducted through interviews, followed by single case studies and multiple case studies, reviews, pure ethnography and ethnographies combined with interviews. Hence, considering that the total number of qualitative studies in our sample amounts to forty-five articles, in terms of percentages, qualitative studies are represented by interviews for the 36%, by single case studies and multiple case studies, respectively for 24% and 20% (e.g. Dwivedi, Joshi, and Misangy, 2018; Liu, Cutcher and Grant, 2015) and by reviews for the 11% (e.g. Kirsch, 2018). Lastly, 4% of qualitative researches have been conducted recurring to pure observation or ethnography and the remaining 4% through observation combined with interviews. Following, figure 3 displays the percentage distribution of the qualitative approaches listed above.

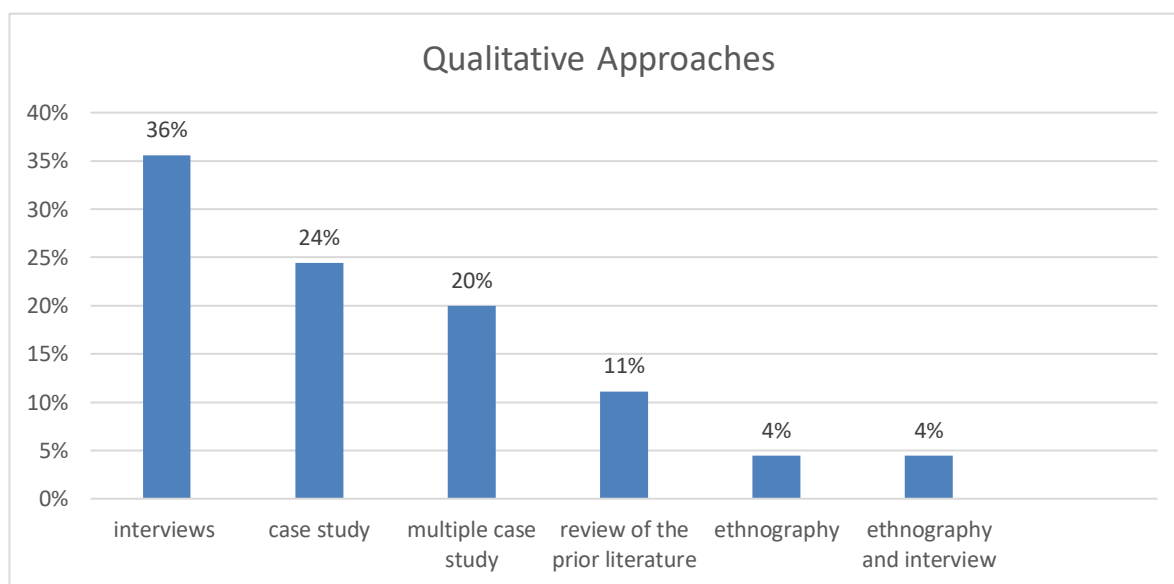


Figure 3: Qualitative approaches.

This analysis provided evidence to the most interesting articles that emerged according to their methods. In this regards, Chrobot-Mason et al. (2019) emerged as one of the most relevant case studies deepening the concepts of “Lean In” already presented by Sheril Sandberg. Gerpott et al. (2018), instead, conducted their study through observation to reveal the basics of emergent leadership in team interactions. To conclude, Mavin and Grandy’s work (2015), conducted through interviews and often recalled along this thesis, explored the topics coming from the application of the theory of Abject Appearance experienced by 81 women in UK based organizations.

### 2.1.2 SETTING

Third, our analysis shows that there is a variety of settings used by scholars to investigate female leadership. To provide a systematization, we grouped them according to eight main categories: (1).

Organizational<sup>4</sup>; (2). Academic; (3). Undefined; (4). Military; (5). Politics; (6). Church; (7). Organizational and academic; (8). Organizational and politics.

From the analysis not surprisingly, it emerged that the majority of the articles (64%) consider organizations as their settings. “Academic”, as a general setting category, refers to those studies that have been conducted as academic researches; hence, it comprises universities located in different geographic areas, schools, colleges, labs, scientific fields and also leadership development programmes. It represents the 13% of the total number of articles’ settings. “Undefined” is a category, which representing the 13% of the total number of articles’ settings, appeared, in terms of percentages, to be as relevant as the previous mentioned “Academic” category. It includes all those articles located in settings that are not mentioned. Interestingly, this category comprises articles that mostly investigate traits or leadership characteristics, through different approaches, in addition to two particular settings worthy of mention: Covid-19 Pandemic (Vroman and Danko, 2020), Global Financial Crisis ( Elliot and Stead, 2018). These are not two proper settings but rather two phenomena that, once analysed, will be useful to predict future organizational outcomes or behaviours. “Military”, as setting category, comprises the minority of studies conducted within military units, fields, organizations or armed forces and it represents the 4% of the total number of articles’ settings. The smallest percentages are displayed by the four categories of “ Politics”, “Church”, “Organizational and Academic” and “Organizational and Politics”, respectively representing 2%, 1%, 1% and 1% of the total number of articles’ settings. “Politics” refers to those articles investigating female leadership political issues or conducted within political election environments while “Church” comprises all the articles investigating about female leadership within religious environments or congregations. To conclude, “Organizational and Academic” and “Organizational and Politics” are two minor categories representing all those articles investigating simultaneously business and political issues on the one hand, and studies which exploiting students’ samples trying to anticipate organizational outcomes, on the other. Following, figure 4 displays the aforementioned percentages.

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<sup>4</sup> Organizational” refers to all those settings eventually related to a broader definition of organization or organizational structure; hence, it comprises settings such as range of industries, included creative industries, corporate boards, private and non-private companies, listed companies, large and small organization in general, as well as hospital and healthcare settings, unions and all those virtual or simulated environments aimed to reproduce an organizational location

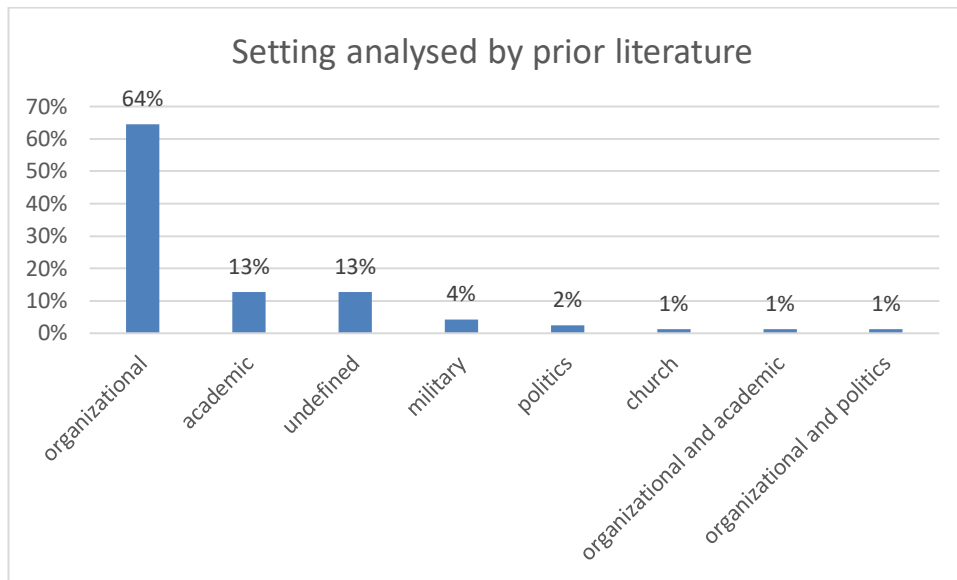


Figure 4: Setting analysed by prior literature.

### 2.1.3 THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Fourth, in this section the main theoretical framework adopted by scholars to analyse female leadership are presented. In particular, two theories seem to be prominent in such debate. The first one is the Social Role Theory advanced by Eagly and Wood in 1999 followed by Role Congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002). According to Social Role Theory, the roles occupied by, and division of labour between men and women create expectancies about what women are like and how they are expected to behave (Eagly and Wood, 1999). As such women are expected to be communal, enacting behaviours that are cooperative and other-oriented, whereas men are expected to demonstrate agency, enacting behaviours that are independent and action-oriented. Women who violate these gender norms are often socially and economically penalized or disadvantaged (Rudman, 1998; Rudman and Glick, 2001) for instance, experiencing social discrimination or mobbing within the workplace or the society.

For example, agentic women, which are those women acting through assertiveness and control, are evaluated less favourably, receive lower salaries, and are less likely to be hired than agentic men (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs and Tamkins, 2004; Rudman, 1998; Rudman and Fairchild, 2004). As a result, both women and men are sensitive to situations that elicit social sanctions for counter-stereotypic behaviour (Brescoll et al., 2012; Moss-Racusin, Phelan and Rudman, 2010) and try to adapt to what is socially expected from them avoiding to violate the stereotype's category they belong to. This social sensitivity to gender-role incongruence may have implications for how women perceive delegation, as the social penalties, which authors considered similar to a social stigma or social discrimination, for stereotype-incongruent behaviour may loom larger in their minds than the rewards of congruency (Heilman and Chen, 2005; Rudman and Phelan, 2008). As result, individuals are more focused on avoiding to violate stereotypes rather than trying to approach to new and riskier ways of conduct that could be eventually rewarded if successful.

As far as Role Congruity Theory concerns (Eagly and Karau, 2002) it puts emphasis on exploring the

antecedents of the prejudice towards female leadership. The authors proposed that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. Consequently, common attitudes, coming from the society as a whole, are less positive toward female than male leaders and potential leaders. Therefore, other consequences are that it is more difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles (Lanaj and Hollenbeck, 2015) .

As the two theories show, prior literature emphasized the role of expectations in relation to female leadership. For instance, Expectations States Theory (Berger, 1983) is, in fact, a set of theories aimed to explain how various social actors interact among themselves and expectations people rely on each other. Specifically, it addresses how status hierarchies emerge in situations where individuals are oriented towards a collective goal (Berger et al., 1974; Correll and Ridgeway, 2006). Two primary perspectives in EST– the evaluation-expectation and status characteristics perspectives (Fişek et al., 1991) – are particularly useful for understanding how certain types of voice, which are leaders’ communication tools, and speaker gender affect others’ perceptions of social standing. The evaluation-expectations perspective focuses on how behavioral patterns relate to the status structure of a group. It posits that behaviors like assertive participation are attempts to claim and confirm one own status and authority. Because voice, which represents an important signal coming from leaders, is assertive and change-oriented, it represents a potential status-claiming behavior (Anderson and Kilduff, 2009a). However, not all assertive behavior, and therefore authors argue not all kinds of voice, will lead to status confirmation. Instead, the status claim must also be accepted by others (Fişek et al., 1991). To the extent that one’s status claiming behaviors align with others’ expectations, the behavior is seen as legitimate and status is granted. To the extent that the status claiming behavior does not align with others’ expectations, it is seen as less legitimate and does not correspond to being granted status. Together, the evaluation-expectation and status characteristics perspectives suggest that status hierarchies are influenced by both the status claiming behaviors that different group members engage in, and how group members’ socially significant characteristics influence the perceived legitimacy of those behaviors (Berger and Wagner, 2016).

Contrarily, *Expectancy violations theory* (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon and Jones, 1976), is a theory stemming from communication field that sought to explain how different expectations’ violations affect individuals’ responses. Specifically, it attempts to predict and explains the effects of nonverbal behavior violations on interpersonal communication outcomes such as attraction, credibility, persuasion, and smooth interactions. Human interactions are strongly governed by expectations which, if violated, are arousing and trigger an appraisal process that may be moderated by the rewarding by the violator (Burgoon, 1988). Violation interpretations and evaluations determine whether they are positive or negative violations. Positive violations are predicted to produce more favorable outcomes, and negative violations less favorable outcomes, than positive and negative confirmations respectively (Burgoon, 2015).

Third, differently from leadership literature that extensively studied the leader-subordinate relation and the

leaders-follower relationship development, we noticed that this core topic is less investigated in case of female leadership. The few set of papers that investigate the relationship between the leader and followers draw on one more relevant theoretical framework which is the Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen, and Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen and Cashman, 1975).

LMX theory focuses on the two-way dyadic relationship between leaders and followers as well as supervisors and subordinates, seeking to investigate why leaders could display different approaches, in terms of leadership styles, depending on the group they are leading or supervising (Hogg et al., 2006). Specifically, the theory establishes that each supervisor-subordinate dyad is unique and that leaders are accustomed to form relationships with their follower based not only on contractual obligations but also on mutual trust, admiration, and depending on the amount of time spent together throughout the process composed by three steps: role making, role taking and routinization (Graen and Scandura, 1987).

Finally, we claim that two additional theories are worthy of mention. The first one is the transformational and charismatic leadership theory, which is a well-established theory in leadership literature (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Avolio and Bass, 1991; Antonakis and House, 2002). The second theory is the authentic leadership theory (Avolio et al., 2004) that has been considered particularly relevant by prior literature especially to understand the role performed by women leaders or managers and to eventually confirm whether they get an advantage in leadership thanks to the traits they possess or not.

To conclude, we also investigated whether the topic of female leadership has received growing attention from 1991 to 2020 or not and what are the top tiers journals that mostly hosted this debate.

Following Figure 5 and Figure 6 display the aforementioned information.

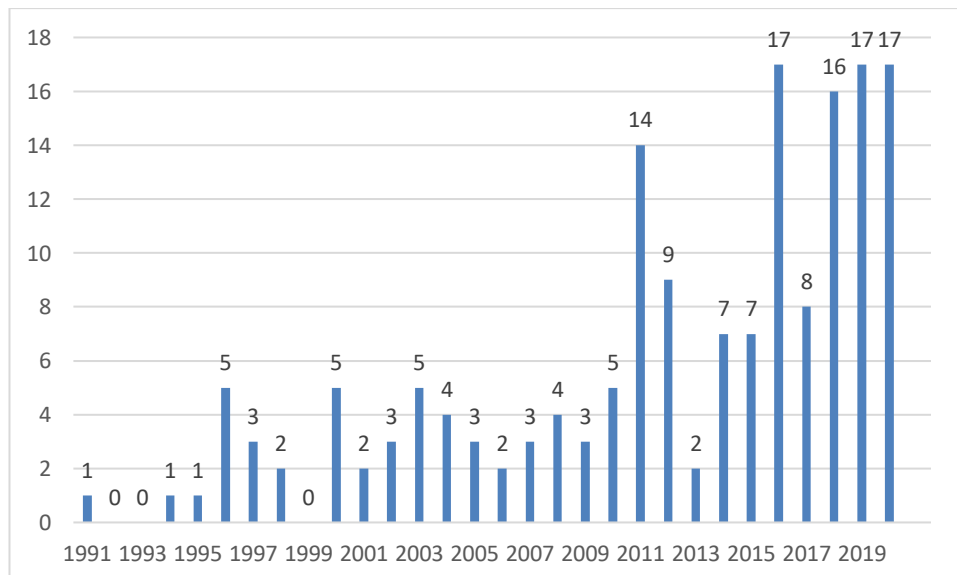


Figure 5: Number of publications dedicated to female leadership per year, from 1991 to 2020



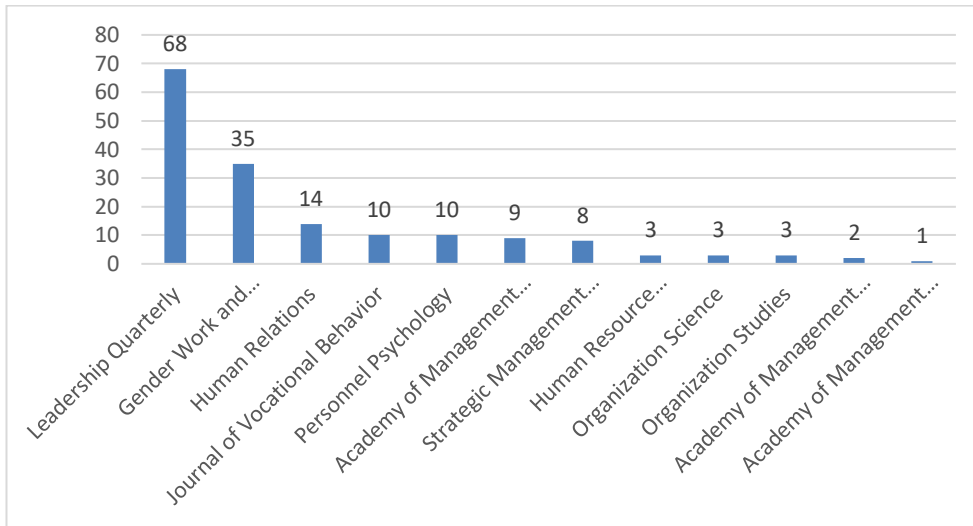


Figure 6: Distribution of top tiers journals hosting the debate, from 1991 to 2020

As emerging from our sample and displayed by Figures 5 and 6, the debate about female has received growing attention in the last decade, namely from 2011 on. Moreover, Leadership Quarterly and Gender Work and Organization resulted as the top tiers journals who largely hosted this debate.

## 2.2 MAIN THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

One of the key results of our study emerging from the coding is about the main topic tackled by the literature over the last decades, namely from 1991 to 2020. We noticed that the articles within our examined sample can be categorized around to seven main topics' categories. The following section will provide an overview about how the debate on each of the following mentioned thematic macro-areas (displayed by Figure 7) has evolved over time.

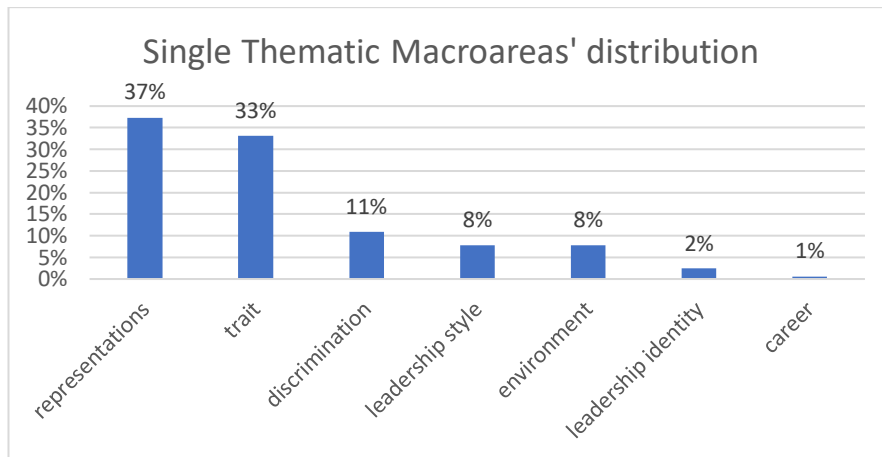


Figure 7: Single thematic macro-areas' distribution

### 2.2.1 REPRESENTATIONS

The discussion about female leadership is permeated by shadows of prejudice toward the female gender in different settings. *Representations* as thematic macro-area includes all the articles whose main theme is about gender and/or race stereotypes, biases toward women in management positions and similar or derived topics. Overall, authors argue that the prejudice toward women, who might be disadvantaged when performing top executive or political roles, is due to common beliefs or deep-rooted expectations related to the female gender and to the role of women within the society. For instance, Brannan and Priola (2012) analysed the reasons for the limited achievement of women, who achieve junior and middle level positions in a lower proportion respect to men, and according to them this is the result of patriarchal social system in which the male retains more power and authority (Brannan and Priola, 2012; Katila and Mariläinen, 1999, 2002; Ledwith and Colgan, 1996; Powell, 2000; Walby, 1986; Witz, 1992).

Duehr and Bono (2006) provided evidence of how gender stereotypes have evolved in the last decades. They administered seven different surveys to four different samples comprised by an heterogeneous sample in which there were both male and female managers and students. Their findings revealed that both male and female managers perceive men and women as similar to successful managers, namely managers who are successful achieving their goals. This result was due to change of perceptions that was most dramatic among male managers, who started to embrace the vision that women can be successful managers as well as men. On the other hand, results also suggest that less change has occurred in students' gender stereotypes. Indeed, male

students, on the other hand, exhibited some gender stereotypes, which led them to the immediate association of men with the role of leader while the same was not found for women. This study, which ultimately has revealed that current managers view successful managers as less agentic and more communal, indicating a general movement toward greater balance in the stereotypically male agentic and female communal characteristics of successful middle managers, is in line with arguments that modern leadership paradigms are moving toward the feminine (e.g. Eagly and Carli, 2003; Fondas, 1997).

Additionally, our systematization revealed that women who perform key roles can also influence other women's patterns both positively or negatively. Indeed, studies revealed that female support is not taken for granted. In fact, it is not obvious that women help other women in their career development; instead, women can represent the highest barrier to other women's goal achievement. This is the case of corporate boards described by Sheridan, Mckenzie and Still (2011) where women under-representation is not the only motivation disadvantaging employed women advancement. In fact, authors noticed that women in these boards reported characteristics very similar to those of men in the boards. To overcome the issue of women under-representation, various policies have been put in place to avoid such gap; however Sheridan, Mckenzie and Still (2011), using a sample of 53 board members, 21 women and 32 men, demonstrated how these policies were ineffective when women presence within such boards is not enough to guarantee the representation of women and their related traits, such as cooperativeness and support for people. Indeed, they observed that usually these women, who have been able to gain higher position, reached it by displaying masculine traits and specifically they led through agency rather than traits associated to communality, which are usually considered as characteristics of women personality.

Hence, in this case, corporate diversity does not represent a step forward toward women integration but it is the result of women adaptation as a way to allow their career advancement, which reinforce the masculinized doing of business (Connell and Wood, 2005). In this case, the approach of women board members relies on the idea that "as board roles have traditionally been held by men, there is a common association of masculinity and board membership with the associated privileging of both" (Sheridan et al., 2011: 7). The result is that such board membership allows alignment with the masculine hegemony (Sheridan, Mckenzie and Still, 2011) rather than helping to overcome it. Additionally, it helps to explain why groups on the boards appear to be so homogenous, in terms of behaviours, despite the representation of both genders. Further, it provides evidence that the mere body counting, accounting for gender differences, is not enough to achieve corporate boards' diversity. This concept lies at the basis of the so-called "queen bee" phenomenon, which occurs when women leaders or top executives distance themselves from other employed women or when women in general start distancing themselves from their social group of other women and act displaying masculine traits to achieve their goal (Kanter, 1977; Staines, Tavriss and Jayaratne, 1974). Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers (2016) found that this phenomenon is driven by the presence of gender stereotypes in leadership together with the existence of gender biased organizational hierarchies. This legitimizes and reinforces the

existent model of gender biased hierarchy within an organization, highly affecting the presence and how women are represented. Notwithstanding the “queen bee” behaviour would be beneficial for women in achieving career success in both short and long term, it may come with substantial costs that result in suboptimal work conditions for women leaders compared to their male peers (Derks et al., 2016). At the macro organizational level, the “queen bee” phenomenon can diminish outcomes for organizations by limiting opportunities to benefit from the diversity that women have to offer (Ellemers et al., 2012). And finally, at the societal level, this phenomenon might be a powerful source that legitimizes current gender inequality because it allows people to infer that women may be the cause and the effect for their lower outcomes (Mavin, 2008).

Despite increasing evidence shows that women are less likely to help other women’s career advancement than it expected, there still is a large body of studies that underlines the positive impact of women presence within the workplace in order to improve other women working conditions and realize their career potential. For instance, Chen and Houser (2019) analysed the impact of groups’ gender composition on the likelihood of a man or a woman to emerge as a leader. They observed that as the maleness, which is the percentage of male individuals over the total number, of the group increased, men became significantly more likely to lead the group and women, in comparison, became significantly less likely to lead. In the same vein, the case study conducted by Arnold and Loughlin (2019) around the “Lean-In” book written by Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, supported similar ideas that one important factor to narrow the gap between rewards and performance evaluations between men and women is an increasing percentage of women in executive positions. Indeed, the CEO Sandberg, who is known to be one of the first CEOs in social media, stated that having an equal representation of women in senior leadership roles will be an effective strategy to lessen bias against women seeking more senior roles. Her view maintains that an increasing percentage of women in senior leadership role will eventually be the way to allow other women’s advancement in senior roles. The perceived incongruence between women's gender and leadership roles would be lessened due to two types of changes: changes to the female gender role stereotypes and/or changes to the leadership stereotype (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019). According to them, this type of changes are necessary to create a new leader’s model within society, which could match the role performed by female managers or top executives.

In the same vein, Hogg et.al. (2006) considered the importance of individual prototype, which is defined as the of the essence of a set of beliefs or stereotypes (Hogg, 1993), its creation and its impact on leaders’ evaluation. Authors showed, by a predictive model, that in the case of a female leader, leadership effectiveness would be considered with higher mixed-gender groups where the leader was considered more prototypical of the group itself (Hogg, Fielding, Johnson, Masser, Russel and Svensson, 2006). Therefore, drawing on Social Identity Theory of leadership, it is showed that people apply their own stereotypes of social categories to infer the match between a specific leader and the local group norm. Supporting this idea, Leicht et al. (2014) showed that exposure to counter-stereotypic role models can decrease the impact of stereotype-based processes (Leicht, Randsley de Moura and Crisp, 2014).

## 2.2.2 DISCRIMINATION

Another recurring topic about female leadership is about form of discrimination that women have to face within and outside organizations. In this macro-area we codified all the articles that investigate the obstacles, the barriers and the issues encountered by women when trying to realize their career potential such as lower compensation and worse working conditions.

First, our systematization highlighted some issues encountered by women when trying to realize their aspirations becoming managers. As reported by Guillaume and Pochic (2009), in 1992, Witz described this phenomenon claiming that “gendered take-over, exclusion and occupational closure” is detrimental to women and beneficial to men. Additionally, Guillaume and Pochic (2009) found that women seem to progress more slowly than men, experiencing repeated professional tests and challenges. Their career promotion is very progressive: they advance step by step and rarely skip one of the steps of the ladder, sometimes accepting horizontal mobility, unlike their male colleagues who are much more vigilant to the statutory aspects of their career progression. They show how women indeed access the first levels of senior management later than men, except for experienced women with rare expertise and social credentials either coming from other companies or having been mentored by male senior managers. Even in departments in which the presence of women is higher, access of women to top management remains difficult. Further, analysing the requirements for success, the aforementioned authors identified three sorts of promotion criteria — structural, cultural and organizational — all of which involve drawbacks for women. For instance, temporal norms or geographic mobility associated either with career progression or working hours are very prejudicial for women. Both intense working involvement and working transfers are required between the ages of 25 and 35 when they are likely to have children and family constraints. This typical organizational career pattern, linear and progressive, ignores individual life cycles and implicitly assumes that managers are male. On the other hand, it means that women are clearly hindered by the social representations attached to sexual roles and household division of labour (Guillaume and Pochic, 2009).

Images of masculinity, which are present in the dominant symbolism, such as the idea of a ‘tough and forceful leader’ and the emphasis put on charismatic management style that contains an implicit exclusion of women (Wajcman, 1998) are highly visible within organizations while other forms of discrimination are implicit; indeed, it was demonstrated that technical abilities, leadership abilities proven by past experiences and administrative ability are skills strongly required to candidates for leadership position and they are also attached to the masculine image (Guillaume and Pochic, 2007). Moreover, it has been shown that the status of women is undermined by the numerical dominance of men and by the gendered distribution of power (Guillaume and Pochic, 2007). Thanks to their numerical weight but also due to their central role in career promotion (Guillaume and Pochic, 2009), male managers play an active role in the reproduction of a masculine symbolic order. Besides the geographical mobility criterion, career promotion has always been linked to time availability. This is also due to the traditional belief that commitment is represented by working full-time,

consequently men and women are now obliged to conform to the male model of working life, even if they are not equal in dealing with this time constraint (Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998; Guillaume and Phocic, 2009) .

Mostly or frequently, women might be clustered at junior managerial levels. Namely, they could be appointed to perform less relevant roles compared to those attributed to men. In this regard, Askehave and Zethsen (2014) conducted a research to investigate the motivation of the gender imbalance occurring at the top management level. By two separated studies they discussed how among seven themes (professional background and experience, being analytic and strategical, displaying authority, drive, down to earth, result oriented, cooperation) related to leadership six were considered as male-biased whereas just one, namely cooperation, could be defined as female-biased (Askehave and Zethsen, 2014). Additionally, the second study conducted by the authors throughout their research comprised a survey administered to MBA students, asking them to decide whether the task at hand was more appropriate for men or women. Respondents have been called to judge the appropriateness of 20 managerial tasks; it emerged that 14 over 20 tasks have been judged more masculine than feminine. As already mentioned, Brannan and Priola (2012) investigated the clustering of women managers at junior levels. They also found that, within the social service sector as setting, once identified two key roles, problem manager and team leader, informal discussion and general observation were suggestive of a link between the role of problem manager and stereotypical views of masculinity, and further, stereotypical feminine skills were perceived as being of particular value, for performing the team leader role, which perhaps accounts for the disproportionate numbers of women who occupied these junior management positions (Brannan and Priola, 2012). Still, Fitzsimmons and Callan (2016) evidenced that the barriers faced by women aspiring to be appointed as CEO are not context-independent. They argued that barriers to women's career potential realization are rooted at societal, organizational and individual level. Specifically, these obstacles are faced by women outside job related settings, as women are accustomed to face issues and obstacles from their childhood. Scholars observed that early childhood and adolescence are the peak times for the development of gendered behaviour, which is more or less passively acquired from observation of societal norms (Lippa, 2005; Sherman and Zurbriggen, 2014), that are going to affect the behaviour of women at the beginning of their career. The authors deeply analyse how societal-level effects create gendered contexts for capital creation in children. In turn, experiences in these contexts generate gender differentiated capital which can have profound effects upon opportunities for capital accumulation in later stages of the life cycle. Yet, women face direct or indirect discriminations, within the organizational context, which are very difficult to escape. Indeed, sometimes women who argue for being discriminated result in a higher level of discrimination, exclusion or harassment for them (Fitzsimmons and Callan, 2016). These issues are then enforced by gender inequalities across the different levels as well. Examples are selection and promotion bias, which can be driven by higher request by women for flexibility to face their motherhood or family caring, and gender pay gap or differentials in access to mentoring. As a result, it emerged a need for cross-level action to overcome the mentioned barriers, either at governmental and organizational level. The ideas of equitable pay and progression policies, as well as structured mentoring, sponsorship and role modelling, to ensure that the pipeline of female

graduates moving through to senior roles in the business are supported. Flexibility also need to be promoted by organizations for both men and women, and additionally organizations need to ensure that flexible workers have the same access to networking, training, and development opportunities as traditional workers, in order to build rather than erode their human and social capital (Fitzsimmons and Callan, 2016).

While authors have emphasized and elaborated about issues faced by women to be appointed in high status positions, or to the possibility for them to reach this positions during crisis or uncertainties, Ryan et.al (2016) proposed a shift from this female disadvantage to a male advantage to access to the "glass cushion". First, "Glass Cliff" is the metaphor used to identify the nuanced context-dependent phenomenon of women breaking through the glass ceiling into the upper echelons of management to be placed in more precarious leadership positions than men (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). The analysed scenario mostly refers to instances where female leaders succeed male leaders because they are appointed to face time of crisis or bad performance. Hence, the literature suggests that women, who are appointed as CEOs or at the top management level, under certain conditions, experience a precarious satisfaction reaching their career goals because they have higher probability to be blamed in case of negative results under their mandate, despite the fact that those results are not linked to their work but instead to previously existent circumstances (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). As result, they will probably experience a shorter average tenure as CEOs, when compared to men, and, consequently they will be demotivated with regard to the realization of their career potential (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). Moreover, this study identified different sources of the "glass cliff". First, it can be due to decision makers seeking for diversity to communicate an organizational change to stakeholders; second, selection bias, in which particular women skills or preferences, lack of resources emerge or finally the need to paradoxically confirm the status quo within the organizational environment. Therefore, according to the authors, decision makers may appoint women as leaders in time of crisis or risk to show the importance to maintain the status quo of "think male- think managers" to guarantee effectiveness and a good performance (Ryan, Haslam, Morgenroth, Rink, Stoker and Peters, 2016).

Bechtoldt et.al (2019), conducted a similar study to test whether same results could be extended and replicated in different contexts, such as Germany and England. They indeed found that shareholders usually respond more positively to organizations that appoint female board members respect to those organizations in which there are only male board members, under the condition that an extended period of performance declines (24 months) has preceded these appointments. The two studies together have contributed to the partial overcoming of the "Think-Male-Think-Manager" stereotypes in favour of the adoption of the "Think Crisis, Think Female" stereotype, when longer periods of performance declines occur. However, the authors argue that reasons are twofold. First, organizations are either still hesitant to promote women to top executive positions or, rather the number of female leader is still limited as organizations lack and failing in supporting women through their careers (Bechtoldt, Bannier and Rock, 2019).

Overall, the studies about discrimination in leadership provided evidence that, in the latest decades, organizations, institutions and governments have gained awareness about the existence of discrimination, both within and outside organizations. However, despite the efforts and commitment displayed trying to overcome it, these studies also show how prejudices are rooted and embedded at the societal level. Hence, at the organizational level, it emerges that activities such as mentoring and training programmes are crucially important. More broadly, suggestions of educational reforms are provided to adapt schools, colleges and universities programmes to new emerging issues to be faced by future leaders and citizens, in general.

### **2.2.3 LEADERSHIP STYLE**

During the last decades the majority of the discussions about leadership has been centred around the analysis of different leadership styles as relevant topics to predict performance effectiveness. In these instances, the differences between men and women as managers or leaders became more evident. One of the most established and foundational theory is about transformational leadership, in which authors distinguish between transactional and transformational leadership styles (Burns, 1978; Druskat, 1994). Leadership scholars agree on identifying transactional leaders as more autocratic, goal-oriented, reward-oriented and likely to monitor subordinates' work whereas transformational leaders drive concepts such as cooperation, support, democracy and people-orientation (Bass, 1985, 1990; Tichy and Devanna, 1986; Burke, 1986). Leadership scholars have also attempted to consider whether transactional style could be referred to more masculine or feminine traits. For instance, it has been argued that transactional leadership best reflects masculine traits while transformational style is built upon feminine values (Druskat, 1994). Since this study, literature has tried to overcome this dichotomous and limiting view.

For instance, the discussion about leadership styles has been also developed to consider the impact and the effects of different ways of leadership on performance on supervisors, peers and subordinates. Generally, it has been found that subordinates or followers are more satisfied when led by transformational leaders rather than transactional or non-transformational leaders (Bass, 1985; Hater and Bass, 1988; Yammarino and Bass, 1990; Ross, 1990; Yammarino, Spangler, and Bass, 1993). Moreover, transformational leadership has been found fostering both positive perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Bass, 1985; Hater & Bass, 1988; Yammarino and Bass, 1990) and individual follower effort (Yammarino and Bass, 1990). However, it has been found that when women only display transformational leadership style, the relationship between leader-follower might be influenced by gendered theory (Vecchio, 2002). When women are asked to supervise, they are more likely to provide better evaluations of leader performance, standard financial measures of organizational success and performance data (Eagly and Carli, 2003). Drawing on the study of Petty and Lee (1975), the author provides evidence that higher satisfaction of subordinates was highly related to women leaders who were much more inclined to help and cooperative with subordinates, caring for others' welfare and being friendly. Conversely, women leaders were evaluated negatively and less influential by their



subordinates, when behaving autocratically and dominantly rather than when adopting considerate styles (Jago and Vroom, 1982).

To conclude, in 1990, Delgado had already provided the construct of “double-bind” to describe the issue faced by women when trying to satisfy both supervisors’ and subordinates’ expectations. On the one hand, subordinates usually appreciate female leaders that are warm and personally open, in line with their expectations; on the other hand, these behaviours could be devaluing of women leaders in the eyes of their superiors. This specifically applies in hierarchically structured organization and not in cooperatively structured ones. Hence, these findings provide additional evidence to confirm that contexts influence leadership behaviour. Eagly and Carli (2003) provided further confirmation for these insights claiming that effectiveness is driven by masculine features in some settings and from feminine ones in others. In sum, they suggest that female and male leaders may be differentially effective in particular settings (Eagly and Carli, 2003).

In this regard, Rutherford (2001) conducted a survey and the respondents showed that a big majority of women respondents (84%) considered that women managed differently from men, showing better managerial skills and people concern ; on the other hand, just 55% of men did so. This study provides evidence on how gender differences are rooted in individuals’ perceptions or beliefs. Indeed, stereotypes about the role of men and women, of course, influence the way they are expected to behave as leaders, hence influencing leadership styles as well. Deaux and Major (1987) provided an interactive model of gender-related behaviour that demonstrates how expectations or stereotypes can alter or prescribe the appropriate leadership behaviour. The model is based on two related forces: the first is the one used by the perceiver to seek out, select and make the stereotype; the second is the one used by the individual to communicate his or her own self-expectation and balance it with the external standard of situation (Deaux and Major, 1987).

Overall, different studies highlighted the main differences stating the higher effectiveness associated to the leadership style displayed by women that have been found in better people skills than men, fewer status concerns and better managerial skills when compared to men's managerial practice. In support of this, women stated that they dislike arguments about status and politics and they consider themselves not as political as men, identifying the motivation why they are often excluded by position of power in organizations (Rutherford, 2001). Moreover, they highlighted a general feeling that they perceive that many of their skills are not recognized in organizations (Rutherford, 2001). Additionally, the fact that before industrialization a leader was required to be assertive, controlling and task-oriented, whilst the post-industrial era opened the scene to new leadership styles, supposed to be more supportive, communicative, empowering, recalling the features that have always been stereotypically attributed to women, led the scholars to introduce the concept of “feminine advantage” in leadership (Vecchio, 2002). Comparative gender advantage, namely "feminine advantage" or "masculine advantage", come from stereotyped reasoning and they led scholars to the overemphasis of this assumption (Vecchio, 2002). Further, this concept has been reinforced by the positive

correlations between effectiveness and all components of transformational leadership that have been found in 39 different studies (Eagly and Carli, 2003). However, this advantage does not always hold. In practice, when there are contextual factors such as pressure, individuals of both sexes are required to behave as work-focused. Conversely, in more relaxed environments, such as service-sector organizations, both men and women could behave giving more importance to interpersonal relationships (Vecchio, 2002). Indeed, women traditional transformational style is not always considered the most appropriate leadership style, usually depending on the organizational division ((Druskat, 1994). In fact, women tend to reveal their characteristic values and leadership styles more often in certain contexts rather than others. Otherwise, if women might not consider the environment they work in, they could face judgements and discrimination. For instance, in finance divisions, being goal-oriented is considered a good trait but evidence from finance divisions underlines the fact that women who display masculine traits are not appreciated and they are rather considered "unwomanly" (Linstead, 1995). Women management style has been appreciated in service-related division, such as in cabin services, whereas when the goals of the division are not service-related, the management style reflected less personal involvement in employees' welfare, regardless of whether the leader was a man or a woman within the gender composition of the workforce (Kanter, 1977). In this sense, it is recalled the importance for a leader to be flexible. Hence, gender differences in leaders' behaviour do not exist per se but they can emerge as a result of contextual factors; for instance women can sometimes have advantages in certain contexts but they can also suffer from disadvantages due to a masculine organizational context (Vecchio, 2002).

#### **2.2.4 TRAIT**

“Trait” represents the fourth among the aforementioned thematic macro-areas. It comprises all those articles focused on the discussion about individuals’ trait anticipating leadership behaviours or outcomes. Specifically and not surprisingly, the majority of the articles at hand are based on the assumptions coming from Social Role Theory by Eagly and Wood (1999). These authors argued that, by performing certain roles within the society, men and women are expected to behave following pre-determined modalities. Particularly, the assumptions from Social Role Theory attributed agentic traits to men and communal traits to women. But, what do we mean with agency and communality? On the one hand, the term “Agency” refers to a set of traits traditionally displayed by men; these are for instance dominance and powerfulness. On the other hand the term “Communality” refers to a set of traits traditionally displayed by women: these are compassion, supportiveness and warmth (Eagly, 1987).

Following this distinction, it emerged that, in practice, those characteristic traits attributed to men overlap with those traditionally required by a leader (Koenig, Mitchell, Eagly, and Ristikari, 2011). This is probably one of the most relevant argument that represents the reason why prior literature has largely contributed to the development of the prejudice toward women as leaders. However, most recently, different authors focused their attention on the different outcomes agency and communality drive within a given context,

to provide that leadership conceptualization is moving from pure masculinity toward androgyny, in which androgyny is defined as the equal endorsement of feminine and masculine traits (Kirchmeyer and Bullin, 1997)

In this vein, Pillemer, Graham and Burke (2014), using a sample of 50 students, conducted a survey to investigate how gender related traits influence corporate performance evaluation. They found that communal traits were related to company performance for female CEOs, while agentic traits were related to company performance for male CEOs. Further, throughout the mentioned research, it was found that higher powerfulness in male CEOs and higher supportiveness, compassion and warmth in female CEOs, predicted better company rank and/or profits. This association of higher ratings for both communal and agentic traits with company rank and profits in women CEOs is consistent with the view that conceptions of leadership are becoming more androgynous, meaning that a combination of female and male traits is increasing required in order to be effective leaders (Pillemer, Graham and Burke, 2014). With the same intention, the findings from Lemoine et.al (2016) provided that leadership emergence is not anymore related to individuals belonging to the predominant gender only. Indeed, they found that the mismatch between the leader role and the female role suggested by Social Role Theory may be attenuated by the incorporation of more feminine behaviors, as in the case of extraversion (Lemoine, Aggarwak and Steed, 2016). Moreover, Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir (2012) demonstrated that the effectiveness of both men and women leaders is related to their ability to draw on both culturally 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics. In presence of a need to choose between using 'masculine' or 'feminine' characteristics, the 'feminine' ones have resulted in better outcomes for both men and women leading to higher effectiveness in work organizations. Behaving in an 'androgynous' manner or drawing mainly on 'feminine'-communal characteristics may enable women to resolve the double bind paradox and derive an advantage (Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir, 2012). Further, their findings suggest that both culturally 'feminine' and 'masculine' characteristics contribute to higher ratings of transformational leadership. Using the categories of gender-types it was further found, as expected, that 'androgynous' managers had the highest ratings on transformational leadership in comparison to all 'non-androgynous' gender-type categories (Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir, 2012).

Within the discussion about leaders' traits we also found articles related to authentic leadership and charismatic leadership. Eagly (2005) investigated the topic of authentic leadership through the lens of the relationship between leader and followers. Hence, she described relational authenticity as the trait the leaders achieve when performing challenging task in order to get trust from his or her followers. The author observed that the mentioned task is particularly difficult for women or outsiders, who are not traditionally performing leadership roles and the reason has to be found in role incongruity and value inconsistency. On the one hand, role incongruity refers to the difficulties faced by individuals who are not perceived as owning all the features traditionally associated to a particular leadership role. It is the case of a women becoming the leader in a place where traditional masculine features have always been performed. The woman leader could also start behaving in a more assertive or autocratic manner but she could be judged more negatively than when behaving as it is

expected by women. On the other hand, value inconsistency refers to the scenario where leaders from outsider groups have values that are not consistent with those of the leaders who have traditionally performed the role. In this case the leaders' task become more difficult because they need to negotiate this disagreement to gain trust from followers. At the end, there is evidence for value and attitudinal sex differences reflected in leadership roles. Sometimes they can represent an advantage, sometimes they are a disadvantage which increases the difficulties related to the task of being accepted in the leadership role. Overcoming these issues is not an easy task, however, and the author suggests the introduction of training programs for the most sensitive subjects, namely outsiders and women. Moreover, for women, she underlined the advantage they can exploit thanks to the general managerial shift toward transformational leadership: if leaders are not necessarily viewed mainly as dominant, take-charge individuals, women may be able to inhabit these roles with greater relational authenticity (Eagly, 2005).

Conger and Kanungo (1987) defined charismatic leaders as those leaders setting grand, long-term visions and inspiring others to enact these visions. Adopting the followers' point of view, they place more trust in the leader, when he or she acts with charisma; moreover, followers feel more satisfied and motivated while experiencing higher levels of empowerment and self-efficacy (Conger et al. 2000, Jung and Avolio, 2000). Following this study, Balkundi et al. (2011) found that attributions of charismatic leadership predict team performance. But, how do followers attribute charisma to their leaders? The process by which a follower attributes charisma to a leader involves a cognitive matching between them and the actual leader's characteristics and behaviors, as they are perceived by followers (Lord et al., 1984). If the leader matches the model, the follower endows the leader with a charismatic personality (Nye and Forsyth, 1991), seeing the leader as a role model, namely someone with a vision who sets high performance expectations that the team collectively accepts. It is the charismatic leadership model that supplies missing information and enables the charismatic attribution (Lord and Foti, 1986). This model, however, is not fixed: as follower or situational factors change, definitions of charismatic leadership also change (Lord et al., 2001). Women are seen as less able to fulfill the requirements of leadership, as predicted by Role Congruity Theory, only because of their gender (Eagly and Karau 2002). In practice, Brands, Menges and Kilduff (2015) showed that the attributions of charisma work within teams occur thanks to people expectations alignment. When people's expectations concerning team leaders are misaligned, people attribute less charisma to leaders. Expectations are cued both by the social network context of work, which can be centralized or cohesive team advice networks, and by the gender of the leader. Authors found that, on the one hand, people see women as less charismatic than men when centralized team advice networks cued people's expectations of male status and power. However, on the other hand, people see men as less charismatic than women when cohesive team advice networks cued people's expectations of female caring and communality (Brands, Menges and Kilduff, 2015).

### 2.2.5 LEADERSHIP IDENTITY

The category “Leadership Identity” comprises all those articles that describe the identity of a leader in terms of his/her qualities, characteristics, beliefs. Hence, in this section we will analyse a set of critiques and reconceptualization of leadership identity, especially in relation to female leadership.

In this light, Binns (2008) reflected on ethical leadership and on the identity of leaders to influence a more ethical behaviour. Through the analysis of sixteen leaders in Western Australia, the study demonstrates that the masculine view of leadership is no longer valid but a reconceptualization of leading as a social practice is needed. Starting from the concept of ethical leadership, his findings revealed that ethical leadership practice is not about the achievement of perfect relationships, nor a kind of moral purity; instead he found that it represents, as previously claimed by Ziarek (2001) a product of both "institutional mechanism of control" and "a possible locus of revolt and ethical responsibility" (2001:3), centred on self-appraisal and self-transformation, which can be stimulated by different circumstances such as reflecting on mistakes. In particular, Binns (2008) observed that gendering processes shape the form and effect of self-appraisal, so that self-doubt is more a practice among women while self-confidence was more men. Although the men in the study were willing to talk about mistakes they had made in dealing with people, they often appeared to be troubled or concerned by the interview question, and were somewhat guarded or cautious in their responses. Women, on the other hand, were more inclined to self-critical narratives. However, the study remarked that subjectivities and personal practices are neither fixed nor determined, but are reshaped through an individual's desire and capacity to act on the self, a desire that produces the ethical subject, therefore more related to the identity of a leader. For both women and men, reflexivity is considered relevant when it goes beyond introspection to encompass a critical awareness of the broader social, cultural and discursive shaping of identities, practices and constructs. The author underlines that, despite at times also women embrace masculine identities when leading, they are more likely to dissociate the idea of leadership from that of masculinity (Binns, 2008).

The discussion about leadership identity is intertwined with the topic of sustainability practices within organizations, since the overall calling for a more sustainable practice and behaviour. In this vein, Marshall (2011) provided that, change for sustainability will occur once the society will focus less attention on the broader concept of sustainability itself while focusing on more pragmatic issues such as equality, in order to introduce sustainable patterns of living. These mentioned patterns place gender and other relations of (in)equality as central in addressing sustainability and corporate responsibility. Indeed, the author sustained that once the focus is shifted, the results is the emergence of potential different patterns of gender and leadership (Marshall, 2011).

Leadership identity is a central topic when it comes to discuss about the aesthetical appearance of a leader. Indeed, it was shown how women usually struggle in order to achieve bodies and appearances typical

of leaders, whose appearance is supposed to communicate status and power. Specifically, it has been found that women comply with, reject, monitor and negotiate embodied norms for themselves and other women. In doing so, women leaders constrain and enable ways of embodying leadership (Mavin and Grandy, 2015). Hence, authors argued that women can employ two embodied identity work strategies co-constructed in a context of women's intra-gender relations. These strategies highlight particular complexities. First, the strategy "*Shifting focus from the body and appearance*" reflects how some women leaders acknowledge body work and disciplining of the body, yet they shift focus from or recalibrate the importance of the body and appearance with competence or intelligence, for instance choosing their clothing to communicate authority. Second, women elite leaders, which are defined as those women leading in a masculine environment, also strive to "Achieve a professional balance" as an embodied identity strategy. In this regard, the interviews revealed the lack of norms about how to 'look' as a woman elite leader while women still exert considerable effort to look 'professional' and not be unprofessional. In order to investigate the mentioned issues, the theory of Abject Appearance, which is based on the construct of abjection, advances understandings of women's intragender relations and embodiment of leadership in several ways. Indeed, it brings to light how women come together around 'agreed' bodies and appearance as elite leaders and where they come apart in 'disagreeing' about appropriate bodies (Mavin and Grandy, 2015). Moreover, Abject Appearance explains the constraints of women's embodiment in elite leader roles as women maintain the 'right' bodies against exacting standards of corporeality (Bell and Sinclair, 2014). In addition to this, the context of women's intra-gender relations highlights how self-regulation (Gatrell, 2013) is relational; intricately intertwined with self-Other regulation in how women's bodies are made and remade (Gimlin, 2007). As a result, through Abject Appearance is possible to understand how women, even if they are outsider because of their gender, might be in the best position to transgress boundaries (Kristeva, 1982). Moreover, the dynamics that underpin Abject Appearance offer possibilities for organizing differently. Following the same stream, Martin et al. (2020) interviewed three different women owning and running businesses in creative industries. They found that these women, as many others, faced issues of discrimination and work-family conflicts. However, three detailed narratives offered different insights into identity work in small creative companies, to overcome these mentioned problems. Indeed, these women chose self-employment, attracted by the possibility of independence and financial opportunity rather than being 'pushed' into self-employment from bad jobs or unemployment (Wall, 2015). The success of each business relied on these three women taking a lead to grow the business. Their decision was driven by the desire of securing contracts through their reputation, knowledge, contacts and skills with considerable investment in client relationships through initial contacts, through projects and the following relationship they manage (Wall, 2015). The risks associated to self-employment were additionally shaped by gendered assumptions about their roles and the expectations of others around them (Baines & Wheelock, 2000; Phillips & Knowles, 2012). The maintenance of a 'business owner' identity required them to present themselves as systematic and logical rather than intuitive, in order to fit current societal stereotypes of how a business owner behaves, despite the importance of the intuitive and creative to their businesses (Martin,

Jerrard, Wright, 2020). While they were developing businesses and creating and maintaining relationships with customers, they stressed their compliance with the rational, masculine discourse (Hamilton, 2014; Katila & Eriksson, 2013) but did so by embodying appropriate feminine stereotypes (Banks & Milestone, 2011). Hence, their identity as women within the confines of masculine stereotypes emerged through their accentuating the maternal, with nurturing and empathy described as characterizing their relationships with external and internal contacts and fundamental to business operation. The maternal role emerged in each case as a bridge between the ‘feminine’ and the ‘business-like’, with ‘being a good mother’ spilling over home–work boundaries. These women juggled multiple roles through identity work, both consciously and unconsciously, to meet different needs each day, showing how they managed the interplay of work and home, private/personal and professional, emotional and rational, in sectors that still discriminate women (Martin, Jerrard, Wright, 2020).

### **2.2.6 ENVIRONMENT AND CONTINGENCIES**

Environment represents one of the aforementioned seven thematic macro-areas that emerged as result of our coding. It comprises all those articles where the setting, the context and the conditions have been found particularly relevant with regard to female leadership. Hence, in this section, the environment and the contingencies that foster or hamper women in the leadership roles will be presented.

Overall, we found two main streams representing two working contexts enabling women to realize their career potential. First, we refer to all those conditions allowing women to achieve promotions breaking through the glass ceiling. This is the case of the setting investigated by Furst and Reeved (2008) within their multiple case study. As result of their study, authors provided nine propositions supporting the idea that women are likely to emerge as leaders especially in turbulent times or under uncertainties. Hence, their main findings are related to those propositions themselves. Despite the clarification coming from the authors regarding the need to empirically test the propositions, we observed that the principal arguments rely on the fact that women are more likely to emerge as leaders thanks to the interaction of perceived personality characteristics, leadership styles and accumulated experiences in periods of uncertainty, lack of stability or in presence of scandals. Indeed, it emerges that women are perceived to have certain qualities that are valued as particularly relevant under these circumstances: the lack of stability drives the idea that non-traditional and innovative approaches to leadership will be valued and outweigh gender-related biases, explaining the reason why women are able to break through the glass ceiling.

In the same vein, Glass and Cook (2016) analysed the career patterns of fifty-two female CEOs interviewing them about their experience in the workplace; authors not only found empirical evidence of the glass cliff in the career trajectories of female CEOs and top executives, but in addition they revealed that this phenomenon is not merely attributable to bias on behalf of decision makers. Indeed, in response to their minority status and to the negative visibility that being a woman entails, women develop strategies to become

visible for the 'right' reasons trying to overcome the issues coming from a traditionally masculine environment. These strategies include a willing acceptance of risky appointments, the development of a skill set based on successful crisis management and the cultivation of a reputation as a transformation expert. Moreover, findings revealed that only 13% of women started as CEO and Chair of the Board while this is true for 34% of the male CEOs. This appeared to be relevant because women who serve only as CEO and not Chair of the Board may experience greater challenges to their leadership, less support from the board and less power and influence over corporate strategy, providing further confirmation that organizational practices do not support their appointments. It means that for women, dual appointments, which comes from rooted practices within their work environment, eventually reflect a greater degree of power and influence than non-dual appointments. In fact, if women start performing managerial roles in time of crisis and they lack the support or authority to accomplish what they need to, due to their non-dual appointments, then they may be increasingly vulnerable to scrutiny and performance pressures. As a result, female leaders may experience shorter tenures compared to their male peers. Confirming this, results provided a mean tenure length for women of 66 months compared to a mean tenure length for men of 69 months, and more significantly, for women, the median length was only 42 months compared to the median length for men of 60 months. Still, findings further confirmed and suggested that the reasons, coming from the working environment, for stepping down and post-CEO career vary by gender. Specifically, 32% of the women were forced to step down or fired compared with only 13% of the men. Overall, it emerged that women's exit from top positions and their greater likelihood of pursuing post-career activities outside of the corporate sector may indicate agency rather than bias on the part of late-career women. While bias shapes their career in a host of ways, their exit decisions may be shaped by a growing unwillingness to continue to confront bias and 'prove' their abilities later in life. Hence, Glass and Cook (2016) confirmed the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon, as the result of both gender biases and women functional attitudes toward risky situations to get their credibility as leaders and demonstrate their ability to overcome those obstacles provided by the conditions characterizing their working environment.

Secondly, we investigate the conditions allowing women career potential realization, albeit unrelated to the glass cliff phenomenon. In this stance, Dwivedi et. al (2018) demonstrated that certain enabling factors and the local context set the conditions for gender-inclusive gatekeeping wherein male predecessors facilitated female leadership effectiveness. In practice, their findings clearly suggested that the long tenure of the male predecessor and the insider origin of the female successor are both essential enablers of female success. Hence, these two essential conditions enabled gender-inclusive gatekeeping by combining with the local governance structure and the embedding context to form three different recipes for success. Two of these success recipes involved a favourable performance legacy in which the long-tenured predecessor either handed over to, or partnered with, an insider female successor. In the third scenario, the long-tenured predecessor guided the insider female successor to turnaround an unfavourable performance legacy (Dwivedi, Joshi and Misangyi, 2018). Following this stream, Farh et al. (2020) investigated the conditions facilitating token female voice,



which is defined as the communication tool of a solo female in a group of males (Kanter, 1977), and its enactment within military teams. They found that, among a sample of 173 enlisted personnel from US marine corps, token females had, in general, their voice enacted more than a comparison male in an all-male team, especially under a leader who espoused more positive gender beliefs. Moreover, token female voice enactment has been found as a factor enhancing team performance in high complexity tasks while hurting team performance in low complexity. For the male counterpart, the male majority voice enactment exhibited the opposite effects (Farh, Oh, Hollenbeck, Yu, Lee and King, 2020). Konrad et al. (2010) further highlighted that the gender demography effects on climate for gender diversity are asymmetrical and show stronger relationships for women than for men. Specifically, throughout their study, women reported less organizational support when they worked for male supervisors, more gender discrimination when the top administrator in their organization was male, and more gender harassment when they worked with a higher percentage of men. These three gender demography variables had no significant associations with outcomes for men. This pattern of findings is consistent with the predictions of system justification theory claiming that men are usually more supported to perform well thanks to initial better expectations and greater opportunities provided by supervisors (Jost et al., 2004; Kreiner et al., 2006). It explains these findings as owing to the motivation to hold favourable attitudes toward the status quo through the belief that higher status people deserve their good fortune because of their superior characteristics. Although people hold lower expectations for women's performance in fields such as medicine from which they have historically been excluded (Carli, 2001; Heilman, 1995, 2001; Perry, 1997), working in a situation where there are proportionately more women peers as well as women in positions of authority may enhance women's outcomes in two ways. First, as relational demography researchers argue, demographic similarity to others in the workplace may make it easier to establish a positive relationship (Riordan, 2000). The improved work relationships resulting from this relationship are likely to enhance perceptions of positive social and reward outcomes. Second, the presence of many women peers and authority figures may symbolize the legitimacy of the organization's policies and practices toward women (Bernardi et al., 2005). This enhanced legitimacy may reduce the likelihood that women will attribute negative interactions or reward outcomes to gender, resulting in reduced perceptions of gender discrimination and gender harassment and increased perceptions of fairness, inclusion, and support (Konrad, Cannings, Goldberg, 2010).

Finally but importantly, we also find an article investigating the Pandemic environment due to Covid-19 as a factor enabling a shift in the hegemonic representations of masculine leadership. Indeed, Cherneski (2020) conducted a study within Canadian medical organizations dealing with issues coming from the Covid-19 crisis pandemic. The analysis revealed that despite the fact that women are still underrepresented as leaders of Canadian and, more broadly, internationally spread organizations, due to systemic gender bias and a lack of opportunity for advancement in health care, like other sectors (Betron et al., 2019), today, COVID-19 appears to be the scenario allowing women to challenge the traditional leading rules. In fact, the countries with the most successful responses to COVID-19 in terms of a lower mortality rate, such as Germany and New

Zealand, are led by women. Moreover, it is not casual that these leading countries also rank highest in terms of gender parity, which measures women's participation and progress based on economic, educational, health and political criteria over time (World Economic Forum, 2020). Extensive coverage of women during the pandemic is providing plausible normative representations of women in power that are being situated outside of stereotypical categories of motherhood and fashion (Phalen & Algan, 2001). These messages can be powerful as they create, maintain and modify (Foldy, 2006) female leaders as visible examples of exemplary leadership in this time of crisis. Moreover, it was noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, having a good leader who is empathetic and sincere is beneficial to employees' welfare, and it is even more positive if that leader is a woman. This reflects the fact that female leaders may have a different approach to leadership than their male counterparts, one that focuses on relationships and is more attuned and sensitive to their employees. And this greater sense of wellbeing helps them be more productive at work (Sadler, 2020). In many ways, female leaders during this time of crisis behave in a manner opposite of how we normally think about leadership. Disengaging from existing masculinist paradigms of leadership, there is now an emphasis on soft skills that humanize the workforce while focusing on a sense of community. The value of teamwork, empathy, inclusivity, collaboration and listening to other perspectives in order to be informed on best practices, is being embraced (Cherneski, 2020).

### **2.2.7 CAREER**

In terms of percentages, "Career" represents the less mentioned among the single thematic macro-areas. As already mentioned, it refers to all those articles investigating both, the issues related to gendered individuals' career progression and outcomes and the impacts of gender on organizational and performance outcomes. Hence, we are going to analyze the this category first adopting the organizational perspective of career, which is related to the performance and other organizational contingencies influenced by women presence, and secondly the individual's one.

From the organizational perspective, gender composition has been investigated as related to strategy and performance. For instance, Lyngsie and Foss (2017) conducted a quantitative study on a sample of 392 firm-level observations within the Danish private sector. Their analysis revealed a positive association between higher proportions of female top managers and entrepreneurial outcome, and a negative association at initial addition of female top managers to top management teams (TMT). Moreover, the influence of female top managers was found conditional on the overall gender composition of the firm. This means that they found that a high/low proportion of female employees relates to a negative/positive association between female top managers and firms' entrepreneurial outcomes. Hence, authors suggested that negative biases and stereotypes of female top managers are alleviated when women are (re)categorized as "just" members of the firm's TMT rather than as female top managers. This allows women to be effective members of the top-management team (Lyngsie and Foss, 2017).

In the same vein, Chen et al. (2016) discussed the implications of female board representations on strategic behavior within the domain of mergers and acquisitions (M&A). Their quantitative analysis, which aimed to analyze this phenomenon within the border of US firms, revealed that female board representation was negatively related to acquisitiveness and further, that female board representation was negatively related to acquisition size, as well. This implies that greater female board representation was negatively associated with both overall firm acquisitiveness and target acquisition size, thus suggesting a partial explanation for the unclear impact of board gender composition on firm performance (Chen, Crossland, Huang, 2016), which represents one of the dimensions of organizational outcomes. Confirming this, Sidhu et al. (2020) also found a significant negative effect of increasing boards' diversity on strategic US firms' change, while pointing out the need to further investigate this field (Sidhu, Feng, Volberda, Van Den Bosch, 2020). These results could find explanation thanks to the study conducted by Lindley and Borgen (2000), using personality traits and scales. Indeed, authors found that women scored higher than men on the "Work Style" scale, whereas men scored higher than women on the "Risk Taking/Adventure scale". Thus, further research could investigate the relation between gender different traits and scales and firms' strategic change.

From the individuals' perspective what emerged from our coding reveals that this category of articles is saliently related to issues such as career or occupational choice, career advancement or success and gender pay gap. Generally speaking about the first of the mentioned issues, namely career or occupational choice, Rocha and Van Praag (2020), in a recent study conducted analyzing 13931 Danish start-ups, found that women are less likely than men to become entrepreneurs. However, authors specified that this gender gap is significantly reduced for startups set up by joiners working with a female founder. The reasons behind the mentioned difference is caused by a higher likelihood of becoming a founder for women employed by a female rather than a male founder, and not by a lower probability of men becoming founders when working for a female rather than a male founder. Moreover, it emerged that joiners working for the same founder are usually more demographically similar to each other than joiners working for different founders (Rocha and Van Praag, 2020). These results resonate with the idea that women in male-dominated roles can be stronger sources of influence on other women if they can break gender stereotypes and biased expectations about their competence (Eagly & Karau, 2002), for instance by exhibiting high performance (Dezső & Ross, 2012; Yang & Triana, 2019). Following, Cook and Glass (2014) focused their attention on the investigation of the mechanisms shaping the promotion probabilities and leadership tenure of women and racial or ethnic minority CEOs. They found that, overall, occupational minorities face greater challenges when appointed CEO and are provided few degrees of freedom with which to establish their leadership capabilities. However, they did not find evidence that occupational minorities experience shorter average tenures compared to the traditional leader model represented by white men. Particularly relevant when analyzing this topic, emotional intelligence has been investigated as related to career success. It has been argued that it may provide a vehicle for developing more holistic models of career development that integrate different perspectives (Rode, Arthaud-Day, Ramaswami and Howes, 2017). Indeed, authors provided evidence for a significant relationship between emotional

intelligence and salary, after controlling for gender, a significant mediating effect for having a mentor, and a moderating effect for job satisfaction level. Similarly, Gentry et al. (2015) provided a powerful tool for women within the leadership domain. They suggested that effective emotional display is critical in determining a leader's current performance and therefore the career. The more a leader displays behaviors that convey empathic concern from the perspective of his or her direct reports, the lower the leader's career derailment potential from the perspective of his or her boss and peers. This is especially true for women (Gentry, Clark, Young, Cullen and Zimmerman, 2015). However, this finding contributed to the confirmation of the expectations coming from gender stereotypes and further enlarged the existing gender differences within the leadership domain. These mentioned gender differences can be found also in compensation, thus authors started to discuss about gender pay gap or gender pay differences. In this regard, Cook et al. (2019) revealed that, despite the existence of this gender pay gap, women representation within boards can help overcoming it. Indeed, authors found evidence that as the number of women increases on the board of directors, the pay gap between male and female executives will decrease and that women in direct decision-making roles, specifically serving on the compensation committee of the board of directors, will be positively associated with a narrower gender compensation gap in the top executive team. However, as authors pointed out, not all types of power are equal: the more direct influence women have over compensation decisions, the greater their influence over compensation outcomes. It means that women's integration on the board, including their integration on the compensation committee is not sufficient for advancing compensation equity. Only when women serve as chair of the committee the compensation gap does shrink (Cook, Ingersoll and Glass, 2019). As already explained by Kanter (1977) first and Eagly et al. (2012) lately, when women hold positions of authority in male-dominated contexts, they face pressure to acquiesce to the status quo and as a result may be reluctant to advance policies that may appear self-serving or that distinguish their priorities from their male peers. In addition, they may also seek to avoid gender-related issues, including issues related to compensation equity in order to assimilate with their male peers (Maume, 2011; Penner and Toro-Tulla, 2010). As a result, despite performing formal managerial roles, women who lack influence associated with this position of authority may be less influential over organizational outcomes related to gender equity than might be expected (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

The following table, (Table 2), provides a summary of the most relevant references for each thematic macro-area, as discussed above.

<b>Thematic Macro-area</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Most Important References</b>
Representations	In this area, studies focus on stereotypes and biases as coming from past theories or practices.	Duehr and Bono, 2006, Personnel Psychology; Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers, 2016, Leadership Quarterly
Discrimination	In this area, studies focus on the obstacles and barriers faced by women in management.	Guillaume and Phocic, 2009, Gender Work and Organization; Fitzsimmons and Callan, 2016, Leadership Quarterly
Leadership Style	In this area, studies focus on the different styles displayed by leaders.	Rutherford, 2001, Gender Work and Organization; Eagly and Carli, 2003, Leadership Quarterly
Trait	In this area, studies focus on the description of leaders' different traits.	Pillemer, Graham and Burke, 2014, Leadership Quarterly; Lemoine, Aggarwak and Steed, 2016, Leadership Quarterly
Leadership Identity	In this area, studies focus on the description of how a leader is.	Binns, 2008, Gender Work and Organization; Mavin and Grandy, 2015, Human Relations
Environment	In this area, studies focus on the environment shaping leadership experiences, hampering or allowing women advancement.	Furst and Reeved, 2008, Leadership Quarterly; Dwivedi, Joshi and Misangyi, 2018, Academy of Management Journal
Career	In this area, studies focus on the analysis of the outcomes, both at the organizational and the individual's level.	Chen, Crossland and Huang, 2016, Strategic Management Journal; Rocha and Van Praag, 2020, Strategic Management Journal

*Table 2: Thematic Macro-areas' table of references.*

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.1 FUTURE LINES

In this section, we will present the future lines to encourage scholars to address in the future and in which there is yet room worthy of investigation. Hence, suggestions will be provided and analyzed for each thematic macro-area emerged from our coding (Figure 7). Our purpose is to highlight theories, topics and contexts to be addressed in future studies related to female leadership.

#### 3.1.1 REPRESENTATIONS

Prior literature has mostly analyzed topics related to stereotypes, biases and other beliefs shaping individuals' expectations about women and their social role, within and outside organizations.

We claim that it is timely to explore crucial events such as the Global Financial Crisis, the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2021 US Presidential election, in which female leadership has played a crucial role. It has also been emphasized that female leaders have represented an advantage for the society as a whole (Vroman and Danko, 2020; Elliot and Stead, 2018). Indeed, under these circumstances we noticed that women have been particularly praised for the effort and commitment displayed when facing very difficult times.

As far as the Global Financial Crisis concerns, it has represented a pivotal event in which female leadership has been tested. For instance, Nelson (2013), in her volume "Would women leaders have prevented the global financial crisis?" (2013), advanced the idea that women could have been able to prevent the Global Financial Crisis, which is a concept that popular media had already been raised, changing the concepts and the teaching of courses related to gender and economics. Specifically she noticed that since gender differences and stereotypes or biases related to women leaders are likely to influence the social construction of markets, which refers to the customs and traditional practices shaping a market, and especially financial markets, newer and positive representations about female leaders would be able to reshape market and the way of doing business, in general (Nelson, 2013). Secondly, Covid-19 Pandemic has showed how women are particularly keen to find balance between conflicting circumstances. In addition to the claims of Vroman and Danko (2020), already emerging in our coding, supporting the idea that women succeeded during the pandemic thanks to their capability of juggling multiple roles both consciously and unconsciously, to meet different needs on a daily basis, Dudman (2020) provided the idea that female leaders are making a difference and that Covid-19 pandemic currently provides a confirmation. The last December, the journalist evidenced that countries such as Norway, Finland, Iceland and Denmark only have in common women as prime ministers and much lower rates of Covid-19 infection than their male-led neighboring nations (Dudman 2020). Her claim was based on the analysis conducted by Garikipati and Kambhampati (2020) and published by the Centre for Economic Policy Research and the World Economic Forum, suggesting that the higher effectiveness displayed by women leader can be explained by their capacity to adopt "proactive and coordinated responses" (Garikipati and Kambhampati, 2020). Yet, Biden, the just elected US President, demonstrated his support toward women, not

only filling out his economics and communication teams mostly by women but also appointing a woman as US Vice President.

In light of this, we claim that since most of the studies concerning representations are grounded on Social Role Theory and other theories coming from such concepts (e.g. Gender Role Theory) next to theories regarding individuals' expectation about the roles performed by other individuals, the evolution of these should be reconsidered in light of these recent events. It would provide room to scholar to test the role played by stereotypes in leadership role and to assess the efficacy of female leaders. Moreover, it could extend the concept already advanced by Duehr and Bono (2006), who claimed that stereotypes changed over time. The analysis of young and usually successful female leaders would allow scholars to better assess to what extent the stereotypes affect the perception of leadership.

At a more organizational level, our review of the literature showed that stereotypes are still highly predominant at higher level of organizations. As stated by Sheridan et al., (2011) women tend to align with men behaviors in order to accomplish and reach popularity. One of the explanation provided by scholars was related to the so called "queen bee phenomenon". However, it remains to assess whether the phenomenon is limited to a certain type of organizations (for instance, highly bureaucratic organizations), or it would be reduced in more horizontal organizations. Such insights would offer a better understanding of the antecedents and consequences of prejudiced representations of women.

Furthermore, as representation is a highly complex and multifaceted topic, we claim that future studies should adopt a broader arrays of methodology, from a more positivistic to a critical view. For instance, shadowing and ethnographical observation would permit scholars to analyze *in situ* how such dynamics occur and to disentangle the phenomenon in such a way to provide a processual view of why stereotypes are still present and affecting women and other minor groups.

In fact, considering Social Role Theory, which claims that stereotypes usually come from people's habits and tradition, new customs and practices could lead to the creation new stereotypes supporting a broader way of thinking about women that includes and considers women's competencies and capabilities not only in time of crisis. Hence, we would appreciate that future studies investigate how and if these mentioned events contribute to the abolition of the phenomenon of women succeeding as leaders in tumultuous times only and investigations of how the perceptions of women leaders would change thanks to stereotypes' changes.

### **3.1.2 DISCRIMINATION**

Our coding showed that one of the recurring topic within the prior literature about female leadership relates to discrimination. It can hamper individuals belonging to minorities (e.g. racial discrimination) and, more specifically, it harms women because of their gender. Hence, the present section will highlight new research questions that should be addressed by scholars.

At institutional level, for instance we experienced a deep change about discrimination. Obama's election as US first black President represents one step further toward the integration of minorities. His election

in 2008 meant that a black man would have occupied a White House built by black slaves, thus representing a historical achievement toward the abolition of racial discrimination. However, as claimed by Bryant (2017), American's racial problems have not been solved merely because Obama has spent eight years in the White House. Despite the huge impact his election had in terms of enhancement of civil rights for black people, he still had to demonstrate how he had reached the presidency (BBC News, Bryant, 2017). Concerning gender discrimination, Obama also included four women within its cabinet to secure women representation and claiming that most of the problem in the world come from people with dated perceptions and beliefs, especially men, expressed his support toward women (BBC News, Asher, 2019). "If women ran every country in the world there would be a general improvement in living standards and outcomes" (Obama, 2019), said the former US President, highlighting the improvements women could drive as leaders within the political domain. Additionally and most recently, Biden's election as US President represents a further example of how America tries to overcome discrimination, both racial and gender one. Indeed, as reported by Linskey and Stein (2020), reporters for the Washington Post, Biden appointed his cabinet, securing a large representation to women and different races. His cabinet has not only been defined as the most diverse ever, but also the one that best reflects America (BBC News, Prasad, 2021). Indeed, it counts the first Native American cabinet secretary, the first female national intelligence director, the first Latino homeland security Chief and, last but not least, the first openly gay cabinet member. It means that Biden positively reacted to the pressures coming from all sides to deliver his promises of a cabinet truly representative of the entire country. Namely, it reflect the US people diversity in terms of different colors, genders and sexual orientation.

In light of this, we claim that scholars should investigate the consequences of these events within and outside organizational borders, to test whether the issues underlined by Guillaume and Pochic (2009), regarding the slow women career progression has been solved thanks to this effort displayed by politicians, to increase women and minorities representation. Hence, we would appreciate future studies aimed to explore the social outcomes of Biden's mandate as well as investigations of organizational responses to diversity, especially of gender. It could lead to the introduction of new and more representative regulations, and more to stereotypes' changes, which contributes to the creation of new prototypes concerning roles performed both within the society and the workplace.

Moreover, since the majority of the studies conducted by prior literature are grounded on US or Canadian samples, we suggest to investigate samples all over the world. In fact, thanks to globalization, it is not surprising that these events, occurring in US, will have an impact on overseas countries, as well.

Thus, we would appreciate future studies investigating the impact of these mentioned events not only on US but also on the political issues of countries all over the world, in order to understand how and if a better representation of minorities, especially women, will be achieved. Starting from Witz's words, we would suggest to investigate whether the "gendered take-over, exclusion and occupational closure" (Witz, 1992) has been overcome in order to provide larger room for women in the workplace. Recalling Guillaume and Pochic (2007), we would auspicate that their demonstration of the attachment between leaders' model and the



masculine image has been untied. Last, we would hope that the barriers faced by women when aspiring to top management roles and described by Fitzsimmons and Callan (2016) will be broken down thanks to the policies that future scholars would indicate as resolutions of discrimination issues at societal, organizational and individual level.

### **3.1.3 LEADERSHIP STYLE**

Leadership Style emerged as the one of the most discussed topics within the female leadership domain. In fact, this represents one of the most recurring theme when talking about leadership, in general. Despite prior literature has centered its focus on transformational and transactional that are the two most important and representative leadership styles, as for first introduced by Burns in 1978, nowadays scholars and theorists of leadership have started to include other styles such as democratic (Bass, 2008) and strategic (Fulmer, Stumpf and Bleak, 2009), which are dimensions of transformational leadership style, and autocratic (Lewin, Lippit and White, 1939), which reflects some aspects of transactional style. Their effort has been oriented to face new organizational issues and to respond to the needs of each industry; additionally, today it is crucial to identify a leadership style that is effective in difficult times.

For instance Rooke and colleagues (2005) discussed about leaders' action logic, which are rooted in leadership styles (Rooke and Tolbert, 2005). Authors explained that leaders are used to carry a mix of different leadership styles depending on the industry in which they operate and on the obstacles they face. By a survey, called "Leadership Development Profile" and composed by 36 open-ended sentences, authors aimed to understand how leaders develop and progress in their career. Identifying seven action logics, namely opportunist, diplomat, expert, achiever, individualist, strategist, alchemist and depending on the survey responses, seven leadership style are presented (see Table 3). Beyond transactional and transformational, they included five more leadership styles, namely *laissez-faire*, strategic, bureaucratic, democratic and autocratic. They further underlined that the more action logics a respondent agreed with, the more he or she is likely to display a mix of leadership styles. Of course, their study also analyzed the degree of effectiveness associated to each of the aforementioned leadership styles as displayed by the following table (Table 3). Concluding, authors underlined that it is a leader's action logic that differentiate him or her. Hence, the discourse about female leadership led to the conclusion that women might display a style that is consistent to their perception of power and safety when facing difficulties or prejudices.

Leadership style	Degree of effectiveness
Democratic	commonly effective
Autocratic	rarely effective
Laissez-fair	sometimes effective
Strategic	commonly effective
Transformational	sometimes effective
Transactional	sometimes effective
Bureaucratic	rarely effective

Table 3: Seven leadership Styles and their degree of effectiveness

A different study conducted by Catalino and Marnane (2019) shows that women are more keen to be inspirational, participative in decision making, focused on people development, dedicated to role modelling and focused on expectations and rewards as result of their nurturing attitude and their roles as mothers.

On the other hand, men appear to be more keen to control and correct and to be individualistic in decision-making (Mckinsey Quarterly, Catalino and Marnane, 2019). Therefore, if we follow Rooke and Tolbert's (2005) seven leadership styles' description, it means that women lead close to democratic and strategic styles while men lead through autocratic or bureaucratic leadership styles. This analysis would imply that women might lead more effectively than men; indeed, thanks to their attitude they would lead democratically rather than autocratically, displaying higher degrees of effectiveness than those driven by masculine attitudes. Hence, we claim that future research about leadership styles should focus on a specification of the different features belonging to each of those styles and on the analysis of leaders' effectiveness regardless of leaders' gender. Moreover, it could be worthwhile to investigate how these styles are effective in different contexts. Moreover, the educational system might consider and reflect not only the new emerging needs about leadership but also the evolution of the theories associated to it. In this regard, we auspicate that women will have larger room in which to apply their competences as leaders next to and with male leaders, at the same time respecting the principles coming from Authentic Leadership Theory (Avolio et al., 2004), which emphasizes the importance to build up leaders' legitimacy in the eyes of followers, through honesty and ethic to guarantee trust building and two-way respectability.

As a result, we would suggest that future studies should investigate the impact produced by the emergence of new leadership styles on the educational system as well as on the leader-follower relationship.

### 3.1.4 TRAIT

Trait represents one of the most studied topic by leadership scholars. Within the discussion about female leadership it assumes a particular meaning related to association of communal traits, namely cooperation,

concerns for others and participation, with females and agentic traits, which are embedded by focus on goals, monitoring and control, with male leaders.

A recent study by Catalino and Marnane (2019) found that women, more frequently than men exhibit leadership traits, such as listening and collaboration, that authors defined as “highly applicable to future global challenges” (McKinsey Quarterly, Catalino and Marnane, 2019). Their claim was addressed to organizations that overemphasizing outdated leadership traits, limiting in this way the inclusion of new and more effective ones, such as intellectual stimulation, inspiration and participative decision-making. An interesting future line of research would be about the analysis of female traits of leadership, such as people development and role development in addition to those mentioned above, and the investigation of their effects on followers. Moreover, another line of inquiry would concentrate on testing the misconception that women show higher degrees of empathy compared to men. Indeed as argued by Gentry et al. (2015), leaders’ empathy could lead to better outcomes in terms of lower career derailment and better performance but empathic concern has not been found related to gender. Hence, scholars could investigate the variables leading to empathy in order to provide practical guidelines to organizations willing to welcome such attitude (Gentry, Clark, Young, Cullen, Zimmerman, 2015).

Another significant topic tackled by scholars is about the traits related to gender choice, which refers to the intentional choice of a leader to embody masculine or feminine traits. In this regard, scholars started to investigate the notion of androgyny as the future evolution of leaders’ traits, in order to find a balance between the two aforementioned extremes (Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir, 2012; Lemoine, Aggarwal, Steed, 2016). In our discussion, this represents an important achievement to overcome the problems related to different genders and how both men and women are expected to approach to leadership, as it comes from gender behavioral stereotypes.

In this regard, recent studies advanced the concept of androgyny leadership (Kirchmeyer and Bullin, 1997; Kark et al., 2012). According to them androgyny leadership is identified by a balanced set of traits between masculinity and femininity, such the combination of competition and control, which are masculine traits, and empathy and concern for others, which are feminine traits. The study from Kark et al. (2012) provides an explanation of androgyny in leadership and its relative effects. Indeed, authors, conducting a study on a sample of employees for a large Israeli bank, investigated whether the notion of androgyny could help women facing the so-called “double bind” and more broadly overcoming disadvantages they usually face as women approaching to leadership. They found that balancing between masculinity and femininity, as characteristic gender-typed traits, leaders achieve androgyny, which also allow them to display a more transformational approach, when performing their roles (Kark, Waismel-Manor and Shamir, 2012). Moreover, following this stream, Lemoine et al. (2016) suggested that androgyny could be the way to build up a new leader model, resulting in few disadvantages faced by women when trying to match it (Lemoine, Aggarwak, Steed, 2016). However, these results are, in our opinion, limited to provide solutions to issues related to discrimination and leadership traits rather than contributing to leadership in general, and more specifically, to

feminine leadership literature a proper definition and prescription about what androgynous traits are. Indeed, defining it as something in between of agency and communality might not be enough. In this stance, we auspicate that scholars will further investigate this topic, providing a theoretical definition and practical guidelines for leaders who want to approach androgynously.

### **3.1.5 LEADERSHIP IDENTITY**

Leadership identity is the thematic macro-area that defines the features of a leader.

Despite we found that the theory known as Abject Appearance is the theoretical framework that explained how women challenged the traditional role of leadership identity within the context of intra-gender relation (Kristeva, 1982), we also noticed that this topic has been less investigated. Mavin and Grandy (2015) found that women adopt two main strategies to face obstacles related to intra-gender relations in their workplace, namely "Shifting focus from the body and appearance" and "Achieve a professional balance".

Despite the few contributions about leadership identity and female leadership, it would be particularly to further investigate the strategy employed by women to discipline their body appearance in order to avoid that their ability as leaders would be judged depending on their body appearance. Indeed, deepening the investigation of this strategy could lead to a better preparation of women entering in the workplace as well as to the overcoming of the obstacles women face as result of their appearance. This could drive better outcomes not only in terms of leadership identity but also in terms of less cases of discrimination. Moreover, as Mavin and Grandy (2015) pointed out, this mentioned body work help women to look like a professional leader; thus we claim that the topic should be considered relevant by colleges and universities, which being accountable for future leaders' education are required to adapt their leadership and management programs to these new principles.

Further contributions to leadership identity as a relevant topic have been provided by Chrobot-Mason et al. (2019), which analyzed Sheril Sandberg's book "Lean In" and treating her successful career as a case study, evidenced the need for women to change women's mindset when they approach to leadership and obtain negative messages. Authors suggest that adopting a self-affirming mindset should be helpful reacting to negative critiques coming from deep-rooted stereotypes (Chrobot-Mason, Hoobler, Burno, 2019). Sandberg's "Lean In" philosophy provides to women a new approach to leadership defined by the expression "Fake it 'til you make it". It does not mean that women should sacrifice authenticity in the name of adaptation, it rather identifies the behavior through which women adopt a body language that conveys confidence and competence while adopting an optimistic mind-set, in order to develop a set of abilities enabling them to achieve their goals (TED Talks, Cuddy, 2016). This view could be empirically investigated in organizations in order to assess how confidence affects performance.

Lastly, authentic leadership is centered on the traditional visions of leadership stemming from gendered stereotypes (e.g. Liu, Cutcher, Grant, 2015) and driving a leader's model based on images of masculinities. The result is that a formal definition of authenticity in leadership, which considers stereotypes changes, for

women is currently still lacking. Hence, we auspicate that scholars will further investigate themes related to authenticity considering a broader view of leadership, finally including women.

### **3.1.6 ENVIRONMENT AND CONTINGENCIES**

Environment is the thematic macro-area that includes and discusses the sets of conditions enabling or hampering women's career advancement. As emerged from our reviews, there are some conditions enabling women success because their approach to leadership is considered appropriate when facing difficulties or crisis and other supporting women, even in absence of organizational issues or problems.

Moreover, the discussion about the environment supporting female leadership is interrelated to the topic of women's traits, such that most of the investigated environments are yet not ready to welcome women's traits and to adapt to them. For instance, the study conducted by Højgaard (2002) grounding on a constructivist approach, assumed that gender roles is socially constructed and thus highly depending on culture. Hence, culture and society are presented as environmental factors that have shaped and facilitated the inclusion of men and, on the other hand, the exclusion of women from leading roles (Hearn and Collinson, 1996). Within such environments, these factors result, among the other outcomes, in different and deep rooted organizational practices, such as broader recruitment of men compared with women (Barbulescu and Bidwell, 2013). In this regard, future studies about the environment and the contingencies facilitating female leadership might consider the analysis of successful recent cases, such provided by New Zealand that being a country directed by women has already accustomed with images of femininity associated to the leader role.

This country was for first directed by a woman, as prime minister, in 1999 and this meant a lot for New Zealand. Indeed, the presence of women in political roles was normalized as provided by the last elections, featured by the presence of women as leaders for both country's biggest parties. As a result, this country represents an environment where both leaders and citizens, representing the electorate, have reference models for women in leadership resulting in a greater representation of women and minorities within the country's Parliament, which can be identified as one of the more inclusive all over the world.

Georgeac and Rattan (2019) claimed that progress in women representation in leadership could weaken people's issues and concerns for gender inequalities in different domains. Authors support the idea that an higher representation of women in the leadership domain could reduce the psychological process of concern for gender inequalities thus providing remedies to many disparities faced by women in other domains, such as gender pay gap, and driving perceptions of women access to equal opportunities (Georgeac and Rattan, 2019).

Since different studies have investigated the theoretical conditions facilitating women's career advancement (Glass and Cook, 2016; Dwivedi, Joshi, Misangyi, 2018;), and considering that recent events (e.g. Global Financial Crisis and Covid-19 pandemic) provided an opportunity for women's larger participation and appraisal, we would suggest that future studies might observe how and if an higher presence of women is really able to reshape the environment in which they work as well as the relative effects on the societal level. In this stance, New Zealand could represent the societal environment to be tested in order to

confirm the claims from Georgeac and Rattan (2019), while providing guidelines to allow other countries welcoming female leaders, in the political field as well as within other domains.

### **3.1.7 CAREER**

Our reviews provided evidence that “Career” is recurring as the second main topic of the majority of the articles within our analyzed sample, as it includes the discussions about the variables influencing the outcomes related to both individuals and organizations.

Our coding highlighted the effort of leadership scholars toward the investigation of gender differences in the outcomes related to leaders’ emotions and mindsets. Specifically, our sample comprises investigations of the effects of self-esteem and general mental ability (Li, Arvey, Song, 2011), displaying empathetic concern (Gentry, Clark, Young, Cullen, Zimmerman, 2015) and emotional display (Brescoll, 2016) on female individuals’ career advancement as leaders. Considering that findings revealed that both displaying empathetic concern and emotional display lead to different outcomes depending on gendered stereotypes, we claim that these topic might be further investigated in the future because of the probability of stereotypes’ changes due to the recent events characterized by successful examples of female leadership.

Similarly, scholars also evidenced the correlation of demographic traits, such as age and gender (Pelled and Xin, 1997) or sociodemographic variables, human capital indices and individual differences variables (Pachulicz, Schmitt, Kuljanin, 2008) with organizational outcomes, such as financial performance, or career success. Pelled and Xin (1997) reported that gender similarity had a significant effect on employees’ absence rate, explaining that people are more apt to identify themselves with leaders with the same gender. Pachulicz and colleagues (2008) additionally provided that career satisfaction and success is experienced mostly by men. In light of the recent events, which proved women leaders’ competences and abilities, even in unexpected or turbulent times, we argue that these findings might be further and empirically tested. We auspicate that the increasing representation of women in leadership roles we are observing, will improve their personal experience as leaders in terms of both higher career satisfaction and success.

Another topic the leadership literature has tackled so far investigates the effects of feedback on leadership development considering gender differences. Doldor et. al (2019) provided evidence that feedback encourages men to build strength and actively leverage politics as a leader, while cautioning women to manage their shortcomings; depicting men and women as proactive versus defensive political players. Specifically, developmental feedback conveys more belief in men's leadership potential, giving men a mandate to assertively forge ahead into leadership roles, while directing women to be communal by continually attending to interpersonal dynamics (Doldor, Wyatt, Silvester, 2019). Consistently, Bear et al. (2017) had already found that the degree of power associated to the feedback source is negatively associated to the probability for a woman to receive a feedback that promotes leadership advancement. The result is that women feel more powerless than men when receiving feedback and they start internalizing feedback and interpret ambiguous ones more negatively than men (Bear, Cushenbery, London, Sherman, 2017). In light of this, we auspicate

that, on the one hand, feedback could provide support and motivation to women career potential realization, and on the other, we highlight the potential of training programs for organizations to be informed about the powerful effects of feedback on organizational outcomes, in general.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the stream of research that has studied the sources of gender inequality and their effects on women's careers (e.g. Fernandez-Mateo, Kaplan, 2018; Cook, Ingersoll, Glass, 2019). For instance, Cook et al. (2019) evidenced that the greater women representation on corporate boards is not enough to overcome gender pay disparities, which are considered relevant features of unequal opportunities within the discussion of women career advancement. Indeed gender pay gap shrink only when women serve as chair of the compensation committee (Cook, Ingersoll, Glass, 2019). Interestingly and relevant for future researches, demand and supply effects have been identified as sources of gender inequality, as well. Fernandez-Mateo and Kaplan (2019) evidenced that supply and demand on the employment market for women are dependent on each-others. The supply, represented by women's choices and actions, is affected by the demand, where demand can be understood as deriving both from the decisions of evaluators, employers, or other audiences and also from the social context and interactions within those contexts (Fernandez-Mateo, Kaplan, 2019). Hence, the fact is not only that women have intrinsically low confidence, which in some instances limits women requests for promotion, it is also that jobs are masculinized, and therefore women have a low probability of getting them (Barbulescu and Bidwell, 2013). These findings not only are meaningful for policy-makers, evidencing the need for them to be focused on both demand and supply but, in addition, represent a future line of research for scholars. Indeed, we suggest to further investigate the mechanisms shaping the employment market as affecting the career patterns of women leaders.

The following table, (Table 4), provides a summary of the aforementioned future lines in forms of research questions that might be addressed by scholars.

<b>Thematic Macro-area</b>	<b>Future Research Question</b>
Representation	<i>e.g. How do recent events, such as Global Financial Crisis and Covid 19 pandemic, have been affecting existing stereotypes about women's social role?</i>
Discrimination	<i>e.g. Do stereotypes changes eventually produce effects, in terms of less instances of discrimination and lower barriers to women career progression?</i>
Leadership Style	<i>e.g. Which are the new leadership styles that are more successful in troubling times?</i>  <i>e.g. How does the emergence of new leadership styles impact the educational system and the relationship between leader and followers?</i>
Trait	<i>e.g. Which are the traits of a leader that foster inclusion?</i>
Leadership Identity	<i>e.g. How authentic leadership style and charismatic leadership are intertwined, in particular related to female leaders?</i>  <i>e.g. How could women protect their authenticity as leaders while approaching to the adoption of a more optimistic mindset to display higher levels of self-confidence and self-awareness?</i>
Environment	<i>e.g. How do environments already accustomed to female leadership, such as New Zealand and its inclusive Parliament, contribute to the creation of a leader model for women?</i>  <i>e.g. Which are the contingencies that foster an inclusive leadership?</i>
Career	<i>e.g. What effects does the increasing representation of women produce on their experiences as leaders, in terms of career satisfaction and success?</i>

Table 4: Future Lines and Research Questions



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Since its origin, leadership has been one of the most investigated topic by the management literature.

Different definitions of leadership have been used, depending on the emphasis that authors have put on concepts such as traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns and administrative positions. However, a common definition of female leadership, which is the topic of the present thesis, is still lacking in the academic literature. Hence, we decided to draw on the definition provided by the practitioner Susan Fallender, director of the Global Girls & Women Initiative for Intel, which emphasized the need to support women career advancement through greater investments that organizations and broadly institutions should bear. Indeed, this thesis provides a systematization of the academic literature investigating topics related to female leadership within a long time horizon, ranging from 1991 to 2020, in order to fill the existing gaps of the extant literature.

To do so, we selected 166 articles, which revealed to be the most pertinent to our topic, published by twelve top tiers journals, concerning the business and management fields, as confirmed by the SCIMAGO 2019 rank list and simultaneously belonging to the ABS list or rated as A or A\*. Following, we conducted a systematic qualitative analysis of the articles included in our sample, trying to cluster them within seven thematic macro-areas. The results of our analysis have been discussed in forms of descriptive statistics as well as of elaborated findings.

The main findings regard not only the main topics of the mentioned articles but, additionally, the exploration of the most important theories adopted by the extant literature, settings and the approaches employed by the scholars.

It emerged that the majority of the articles are conducted through quantitative approaches, followed by qualitative ones and a minority of conceptual papers and mixed approaches. This is not surprising since leadership literature is mostly quantitative and positivistic oriented.

For what concerns the settings of the articles at hand, the majority of them, not surprisingly, investigates organizational settings, which refers to all those settings eventually related to a broader definition of organization or organizational structure. Moreover, military, politics and church are the settings investigated by the remaining articles.

In terms of theoretical frameworks, we found that scholars grounded their studies on seven main theories. Social Role Theory (Eagly and Wood, 1999) and Role Congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) are the two most recurring theories that explain the role played by individuals' stereotypes shaping their thoughts about the division of labour and the role performed by men and women and consequently representing antecedents of the prejudice toward female leadership. Expectation States Theory (Berger, 1983) – EST – and Expectancy violations theory, instead, are two set of theories investigating the effects of expectations on the interactions between individuals from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the first analyzes how status hierarchies emerge in situations where individuals are oriented towards a collective goal (Berger et al., 1974; Correll and Ridgeway, 2003). On the other hand, the latter is a communication field

that investigates individuals' responses to expectations' violation.

One more relevant theoretical framework is represented by Leader-Member-Exchange(LMX) Theory (Graen, and Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen and Cashman, 1975), which focuses on the two-way dyadic relationship between leaders and followers as well as supervisors and subordinates, seeking to investigate why leaders could display different approaches, in terms of leadership styles, depending on the group they are leading or supervising. It is also noteworthy to mention, Transformational and Charismatic Leadership Theory (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Avolio and Bass, 1991; Antonakis and House, 2002) and Authentic Leadership Theory (Avolio et al., 2004), which are among the most famous leadership theories and have been recalled by the articles included in our analyzed sample, to understand the role of women in leadership and confirm whether any kind of gender advantage does exist.

Regarding the main topics investigated by the literature, we analyzed seven thematic macro-areas, namely representations, discrimination, trait, leadership style, leadership identity, environment and career.

We found that "representations", which includes stereotypes and biases, do produce an impact on individual prototype creation and consequently on leaders' evaluation *de facto* also representing sources for women leaders' discrimination. Moreover, studies about discrimination provided evidence that in the latest decades, organizations, institutions and governments have gained awareness about the existence of this phenomenon. Emerging from our coding, the discussions about leadership style and trait appeared as highly interrelated. Hence, findings provide that women mostly perform a leadership style close to the transformational one, associated to traits such as cooperation, participation and caring for others, and men perform transactional leadership, mostly associated to control, monitoring for employees and high goal orientation. Thus, men are defined to act through agency whereas women are associated to communality.

"Leadership identity" is the thematic macro-area in which scholars described how a leader is and, particularly relevant to our investigation, how women adopt certain strategies to face the constraints they face to maintain the 'right' bodies against exacting standards of corporeality (Bell and Sinclair, 2014). This is explained by the theory of Abject Appearance (Kristeva, 1982) that provides understandings about how women, placed at the margins, might be in the best position to transgress boundaries.

Yet, "Environment" and "Career" also have been revealed as interrelated topics. Indeed, the first investigates the conditions enabling or hampering women's career advancement while the latter, which investigates the outcomes for both individuals and organization, evidences the results of the aforementioned conditions enabling a greater women representation.

Last, we provided some future lines for further investigation, for both approaches and topics, considering current events, worldwide. The most relevant ones relate to the need to consider possible stereotypes' changes, as predicted by Duehr and Bono (2006), and their impact on theories such as Social Role Theory (Eagly and Wood, 1999) and Role Congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Following, we auspicate that stereotypes' changes will reduce the stances of discrimination for women in leadership, as well.

Further, we noticed that new emerging leadership styles and their relative traits have been investigated by recent studies; hence we suggest to further explore this domain providing links with concepts such as efficiency and performance. Moreover, we auspicate that a greater representation of women will contribute to the formalization of a feminine leadership identity, which will eventually represent a new topic to be explored. To conclude, we mentioned countries such as Norway or New Zealand as environments where the idea of a woman as business or political leader has been already legitimized and then, we indicated them as samples to be studied to predict the outcomes of female leadership. Additionally, it is noteworthy to investigate the mechanisms shaping the employment market of these mentioned countries, welcoming female leadership, in order to operate a comparison with the other countries' market practices, as affecting the career patterns of women leaders.

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## **APPENDIX A**

Coding scheme to create our catalogue:

- 1) Abstract
- 2) Keywords
- 3) Research Question
- 4) Method (such as qualitative, quantitative, mixed method or conceptual paper)
- 5) Setting
- 6) Variables (in case of quantitative approach)
- 7) Dimension of the sample (in case of quantitative approach)
- 8) Hypothesis to be tested (for quantitative approach)
- 9) Theoretical Framework
- 10) Findings
- 11) Topic
- 12) Thematic macro-area

## Summary

Leadership is still one among the most relevant topics investigated by the management literature.

Historically, the discussion about leadership has been firstly started by Machiavelli in the sixteenth century (Smith et al., 1989), who, on the one hand contributed to the creation of the contingency theory of leadership stating that the leader should approach to meet specific demands, and on the other highlighted the importance of trust between leaders and their followers (Cosans and Reina, 2018). However, scholars date the origin of a more systematic analysis of leadership earlier in the last century (Aalateeg, 2017). Max Weber (1946), who is recognized by Smith and colleagues (1989) as the first leadership scholar and beginner of a systematic study about leadership, identified three “ideal types” of authorities, namely charismatic authority, traditional authority and legal authority as sources of leadership.

Specifically, charismatic authority reflected personal characteristics and is the leader who is supposed to display them, traditional authority referred to norms and forms of conduct followed by the leaders (Spencer, 1970) and legal authority resulted from functional “duty of office” (Weber, 1946).

Since Weber, different definitions of leadership have been provided, and Stogdill (1974) concluded that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define this concept. Indeed, Yuki (2002) observed that leadership has been defined in different terms, considering traits, behavior, influence, interaction patterns, role relationship and administrative positions. The richest definition, in terms of a broader range of features included, could be identified by the one provided by Antonakis and colleagues (2004:5):

“Leadership can be defined as the nature of the influencing process – and its resultant outcomes – that occurs between a leader and followers and how this influencing process is explained by the leader’s dispositional characteristics, and behaviors, follower perceptions and attributions of the leader, and the context in which the influencing process occurs”.

Therefore, the role of influencing others, the context, and the relation between them are core features of a good leader.

This thesis takes a distinctive angle and considers how the literature has discussed about female leadership in the last decades. Despite the increasing number of women occupying leading roles, likewise in business and political spheres, our attention is focused on the analysis of the literature that has investigated the mentioned topic. Despite noteworthy reviews about female leadership have been published (e.g. Cocchio, 2009; Dekker, 2013), this thesis aims to provide a timely and updated review of the topic.

Additionally, recent events also contribute to demonstrate the need for women to be legitimized as leaders in order to disrupt stereotyped practices, which affect their mandate within and outside the organizational borders. Hence, we conduct a systematic literature review in order to investigate how prior literature has described the presence of women in leadership in the decades from 1991 to 2020 and further to highlight opportunities for future researches.

The thesis is organized as follows. First, we briefly present the main leadership theories in this literature. Second, the research design is presented, in which we explain the steps adopted to conduct our systematization. This leads us to the selection of the articles that represent our analyzed sample and its relative coding. Third, the results will be presented and, future lines and suggestions for further researches are provided.

Since leadership is one of the most discussed topic in management literature, scholars have developed different theories about it. Among these the most influent ones relate to leadership traits, behaviors and contingencies.

Historically in management literature, scholars analyzed leadership as based on the hereditary attributes (Bass, 1990) of those performing power roles in politics, comparing leaders traits with those of followers. This approach emphasized physiological factors, coming and assured by noble heritage, such as age, height, weight, physique, health, and appearance; ability factors such as fluency of speech, tone of voice, academic performance, intelligence, judgment and decision, insight, and initiative; and personality features such as integrity, emotional control, self-confidence, and popularity (Bass, 1990a; Bryman, 1986). According to this theory, an individual must possess these traits or characteristics in order to assume leadership (Aalateeg, 2017). However, as claimed by Stogdill (1974) leadership studies should not focus only on people characteristics but also on the situations and the events they confront. The shortcomings of trait theories of leadership, which emerged during World War II because traits failed to explain leaders' effectiveness (Bryman, 1986), drove to the further research analyzing behavioral styles of leadership. Behavioral theories assume that leaders' behaviors have an impact on work and followers' effectiveness (Aalateeg, 2017) and try to identify the best way to lead. Scholars of behavioral theories identified three leadership styles: autocratic, democratic and *laissez-faire* (Bryman, 1986). Autocratic leaders tend to centralize authority and derive power from their position whereas democratic leaders delegate authority, they are more participative and rely on subordinates' knowledge to get things done (Daft, 1999). Further, according to Bass (1990) *laissez-faire* identifies that leadership style displayed in absence or avoidance of leadership and it has been judged as ineffective. Following this stream, Transformational and Charismatic Leadership Theory (Avolio and Bass, 1991) are presented. Authors present transformational leadership as the opposite of transactional behavior, which is more directed to control employees and reward their efficiency. In fact, transformational leaders focus their attention on people, relationships and adopt a participative style (Avolio and Bass, 1991).

Lastly, answering to the call of considering the environment and context in which the leaders operate, contingencies theories attempted to predict which types of leadership styles would be the most effective in different types of situations (Holda, 1995). This approach assumes that there is no universally applicable style of leadership that could be applied to ensure effectiveness because discrete factors characterizing the situation do influence leadership and its effects. Most recently, authors embrace authentic leadership view (Avolio, 2004) claiming that leaders are required to display authenticity in order to build up their relationship with followers, which are assumed to be based on trust and ethic. Particularly, authentic leadership distinguish itself

from the outset with claims to a strong moral component. Hence, authentic leaders are identified by those who know and trust their own thoughts, feelings, motives, and values (Kernis, 2003) and possess a balanced perception of their strengths and weaknesses (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This style of leadership has been used to explain and analyze some traits of female leadership, since it has been considered a distinctive trait of women (Liu, Cutcher and Grant, 2015).

In sum, if the literature has extensively studied the leadership, providing a common definition of what a leader is, there is still a lack of a common definition for female leadership. Therefore, the current thesis draws on the definition stemming from the professional and practitioner sphere. After a rich examination of the descriptions provided by well-known leaders, we found that the analysis provided by Suzanne Fallender, director of the Global Girls & Women Initiative for Intel, was the most pertinent and inclusive one:

“ To me, – women’s leadership in 2015 – means continuing to advocate for and invest in changes that support advancement of women within their organizations and industries, by addressing issues of unconscious bias and enlisting the support of both women and men in developing solutions” (Fallender, 2015)

Her definition of leadership, and in particular female leadership, indeed, emphasized the need to further support women career advancement, which is translated in investments that organizations and, broadly, institutions are required to do in order to overcome the issues still affecting female career patterns. As our review shows, career advancement, unconscious bias, and stereotypes are still obstacles to reach senior positions. We then provide a systematization of the literature, attempting to cluster it according to its main topics. To do so, we included the articles of 12 top tiers journals that explore issues related to the business and management domains.

In order to answer to the main research question, which investigates how the literature have elaborated and framed female leadership in the latest decades, we chose to conduct a systematic literature review (Short, 2009; Callahan, 2014). This work consists of systematically search for, appraise and synthesis research evidence, adhering to guidelines on how the conduct of a review (Grant et al., 2009). In this study, we draw on SCOPUS as database. In order to incorporate articles published by top tiers journals, we used SCIMAGO 2019 rank list of journals published within “Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management” and “ Strategy and Management”. To include articles published by the most relevant journals, we decided to take into consideration just the fifty journals listed in each category. After checking overlapping journals, our final list was represented by 46 journals. The first search aimed at including all articles containing at least one of the following word roots (GENDER\* OR LEADER\*) in their title, abstract, or keywords that were published within the disciplinary area of Business and Economics. This search led to 1658 articles. To restrict our sample, we included the articles that have produced debates and were resonant among scholars (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Glass and Cook, 2016). Therefore, we excluded all the articles that have not received any citation published before 2015. We obtained a number of 328 articles and we decided to focus our analysis on 16 journals only, belonging to the ABS list or rated as A or A\*. In this way, we obtained a catalogue of 180 articles. We read all the remaining articles’ abstracts in order to consider whether they really were pertinent to our research topic. The analysis led us to delete twelve articles that fall outside the scope of our analysis, such as transgender



or race issues within the workplace, or that had no related implications to leadership. The final step of analysis led us to 166 articles published by twelve top journals.

The first step of analysis was meant to have a preliminary understanding of the literature. We therefore systematized our data according to the following topics: (i) research question, (ii) methods, (iii) theoretical framework, (iv) main findings and contributions. Subsequent in-depth reading of papers served to supplement and validate the emerging coding themes that enabled us to organize and navigate the literature. After several rounds of coding, we identified seven topics around which the literature could be clustered and that are representative of the literature: 1. Representation; 2. Discrimination; 3. Leadership style; 4. Trait; 5. Leadership Identity; 6. Environment and Contingencies; 7. Career.

Following results are presented in forms of descriptive statistics and elaborated findings.

Descriptive statistics provide information about the most representative approaches, theoretical frameworks and settings that have been analyzed by the scholars within our sample. First, our analysis shows that the majority of the studies are quantitative oriented (49%), followed by qualitative researches (27%) and conceptual papers (14%). Lastly, a minority of the articles are mixed researches (10%). Second, when analyzing qualitative researches, we dedicated some extra effort to identify what kind of qualitative methods authors decided to apply throughout their studies. Considering that the total number of qualitative studies in our sample amounts to forty-five articles, in terms of percentages, qualitative studies are represented by interviews for the 36%, by single case studies and multiple case studies, respectively for 24% and 20% (e.g. Dwivedi, Joshi, and Misangyi, 2018; Liu, Cutcher and Grant, 2015) and by reviews for the 11% (e.g. Kirsch, 2018). Lastly, 4% of qualitative researches have been conducted recurring to pure observation or ethnography and the remaining 4% through observation combined with interviews. Third, our analysis shows that there is a variety of settings used by scholars to investigate female leadership. To provide a systematization, we grouped them according to eight main categories: (1). Organizational; (2). Academic; (3). Undefined; (4). Military; (5). Politics; (6). Church; (7). Organizational and academic; (8). Organizational and politics. Fourth, we highlighted the main theoretical frameworks used by scholars within our sample. It emerges that the most representative backgrounds are: 1) the Social Role Theory (Eagly and Wood, 1999); 2) Role Congruity Theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002); 3) Expectations States Theory (Berger, 1983); 4) Expectancy violations Theory (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon and Jones, 1976); 5) Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen, and Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen and Cashman, 1975); 6) Transformational and Charismatic Leadership Theory (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Avolio and Bass, 1991; Antonakis and House, 2002); 7) Authentic Leadership Theory (Avolio et al., 2004). To conclude, we also investigated whether the topic of female leadership has received growing attention from 1991 to 2020 or not and what are the top tiers journals that mostly hosted this debate. The debate about female leadership has received growing attention in the last decade, namely from 2011 on. Moreover, *Leadership Quarterly* and *Gender Work and Organization* resulted as the top tiers journals who largely hosted this debate.

Our coding showed that studies can be clustered into seven topics. Elaborative findings provide insights about each of these seven thematic macro-areas. First, we analysed the thematic macro-area called “representation”, which includes all the articles whose main theme is about gender and/or race stereotypes, biases toward women in management positions and similar or derived topics. . Overall, authors, such as Duehr and Bono (2006) and Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers (2016), argue that the prejudice toward women, who might be disadvantaged when performing top executive or political roles, is due to common beliefs or deep-rooted expectations related to the female gender and to the role of women within the society. Secondly, we analysed “discrimination” as thematic macro-area, which includes all the articles that investigate the obstacles, the barriers and the issues encountered by women when trying to realize their career potential of lower compensation and worse working conditions. In this section authors, for instance Guillaume and Pochic (2009) and Askehave and Zethsen (2014), highlighted some issues encountered by women when trying to realize their aspirations becoming managers, such as slow women career progression and women imbalanced representation at the top management levels. Third, we analysed the articles belonging to the macro-area discussing about “Leadership Style”, which includes investigations of differences between men and women behaviours as managers or leaders in order to predict performance effectiveness (e.g. Vecchio, 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2003). Fourth, “Trait” represents the thematic macro-area that comprises all those articles focused on the discussion about individuals’ trait anticipating leadership behaviours or outcomes (e.g. Pillemer, Graham and Burke, 2014; Lemoine, Aggarwak and Steed, 2016). Most of these studies are grounded on the assumptions coming from from Social Role Theory by Eagly and Wood (1999) and overall, authors argued that, by performing certain roles within the society, men and women are expected to behave following pre-determined modalities, namely agency and communality, which respectively refers to the sets of traits traditionally displayed by men and women. Following, the fifth mentioned thematic macro-area is “Leadership Identity”, which includes all those articles that describe the identity of a leader in terms of his/her qualities, characteristics, beliefs. Overall, authors in this section provide a set of critiques and reconceptualization of leadership identity, especially in relation to female leadership (e.g. Binns, 2008; Marshall, 2011). Yet, “environment” is the sixth analysed thematic macro-area, including all those articles where the setting, the context and the conditions have been found particularly relevant with regard to female leadership. Specifically, this section studies the environment and the contingencies that foster or hamper women in the leadership roles. Overall, we found two main streams representing two working contexts enabling women to realize their career potential. First, we refer to all those conditions allowing women to achieve promotions breaking through the glass ceiling such provided by the study conducted by Furst and Reeved (2008); secondly, we investigate the conditions allowing women career potential realization, albeit unrelated to the glass cliff phenomenon, for instance the research conducted by Dwivedi, Joshi and Misangyi (2018). Lastly, “Career” represents the less mentioned among the single thematic macro-areas, referring all those articles investigating both, the issues related to gendered individuals’ career progression and outcomes and the impacts of gender on organizational and performance outcomes. This category is analyzed by adopting first, the organizational perspective of

career and secondly the individual's one. From the organizational perspective, gender composition has been investigated as related to strategy and performance (e.g. Lyngsie and Foss, 2017) instead, the individuals' perspective is saliently related to issues such as career or occupational choice, career advancement or success and gender pay gap (e.g. Rocha and Van Praag, 2020).

The third section is dedicated to the provision of the future lines for each thematic macro-area that represent topics where there is yet room worthy of investigation. Regarding "representation" as thematic macro-area, we suggested the possibility that recent events, such as Global Financial Crisis and Covid 19 pandemic, where women have proved their abilities and competencies as leaders, might lead to the change of stereotypes about women and their social role. For "discrimination", we noticed that if stereotypes changes occur, as anticipated by Duehr and Bono (2006), they would eventually produce effects in terms of lower instances of discrimination and barriers to women career advancement. Regarding "Leadership Style", we noticed that new leadership styles recently emerged and that these could have an impact, worthy of investigation, on the educational system as well as on the relationship leader-follower. Concerning "Trait", we question what are the leaders' traits fostering inclusion. Regarding "Leadership Identity" we first suggested that future research might deepen the investigation regarding the implication of charisma and authenticity for female leadership; secondly and consequently, considering that women have been suggested to display higher levels of self-confidence and self-awareness, we also questioned to future scholars how they are supposed to preserve authenticity while welcoming this suggestion. Following and analyzing the literature as well as recent events about "Environment and contingencies", we noticed that there are environments already accustomed to women performing leaders' roles, such as New Zealand and its inclusive Parliament, which could provide future lines of inquiry for scholars, who might analyze the relative implications for the creation of a proper leader model for women, as coming from accustomed practices of female leadership. Additionally we also suggested to highlight what are the contingencies fostering inclusion. Finally, as far as "career" concerns, we questioned the scholars to investigate the effects eventually produced by the increasing representation of women on their experiences as leaders, both in terms of career satisfaction and success.

To conclude, we auspicate that women will be increasing represented in the future, in business as well as in political and other spheres, until the achievement of equal opportunities for both genders.

