Cracking the Glass Ceiling:

Women on Corporate Boards in Germany and China

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie
im Fach Politikwissenschaft
am Fachbereich Politik- und Sozialwissenschaften
der Freien Universität Berlin

vorgelegt am 27. September 2019 von
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Tag der Disputation: 16.12.2019 um 10:00 Uhr

Abstract

Internationally women are still largely underrepresented on publicly listed corporate boards. The literature frequently uses the metaphor of a glass ceiling to highlight barriers that may block the rise of women to high-level corporate positions. In this study I analyse barriers for female board access in Germany and China, by asking, "*Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Which barriers do women in China and Germany face when trying to reach a board position?*" For this study I conducted 31 interviews in both countries with female board members, CEOs, entrepreneurs and experts. The transcribed interviews were then addressed in an inductive manner by using qualitative content analysis and doing a cross-case analysis of female board underrepresentation in Germany and China. The most frequently mentioned and emphasised factors by both German and Chinese interviewees were summarised and revealed the following five thematic categories:

- Policies & Laws
- Compatibility: Family & Career
- Personal Initiative
- Individual Support & Networks
- Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Societal Expectations

All five categories include both limiting barriers and promoting factors. In this study, I primarily focused upon barriers for female board access. All five categories were emphasised to a different extent by German and Chinese interviewees. My findings, based on the conducted interviews in both countries, suggest a five-fold result. First of all, I find that policies aimed at promoting and safeguarding women can have the opposite effect. German interviewees criticise the *"Herdprämie"* and *"Ehegattensplitting"* while Chinese interviewees mention the *"early retirement scheme"* and *"two-child policy"* as reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes and not being conducive when trying to increase the number of women on boards. Secondly, I find that measures encouraging alternative working models, as part-time work, are not necessarily always career enhancing. This is particularly the case when a person is penalised in his or her career development after taking advantage of alternative working models. Thirdly, I find that a lack of confidence in one´s own abilities in addition to stereotypes assuming women to not have any interest in a board or management position to be a barrier in Germany and China. Fourthly, limited access to powerful often *"old boys´ networks"* and a lack of networking skills are barriers. Fifthly, societal expectations assuming women to naturally embody stereotypical feminine characteristics are a barrier for women´s career development. I find that societal expectations, as assuming women to be the primary caretaker, can lead to an underestimation of women´s abilities in the professional world.

Key words: glass ceiling, women on boards, women in high-level corporate positions in China and Germany

Zusammenfassung

Frauen sind weltweit in börsennotierten Vorständen und Aufsichtsräten weiterhin unterrepräsentiert. Die Fachliteratur verwendet häufig die Metapher einer Glasdecke, um Barrieren aufzuzeigen, die den Aufstieg von Frauen in hochrangige Unternehmenspositionen blockieren können. In dieser Studie analysiere ich solche Barrieren für Frauen in Deutschland und China. Ich gehe dabei folgender Frage nach: *„Durchbrechen der Glasdecke: Welche Barrieren begegnen Frauen in China und Deutschland, wenn sie eine Vorstands- oder Aufsichtsratsposition erlangen möchten?"* Für diese Studie habe ich in beiden Ländern 31 Interviews mit weiblichen Vorstandsmitgliedern, Aufsichtsratsmitgliedern, CEOs, Unternehmerinnen und Expert*innen durchgeführt. Die transkribierten Interviews wurden anschließend induktiv mittels einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse und einer fallübergreifenden Analyse zur Unterrepräsentation von Frauen in Aufsichtsräten und Vorständen in Deutschland und China untersucht. Die am häufigsten genannten und von den Befragten besonders hervorgehobenen Faktoren wurden zusammengefasst und ergaben die folgenden fünf thematischen Kategorien:

- Richtlinien & Gesetze
- Kompatibilität: Familie & Beruf
- Persönliche Initiative
- Individuelle Unterstützung & Netzwerke
- Gesellschaftsstrukturen: Geschlechterrollen & gesellschaftliche Erwartungen

Alle fünf Kategorien beinhalten sowohl hemmende Barrieren als auch fördernde Faktoren. Für meine Analyse habe ich mich vornehmlich auf die Barrieren konzentriert. Von allen Befragten wurden Barrieren in unterschiedlicher Ausprägung genannt, die den oben aufgezeigten fünf Kategorien zugeordnet werden können. Meine Ergebnisse, basierend auf den in beiden Ländern durchgeführten Interviews, schlagen ein fünffaches Ergebnis vor. Erstens stelle ich fest, dass Maßnahmen, die zur Förderung und zum Schutz von Frauen dienen, einen gegenteiligen Effekt erzielen können. Deutsche Befragte kritisieren dabei die *"Herdprämie"* und das *"Ehegattensplitting",* während chinesische Befragte die *"vorzeitige Pensionierungsregelung"* und die *"Zwei-Kind-Politik"* hervorheben. Die Befragten sagen, dass solche Gesetze traditionelle Geschlechterstereotypen stärken und nicht förderlich sind, um die Anzahl von Frauen in Aufsichtsräten und Vorständen zu erhöhen. Zweitens stelle ich fest, dass Maßnahmen zur Förderung alternativer Arbeitsmodelle, wie zum Beispiel Teilzeitmodelle, nicht unbedingt karrierefördernd sind. Dies ist insbesondere dann der Fall, wenn eine Person in ihrer beruflichen Entwicklung durch die Nutzung alternativer Arbeitsmodelle benachteiligt wird. Drittens stelle ich fest, dass ein Mangel an Vertrauen in die eigenen Fähigkeiten sowie Stereotypen, die davon ausgehen, dass Frauen kein Interesse an einer Führungsposition haben, ein Hindernis für die Karriereentwicklung von Frauen darstellt. Viertens bildet der begrenzte Zugang zu machtvollen, oftmals "old boys´ Netzwerken" sowie mangelnde Netzwerkarbeit Hindernisse für Frauen in beiden Ländern. Ein fünftes Hindernis stellen gesellschaftliche Erwartungen dar, die davon ausgehen, dass Frauen natürlich gegebene weibliche Eigenschaften verkörpern. Gesellschaftliche Erwartungen, wie die Annahme, dass Frauen Hauptverantwortliche für Pflegearbeiten sind, können zu einer Unterschätzung ihrer Fähigkeiten in der Berufswelt führen.

Schlüsselwörter: Glasdecke, Frauen in Aufsichtsräten und Vorständen, Frauen in hochrangigen Unternehmenspositionen in China und Deutschland

To my mother

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone that supported me during my doctoral studies. My gratitude goes to my supervisors Professor Levy and Professor Meng for their advice, support and suggestions.

I would like to thank my parents and siblings for their continuous moral support. I am especially grateful to my mother. A big thank you to my grandmas who provided me with an undisturbed working environment and let me enjoy their cooking skills. I am grateful to my friends Carlos, Resi, Ivan, Lilo, Matthias, Tobias and Kinga who were always there with a kind word. Thank you to the Graduate School of Global Politics (GSGP) particularly to Professor Segbers, Sabine and Sandra for giving me the best possible surrounding environment for my studies.

My particular gratitude goes to my interviewees in China and Germany. This study would have been impossible without you.

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1. Introduction

Internationally women are still largely underrepresented on corporate boards and in top-management positions. Terjesen and Singh (2008: 55) argue that the overall lack of women on corporate boards is an international phenomenon. Thereby, the literature often uses the metaphor of a *"glass ceiling"* to describe *"invisible barrier(s) blocking the rise of women to top jobs"* (Holst, 2006: 124). The *"glass ceiling"* highlights the phenomenon that women´s career development frequently declines after middle management positions (Macarie and Moldovan, 2012: 157).

In order to address the above, I analyse the following research question: *Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Which barriers do women in China and Germany face when trying to reach a board position?* By highlighting barriers and ways of overcoming them, I intend to shed light upon the *"glass ceiling"* in China and Germany.

To answer the research question I conducted 31 interviews with female board members, CEOs, entrepreneurs and experts in both countries. When analysing the transcribed interviews in an inductive manner the most frequently mentioned and particularly emphasised factors by German and Chinese interviewees were summarised and revealed the following five thematic categories:

- Policies & Laws
- Compatibility: Family & Career
- Personal Initiative
- Individual Support & Networks
- Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Societal Expectations

All five thematic categories include both inhibiting barriers and fostering factors for female board access. This means that each category contains both barriers for female board access as well as suggesting ways of overcoming them. These factors create power relations that can either limit or promote women when striving for a board position in Germany and China. In order to answer the research question I will primarily focus upon barriers, thus factors limiting female board access. Although all five thematic categories are mentioned by both German and Chinese interviewees, each is emphasised to a different extent. My findings, based on the conducted interviews in both countries, suggest the following five-fold results:

First of all, I find that policies aimed at promoting and safeguarding women can have the opposite effect. Thus, policies triggering contradictory results can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, thereby posing barriers for female board access in both China and Germany. Barriers are policies that create incentives for women to not work. German interviewees highlight the *"Herdprämie"*[1] and

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[1] "Herdprämie"- A policy literally translated as "Cooker Bonus" that came into force in 2013. It is pejoratively used to refer to the "Betreuungsgeld" translated as "Childcare Allowance." A social support for families in Germany that raise their children aged one to three years old without taking advantage of childcare facilities.

"Ehegattensplitting"[2] while Chinese interviewees mention the *"early retirement scheme"* and the *"two-child policy"* as not being conducive when trying to increase the number of women on boards (WoB)[3].

Secondly, I find that measures encouraging alternative working models, as for example part-time work, can improve compatibility between family and career, however are not necessarily career enhancing. This is particularly the case when a person is penalised in his or her career development after taking advantage of alternative working models. Insufficient childcare facilities, mentioned by German interviewees and a lack of governmental support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) during employees' maternity leave, mentioned by Chinese interviewees, are barriers for women´s board access. In addition, insufficient framework structures and societal expectations leading to a double burden for women can be a barrier in both countries when aiming for a board position.

Thirdly, I find that a lack of confidence in one´s own abilities in addition to societal stereotypes assuming women to not have any interest in a board or management position to be a barrier in Germany and China.

Fourthly, limited access to powerful often *"old boys´ networks"* and a lack of networking skills are barriers for female board access in both countries. Interviewees argue that a non-existent social and professional environment can hinder women when aiming for a board position. In addition, having no social, national or international pressure to improve structural framework conditions for female board access is a barrier. Framework conditions can be further hampered when national actors limit social efforts aimed at improving structural framework conditions of gender equality, as mentioned by Chinese interviewees.

Fifthly, societal expectations presuming women to naturally embody stereotypical feminine characteristics are a barrier for women´s board access in both countries. Interviewees criticise societal expectations presuming women to be the primary caretaker of household and childcare duties. I find that societal expectations can lead to an underestimation of women´s abilities in the professional world. Thus, it can lead to a situation in which women are constantly trying to prove themselves and their abilities in order to be taken seriously.

The innovative result of this study is the analysis of factors that limit female board access in Germany and China as well as suggesting ways of overcoming them. Unexpectedly interviewees from both countries mentioned very similar to the same factors during the interviews. However, respondents emphasised these factors differently. For the analysis I used Allen´s (1999) threefold concept of ´power.´ Thereby, I conducted theoretical development by adding a fourth ´power ´category to Allen´s (1999) concept. Allen (1999) defines ´power´ in a threefold way, thus ´power over´ (oppression), ´power to´ (empowerment) and ´power

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[2] Ehegattensplitting"- A policy literally translated as "Spousal Income Splitting" that came into force in 1958 in Germany. It refers to splitting the difference in spousal income.
[3] In the following, the abbreviation WoB will be used for women on boards.

with' (solidarity with others). I add the category of 'power without[4]', thus having no solidarity with others and therefore only limited power leverage. I argue that this fourth category makes the analysis more comprehensive and inclusive.

This study adds to the greater theoretical debate on *"Global Sisterhood."* In line with *"Global Sisterhood"* I find that the international *"glass ceiling"* exists in both China and Germany, thus women are underrepresented on publicly listed corporate boards in both countries. In addition, Chinese and German interviewees mention similar barriers and ways of overcoming them during the interviews. However, unlike the *"Global Sisterhood"* debate my findings suggest that barriers for female board access are emphasised differently across countries.

Analysing the composition of boards is crucial as they are very powerful bodies. Thus, a corporate board has the capacity to manage, regulate and supervise companies' affairs. Thereby, boards hold major decision-making power within the company. The decisions of corporate boards in large and publicly listed companies can also have great influence upon a country's economy. This means that decisions taken by members of powerful corporate boards can influence a company, an economy and a society as a whole (Ramge, 2005; Financial Reporting Council, 2016). The purpose of my study is to analyse reasons for female board underrepresentation in Germany and China, thereby I use first-hand interview data in order to draw conclusions on the *"glass ceiling"* in both countries. Increasing gender diversity on corporate boards can lead to a greater range of perspectives in decision-making processes (Burgess and Tharenou, 2002: 40). In addition, women on corporate boards can act as role models for younger generations (Bilimoria, 2006).

The study is also relevant for existing scholarship discussing WoB as it responds to three major research gaps: First of all, existing literature is criticised for being too limited in its geographical scope by primarily focusing upon Western countries (Terjesen, 2009: 324; Liu, Wei and Xie, 2014: 170; Kirsch, 2018: 348). Thereby, scholars call for further research on the BRICS countries or other emerging powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333). In addition, scholars criticise that existing scholarship on WoB are primarily single countries studies (Kirsch, 2018: 348; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1158, 1160). Thus, Terjesen and Singh (2008: 62) call for further studies analysing the research matter in a comparative cross-national way to uncover factors that may limit women when trying to obtain a board position. My analysis responds to calls for more cross-national research by including China as an emerging power. Secondly, current scholarship published on the research issue is criticised for applying too little theory and being too descriptive (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 320, 334). I respond to this call by using Allen's (1999) theoretical concept of 'power' for the analysis of power structures that may inhibit female board access. Thirdly, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) criticise existing scholarship on WoB for being too descriptive and calling for

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[4] Please refer to the section "Theory & Methodology" for a thorough discussion on the different 'power' concepts and the reasons for an inclusion of a fourth category 'power without' to Allen's (1999) threefold definition.

"more in-depth investigation...beyond the statistics." In addition, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 332) highlight that *"truly innovative research"* within the area would include drawing from female board member´s first-hand experience. I respond to this call by conducting 31 interviews with female board members, CEOs, top-level managers and experts in both Germany and China to understand possible barriers that may limit female career development.

In the following, I will provide background information for the research question: *´Which barriers do women face when trying to obtain a board position?´* I will highlight relevant statistical and legislative developments of gender equality in China and Germany. This is not meant as an exhaustive summary. Rather, crucial developments for the research topic will be briefly described.

China has had one of the highest female labour participation rates throughout the world. After the constitution of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, efforts began to increase women´s participation in the workforce. Attané (2012: 6) highlights that in the 1950s China initiated programs aimed at encouraging women to work outside their home. Fincher (2013) states that China´s high female labour participation force has primarily resulted from the Communist Party´s mass mobilization of people in an attempt to increase the country´s overall productivity. She thereby emphasises Mao Zedong´s famous 1968 slogan ´Women Hold up Half the Sky.´ Dasgupta, Matsumoto and Xia (2015: 13) argue that especially at the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978 China implemented various measures as state-subsidized childcare facilities in order to encourage female participation in the workforce. Above highlighted initiatives led to China not only having one of the highest female labour participation rates in the world but also a small gender pay gap (Attané, 2012: 7). Fincher (2013) however specifies that China´s high female labour participation rate primarily rests upon rural working women.

Ever since the early 1990s China´s female participation rate has been decreasing. In the 1990s among others market-oriented economic reforms started to kick in and many state-owned enterprises were becoming privatised. Although the ratio of both male and female labour participation force has been decreasing since the 1990s, female labour participation force has been decreasing to a much greater extent in China (Liu, Li and Yang, 2014: 5; Chen *et al.*, 2013: 258). This decrease has primarily been affecting urban areas (Attané, 2012: 8). Thereby, scholars have witnessed a particularly sharp decrease of labour participation force among Chinese mothers with young children (Liu, Li and Yang, 2014: 5; Chen *et al.*, 2013: 258; Attané, 2012: 7). Scholars draw connections between the decrease of China´s female participation force and possible effects of economic reforms. Despite overall controversial findings, Attané (2012: 8, 9) argues that ever since the early 1990s China has also been witnessing an overall worsening gender pay gap. Scholars highlight that after the reforms women have obtained new opportunities in terms of education, salary or taking up entrepreneurship. Although economic reforms have provided women with new opportunities, scholars suggest that implemented reforms have been particularly harmful for women (Attané, 2012: 8).

Also Germany has witnessed a change in female labour participation force and

gender pay gap since the reunification of the country in 1989. Holst and Wieber (2014: 33) highlight that *"(a)lmost a quarter of a century after the fall of the Wall, there are still more women in employment in eastern Germany than in the west."* However, today differences regarding female labour participation force in the former Eastern part versus the former Western part of Germany are marginal. Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 327) highlight that *"(u)nder communism, women worked and had families. Highly subsidized childcare was the norm, and in an egalitarian social system, women gained relatively powerful social and economic positions."* Although female labour participation force has been particularly high in the former Eastern part of Germany, as well as in China both show trends of occupational gender segregation (Cooke, 2003: 320, 321; Wippermann, 2015: 10). Thus, women were primarily employed in the rather less paid occupations. Differences can be observed when regarding the development of the gender pay gap in former Eastern versus Western Germany. Studies suggest that before Germany´s reunification the gender pay gap in former Western Germany was greater than in Eastern Germany (Wippermann, 2015: 10). However, this development is difficult to trace as the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) failed to keep detailed records of income statistics segregated by sex. Ever since Germany´s reunification studies suggest a slow but steady improvement of a relatively large gender pay gap in Western Germany. For Eastern Germany figures suggest a worsening of a relatively small gender pay gap right after reunification, eventually however improving. Still today the gender pay gap differs between the Eastern and Western part of Germany (Wippermann, 2015: 10). Despite overall calculation differences Gallego Granados and Wittenberg (2018: 180) from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) found that in 2018 the average gender pay gap in Western Germany was between 16 to 17 percent while the average gap in Eastern Germany was only about seven percent (Wippermann, 2015: 10).

Although former Eastern Germany as well as China have both had and to an extent still have a high female labour participation rate, the number of female top managers in both countries has remained rather low (Cooke, 2003: 320, 321; Wippermann, 2015: 10). Studies suggest that the number of women in top management positions in former Eastern Germany was nearly as low as in former Western Germany (Wippermann, 2015: 10). Highlighting the case of China Cooke (2003: 320, 321) states that despite almost *"half of a century of state intervention in women's employment"*, statistics show great occupational segregation, thus finding women to be less likely to be employed in management or other professional high-income occupations and more likely to be employed in low-income jobs. Thereby, state intervention was primarily focused upon increasing female labour participation force, thus increasing women´s employment quantitatively, rather than improving the conditions qualitatively (Cooke, 2003: 320). Currently differences regarding the overall percentage of Chinese female board members exist. Fu and Ma (2012: 7) state that China has about 40 percent of female board representation. This percentage however appears to be particularly high and inaccurate when compared to global statics. Deloitte Global Centre for Corporate Governance (2017: 3) found that internationally on an average only about *"15 percent of all board seats"* were occupied by women in 2017. Among

all analysed countries Norway has repetitively been the pioneer for female board representation with 42 percent (Deloitte, 2017: 79). The country has a fixed 40 percent quota for female board representation with harsh consequences, as the companies´ dissolution, in case of non-compliance (Strovik and Teigen, 2010: 9). This is to say that a 40 percent female board representation rate in China is rather unlikely. China does not have a board gender quota nor does it apply any strict sanctions for non-compliant companies that have no female board members. The majority of studies highlight the more accurate number of 10 to 11 percent of female board representation in China on publicly listed companies in 2017 (Zhang, 2013: 70; Deloitte, 2017: 79; Deloitte China, 2019: 5; IFC, 2019: 15). Thereby, Chinese studies suggest a relatively higher proportion of female board members in non-state-owned enterprises (non-SOEs) than in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Zhang, 2013: 70). In addition, Chinese scholars trace a small increase in the number of female board members. Zhang (2013: 73) sees the reason for this to lie within the non-SOEs sector. She highlights that many women on corporate boards and in other top-management positions are either the founders, the owners or belong to the founding family of the company, thus having been born into the position. Statistics addressing the overall percentage of women on corporate boards in China are frequently not segregated between female presence on management versus supervisory boards (Deloitte China, 2019). Different to Germany where the percentage of female board members on publicly listed supervisory boards is currently approximately 33 percent and about seven percent for management boards (Holst and Wrohlich, 2019: 19). Above listed statistical trends and numbers are the most frequently used within current literature. However, differences can appear, depending on which factors are included in the calculation of the statistics. Above highlighted statistics on female board representation, gender pay gap and female labour participation force are crucial when painting the bigger picture and tracing overall statistical trends. However, statics only give one insight into the situation of women on corporate boards in Germany and China. In order to gain a more in-depth overview more qualitative research on the matter is needed.

Besides highlighting statistical trends crucial legislative developments regulating the situation of female board members in Germany and China will be described in the following. I will start off by briefly highlighting the German and Chinese supervisory board structure. Then I will refer to Chinese and German legislation laying out the role and function of supervisory boards and will continue by highlighting other crucial laws for the research matter. This will be a general overview of crucial legislative development important for the research issue.

De Jonge (2015: 28) argues that *"China´s corporate governance system is designed loosely on Germany's two-tier board structure."* This means that both China and Germany have a management as well as a supervisory board. In the following, I will primarily focus upon supervisory boards in both countries as these have been the primary focus of recent legislative measures and have been at the centre of public debate. Article § 53 of the Company Law of the People's Republic of China (2018 Amendment) defines that "*The board of supervisors or*

supervisor of a company with no board of supervisors may exercise the following power:

> *(1) To check the financial affairs of the company;*
> *(2) To supervise the duty-related acts of the directors and senior managers, to put forward proposals on the removal of any director or senior manager who violates any law, administrative regulation, the bylaw or any resolution of the shareholders´ meeting;*
> *(3) To demand any director or senior manager to make corrections if his action has injured the interests of the company;*
> *(4) To propose to call interim shareholders´ meetings, to call and preside over shareholders´ meetings as prescribed in this Law;*
> *(5) To put forward proposals at shareholders´ meetings;*
> *(6) To initiative actions against directors or senior managers according to Article 151 of this Law; and*
> *(7) Other duties as provided for by the by law"* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2018a)*.*

In Germany Article § 111 of the German Stock Corporation Act lays out the tasks and rights of German supervisory boards. It states that:

> *"(1) The Supervisory Board shall supervise the management of the Company.*
> *(2) The Supervisory Board may inspect and examine the books and records of the Company as well as the assets, in particular the cash of the Company and the holdings of securities and commodities. It may also commission individual members or special experts for specific tasks. It shall commission the auditor to audit the annual financial statements and the consolidated financial statements in accordance with § 290 of the Commercial Code. It may also commission an external review of the content of the non-financial statement or the separate non-financial report (section 289b of the German Commercial Code), the non-financial group statement or the separate non-financial group report (section 315b of the German Commercial Code).*
> *(3) The Supervisory Board shall convene a General Meeting if the best interests of the Company so require. A simple majority is sufficient for the resolution.*
> *(4) Management measures may not be transferred to the Supervisory Board. However, the Articles of Association or the Supervisory Board shall stipulate that certain types of business may only be transacted with its consent. If the Supervisory Board refuses its approval, the Executive Board may demand that the General Meeting decide on the approval. The resolution by which the general meeting approves shall require a majority of at least three quarters of the votes cast. The Articles of Association may not stipulate any other majority or any other requirements.*
> *(5) The supervisory board of companies which are listed on the stock exchange or subject to co-determination shall set target figures for the proportion of women on the supervisory board and the management board. If the proportion of women is less than 30 percent when the target figures are set, the target figures may no longer be less than the proportion achieved in each case. At the same time, deadlines must be set for achieving the target*

figures. The deadlines may not be longer than five years. If a quota already applies to the Supervisory Board pursuant to § 96 (2), the stipulations shall only apply to the Management Board.
(6) The members of the Supervisory Board may not have their duties per-formed by others" (dejure.org, 2019).

When analysing female board underrepresentation in Germany and China, un-derstanding similarities and differences between boards in both countries is cru-cial for the analysis. The differences and similarities of the structure, role and function of corporate boards give insight into the comparability of corporate boards in both countries. As stated above, the German and Chinese corporate structure is similar. Despite existing similarities De Jonge (2015: 29) however highlights crucial *"differences between the German and the Chinese model which render the Chinese supervisory committee unable to perform a supervi-sory role equivalent to its German counterpart."* Major differences between the two systems include an on average smaller size of Chinese supervisory boards than the German ones. In addition, De Jonge (2015: 29) highlights that Chinese supervisory boards tend to have less power and fewer functions than German boards. De Jonge (2015: 30) finds that the *"difference between the Chinese and German systems are that in many respects the supervisory committee in a typi-cal Chinese company is only symbolic…"*

After briefly highlighting the laws defining the role and function of boards in Ger-many and China I will now give an overview of crucial legislative developments regulating gender equality in China. Cooke (2001) argues that in an attempt to support the state´s aim of increasing the number of women in the workforce dur-ing the late 1950s a policy was adopted of *"´replacing male with female workers´"*, thereby primarily *"in the commercial and service sectors."* Cooke (2001) states that from the 1960s till 1970s a form of *"labour distribution"* was adopted. This particularly served the allocation of administrative occupations, thus following a pre-determined gender quota. This was again an attempt to increase female la-bour participation force within the country. From the 1980s onwards a *"job be-queath"* policy was introduced. Thereby, parents could "bequeath" their job to their off-spring. This policy was adopted in an attempt to decrease massive youth unemployment (Cooke, 2001: 335). However, on average women were more likely to give up and "bequeath" their job than men. Many female employees gave up their job to take up care work, thus primarily caring for elderly parents or grandchildren. Among others this also led to a lower pension for women. Then in the late 1990s after economic reforms kicked in and female labour participation force started to decrease, the All-China Women´s Federation joined the Chinese Ministry of Labour to issue policies addressing the problem of laid off female la-bour, thus primarily promoting *"re-employment"* of women (Cooke, 2001: 336). In addition to legislative trends a major gender equality event was hosted in 1995 in Beijing, the 4th World Conference on Women. Scholars argue that this marked crucial steps towards a greater gender equality commitment (Cooke, 2001: 334; Attané, 2012: 6; Dasgupta, Matsumoto and Xia, 2015: 1).

After highlighting more general legislative developments, in the following several specific laws crucial for the research topic will be addressed. Article 2 of the Law

of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests (2018 Amendment) highlights that *"Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in all aspects of political, economic, cultural, social and family life"* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2018b)*.* Regarding maternity leave, Cooke (2001: 336) argues that the law states that *"after childbirth, female workers shall be entitled to no less than 90 days of maternity leave with full pay."* Recently maternity leave was extended in China. While the actual duration depends on the province, by 2017 overall maternity leave in China was between 90 to *"158 days"* for women and about *"15-30"* days for men on paternity leave (Dong, 2017). Existing policy also regulates maternity allowance in China which again depends on the province. In Beijing, Shanghai as well as some other parts of China *"maternity allowance in lieu of salary"* is largely paid by the employer. In other provinces, if the Chinese female employee pays maternity insurance in advance she will be entitled to receive an allowance by the local Social Security Bureau. If the employee does not have a maternity insurance, however, the full allowance shall be paid by the female employee's company (Hu, 2017). This poses a particular burden upon SMEs in China. A lack of state subsidies for maternity leave can create incentives for companies to discriminate against women during the hiring process. Article 3 of the Employment Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China (2015 Amendment) states that *"Workers seeking employment shall not be subject to discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, race, gender, religious belief etc."* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2015)*.* Although China has a legislated gender quota [5] adopted for parliamentary seats in the National People's Congress, it does not have a fixed quota for corporate boards (De Jonge, 2015: 40). Despite the existence of gender equality laws in China, Cooke (2001: 338) highlights three main *"legislative loopholes"* in the countries legislation regulating gender equality. These three "*loopholes*" are:

- *"Sex and age discrimination in the recruitment process;*
- *Unfair treatment during employment, especially in their childbearing period; and*
- *(earlier) retirement age and (therefore reduced) pension"* (Cooke, 2001: 338).

Despite the existence of laws prohibiting any kind of discrimination on the ground of ethnicity, race, gender or religious belief, as briefly highlighted above, Cooke (2001: 338) finds that sex discrimination in the recruitment process in China is still prevalent. She states that requiring a certain gender in job advertisements is still common. Cooke (2001: 339) highlights that despite existing policies regulating the matter often no effective legal mechanisms are available for the individual seeking justice. A second *"legislative loophole"* is the still prevalent unfair treat-

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[5] The first paragraph of Article 6 of the "Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People´s Congress Regarding Revision of the Electoral Law of the National People´s Congress and Local People´s Congresses of the People´s Republic of China (1995)" states that *"Among deputies to the National People's Congress and local people's congresses at various levels, there shall be an appropriate number of women deputies, and the proportion thereof shall be raised gradually"* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1995)*.*

ment particularly during the childbearing period for women. As highlighted above, with a lack of financial government support especially for SMEs when facing job loss due to pregnancy or childcare responsibilities, an incentive to not employ women is created. Cooke (2001: 338, 342) highlights the earlier retirement scheme as a third *"legislative loophole."* Cooke (2001: 342) states that in 1951 China implemented a retirement scheme *"in which female workers in general retire five years earlier than their male colleagues in the same occupations (at the age of 50 for blue collar female workers and 55 for white collar.)"* Blue collar jobs require physical labour while white collar employees primarily perform administrative or professional work (Surbhi, 2018). However, in 2016 the Chinese government announced plans to increase the retirement age. Thus, the aim is to increase women´s retirement age one year every three years and the retirement age of men one year every six years. Thus, the aim is to have an equalised male and female retirement age at about 65 for both men and women in China by the mid 21st century (Hong'e, 2018). Cooke (2001: 343) and Attané (2012: 8) criticise the current earlier retirement scheme for discriminating women by making them retire five years earlier than their male peers. Among others this implies that women will also have a lower pension than their male peers. In addition, Cooke (2001: 343) highlights a form of ´elite discrimination´ when stating that highly qualified women already entering the labour market at a later stage will have even less time available than male peers when trying to reach a board or top-management position. Even if women were to reach a top-management position in less time than men they would most likely not stay there for very long (Cooke, 2001: 343). This can create incentives for firms to invest rather in the promotion of men to top-management jobs than women.

In addition, also the Chinese one-child and two-child policy are crucial when discussing background information on the research matter. At the end of 2015, the Chinese government introduced the two-child policy, thereby ending the one-child policy that had been imposed upon the people since the early 1980s (Cooke, 2017: 2). This means with effect from 2016 onwards each married couple was allowed to have two children. The two-child policy was among others implemented to address emerging social problems of an ageing population. While the abolition of the one-child policy has triggered positive international resonance, Cooke (2017: 20) warns that the two-child policy can trigger negative consequences for gender equality in China. Cooke (2017: 20) assumes an exacerbation of labour market discrimination against female graduates. The implemented one-child policy had the intention of decreasing birth rates within the country. However, thereby a rather *"unintended consequence"* was the *"distortion in the country's sex ratio"*, triggering a major surplus of men over women in Chinese society (Attané, 2012: 13; Ebenstein, 2010: 87-88). Scholars frequently refer to this as the ´missing girls´ of China, thus triggered by sex-selective abortions during the one-child family planning policy. Despite severe forms of prenatal discrimination against female foetuses, Fong (2002: 1098) however suggest that *"urban daughters born under China's one-child policy have benefited from the demographic pattern"* triggered by the policy. Thus, the scholar implies that the policy has had positive effects for female leadership in China. Scholars argue that before the implementation of the one-child policy, daughters were

more likely to compete with their brothers over available resources, funding and their parent´s attention. With an overall son-preference parents were more likely to invest in a son than in a daughter. With the one-child policy parents however had no option than to invest all their resources and attention in their only child, if it was a girl, thus in their daughter. Fong (2002: 1099) finds that the one-child policy and low fertility rates primarily empowered daughters in urban areas, thus areas where resources and higher education as well as employment opportunities were already existent and available for girls. Fong (2002: 1099) underlines that in Chinese rural areas the one-child policy triggered rather frustration than actual empowerment for women. Despite several improvements for women in China, Fincher (2013) warns of a too optimistic picture of the actual current situation of gender equality in China. Fincher (2013) discusses a recent "*stream of rosy media accounts*" using headlines as *"China Dominates List of Female Billionaires"* and *"Women in China: the Sky's the Limit"* as often suggesting China to be an international model for gender equality in the workforce.

After highlighting crucial legislation regulating gender equality in China, I will now turn to Germany´s legislation on the matter. Unlike China that does not have a gender quota for the appointment of corporate boards, Germany adopted a law for the "equal participation of women and men in executive positions[6]" in 2015 (BMFSFJ, 2019b). The law is colloquially often called ´Frauenquote.´[7] The policy rests upon two pillars. The first pillar implies that from the 1st of January 2016 onwards a gender quota of 30 percent shall apply for the underrepresented sex on newly appointed supervisory board positions of publicly listed and fully co-determined German companies. *"As a rule, these are companies with more than 2,000 employees and a supervisory board made up of equal numbers of employer and employee representatives" (*BMFSFJ, 2017*)*. In Germany the 30 percent quota applies to approximately 100 companies. In case of non-compliance with the 30 percent quota the seat that shall be newly appointed is to remain empty, thus applying the "empty chair" rule. The second pillar of the law applies to approximately 3500 companies to set their own target figures of female representation on supervisory boards, management boards and top-management positions. While scholars are still debating on long-term effects of the implemented gender quota, Holst and Wrohlich (2019: 20) from the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) have found the quota to be effective for supervisory boards. Holst and Wrohlich (2019: 20) demonstrate that in 2019 the percentage of female board members on supervisory boards with a fixed quota was approximately 34 percent and had increased to a larger extent than companies not affected by the quota (BMFSFJ, 2017a). Before the implementation of a fixed quota the percentage of female members on supervisory board was a little more than 21 percent. However, Holst and Wrohlich (2019:19) find first indications that companies falling under the quota law are likely to reduce their efforts in increas-

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[6] The policy is called "Gesetz für die gleichberechtigte Teilhabe von Frauen und Männern an Führungspositionen (FüPoG)."

[7] "Frauenquote" is literally translated as a "Women´s Quota" and refers to the law for the "equal participation of women and men in executive positions" called "Gesetz für die gleichberechtigte Teilhabe von Frauen und Männern an Führungspositionen (FüPoG)" adopted in 2015 in Germany.

ing the number of women in board positions after having reached the required 30 percent level. Although the quota law primarily regulates publicly listed and co-determined German supervisory boards a positive spill-over effect for management boards was expected. However, Holst and Wrohlich (2019: 19) find that in the short-term such an expected spill-over effect has not taken place. The percentage of female management board members is approximately eight percent in companies with a fixed quota for its supervisory boards in 2019 (Holst and Wrohlich, 2019: 29; BMFSFJ, 2017a).

When analysing female board access, not only the above mentioned gender quota for supervisory boards but also policies regulating parental leave are crucial for establishing structural framework conditions for working parents. Since women on average are more likely to take off work for childcare duties, parental leave regulations, as Germany´s legislation on parental allowance and parental leave (Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz - BEEG), appears to be of particular importance when discussing female board underrepresentation (BMFSFJ, 2018). In 2015, the law "ElterngeldPlus" (Parental Allowance Plus) was adopted. It includes a partner bonus as well as a flexible period of parental leave. The policy entails that from the 1st of July 2015 onwards parents taking time off for parental leave may choose between the (basic) parental allowance, the "ElterngeldPlus" or a combination of both. Jointly both parents are *"entitled to a total of 14 months basic parental allowances if both take part in the (child) care…"* (BMFSFJ, 2018). This means that both parents may divide the 14 months of childcare *"freely among themselves. One parent can claim a minimum of two months and a maximum of twelve months"* (BMFSFJ, 2018) .The Parental Allowance is calculated depending on the parent´s income, thus who is taking up childcare. It is at least 300 Euros and maximum 1800 Euros. Parents can also receive ´Parental Allowance Plus´ (´ElterngeldPlus´). This supports parents that already want to start working part-time while receiving parental allowance, meaning that the part-time working parents are allowed to receive a longer parental allowance. In addition, parents that decide to share childcare duties receive a partner bonus. This means if both parents work between 25 to 30 hours each per week to share childcare duties the couple may receive four extra months of ´Parental Allowance Plus´ (´ElterngeldPlus´). Among others this may encourage parents to share childcare duties instead of dumping childcare duties upon a single parent alone (BMFSFJ, 2019a).

In the following, ´Betreuungsgeld [8]´ (Financial Childcare Supplement) and ´Ehegattensplitting´ (Spousal Income Splitting) will be addressed. Both policies have been criticised for reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes in Germany.[9] Thereby, Sacksovsky (2010: 7) finds that from a married couple usually the person with a higher income, often still the male partner, tends to have more advantages of ´Ehegattensplitting´ than the person with a lower income. This implies

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[8] "Betreuungsgeld" literally translated as "financial childcare supplement." Critics often call it the "Herdprämie." The policy was adopted in 2013. For further information on the "Betreuungsgeld/Herdprämie" please refer to footnote 1.
[9] Please refer to "Background Information" under "Introduction" for a detailed discussion on "Ehegattensplitting."

that among the couple the person with the lower income will on average have a comparatively high taxation. This leads to a correspondingly lower net salary. Which then can lead to a situation when the couple has their first child and one of the partners might want to step back from his or her career for childcare duties, it will assumingly be the person with the lower salary, thus often the woman. Wersig (2019: 16) argues that the assumed neutrality behind ´Ehegattensplitting´ is an illusion. Wersig (2019: 16) and also Spangenberg (2016: 3) highlight that such policies can frequently result in negative effects for women´s income as well as career development as a whole. Wersig (2019: 17), Spangenberg (2016: 3) and Sacksovsky (2010: 7) find that ´Ehegattensplitting´ tends to trigger misleading incentives by discouraging second earners, frequently women, to take up a full-time job particularly when the couple starts having children. This can create incentives for women to stay at home and not take up a full-time occupation as it does not pay off salary-wise. Thereby, women´s economic dependency upon their spouse is encouraged and traditional gender roles reinforced. In addition, the ´Betreuungsgeld´ (Financial Childcare Supplement) by critics colloquially called ´Herdprämie´ (Cooker Bonus) was adopted in 2013. It financially supports parents that decide to not take advantage of childcare facilities and take up childcare duties of their up to three-year-old child by themselves. Thus, again reinforcing traditional gender roles.

In the following chapters, I will start off by providing a Literature Review (chapter 2) on the state of research on WoB. I will highlight German, Chinese and International literature on the issue. I will conclude this section by pointing out current gaps in the literature and how this study aims to address them.

Secondly, I will discuss Theory and Methodology (chapter 3). Hereby, I will highlight the greater theoretical debate on *"Global Sisterhood"* to which the analysis will add. Then I will define the concepts of ´sex´ and ´gender´ and will explain Allen´s (1999) concept of ´power´ that will be used for the study. I will use her concept of ´power´ as it proves to be particularly useful when aiming for a comprehensive analysis of power structures, thus including the following three concepts:

- Power over (forms of oppression)
- Power to (forms of empowerment)
- Power with (forms of solidarity with others).

In addition to the before mentioned threefold definition I will add a fourth category of ´power without´ (no solidarity with others). For the methodological part, Yin´s definition of case studies will be discussed as it is used for the study. In addition, Mayring´s (2015) Qualitative Content Analysis will be discussed and used for the analysis.

Thirdly, I will present findings from the conducted interviews (chapter 4). I will start off by discussing findings from interviews conducted in Germany by segregating them into five most commonly and emphasised thematic categories: ´Policies and Laws´, ´Compatibility of Family and Career´, ´Personal Initiative´, ´Individual Support and Networks´ and ´Societal Structures of Gender Roles and

Societal Expectations.´ All five thematic categories include both inhibiting barriers and fostering factors for female board access. In chapter 4, findings of conducted Chinese interviews will be listed.

Fourthly, I will conduct a discussion of the findings (chapter 5). Hereby, Allen´s (1999) concept of ´power´ will be used to discuss German and Chinese findings together in order to conclude which barriers women in both countries face when aiming for a board position. This is segregated into five sections: ´Power Over and Power To´ to discuss German and Chinese ´Policies and Laws´, ´Power Over and Power To´ to discuss German and Chinese ´Compatibility of Family and Career´, ´Power Over and Power To´ to discuss German and Chinese ´ Personal Initiative´, ´Power Over and Power To´ to discuss German and Chinese ´Societal Structures of Gender Roles and Societal Expectations´ and ´Power Without and Power With´ to discuss German and Chinese ´Individual Support and Networks.´

Fifthly, I will end by drawing a conclusion of the main findings (chapter 6). Then, I will explain how this study contributes to the greater theoretical debate on *“Global Sisterhood.”* In line with *“Global Sisterhood”* I find that the international *“glass ceiling”* exists in both China and Germany. Women still tend to be underrepresented on publicly listed corporate boards in both countries. In line with the debate both Chinese and German interviewees mention similar barriers when aiming for a board position. However, these barriers are emphasised differently by the interviewees.

2. Literature Review

In the following I critically review the literature that has been published on the topic "Women on Corporate Boards" (WoB), "WoB in Germany" and "WoB in China[10]." Literature on WoB is interdisciplinary in its nature, primarily applies quantitative methods, using human capital- and social identity theories, and tends to focus upon Western countries (Bührmann, 2013: 155; Kirsch, 2018: 347; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 320, 321, 324). Despite a growing body of qualitative research on WoB in Germany (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015; Kirsch and Sauerborn, 2019), existing literature primarily uses quantitative methods (FidAR, 2018; Holst and Wrohlich, 2019). Also literature on WoB in China primarily uses quantitative methods (Du and Du, 2014; Zhaopin, 2017). Scholars writing on WoB in China, often apply biological determinism to argue in favour of the "business case[11]" for greater gender board diversity (Wang, 2004; Luo *et al.*, 2017). Besides analysing literature on WoB, WoB in Germany and WoB in China, I will also draw upon the following detailed literature reviews written by: Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009; Davidson and Burke, 2011; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016; Kirsch, 2018. I will review existing literature by categorising it into the following main clusters[12]:

1. *Individual characteristics* of women on corporate boards,
2. *External factors* influencing female board appointment and
3. *Impact* of increasing the number of women on corporate boards.
4. *Gaps* in the literature.

The thematic clusters have not only emerged thematically but also across time. Kirsch (2018: 348) states that ever since the early 1980s scholars have been publishing on the topic WoB. Furthermore, she highlights that in the early 1990s scholars were primarily concerned with analysing individual characteristics of female directors as well as existing national institutional factors. Thereby scholars analysed the impact of the above onto women´s board appointments and onto gender diversity within firms. Later in the late 1990s and early 2000s Kirsch (2018: 349) highlights that scholars primarily investigated which impact increasing the number of WoB had for firms´ financial output and strategy. Furthermore, in the late 2000s, scholars primarily analysed to what extent actors or institutional factors may influence female board appointment. Ever since the late 2000s, scholars have been highlighting which impact existing regulations, i.e. as gender quotas, can have upon female board appointment (Kirsch, 2018: 349).

Literature published on WoB is interdisciplinary; thus having been published in a wide range of academic journals and across disciplines. Bührmann (2013: 155),

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[10] The Chinese literature was analysed with the help of Chinese-English interpreters.
[11] The "business case" for greater board diversity is frequently used as an argument to argue in favour of female board presence. It is based on the assumption that women hold naturally given stereotypical feminine characteristics that are assumed to be a benefit for the company. The concept will be discussed in greater detail below in the literature review.
[12] A thorough discussion of methodological and theoretical approaches used for this study will be highlighted in a separate chapter under "Theory & Methodology."

Kirsch (2018: 347) and Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 320-321) highlight that publications on the topic have among others appeared in the following kind of journals: management, political science, sociology, psychology, leadership, gender studies, finance, law and corporate governance. This makes the research topic trans-disciplinary, heterogeneous and complex (Bührmann, 2013: 155). Furthermore, Bührmann (2013: 156-157) calls for future research to be trans-disciplinary using an intersectional perspective and a multi-method approach.

Existing scholarship on WoB has primarily used quantitative methodology for conducting research. Various scholars have highlighted the *"vast flood"* of quantitative articles published on the research topic (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333; Bührmann, 2013: 158; Bührmann, 2014: 97; Kirsch, 2018: 348). Thereby scholars primarily draw from publicly available information frequently statistics to conduct their analysis (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 323). Along the line of emerging qualitative data, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) call for *"more in-depth investigation...beyond the statistics."* Furthermore, they highlight that *"truly innovative research"* would access WoB directly *"tap(ing) into the female director´s experiences"* by using in-depth interviews (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 323, 334). Also Bührmann (2013: 158) states the need for further in-depth interviews to analyse female managers' own experience concerning their careers. Thus, analysing how they obtained a board position, which factors were important, which barriers they faced and how they were able to overcome such. Also Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1187) highlight the importance of hearing the *"voice of women themselves",* thus speaking to WoB to learn from their first-hand experiences. Scholars have criticised existing literature on WoB as being too descriptive frequently lacking theory (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 320; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1181). Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 320) highlight in their literature review that the vast majority of academic articles published on the issue does not use a theoretical framework. They argue that the existing literature is too descriptive and would greatly benefit from more theoretical development in the area (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 334). Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 332) argue that the few studies that do include theoretical approaches tend to use more than one theoretical perspective. Furthermore, some studies focus on several levels of analysis (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015; Kirsch, 2018). One of the most frequently used theories when analysing WoB is human capital theory (Becker, 1964). This outlines that individuals can accumulate human capital throughout their life. Human capital thereby refers to skills, i.e. acquired through education and work experience. It is assumed that the higher a persons' accumulated human capital, the higher a person´s salary or job position. Using human capital theory to analyse the gender pay gap, thus women receiving less money for doing the same job, one could assume that women must have lower human capital than their male peers. Burke and Mattis (2000) find it to be a commonly held assumption that women lack the necessary human capital for board positions. Other scholars however would contradict this assumption arguing that on average female board members tend to be even more qualified than their male peers (Burke, 1994; Pajo, McGregor and Cleland, 1997;Terjesen and Singh, 2008) Thereby human capital theory fails to comprehensively explain female underrep-

resentation on boards. Also social identity theories are frequently referred to when analysing WoB (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 322). This rests upon the assumption that a person tends to feel more connected to someone having similar characteristics to oneself (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 39). Social identity theories frequently use terms as: "similarity-attraction" (Byrne, 1971), "homosocial reproduction" (Kantner, 1977) or "self-cloning" (see also: Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014: 1; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 39,45, 46; Kirsch, 2018: 351, 352). The phenomenon of "similarity-attraction" can trigger a monoculture on boards. Thereby it is assumed that the root cause of female underrepresentation on boards lays in the exclusion of women from powerful, traditionally the "old boy´s", social networks. Women frequently have only very limited access to powerful, often male-dominated, networks (Kantner, 1977; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009). Social identity theory can highlight certain underlying barriers for female board representation. Nevertheless, the theory still fails to give a comprehensive explanation of the actual reasons for female underrepresentation. Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016: 408) highlight that in order to analyse the overall lack of women in top corporate positions, power structures need to be analysed. Accordingly, a theoretical concept aimed at analysing power structures seems particularly suitable for this task.

In my analysis I will use Allen´s (1999) feminist concept of "power"[13] to analyse power structures that may pose barriers for female board access in Germany and China. In addition, I analyse ways of overcoming such barriers. Allen´s (1999) concept of "power" includes the following forms:

- power over (forms of oppression or domination),
- power to (forms of empowerment) and
- power with (forms of solidarity with others).

Allen (1999) states that "power" is a crucial concept in the feminist literature. However, she criticises existing feminist definitions of "power" as being too narrow-focussed and too little crosscutting. Thus, she states that scholars tend to see "power" either as a form of domination or as a form of empowerment. However, they rarely see the concept of "power" as cross-cutting, thus being both empowering and dominating at the same time. Therefore, Allen (1999) draws on theoretical assumptions from Foucault (1978, 1979), Butler (1993, 1997; Benhabib, Butler and Cornell, 1995) and Arendt (1963, 1969) to establish a new feminist concept of "power." A detailed discussion of how Allen uses each of the before mentioned scholars´ theoretical assumptions to construct her own concept will follow in the next chapter under "Theory." Eventually, Allen *"introduce(s) a conception of power that can illuminate domination, resistance, and solidarity and that highlights the complex ways in which they are interrelated"* (Allen, 1999: 121). I will use Allen´s (1999) feminist concept of "power" and will contribute to theoretical development by adding a fourth form, thus "power without." This will make Allen´s "power" approach more comprehensive. This concept implies hav-

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[13] For a detailed discussion of the theoretical concept and its´ emergence please refer to the section "Theory."

ing no solidarity or no power with others. Having no solidarity with others can negatively impact one´s power leverage.

When tracing the geographical scope of the published literature on the research topic, it becomes apparent that they have primarily been conducted in and have focused upon Western countries (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 324). Thereby Kirsch (2018: 348) highlights that the vast majority of articles have focused upon single country studies. These frequently being: US, UK, Norway, Australia and Spain. Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) argue that along the idea of globalisation future research on the issue should shed light upon new geographical research areas especially in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa). Moreover, Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1186) highlight that future research on the research topic should focus on countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Furthermore, Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1158) state that only a very limited amount of research currently exists concerning comparative cross-national research to uncover factors that may hinder or facilitate women´s access to boards across countries. Moreover, scholars argue that promising future research could be drawing from female board members´ first–hand experience across countries to analyse their career paths and experiences (Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1187).

Summarising the above section, scholarship on WoB tends to be interdisciplinary, primarily applying quantitative methods, using human capital- and social identity theories and mainly focusing upon Western countries. Below, published literature on the research issue will be thematically clustered and discussed according in the following clusters: *Individual characteristics* of women on corporate boards, *External factors* influencing female board appointment, *Impact* of increasing the number of women on corporate boards and *Gaps* in the literature.

2.1. Individual Characteristics of Female Board Members

A large amount of articles published in the early 1990s on the research topic have primarily addressed individual characteristics of WoB (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 324; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 47; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1162; Kirsch, 2018: 349). Within this section on "individual characteristics of female board members" (2.1.), the first cluster (2.1.1.) of literature is primarily concerned with highlighting female board members´ demographics as well as human and social capital (Burke, 1994); thus whether women possess the same educational qualification, career experience and network structures as their male peers. The second cluster (2.1.2.) highlights persistent perceptions, attitudes and stereotypical attitudes that female board members frequently face. This section deals with individual character traits of female board members.

2.1.1. Demographics, Human- and Social Capital

In the following section, literature on female board members´ individual characteristics addressing "Demographics, Human- and Social Capital" will be discussed. Thereby, particularly research published on the demographics, board experience, tenure track, human- and social capital as well as family ties of female board members will be discussed.

Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009) as well as Kirsch (2018) highlight that a large amount of scholarship written on WoB highlights female board members´ demographics. Thereby particularly focusing on the percentage of WoB across companies, sectors and countries (Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe, 2008; Deloitte Global Centre for Corporate Governance, 2017; FidAR, 2018; Holst and Wrohlich, 2019). It is crucial to note that the percentage of WoB largely depends on the professional sector and the nature of the firm. Zhang (2013: 70) taking China as an example, points out that *"the proportions of female board chairs and CEOs were higher in non-state-owned enterprises (non-SOEs) than in"* state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Also other characteristics of female board members are being addressed in the scope of articles, these primarily refer to board members´: educational background, family background, age, marital status, having children or not, the number of boards they are appointed to and the years of management experience female board members possess compared to their male peers. Although many articles have been published on this issue, studies find contradictory results.

A common finding tends to be that female board members are on average younger than their male peers (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 324; Dang, Bender and Scotto, 2014: 501; Kirsch, 2018: 350). Vinnicombe, Sealy and Singh (2007: 15) highlight in their study on female directors of FTSE 100 companies in the United Kingdom that female directors were on average three years younger than their male colleagues. Also Peterson and Philpot (2007: 184) analysing US Fortune 500 companies have had a similar finding, thus female board members were on average younger than their male peers. Moreover, Simpson, Carter and D´Souza (2010: 4) confirm the above. Analysing female directors of 1500 Standard & Poor companies, women were on average four to five years younger than men. Burgess and Tharenou (2002) do not necessarily see female board members' younger age as a disadvantage. Rather, they argue that corporate boards may *"benefit from new ideas and strategies"* from younger female board members (Burgess and Tharenou, 2002: 40; 45). Accordingly, Gamba and Goldstein (2009: 204) state that female board members have proven to possess an impressive educational background and work experience once they made it onto a corporate board despite their younger age. This can be seen as an indication for the manifold effort women have to undergo when trying to reach high-level corporate positions. Moreover, Kirsch (2018: 350) argues that the trend of younger female board members does not need to *"continue indefinitely."*

Another common finding is that female board members tend to have a shorter tenure track[14] and less board experience than their male peers (Kesner, 1988: 75; Kirsch, 2018: 350). Furthermore, Dang, Bender and Scotto (2014: 494) analysing French corporate boards state that female board members might have less board tenure than their male peers as they are still "newcomers" to French

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[14] A "Board Tenure" Year thereby defines *"the period which, in reference to any given calendar year, begins on the date of the Company's annual shareholder meeting held in such year and ends on the day before the Company's annual shareholder meeting held in the immediately following calendar year",* thus tenure refers to the actual term or mandate a corporate board member serves (Law Insider, 2019).

boards. With board experience being an essential recruitment prerequisite, women might still be lacking the experience. Dang, Bender and Scotto´s (2014: 502) findings from French female board members go in line with the findings of Hillman, Canella and Harris (2002: 747) that American female board members tend to *"hold less business expertise, being less often CEO."* However, Dang, Bender and Scotto (2014: 502) contrast their findings to those of Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008: 48) arguing that *"men are not more likely than women to have management experience."* These contrasting findings can be traced back to different forms of measurement regarding management experience. According to Dang, Bender and Scotto (2014) female board members do have very similar management experience compared to their male peers. However, female board members are less likely to possess top corporate management experience (Dang, Bender and Scotto, 2014: 502). This seems an unsurprising phenomenon as female board members are on average younger than their male peers. More-over, Kesner (1988: 80) argues that this lack of experience could be a reason for the underrepresentation of women on executive committees. However, Peterson and Philpot (2007: 190) counter this argument by stating that even *"after control-ling for experience women were still unlikely to find a spot at the executive com-mittee table."*

A frequently assumed reason for female board underrepresentation is that women might lack the necessary human- or social capital for a board position. Becker (1964) defines human capital as referring to an individual´s set of educa-tion, experience and skills that can enhance one´s productive capabilities for the person itself and the firm he or she works in. Pajo, McGregor and Cleland (1997: 174) cite one of their interviewees, a male chairperson, stating that *"good women were hard to find"* for the boardroom. This raises the question: Are women less qualified than men when trying to obtain a board position?
Several studies have pointed out the high educational background of female di-rectors (Burke, 1994; Pajo, McGregor and Cleland, 1997: 176). Zelechowski and Bilimoria (2004) argue that despite earlier contrary studies they found that female board members do not differ from their male peers in board- or corporate tenure experience. Female board members tend to have fewer multiple directorships, less *"powerful corporate titles, occupy disproportionately more staff functions, are less likely to be top earners of the corporation, and earn considerably less"* than their male peers (Zelechowski and Bilimoria, 2004: 341). Concluding the scholars argue that despite holding similar tenure experience, female board members tend to have less influence, prestige and impact than their male peers despite holding similar ranks. Furthermore, Xiang (2016: 2) from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, using China as an example points out that women´s return on human capital is on average lower than that of men. More-over, Xiang (2016) states that women holding higher educational degrees tend to face stronger "glass ceiling" effects than women having a lower educational de-gree in China.
Ruigrok, Peck and Tacheva (2007: 549) contrast their findings of Swiss female directors with existing research on American female directors who tend to have higher educational degrees than their male peers (Burke, 1997; Hillman, Canella and Harris, 2002). Opposing the before mentioned findings, Ruigrok et al. (2007:

555) argue that this is not the case with Swiss female directors. Contrary to this finding, Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008) argue that female board members in the United Kingdom do not lack human capital for the boardroom. On average they tend to have similar to more human capital than their male peers. They state that female board members are more likely to hold a MBA degree and have an international background. They argue that female board members, despite their younger age, tend to have a fairly similar set of human capital compared to their male peers; particularly in regard to *"education, reputation, board experience and career experience"* (Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe, 2008: 11). However, they find that newly appointed male directors in the United Kingdom are more likely to have board and CEO experience. Thereby, newly appointed female directors are more likely to hold experience in smaller firms. In addition, Hillman, Canella and Harris (2002: 758) found similar results when analysing diversity on American boards. They analyse diversity by segregating between African American men, African American women, as well as white men and white women. They argue that racial minority- and female board members were much more likely than their white male peers to have advanced degrees, thus indicating that they have to take multiple efforts in order to reach a board position. Dang, Bender and Scotto (2014: 14) found no differences in the educational background of French female and male board members. Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008: 1) state that women often need to be "*twice as good as men*" to be able to obtain a board seat. Nevertheless, Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008: 11) highlight that women frequently possess a different set of human capital than their male peers. Fu and Ma (2012: 5) conduct a thorough literature review of the Chinese literature on women in top management positions in China. In line with the above mentioned, their findings suggest that the success of female managers frequently requires *"doing better than men."* Furthermore, current surveys have shown that instead of actually lacking the necessary human capital, female board members are frequently only perceived to lack such (Catalyst/Opportunity Now, 2000 in: Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe, 2008: 1). Also Pajo, McGregor and Cleland (1997: 177) highlight such frequently held assumptions concerning women. According to their findings the most commonly referred to reason for female board underrepresentation is that firms tend to think that women are not sufficiently qualified for the boardroom.

Other scholars have argued that it is not so much women´s lack of human capital but rather their lack of social capital that prevents them from reaching the boardroom. Stevenson and Radin (2009: 19) define social capital as one´s investments in social relations with others, when one is expecting returns. Using this definition on corporate board members, Stevenson and Radin (2008: 4) state that social capital refers to the *"investments in social relations"* (Bourdieu, 1986). Gamba and Goldstein (2009: 202) highlight that besides expertise and records of accomplishment, personal relationships are important when aiming for a board position. This is frequently referred to as the "old boys" network. Burke (1997) argues that new board appointments usually follow recommendations from other already appointed board members. This phenomenon can create a vicious circle; thus, the less women are on boards, the less likely for new women to become appointed.

Some scholars argue that having the necessary human- and social capital is not as relevant. Rather, what is essential when trying to obtain a board position are family ties and belonging to an elite network (Ruigrok, Peck and Tacheva, 2007: 555). Thereby, female board members are much more likely to be related to the founding family than their male peers (Peterson and Philpot, 2007: 8). Also Dang, Bender and Scotto (2014: 14) argue that WoB are much more likely to belong to the family shareholders. In their analysis of Swiss corporate boards, Ruigrok, Peck and Tacheva (2007: 546, 554, 555) find that there is a much higher probability that female directors are related to the firm´s management level through family ties or contacts than it is the case for male directors. Furthermore, Dang, Bender and Scotto (2014: 14) analysing French corporate boards find that approximately ten percent of women on French boards share family ties with the owners of the company. They highlight that French female board members tend to be from the same recruitment pools and elite networks as male board members. They thereby do not find any differences in their educational background nor in their network structure. Rather, they see homogeneity between the profiles of both female and male French board members, taking out the exception for career experience and corporate board status.

2.1.2. Perceptions and Attitudes regarding Female Board Members

In the following, "Perceptions and Attitudes regarding Female Board Members" will be discussed. Thereby, literature on the "Business Case for Gender Diversity" and on "Gender Bias" will be addressed.

As highlighted above female board members do not necessarily lack human or social capital. According to above highlighted findings female board members tend to possess the same at times even higher human capital than their male peers (Hillman, Canella and Harris, 2002: 759). Pajo, McGregor and Cleland (1997: 177) highlight prevailing assumptions, perceptions and attitudes towards women and argue that these can influence women while pursuing their career path.

Kirsch (2018: 7) highlights that articles analysing whether female or male directors have any distinct value traits are rather rare. Nevertheless, she states that part of the literature does analyse which impact a higher number of female board membership has on firm´s financial output and governance. Some scholars apparently assume that women tend to embody stereotypical feminine traits as being less competitive, aggressive, ambitious and risk-taking than men. Such stereotypical assumptions can be used to argue in favour or against female board representation. Du and Du (2014: 121) argue in support of female board membership. Building their argument on feminist essentialism, they state *"women are more merciful, more compassionate, and incline more towards reciprocity than men; thereof women in the boardroom have a significant impact on corporate ethical decision."* Moreover, also Luo et al. (2017: 128) find in their study on female leaders using classical grounded theory that the presence of female leaders has a positive impact on the firm. Thereby scholars highlight that female leaders can have among others *"sensitive observation"* skills and an *"intuitive mindset and foresight"* capacity (Luo *et al.*, 2017: 128). In line with the

before mentioned, Wang Anping (2004: 77) highlights that female managers tend to have feelings of *"strong responsibility, ambition"* as well as good *"communication"* skills. Furthermore, also Li (2006) addressing the situation of women in the media industry in China highlights that women are usually *"born communicator(s)."* In line with Li (2006) also Yang (2011: 301) highlights that female managers tend to be better communicators than their male peers. Above highlighted arguments, frequently drawing on feminist essentialism, cut short on the great diversity of character traits of men and women.

Such stereotypical assumptions are frequently used when underlining the "business case" for more gender diversity on corporate boards. Supporters of the "business case" for board diversity tend to argue that corporate governance and firm´s financial output can be improved by increasing the number of WoB. Furthermore, they argue that a wider range of experiences and views can be included in board decision-making by increasing the percentage of female board members. While some of the before mentioned assumptions may be true, the "business case" ultimately rests upon stereotypical assumptions of gender behaviour (Bührmann, 2014). Thereby women are not assumed to be equal to men but different to men. Simpson, Carter and D´Souza (2010: 27) highlight that in the "business case" for more gender diversity on boards women are not assumed to *have "equal abilit(ies) and qualifications"* to men. Rather, women are assumed to be special, thereby possessing a special set of stereotypical feminine skills, character traits and values that could increase board and firm performance. Despite assumingly good intentions behind the "business case", underlying arguments build on gender inequality when actually aimed at more equality (Bührmann, 2014).

Simpson, Carter and D´Souza (2010: 38) highlight that the "business case" for gender diversity assumes an increase of shareholder returns and firm profitability when increasing the number of women on corporate boards. Analysing the effects they find contradictory results. Burgess and Tharenou (2002: 40) list the benefits of adding women to corporate boards. Burke (1994) highlights survey data stating that male CEOs particularly value female board members´ capability of understanding female customers; thereby underlining the idea of women understanding other women. While such arguments might have good intentions they ultimately simplify the great heterogeneity among women. Others assume that female board members, simply due to being women, must bring a special set of feminine skills and traits to the task. Such articles cut short on the great diversity among women and men. Luo *et al.* (2017: 83) believe that female leaders are more likely to have an *"intuitive mindset"* and a *"sensitive observation"*, thereby using concepts as *"feminine leadership"* and *"female leadership."* Wang (2004) finds that female managers tend to be more motivated and more responsible than their male peers. Mu (2016: 23) finds that female leaders have a different set of human capital, way of thinking and behaviour than their male peers. Mu (2016: 23) defines *"female thinking"* as being *"(m)ore meticulous, good at emotional expression and communication, emphasis on teamwork."* Such arguments attach sex to gender; thus assuming that female board members, simply because they are women, will act according to presumed stereotypical feminine behaviour. However, this is not necessarily always the case. Another argument

in support of the business case outlines that the likelihood of corporate failure is reduced when having a well-balanced corporate board (Burgess and Tharenou, 2002: 40). Burgess and Tharenou (2002: 40) argue that homogenous boards can lead to "group think" errors. In addition, Burgess and Tharenou (2002: 42) state that the assumed greater sensitivity of female directors frequently seems to be a major argument in support of female board appointment. Gamba and Goldstein (2009: 202) cite a Catalyst (2007) study demonstrating that an increase in the percentage of female board members on Fortune 500 firms resulted in an increase of firm´s financial output. Other studies however do not find positive links between board gender diversity and firm performance. Rose (2007) finds no significant relation between the percentage of WoB and firm performance measured by Tobin's Q.[15] Mavin (2008) however states that one ought to stay realistic and not impose unrealistic expectations onto female board members that ultimately cannot be fulfilled.

The before mentioned "business case" for more gender diversity aims at increasing the number of women on corporate boards. However, arguments supporting the "business case" frequently draw on gender stereotypes about women and men. Such assumptions prescribe how women and men shall act accordingly. This does not necessarily trigger more gender equality. Rather it further consolidates already existing gender bias. Peterson and Philpot (2007) conclude that prior work on the issue has shown a systemic bias against women when analysing board assignments. Singh and Vinnicombe (2004: 480) highlight that women are frequently stereotyped as being less ambitious and career-focused than men. By now, this stereotype is clearly found to be incorrect. Still this is a perceived stereotype that constitutes a barrier for women when aiming for a corporate board position as it *"stop(s) women from achieving their full potential"* (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004: 486). According to the findings of Pajo, McGregor and Cleland (1997) women felt it was irrelevant whether they were sufficiently qualified or not. Rather *"(t)he point is that the female directors believe companies felt women were not qualified, were not interested in appointing more women to boards and had no real idea where to look for them"* (Pajo, McGregor and Cleland, 1997: 178). Instead of triggering change such assumptions can lead to an unaltered state of affairs. Furthermore, Hillman, Canella and Harris (2002: 758) find that in the US women and minorities face a glass ceiling and discrimination when trying to obtain a position on a corporate board. Moreover, Hillman, Canella and Harris (2002: 758) argue that *"deeply held stereotypes are still prevalent"* in the workforce. In their analysis of American corporate boards, they found that women and racial minorities were much more likely to have a higher educational background than their white male peers. Fu and Ma (2012: 9) taking

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[15] Tobin Q was introduced by Tobin in 1963. It defines *"(e)conomics theory of investment behavior where 'q' represents the ratio of the market value of a firm's existing shares (share capital) to the replacement cost of the firm's physical assets (thus, replacement cost of the share capital). It states that if q (representing equilibrium) is greater than one (q > 1), additional investment in the firm would make sense because the profits generated would exceed the cost of firm's assets. If q is less than one (q < 1), the firm would be better off selling its assets instead of trying to put them to use. The ideal state is where q is approximately equal to one denoting that the firm is in equilibrium"* (Dictionary, 2019).

China as an example point out that due to the glass ceiling and the challenge of trying to combine having a family with a career, many Chinese women want to have their own company by starting a business and becoming an entrepreneur.

Summary "Individual Characteristics"

Above I highlighted research on "individual characteristics" of female board members. A major part of the discussed scholarship has been written on the demographics of women on corporate boards. Thus, frequently criticised for being too descriptive and lacking theory. Despite a large amount of studies published in this area, results have been contradictory. A common finding is that female board members tend to be younger and have less tenure experience than their male peers. A large amount of scholarship argues that female and male board members tend to have very similar to the same human and social capital. Still female board members are much more likely to be related to the founding family of the firm than their male peers. Furthermore, I highlighted that particular stereotypical perceptions and attitudes about women are still existent in the workforce and can limit women when trying to show their full potential. Frequently the "business case" for more gender diversity draws on feminist essentialist stereotypes. Thereby the "business case" assumes that by increasing the number of WoB, governance performance and financial output will improve. This however may further consolidate already established gender bias.

2.2. External Factors Influencing Female Board Appointment

The second cluster of literature on WoB highlights factors that may influence, i.e. hinder or facilitate, women's rise to a corporate board (Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1157). In the following, I will use Kirsch´s (2018: 351-352) and Bührmann *et al.´s* (2015: 18-47) categorization of external factors that may influence female board appointment on a: macro, meso and micro level. On a macro level, I will discuss factors on a national level, i.e. existing formal institutions as governmental gender policies and childcare facilities. Furthermore, I will highlight informal institutions as national cultures and national mentality structures. Moreover, I will analyse the role actors have, as: media, shareholders, executive firms and head-hunters, which may influence female board appointment. On a meso level, I will underline factors influencing female appointment on a company level. Here, I discuss the "think manager think male" phenomenon as well as the double bind dilemma and more general societal expectations existent within the workforce. Furthermore, I highlight metaphors as "Glass Ceiling, Glass Wall and Glass Cliff" that are frequently used to explain female underrepresentation on corporate boards. Moreover, I stress current characteristics of management work culture as well as temporal and spatial mobility. To conclude this section I will highlight future work models that could increase the compatibility of family and work.

2.2.1. Macro Level

In the following, I will highlight literature analysing factors that may influence female board appointments from a macro level. I will discuss literature on formal and informal institutions and actors that may influence female board appointments. I define the macro level as a national level. On the one hand, formal institutions primarily define governmental regulations as gender quotas and childcare support. On the other hand, informal institutions include culture, norms, gender stereotypes and media representation of female board members. Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016: 407) define institutions as *"the formal (e.g., laws, constitutions) and informal constraints (e.g., taboos, traditions, socio-cultural norms) which limit individuals and organizational choices"* (North, 1990). Rigidified formal and informal institutions can shape people´s behaviour by creating certain expectations.

In their quantitative cross-country study including 38 countries Grosvold and Brammer (2011: 116) find that *"as much as half of the variation in the presence of women on corporate boards across countries is attributable to national institutional systems."* Furthermore*, "culturally and legally-oriented institutional systems appear to play the most significant role in shaping board diversity"* (Grosvold and Brammer, 2011: 116). The scholars find that countries belonging to the Germanic and French clusters had on average fewer WoB despite their *"greater legislative safeguards designed to assure women´s employment rights and professional career opportunities"* (Grosvold and Brammer, 2011: 131). They argue that a possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that if companies are not sufficiently supported when women fall out of the workforce due to pregnancy or child-care duties they might be more hesitant to hire and invest in women. Therefore, not all policies that are made to protect women are necessarily equally beneficial for women. Furthermore, also Aguilera and Jackson (2003) highlight the importance of institutional factors in their cross-national study, arguing that institutional factors greatly influence women´s appointment to corporate boards. Moreover, in their quantitative multi-country study of 43 countries on women on corporate boards Terjesen and Singh (2008) analyse the environmental factors influencing women´s presence on corporate boards. Their findings suggest that the number of women on corporate boards is greatly influenced by social, political and economic structures of the respective country. Terjesen and Singh (2008) argue that countries with a higher percentage of WoB tend to have more women in senior management teams and a lower gender pay gap. However, countries with a longer history in female political representation tend to have fewer WoB. Contrary to this finding, Chizema, Kamuriwo and Shinozawa (2015: 1059) find that *"the representation of women in parliament impacts positively on the prevalence of WoB."* Furthermore, Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016) along with other scholars find that welfare states and welfare policies play a crucial role in promoting gender equality (Mandel and Semyonov, 2006; Grosvold and Brammer, 2011 in: Iannotta, Gatti and Huse, 2016: 408). Thereby, Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016: 406, 416) argue that higher paternity leave, lower maternity leave, higher parental leave, higher childcare support and services, higher female labour force participation rate and higher gender equality in a specific

country can have positive effects on a higher percentage of female board membership. Adams and Kirchmaier (2013) in their study of 9,888 listed companies in 22 countries over the time period from 2001 until 2010 have found that gender quotas, codes of conduct promoting gender equality and cultural norms can influence the percentage of WoB. Furthermore, according to their analysis the female labour force participation rate is greatly related to the representation of women on corporate boards; however only when unemployed and part-time workers are excluded. The case of China however contradicts this finding. According to the Executive Report of the third Survey on the Status of Chinese Women published in 2011, the employment rate among Chinese women aged 18 to 64 was 71.1 percent, thus among the highest in the world (Project Group of the third Survey on the Status of Chinese Women, 2011). Nevertheless, China does not have a proportional equally high rate of female representation on corporate boards.

Furthermore, scholars address the different effects of regulations upon the composition of gender on corporate boards (Kirsch, 2018: 355-356). Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 19) state that already in 2010 the German Corporate Governance Codex called for an *"adequate participation of women."* However, Obermeyer and Reibold (2011: 23) argue that particularly in the *"private industry, past experience has shown that without compulsory measures nothing changes."* This calls for a gender quota. Recently, several countries have implemented gender quotas for corporate boards. However, the impact and functionality of gender quotas are hotly debated upon. While some scholars argue that gender quotas hinder the aim of empowering women, others state that quotas can increase the percentage of female board members, eventually triggering more gender equality. Furthermore, contradictions exist regarding the effectiveness of quotas. Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016: 418) as well as Adams and Kirchmaier (2013) state that gender quotas may not be sufficient when trying to overcome gender discrimination on the board level. Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016) using a sample of 23 countries, find that institutions like family, education, economy and government can greatly influence women´s board appointment. Furthermore, they highlight that the institution religion does not influence female representation on boards. Contrary to this result, Chizema, Kamuriwo and Shinozawa´s (2015: 1060) findings suggest that religion does seem to have an impact on female representation on corporate boards. They argue that a higher degree of religiosity tends to have a negative impact on the presence of women on corporate boards. Furthermore, Chizema, Kamuriwo and Shinozawa (2015) demonstrate that a higher percentage of women in key national institutions tends to have a positive effect on female board appointment.

Besides the above listed institutions, also individual actors can play an influential role for female board appointment. Actors frequently mentioned are media, shareholders, executive firms and headhunters. Media can generate common knowledge. Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 23) state that the media plays a crucial role when generating common knowledge. Usually society acquires its knowledge on female top-managers from media reports not from first-hand interaction with female top-managers. Grittman (2012: 165) argues that active female top-managers are less frequently visible in media reports than their male peers,

thereby remaining tokens. Bührmann (2014) argues that women on top-management teams are frequently portrayed by media reports as belonging to one of two categories: the first one describes the rather negatively connoted *"business woman"* (Bührmann, 2014: 101). She is portrayed as incorporating stereotypical masculine characteristics, i.e. as having short hair, a rough voice and being of belligerent nature. The second category is more positively connoted as the *"power woman."* While embodying feminine characteristics as wearing figure-accentuating outfits and luxuriant jewellery, it becomes obvious that the *"power woman"* has successfully conquered a male domain (Bührmann, 2014).

In addition, shareholder and executive firms can influence women´s appointment to corporate boards (Kirsch, 2018: 351). In a qualitative study on the subject Doldor, Sealy and Vinnicombe (2016) examine the role of marginal actors, particularly headhunters in the process of female board appointment. They argue that headhunters can have a significant impact triggering change processes. Furthermore, in their empirical study on the relationship between shareholder activism and board diversity Marquardt and Wiedman´s (2016) findings suggest that shareholders´ staff recommendations for board appointments can greatly increase the percentage of WoB, thus aiming towards more gender diversity. Furthermore, Sheridan, Ross-Smith and Lord (2014: 154) in their analysis of Australian corporate boards in the time period between 2009 and 2012 highlight the importance of pressures from various actors as "*government, media, lobby groups, the professional associations*" in order to disrupt the status quo, eventually increasing the percentage of WoB.

2.2.2. Meso Level

In the following, I define the meso level as the organisational level, thus focusing on firms and the workforce within firms. In this section literature on the "think manager think male" phenomenon will be discussed. In addition, prevalent societal expectations towards female managers and the double bind dilemma will be highlighted. Then the terms "glass ceiling, glass wall, glass cliff" are addressed. The section on meso level will be concluded by discussing scholarship on temporal and spatial mobility, workplace presence culture and future work models. As discussed above, on the macro level ideational factors could be societal expectations or mentality structures on a national level. Such ideational factors also exist on a meso level and on a micro level. These ideational factors, such as societal expectations or mentality structures tend to be cross-cutting and inter-connected, thereby creating certain spill-over effects from one level to another. Due to their interconnected nature societal structures, expectations and beliefs are difficult to analyse on a single level of analysis without crossing other levels. In the following however, I will try to focus primarily onto the meso, thus organisational level. I will highlight societal expectations and mentality structures within the workforce.

Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 26) argue that people with specific characteristics are regarded and recognised as managers by society. Such recognition occurs along societal assumed and accepted leader prototype characteristics. Thereby, leadership becomes socially constructed through discourses. Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 26) states that in these debates male managers are seen as the norm while fe-

male managers are constructed and assessed as "the other." In their study of women in worldwide management, Antal and Izraeli (1993: 63) argue*, "the single most important hurdle for women in management in all industrialized countries is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male."* Certainly such stereotypes are also persistent on a macro and micro level.

In a cross-cultural comparison over a period of 30 years, Schein (1973, 1975, 2001; Schein *et al.*, 1996) studied existing sex role stereotypes and requisite managerial characteristics. In her empirical analysis focusing on the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, China and Japan she found that strongly held perceptions particularly among middle management members and business students were persistent. She defines their assumptions as the "think manager think male" phenomenon. Stereotypical characteristics of successful managers were primarily related to stereotypical male characteristics. This was the case for both male as well as female middle managers and university students. Schein (2001: 676) warns that psychological barriers as the "think manager think male" phenomenon can consolidate gender bias against women in the workforce. Moreover, also Anderson and Flynn (2003) analysed existing sex role stereotypes in the workforce (Agarwal, 2018). They conducted an experiment called the "Heidi Roizen" case. Thereby a group of MBA students were divided into two groups. Both groups of students received a Harvard Business School case study that described the career path of a successful entrepreneur. This was the actual career path of "Heidi Roizen." While one-half of the group received the actual case study labelled "Heidi", the other group received the exact same case study however labelled with the name "Howard." Accordingly, both groups of students received the same case study, the only difference being the name. Then students were asked for whom they would rather work and whom they would rather employ. Students perceived both "Howard" and "Heidi" as being equally competent in terms of their qualification. However, while "Howard" was rated as an appealing boss, "Heidi" was classified as being selfish and simply not *"the type of person you would want to hire or work for."* Stereotypes still seem to be an existing barrier for women when trying to obtain a management position. Nevertheless, more recent publications highlight that societal sex stereotypes are altering and becoming less important (Duehr and Bono, 2006; Koenig *et al.*, 2011; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015). However, Koenig *et al.* (2011) as well as Wellington, Kropf and Gerkovich (2003) state that women who possess long-term leadership experience in higher management tend to argue that gender stereotypes are still a major barrier for women when trying to obtain a higher management position. This suggests that particularly in the higher management, gender stereotypes still prevail. However these stereotypes can differ from those found among the normal population (Adams and Funk, 2012). Adams and Funk (2012) argue that gender differences do exist between female and male directors. However, they are not necessarily the same as those found among the average population and civil society (Kirsch, 2018: 350).

Societal expectations and beliefs held towards individuals can influence one´s behaviour. Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 28, 29) state that existing gender beliefs and expectations can indirectly prescribe how men and women shall act appropriately. Non-compliance with such societal expectations can quickly result in a

negative reaction or societal disregard (Heilman, 2012: 116, 117). Cook and Glass (2018: 901) specify this idea by arguing that stereotypical

> "*gender role expectations posit that women are kind, friendly and community-oriented. Yet in leadership roles, those characteristics often undermine women's ability to be viewed as competent and capable (Schein, 2001; Schein and Davidson, 1993); conversely, if women violate gender expectations by demonstrating competitiveness, toughness or assertiveness, they are often evaluated negatively (Catalyst, 2007; O'Neill and O'Reilly, 2011).*"

This phenomenon leads to the so-called "double-bind" dilemma. The Catalyst (2007) defines the "double-bind" dilemma as a "psychological impasse" that is established when disparate, often contradictory, expectations are held towards an individual. Oakley (2000: 324) defines the double bind dilemma as creating an inescapable situation *"where a person cannot win no matter what (he or) she does."*

Glass metaphors are frequently used to describe invisible barriers that may limit women from rising to a corporate board or other top management positions. Gender specific segregation processes at the workforce are primarily differentiated into vertical and horizontal processes (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 33). Holst (2006: 124) defines the "glass ceiling" as *"an invisible barrier blocking the rise of women to top jobs."* Thereby the "glass ceiling" particularly highlights the phenomenon that women often stop progressing further than middle management (Macarie and Moldovan, 2012). Accordingly, Xiang (2016: 1), researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, defines the "glass ceiling" as a phenomenon, when women or ethnic minorities, climbing up the professional career ladder, are obstructed when trying to reach the top. Furthermore, a report on the "Status Quo of Women in the Workplace in China" published in 2017 by Zhaopin (2017) in cooperation with the Social Research Centre of Peking University suggest that better educated women are much more likely to face employment discrimination when applying for a job than men. Thereby 43 percent of the surveyed women with a graduate degree claimed that they have felt severe or very severe discrimination compared to only 18 percent of men holding a graduate degree. Furthermore, regarding career promotion 25 percent of surveyed women have experienced severe or very severe discrimination at least once compared to 18 percent of men. Also Li (2006) highlights the idea of "glass ceiling" by stating that although China has a very high female labour force participation rate, the majority of working women are still heavily located at the "sticky" bottom of the hierarchy, thus in low-skilled professions.

Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) highlight that the "glass ceiling" is an international phenomenon. However, despite being international it can be composed differently across nations.

Moreover, the "Glass Cliff" defines the phenomenon that *"in times of crisis women are more likely to be perceived as suitable managers"* than during easy times (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 35). On the one hand, the "glass cliff" can mean giving a chance to newly appointed female managers to show their skills. However, it also implies having a much greater risk of failure as women *"disproportionally occupy risky and precarious leadership positions"* (Morgenroth *et al.*,

2015: 128). Macarie and Moldovan (2012: 157) state that the "glass cliff" is only an *"illusion of breaking the glass ceiling."* Thereby, however, not actually breaking it.

Furthermore, Weidenfeller (2012: 365) defines the "Glass Wall" as *"lateral barriers that also limit women's advancement."* Wellington, Kropf and Gerkovich (2003) argue that the "glass ceiling" metaphor is too simple. Rather, they suggest that "glass walls" are firmly established within the workforce. These *"glass walls limit women's job potential almost from the beginning of their careers."* Thereby, lacking women in the pipeline does not seem to be a problem anymore. Rather, *"(t)he main issue appears to be the lack of top leadership ensur(ing) that women get the profit-and-loss experience that would qualify them for the most senior positions"* (Wellington, Kropf and Gerkovich, 2003: 19). Furthermore, Yang (2011: 301) highlights the importance of creating a system within a company that facilitates promotion channels for female employees on all levels.

Round-the-clock accessibility is frequently expected from corporate board members and other top-managers. Thereby unrestricted temporal and spatial availability is often seen as a matter of course for managers (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 32, 33). However, Krell (2012: 30) argues that even when complying with temporal and spatial mobility female managers still tend to benefit less than male managers. Correspondingly Becker *et al.* (2011: 37) highlight that according to their findings women, after an occupational move, felt to have benefitted less than their male peers. Regarding job assignments abroad Hearn, Jyrkinen and Piekkari (2008) find great gender differences concerning the work- und lifestyle of expats. Hearn, Jyrkinen and Piekkari (2008: 52) argue that the majority of male managers living abroad had a stay-at-home-housewife or had a female partner working only part-time. Female managers, on the other hand, were more likely to be single or have a working husband. On average female expats often had to do *"significantly more time management and balancing of home and work requirements"* than male managers. Thereby traditional family structures and gender divisions were being reinforced within expat communities (Hearn, Jyrkinen and Piekkari, 2008: 52; Bathmann, Cornelißen and Müller, 2013: 193).

Long working hours tend to be the norm for members of higher management teams. Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 30) argue that this expectation of continuous availability in the workplace rests upon a stable and gender segregated division of labour. This workplace culture frequently rests upon the traditional model of male breadwinner and female caretaker (Busch and Holst, 2012; Hofbauer, 2014: 146). This workplace culture makes it particularly difficult to combine one´s career with having a family, regardless whether one is male or female. Particularly when lacking sufficient child-care support, investing in one´s career and having children can become a challenging and exclusionary task. Focusing on Germany, Busch and Holst (2012) argue that the majority of German male and female managers live in households without children up to an age of 16 years old. In their qualitative analysis of management recruitment processes, Kricheldorff and Schramkowski (2015) argue that many future managers are still confronted with the question whether to pursue a career or to have children. Thereby one assumes that having a career could cut short on having a family and vice versa (Kricheldorff and Schramkowski, 2015: 7). Wippermann (2010:

29) argues that combining career with a family is still a challenge; however, these are not *"excluding alternatives."* Furthermore, Wippermann (2010: 29) states that till today giving up one´s family formation is still a price that lots of women have to pay when aiming for a management position. However, argues this is not the main cause for sustaining the "glass ceiling" (Wippermann, 2010: 29). Certainly also men living in non-traditional family structures and aiming towards combining a career with a family can suffer from such circumstances.

Statistics have shown that after giving birth women are much more likely to work part-time than men are in Germany (Grabka, 2018). Various studies however have demonstrated that part-time work is the ultimate "career killer" (Hipp, 2018). Drawing from an ethnographic study, Franke (2013: 197) argues that although working part-time can increase one's flexibility, part-time work still means, *"reduced working hours and not necessarily implying a reduced workload."* However, with changing societal demands and trying to stay competitive in the market, companies are starting to look for alternative work-time-models (Franke, 2013: 196). Following the idea of alternative work-time-models Hipp and Stuth (2013) propose a part-time-manager model. In their study of 19 European countries using quantitative data from the 2009 European labour force survey Hipp and Stuth (2013) argue that while differences across countries exist, part-time managers are still rather rare in Europe. While some European countries as the Netherlands have 12 percent of female part-time managers, others as the Republic of Slovakia have less than two percent (Hipp and Stuth, 2013: 4). Part-time-manager-models could mean better compatibility between having a family and a career for both female and male managers. Lehmann (2000) however argues that workforce presence culture is still a frequently seen common habit in firms, particularly among higher management (*Lehmann*, *2000*: 144 In: Franke, 2013: 206). Thereby assuming that good managers should spend long working hours within their firm and should be continuously available. Sorgner, Bode and Krieder-Boden (2017: 42) highlight several positive effects that the digital transformation could bring for women in the workforce. They state that the digital transformation is *"a major tool for empowering women to enable their inclusion in labour markets, in entrepreneurial and financial activities."* In the course of digitalisation and changing of traditional work models, new forms of work are emerging, such as working irrespectively of one´s location and part-time management (Bultemeier and Marrs, 2016; Sorgner, Bode and Krieder-Boden, 2017). This could create new opportunities for combining one´s career with having a family for both female as well as male managers. Furthermore, digitalisation can also change leadership. Thus, prospects assume that future leadership will be less hierarchical and more interconnected on a digital basis. Digitalisation, however, may also bring about negative consequences for women trying to obtain a management position. Carstensen (2015) warns against the new burdens that can rise with digital and mobile technology. New working conditions like round-the-clock mobility, accessibility and continuous flexibility, may increase psychological pressure, eventually leading to stress and burnout symptoms. Carstensen (2015) highlights that instead of supporting female managers; digitalisation may increase pressure leading to an even greater "double burden."

2.2.3. Micro Level

In the following, I discuss literature published on the micro level. I define the micro level as the individual level, thus focusing on processes that may influence an individual´s board appointment. I will particularly highlight scholarship published on the "Thomas Cycle" and "Golden Skirts" as well as on the effect of networking and mentoring.

The existing literature on WoB concerning individual factors for board appointment highlights among others the following concepts: "similarity-attraction" (Byrne, 1971), "homosocial reproduction" (Kantner, 1977) or "self-cloning" (see also: Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014: 1; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 39, 45, 46; Kirsch, 2018: 351, 352). Thereby members of a specific societal group tend to feel more connected to people having similar characteristics (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 39). Furthermore, Rowley, Lee and Lan (2014) highlight that corporate boards often heavily rely on the recommendation of already existent board members for the selection of new ones. Frequently this means relying on the "old boys' network" when looking for new members (Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014). This quickly results in a so-called *"Monoculture"* (AllBright Foundation, 2018). A report published by the AllBright Foundation in 2018 found that the newly elected German board members were nearly *"complete reflections of the already existing members."* The only change seemed to be that members are becoming more international. Regarding the case of Germany there are more corporate board members called *"Thomas"* and *"Michael"* than there are women on DAX, MDAX, SDAX and TecDAX corporate boards. Therefore, one speaks of the so-called *"Thomas-cycle"* (AllBright Foundation, 2017, 2018). This refers to an ever-lasting repetition of board members having similar characteristics. Accordingly, there is only little to no difference regarding *"gender, nationality, age, origin and educational background"* of board members (AllBright Foundation, 2018: 7). The unconscious compliance with and constant repetition of the *"Thomas-cycle"* creates management teams with similar to equal characteristics. Although these teams frequently *"work smoothly together"* their *"focus and range of experience is rather limited"* (AllBright Foundation, 2017: 4). The German *"Thomas cycle"* thereby stands exemplarily for the lack of diversity among corporate boards across the world.

However, things are slowly changing. Thereby the number of women on corporate boards is steadily rising. Huse (2011) analysing Norwegian corporate boards states that slowly but steadily *"old boys' networks"* are being replaced by *"Golden Skirts."* The term *"Golden Skirts"* refers to the newly appointed female independent board members. One could assume that an increase of women on corporate boards will also lead to greater diversity on boards. However, Huse (2011: 5) states that by increasing the number of female board members in Norway also multiple-board-membership rose. This means that an increase in the percentage of female board membership does not necessarily lead to an equal rise of numbers of WoB. Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 45) defines multiple-board-membership as *"interlocking directorates."* Thus, once having a seat on one corporate board it becomes more likely for both men and women to become appointed to a second corporate board. This process creates a monopoly of power in the hands of very few. McDonald and Westphal (2013) argue that multiple-board-membership can

result in a so-called *"corporate elite."* Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008: 10) refer to this phenomenon as the *"'recycling' of a small group of experienced directors"* regardless whether female or male; thus instead of leading to greater board diversity, only a small number of elite people become empowered.

As stated above, corporate boards heavily rely on the recommendations of already existing board members for new appointments. Frequently this implies relying on the *"old boy´s network."* Being part of such a network may increase one´s chances of entering a top management team later on. Thereby networking and mentoring may be good opportunities to enter powerful and influential networks. This is frequently described as possessing social capital. When aiming for a position on a corporate board not only acquired human capital, like educational background and management experience, is relevant, but also social capital, as for example networks and personal contacts (Burgess and Tharenou, 2002: 43; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 331; Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 41; Kirsch, 2018: 352).

On average women tend to possess the same, at times even higher, human capital than their male peers. Still women are greatly underrepresented on corporate boards and have an even larger gender pay gap in higher management positions (Littmann-Wernli and Scheidegger, 2004: 53). Scheidegger and Osterloh (2004: 202) highlight that it is not what but rather whom you know. Littmann-Wernli and Scheidegger (2004: 61) find great differences regarding social capital among female and male managers. Female managers are less likely than male managers to have *"strong ties"* as networks (Littmann-Wernli and Scheidegger, 2004: 64). Yet professional and social networks are of great importance for professional progress. Scheidegger and Osterloh (2004: 202) argue that often one´s career success is connected with one´s social networks. One way of creating such networks could be through mentoring (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 42, 43). Dolff and Hansen (2002: 32, 33) list several benefits of a well-functioning mentoring relationship: it can empower and strengthen the mentee professionally and personally, the mentee can learn to constructively work on his or her weaknesses, the mentoring relationship can be a pool of professional information and one can jointly articulate the mentee´s professional aims.

Summary: External Factors Influencing Female Board Appointment

Above I highlighted the literature on external factors that may influence female board appointment on a macro-, meso- and micro level. On a macro level, I discussed factors on a national level, as existing formal institutions. Particularly governmental gender policies and adequate childcare facilities have proven to be influential when aiming to increase the number of WoB. Furthermore, I highlighted informational institutions as national culture and national mentality structures. Thereby countries belonging to Germanic and French clusters had on average less female board members. The main reason for this could be greater efforts in legislative safeguards for women. Moreover, I emphasised crucial actors that may influence female board appointment as media, shareholders, executive firms and headhunters. Media has proven to be influential in shaping a

public image of female board members. Shareholder, executive firms and head-hunters can directly influence new appointments of female board members. On a meso level, I underlined factors influencing female appointment on a company level. Here I discussed the still dominant "think manager think male" phenomenon by highlighting the "Heidi Roizen" case. This case shows that successful female managers tend to be seen as very competent but at the same time as very unappealing. Furthermore, I discussed the double bind dilemma and more general societal gender expectations existent in the workforce. Moreover, I highlighted the metaphors "Glass Ceiling, Glass Wall and Glass Cliff." These are frequently used to explain female underrepresentation on corporate boards and top management teams. "Glass Ceiling" is the most commonly used term among the three before mentioned. It refers to invisible barriers limiting women when trying to reach top management positions. Moreover, I stressed current characteristics of management work culture as temporal and spatial mobility. Particularly workplace presence culture still seems to be an important factor in today´s corporate culture. Nevertheless, in the process of digitalization increasingly more work models are expected to become available in the future. Thereby, increasing the possibilities of having a family and a career. On a micro level, I discussed literature on the Thomas cycle and Golden Skirts as well as effects of networking.

2.3. Impact on Economic, Social and Ethical Aspects of Firms

A third major cluster of scholarship published on the research topic WoB refers to articles analysing the impact of increasing the number of women on corporate boards upon firm´s economic-, social and ethical aspects of firms. This cluster of literature is crucial for an analysis of WoB as arguments used to contradict or argue in favour of female board presence rest upon studies of the overall impact of female board presence. This section has similarities with the one highlighted above under "Meso Level." This section however differs as it primarily highlights the impact and actual effect of increasing the number of WoB upon firms. I will summarise commonly used arguments for more gender diversity on boards. Then I will outline existing literature addressing economic impact. This means to what extent does a firm´s financial output change when increasing the number of women on corporate boards. Furthermore, I will address the question of social and ethical impact within firms when having greater gender diversity on corporate boards. Here I will highlight governance performance, corporate responsibility, philanthropy and firm´s reputation. Moreover, I will conclude this section by analysing the impact on gender diversity below the board level. Here I will address the idea of female board members being role models for younger generations. Furthermore, I will analyse whether numerical representation of WoB is crucial for token versus critical mass theory.

Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008: 2) as well as Burgess and Tharenou (2002: 40) summarise the frequently used arguments for increasing gender diversity on corporate boards as triggering new, different ideas and views, enhancing communication as well as improving corporate governance. Moreover, they argue that female board members can serve as role models or mentors for younger generations (Bilimoria, 2006). Furthermore, they highlight that greater

diversity on boards can alter leadership styles, improve a firm´s image or enhance boardroom culture. This seems quite far-reaching. Burke (1994: 2), on the other hand, assumes that female board members might have difficulty triggering change on boards.

2.3.1. Economic Impact: Firms´ Financial Output

What is the economic impact for firms when increasing the number of female board members? Particularly, what impact does enhancing the percentage of women on corporate boards have onto a firm´s financial output? Literature finds both positive as well as negative impacts. In addition, other studies find that gender diversity has no economic impact upon a firm´s financial output. Analysing existing literature on the question does not bring clear answers and explicit evidence (Simpson, Carter and D´Souza, 2010: 36; Liu, Wei and Xie, 2014: 170; Post and Byron, 2015: 1546). These contradictory results arise from a different usage of statistical methodologies and samples, thus making comparisons difficult. Moreover, the majority of studies analysing the impact of gender diversity are geographically limited onto the analysis of American firms (Campbell and Minguez-Vera, 2008: 435; Liu, Wei and Xie, 2014: 170).

Burgess and Tharenou (2002: 41) find positive effects thus increased profitability, when having greater gender diversity in American firms. Also Carter, Simkins and Simpson (2003) find a positive impact regarding the American firms´ value when increasing board diversity. In their study they focus on the percentage of African American, Asian, Hispanic and women on board of directors of the Fortune 1000 firms. Moreover, Campbell and Minguez-Vera (2008) find a positive impact in their study of board gender diversity and effects onto Spanish firms´ financial performance, possibly triggering a positive stock market reaction. Furthermore, Liu, Wei and Xie (2014) focusing on China find a significant and positive relation between greater gender diversity and firm performance. Liu, Wei and Xie (2014) focus on more than 2000 listed Chinese firms from 1999 until 2011. Thereby defining diversity as the percentage of female directors on corporate boards. Furthermore, their findings underline the Critical Mass Theory, thus boards with three or more female directors can have a greater impact on firm performance than boards with less women. Furthermore, Liu, Wei and Xie (2014) state that female executive directors tend to have a greater positive impact onto firm performance than female independent directors.[16] In their meta-analysis Post and Byron (2015) find that greater gender diversity on boards to have a positive impact onto accounting returns, however, more so in states that have stronger shareholder protections. Furthermore, it has a positive effect onto moni-

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[16] **Executive director** - a person who is included in the *"day-to-day management of the company", thereby being part of the "full-time salaried employees of the company."* (Deloitte, 2014: 1)
Independent director – a person who *"plays an important role in providing objective judgement",* but thereby not being *"involved in the management of the company."* The person *"is not a representative of a shareholder who has the ability to control or significantly influence the management or board and does not have a direct or indirect interest in the company (including any parent or subsidiary in a consolidated group with the company) which exceeds 5% of the group's total number of shares in issue"* (Deloitte, 2014: 1-2).

toring and strategy efforts of the corporate board. Moreover, Post and Byron (2015: 1546) argue that *"although the relationship between female board representation and market performance is near zero the relationship is positive in countries with greater gender parity (and negative in countries with low gender parity)."* Burgess and Tharenou (2002: 40) cite the Australian report of the industry task force on leadership and management by Burton and Ryall (1995) stating, *"Well-balanced boards that include women directors reduce the likelihood of corporate failures. Homogenous groups tend to have homogenous ways of solving company problems: "group think" errors would be less likely to occur with a heterogeneous board."*

Some scholars however highlight a negative impact of increasing gender diversity onto firms´ financial output. Adams and Ferreira (2009) focusing on American firms find that gender board diversity has a negative impact onto firm performance. They argue that implementing a gender quota by law for corporate boards may decrease a firm´s value. Also Ahern and Dittmar (2012) find negative effects of the 2003 implemented gender quota for Norwegian boards on firm valuation. They argue that the adoption of the gender quota in Norway has overall *"led to younger and less experienced boards, increases in leverage and acquisitions and deterioration in operating performance"* (Ahern and Dittmar, 2012: 137). According to Simpson, Carter and D´Souza´s (2010) findings evidence is generally mixed. Brown, Brown and Anastasopoulos (2002) highlight the importance of time. They argue that firms with two or more female board members were more likely to be revenue industry leaders six years later than firms not having a single female board member (Brown, Brown and Anastasopoulos, 2002). Joecks, Pull and Vetter (2013) find that timing and critical mass is important. They state that in the beginning when increasing the number of WoB there might be negative firm performance, but after ensuring a "critical mass" of approximately 30% of WoB, firms tend to have a higher performance than all-male boards.

2.3.2. Social and Ethical Impact: Firms´ Corporate Responsibility

What impact does an increase in the percentage of women on corporate boards have onto the firm´s social and ethical situation (Kirsch, 2018: 353)? In the following, I will primarily highlight governance performance, corporate responsibility, philanthropy, firm´s reputation and diversity below the board level (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 331; Kirsch, 2018: 353). In addition, literature on the idea that female board members can act as role models, token and critical mass theory will be discussed. Articles analysing the social and ethical impact of increasing gender diversity on corporate boards frequently draw upon essentialist assumptions; thus arguing that since women are supposedly more ethical in their behaviour and way of being, increasing the number of WoB must improve the ethical and social behaviour of firms. While this may be true in some cases, this argument cuts short on the complexity of individuals and their behaviour. Furthermore, such essentialist assumptions primarily reinforce already existing gender stereotypes about women and men, leaving only little room for diversity.

Burgess and Tharenou (2002: 40) highlight studies that have found an increase in gender diversity to have positive effects onto governance performance by increasing a "power sharing" form of leadership. Furthermore, more gender diversity can result in more ideas and different perspectives. Bilimoria (2006) argues that more gender diversity on boards could lead to more "power sharing." Moreover, according to Carter, Simkins and Simpson´s (2003) findings a firm's Tobin's Q measure tends to be positively related to the number of female directors. Adams and Ferreira (2009) found that female directors are more likely than male directors to be part of monitoring committees. Furthermore, women directors had higher attendance results than their male peers. However, with increasing gender diversity male attendance improved. Brown, Brown and Anastasopoulos (2002: 6) in their study of Canadian firms found great *"differences in governance patterns between organizations that have women on their board and those that do not."* Summarising their results they state that gender diversity may trigger more "board unity", thus leading to a better "governance performance." Brown, Brown and Anastasopoulos (2002) emphasise the importance of so-called "inner or invisible diversity" as being crucial for bringing a large set of different skills, experiences and perspectives to corporate boards. Classifying their results the scholars argue that the impact of gender diversity onto governance performance is particularly visible in organisations with two or more women on their boards (Brown, Brown and Anastasopoulos, 2002: 6). This argument highlights the importance of "Critical Mass Theory." Furthermore, also Mu (2016: 23) highlights that female leaders could improve corporate governance. However, according to Mu´s (2016: 26) findings female executives are less likely to take risks than their male peers thereby creating a weaker intention of firm innovation. Singh and Vinnicombe (2004: 481) highlight that *"team diversity can lead to better performance"* drawing from research on group work. However, they warn that diversity, if not implemented adequately, could lead to *"delayed decision-making as well as (to) lower identification with and commitment to the group"* (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004: 481). Nevertheless, they argue that more time could be needed in order for socialisation processes to take place and for actual changes to become visible.

Prior scholarship has highlighted the impact of the number of WoB and firms´ corporate responsibility and philanthropy. Thereby, some studies have found a relationship between the percentage of WoB and the firms´ willingness to engage in charity activities while others have found no link. Williams (2003: 2) states that until recently only *"anecdotal evidence that women actually give more than men"* for firms´ charitable projects have been available. In his study Williams (2003) uses a sample of Fortune 500 firms in the time period from 1991 until 1994 and finds that companies with a higher percentage of WoB were more likely to be engaged in charitable giving. He highlights that while he did find a clear relationship between the number of WoB and firm´s philanthropy in the fields of art and community service, no relationship was visible in the fields of education and public policy. Du and Du (2014) from Shanghai University and Xiamen University, look at firms in the Chinese stock market from 1999 until 2009 to analyse the effects that female directors may have on firms' corporate social responsibility. Their findings suggest that a higher proportion of female

directors leads to a significant increase of corporate social responsibility within firms in the Chinese stock market. Thereby, Du and Du (2014: 121) build their findings on feminist essentialist arguments by assuming that *"women are more merciful, more compassionate, and incline more towards reciprocity than men; thereof women in the boardroom have a significant impact on corporate ethical decision."* Despite arguing in support of female board presence, this assumption cuts short on the great diversity of men and women. It assumes underlying naturally given feminine and masculine character traits. Thereby a man is assumed to behave according to supposedly given masculine behaviour traits and a woman feminine behaviour traits. Mu (2016: 35) from the Research Institute for Fiscal Science at the Ministry of Finance in Beijing, finds a negative correlation between the presence of female executives and the firm´s investment in research and development programmes. According to a study conducted by Cook and Glass (2018: 917) on the Fortune 500 companies from 2001 to 2010, the higher the percentage of female directors on boards the greater a company´s commitment to corporate social responsibility.

A group of scholars have analysed to what extent women´s board appointment may affect the firm´s general reputation, frequently drawing on media coverage (Brammer, Millington and Pavelin, 2009). The results of these studies show diverse findings (Kirsch, 2018: 354). Singh and Vinnicombe (2004: 482) find that positive media coverage of female board members can have a positive effect on the firm´s reputation, thus *"putting the company in a good light."* However, De Anca and Gabaldon (2014) highlighting media coverage of newly appointed directors in Spanish firms from 2007 until 2010 state that the newly appointed board members´ gender had no impact on media coverage. Female board membership may not only enhance a firm´s reputation in media coverage but also among stakeholders. Furthermore, Bilimoria (2006: 49) states that the presence of female directors can improve *"a firm´s legitimacy, especially among stakeholders interested in corporate diversity."*

Kirsch (2018: 354) concludes that only a limited amount of literature exists analysing the impact of gender board diversity onto gender diversity on lower levels within the firm. Nevertheless, she states that this is a frequently assumed argument used in support of gender diversity on boards. Although Bilimoria (2006: 47) warns that analysing the actual effects onto lower levels of gender diversity within a firm by increasing the number of women on the board level are very difficult to point out and isolate, Bilimoria (2006: 57) empirically demonstrates that *"women directors are specifically significant for the success of other corporate women."* Furthermore, Bilimoria (2006: 58) also sees a positive impact of having senior WoB upon younger generations of women in the firm, thus being a sign for younger generations to dream big. In addition, senior WoB and female directors on boards can maintain gender diversity on the executive agenda (Bilimoria and Wheeler, 2000; Bilimoria, 2006: 47). However, Bradshaw and Wicks (2000) highlight that female board members do not always hold a "feminist agenda." They argue that Canadian female board members primarily focus on safeguarding stakeholders´ value just as male board members do as well. Some argue that instead of being diversity supporters, female board members can also hamper

female careers. This phenomenon is the so-called "queen bee syndrome" in which female managers are very hesitant to promote other women, particularly when their power is under threat (Mavin, 2008: 75). Nevertheless, Mavin (2008) criticising the concept of "queen bee syndrome" states that one ought to stay realistic. She highlights that frequently highly unrealistic and unfulfillable expectations are imposed onto female managers (Mavin, 2008: 82). When these unrealistic expectations are not fulfilled by female board members they are instantly stamped as "queen bees."

Some scholars argue that female board members can act as role models and mentors to younger generations simply by being present, thus being living proof of the great spectrum of career possibilities that can be achieved within the firm. Thereby they can increase the number of women on corporate boards in the long run (Burgess and Tharenou, 2002; Bilimoria, 2006; Vinnicombe, Sealy and Singh, 2007). Also Bilimoria (2006) highlights that female board members can act as role models for younger women by symbolising career possibilities.

Some scholars highlight that the impact depends on the actual number of WoB. The scholarly debate primarily draws upon the concepts of "token" and "critical mass." Kantner (1977) highlights the concept of "tokenism." Thereby women or others that are presumed to be different to the dominating group are likely to be regarded as "token", thus as a minority. Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 328) define "tokenism" as a phenomenon when a *"dominant group tends to see women first as female, embodying the sex role stereotype, and only later as individuals."* They argue that this makes it very difficult for female board members to be heard and regarded on an equal basis to men. Bilimoria (2006: 49, 50) argues that only when a "critical mass" of diverse women have senior management positions, women will not be regarded as "token" anymore. Then female board presence will be considered normal. Cook and Glass (2018: 903) as well as Eagly and Karau (2002) highlight that token female leaders tend to have less influence and a lower status than male leaders. Cook and Glass (2018: 903) argue that while token theory tends to focus only *"on the limitations to women´s agency"* when representing a minority; *"critical mass theory seeks to identify the representational threshold necessary to overcome those limitations."* This representational threshold depends on the overall number of board members. Usually however critical mass on corporate boards is defined as having three or more female board members in order for change to take place. Gamba and Goldstein (2009: 203) state that when having a critical mass of female board members women tend to become more visible and they can express their opinions more easily without running the risk of being treated as a "token." When there is a critical mass of WoB, female presence will become normal with women being just another qualified board member. Then their qualifications, skills and background will be primarily highlighted and not the fact that they are a woman. Thus when critical mass processes become normalised female board members will not be as much in the spotlight for being a woman anymore. Then they will stop having to feel the pressure of being particularly outstanding, having to make better contributions and being more qualified than the others primarily because they are a

female board member. Then they will only be regarded as another board member.

Summary: Impact of Increasing the Number of Female Board Members on Economic, Social and Ethical Aspects of Firms

Above I highlighted literature analysing the possible impact of increasing the number of WoB for economic-, social and ethical aspects within the firm.

I summarised commonly used arguments for more gender diversity on boards. Furthermore, I highlighted that frequently the "business case" for more gender diversity is used as an argument in support of increasing the number of WoB. Moreover, I outlined that existing literature on the issue primarily addresses the economic as well as social and ethical impact within a firm. Regarding the economic impact, I highlighted that great disparity exists concerning the question whether female board presence results in an increase in firms´ financial output. Furthermore, concerning a social and ethical impact, I addressed governance performance, corporate responsibility, philanthropy and firm´s reputation. Moreover, I highlighted the impact on gender diversity below the board level, addressing the question of role models and token versus critical mass theory.

2.4. Gaps in the Research

Above I highlighted existing scholarship on the research topic WoB. I divided the literature into three main sections: Individual characteristics of female board members, external factors that may influence female board members´ appointment and the impact of increasing the number of WoB. Below I will highlight gaps in the existing literature that I will try to address with my research.

First of all, existing literature is criticised for being too limited in its geographical scope. Existing scholarship written on the topic WoB primarily analyses the situation in Western countries (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 324). Kirsch (2018: 348) highlights that the vast majority of articles published on the research topic have been studies focusing on: the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Australia and Spain. Furthermore, Liu, Wei and Xie (2014: 170) state that current empirical evidence in existing literature is inconclusive due to the fact that most studies focus on American firms or other developed economies. In addition, Campbell and Minguez-Vera (2008: 435) argue, *"most empirical results are based on U.S. data."* Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) call for future research to analyse the situation for female board members in other countries. They primarily highlight a need for research of newly emerging powers as the BRICS countries –Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.- Accordingly, Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1186) call for future research to focus upon countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Furthermore, Kirsch (2018: 348) highlights that the vast majority of articles published on the issue have been single country studies. Also Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1158) highlight that only a very limited amount of comparative cross-national research exists to uncover factors that may hinder or facilitate women´s access to boards across countries. Thereby one could analyse how this international phenomenon

of female underrepresentation on corporate boards exists worldwide in most diverse countries. Moreover, Terjesen and Singh (2008: 62) call for more cross-national research concerning WoB. I respond to this call by drawing upon the experience of female board members in China as well as Germany. I aim to analyse which factors can prevent or enhance female board access.

Secondly, current scholarship on the issue WoB is frequently criticised for being too descriptive and lacking theory (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 320; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1181). Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 320) highlight in their literature review that the vast majority of academic articles published on the research topic do not use a theoretical framework. They argue that existing literature is too descriptive in its´ nature and call for more theoretical development in this area (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 334). In addition, Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016) highlight the importance of underlying power structures when analysing female board appointments. They argue that the *"presence of women in top corporate positions can be conceived as a subset of the overall power structure"* (Iannotta, Gatti and Huse, 2016: 408). I will respond to this call and further enhance Ianotta et al.´s approach by using Allen´s (1999) "power" concept for my analysis. Allen (1999) defines "power" in a threefold way as: "power over", "power to" and "power with." "Power over" highlights forms of oppression. "Power to" highlights forms of empowerment. "Power with" highlights forms of solidarity in order to create change. In order to make the analysis more comprehensive I add a fourth category of "power without" defined as having neither power nor solidarity with others. Lombardo and Meier (2015: 12) state that Allen´s (1999) concept of "power" is often used and discussed within feminist literature as it´s threefold approach is a way to *"comprehend, critique, and contest the subordination of women"* (Allen, 1999: 121). I will use Allen´s (1999) "power" concept to analyse female underrepresentation on corporate boards in Germany and China. Particularly I will analyse cracking the "glass ceiling": Which barriers do women in China and Germany face when trying to reach a corporate board position?

Thirdly, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 323) argue that *"truly innovative research"* within the area of WoB would be addressing female board members directly to draw from their first-hand experience concerning their career path. Furthermore, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 323) state that current research primarily uses already existing and publicly available data to conduct research. Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) call for *"more in-depth investigation...beyond the statistics"* by conducting in-depth interviews with female board members. Moreover, existing scholarship is criticised for lacking qualitative data (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004: 486). Thereby various scholars have highlighted the *"vast flood"* of quantitative articles published on the research topic (Zelechowski and Bilimoria, 2004: 337; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333; Bührmann, 2014: 97; Kirsch, 2018: 348). Bührmann (2013: 158) highlights that further research should analyse female managers´ experience and their own experiences concerning their career paths. Furthermore, also Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1187) highlight the importance of listening to the *"voice of women themselves"* that managed to make it onto a corporate board. In addition,

Zelechowski and Bilimoria (2004: 342) call for future research to *"specifically track the progress of women... to CEO positions, and identify the most successful paths of upward movement."* I respond to this call by adding to the slowly emerging area of qualitative research on the topic. In my study, I conducted interviews with female board members. In my interviews I asked female board members to highlight their personal career experience. I asked them to share their opinion particularly regarding the barriers they faced when trying to obtain a board position. Furthermore, I asked how they were able to overcome these barriers and whether they had felt support when overcoming them. Thereby I drew from first-hand experience from female board members in Germany and China concerning their career path.

3. Theory & Methodology

3.1. Theory

3.1.1. Greater Theoretical Debate: ´Global Sisterhood´

My analysis adds to the greater theoretical debate on ´Global Sisterhood´, thereby I find the international ´glass ceiling´, particularly the underrepresentation of WoB, to exist in both China and Germany. In line with ´Global Sisterhood´ my findings suggest that Chinese and German interviewees mention similar barriers when aiming for board access, thus trying to crack the ´glass ceiling.´ However, unlike ´Global Sisterhood´ my findings do not suggest that all women across the world have equal working or living conditions. Rather, depending on their socio-economic and cultural background women can face different barriers when trying to reach a board position. In line with ´Transnational Sisterhood´ my research suggests that the international ´glass ceiling´ exists in both Germany and China. However, my findings suggest that it is composed differently across countries. This becomes particularly apparent when German and Chinese interviewees highlight similar barriers for board access but emphasise them differently.

The ´Global Sisterhood´ debate particularly emerged in early second wave[17] feminism and was primarily popularised by Morgan's anthology (Morgan, 1984; Griffin, 2017). Third wave feminist scholars then closely scrutinised and criticised the debate. While second wave feminist scholars frequently used slogans as the ´personal is political´ and ´global sisterhood´, it became apparent that such slogans rested upon the assumption that women across borders tend to be a single and coherent female group (Thompson, 2002: 346; Allen, 1999: 103). Allen (1999: 103) and Adams and Thomas (2018: 4) highlight that ´global sisterhood´ assumes that women across the world share certain commonalities as for example a shared form of patriarchal oppression. Carver, Cochran and Squires (1998: 284) mention that a frequently held assumption by early second-wave feminists was that *"'all men' oppressed 'all women.'"* Within the ´Global Sisterhood´ debate such assumingly shared forms of oppression may bind women together creating a form of ´sister-solidarity-bond´ beyond borders (Allen, 1999: 103, 104). Third wave feminist scholars criticised early second wave feminist scholars´ assumptions, thus arguing that ´Global Sisterhood´ fails to acknowledge the great diversity among women. Thus, despite assumingly well-meant intentions behind ´Global Sisterhood´ critics have argued that it ultimately cuts short on highlighting the different forms of oppression and empowerment women face across the world. Thereby, scholars argue that women may face different living and working conditions triggering different kinds of experience depending among others on one´s culture, ethnical background or societal class. In addition, critics argue that the idea of ´Global Sisterhood´ privileges some women above others (Griffin, 2017). Thus, highlighting that primarily white, Western and

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[17] First Wave feminism *"occurring in the 19th and early 20th century, was mainly concerned with women's right to vote"* (Drucker, 2018).

upper-middle class women are the ones speaking on behalf of other women. Thus, instead of empowering, the debate of ´Global Sisterhood´ was criticised for triggering new forms of oppression within the feminist movement itself, thus Western women oppressing other women primarily from non-Western countries. Adams and Thomas (2018: 3) note that when one group of women speaks on behalf of another, questions as who is eligible to speak for who start to rise. Also Mohanty (1995: 78) criticises ideas of ´Global Sisterhood.´ She recognises that Morgan (1984) uses the idea of ´Global Sisterhood´ to build a global and cross-cultural unity among women. However, Mohanty (1995: 77) criticises that the idea of a ´Universal Sisterhood´ tends to erase any existing material or ideological differences between women across the world. This can be problematic. In addition, also Adams and Thomas (2018: 5) state that the ´Global Sisterhood´ debate may run the risk of ignoring divisions and differences among women primarily based on diverse class, ethnical or racial backgrounds. Also Willis (1984:100) rejects the idea of ´Global Sisterhood.´ She states that *"Feminist struggle will never be a matter of women as a united class confronting men as a united class, but rather of particular groups of women…"* (Willis, 1984: 100). Thereby, she rejects the idea of regarding women as a unified and oppressed female group. Valentine, Jackson and Mayblin (2014: 401) however criticise the overall rejection of a unified category and definition of ´women.´ Valentine, Jackson and Mayblin (2014: 401) highlight negative consequences when rejecting the unified category of ´woman´ altogether, stating that the *"understanding of systematic gender inequalities and patriarchy as an issue of power has diminished as the right to make group claims and act on the basis of shared experience has been lost."* Despite recognising diversity among women Valentine, Jackson and Mayblin (2014: 410) warns of an overall rejection of the unified category of women as *"power continues to operate in and through the spaces within which we live and move in systematic ways to generate hegemonic cultures that marginalise or exclude women."* Thus, Valentine highlights that by failing to make group claims on behalf of women criticising gender inequalities unequal power structures will continue to exist. Accordingly, also Allen (1999: 104) highlights the dilemma by stating that

> *"(e)ither we embrace the category of women so that we can have some basis for theorizing the common experiences of oppression that bring us together and make collective feminist political action possible, but in so doing, we implicitly marginalize or, worse, exclude legions of women from feminist discourse; or we refuse the category of women altogether, thus avoiding the problem of exclusion, but in so doing, we deny ourselves the ability to theorize the ties that might bind us together to make common cause."*

One way of overcoming the above highlighted dilemma is to focus upon agency instead of identity. Allen (1999: 104) states that the concept of ´Sisterhood´ often assumes that all ´sisters´ have a common identity. However, she suggests instead of focusing upon a shared identity of people to focus upon a shared form of agency and solidarity between people (Allen, 1999: 104). This means ´Global Sisterhood´ can emerge when individuals across borders join and act in solidarity together to strive for a common political aim (Allen, 1999: 105). In addition, also

Mohanty (1995: 78) uses the idea of forming *coalitions* between women or other individuals across borders when striving for cross-national feminist struggles. Adams and Thomas (2018: 4) argue that currently many scholars prefer using the term ´Transnational Sisterhood´ instead of ´Global Sisterhood.´ Thereby, the former term tends to acknowledge the limitations of the latter. Thus, while ´Transnational Sisterhood´ recognises the existence of cross-border feminist movements it still acknowledges the existence of cultural differences between women across the globe. My analysis will add to the greater theoretical debate on ´Global Sisterhood.´ I find the international ´glass ceiling´, particularly female board underrepresentation to exist in both China and Germany. In line with ´Global Sisterhood´ my findings suggest that Chinese and German interviewees highlight similar barriers when asked about the limitations women face when trying to reach a board position. Unlike ´Global Sisterhood´ however my findings do not suggest that all women across the world have equal working or living conditions. My findings suggest that the international glass ceiling is composed differently across countries. This becomes particularly apparent when German and Chinese interviewees highlight similar barriers for board access but emphasise them differently. A detailed discussion how my analysis adds to the before mentioned debate will be added in the conclusion. In the following, I will address the theoretical framework that will be used for the analysis of the study.

3.1.2. Sex, Gender, Power

Before outlining the theoretical concept that will be used to analyse the study a clear definition of ´sex´, ´gender´ and ´power´ will be made. A definition of these terms is necessary for understanding the theoretical framework of the study. Despite overall contestations in the feminist literature regarding the term ´sex´ it is often defined as describing biological differences between men and women. ´Gender´ defines *"a set of culturally defined characteristics"* associated to men and women. Thus, ´gender´ often indirectly prescribes what it means to be a man or a woman (Squires and Weldes, 2007: 186). Thereby, ´gender´ is not static. Rather, it may change. Its´ meaning can vary culturally and historically. Thus, what it means to be a man or a woman in one country at one point in time can be different when compared to another country or another point in time. Biological determinists frequently assume that gender is naturally attached to one´s sex. Thus, assuming that women naturally embody stereotypical feminine characteristics while men embody stereotypical masculine characteristics. By now biological determinism has however been largely criticised as limiting by feminist scholars (Squires and Weldes, 2007: 186). Contrary to biological determinism, Carver (2014: 115) argues that gender does not start from biological differences in female and male bodies, *"nor does it presume that behavior proceeds naturally from particular bodily organs or sex hormones."* Carver (2014: 115) argues that gender

> *"(r)ather proceeds from a pervasive and powerful structural hierarchy that allocates power—political, economic, and otherwise—far more to men than to women and rewards masculinity far more than femininity. Even when individual women, in particular circumstances, contradict the premise."*

This is to show that ´gender´ is deeply intertwined with ´power.´ Duerst-Lahti and Kelly, (1995: 19) state that *"Gender relations are also power relations."* Also Jalalzai and Krook (2010: 12) find that argue that *"gender is fundamentally concerned with questions of power"* in all kinds of "*social, economic, and political contexts."* Thus, Carver (2014: 116) highlights that a gender analysis does not necessarily imply studying women or men. Rather, Carver (2014: 116) argues such an analysis implies analysing underlying gender, thus power, relations.

3.1.3. Allen´s (1999) Concept of ´Power´

For the analysis of female board underrepresentation in China and Germany, I analysed underlying power relations that may limit women´s board access. I conducted the analysis by using Allen´s (1999) feminist concept of ´power.´ In line with other scholars I decided to use Allen´s (1999, 2016) concept for the analysis as it seems particularly suitable when analysing power in a threefold approach, thus highlighting forms of power through ´oppression´, ´empowerment´ and ´solidarity´ (Sutherland and Feltey, 2017: 618; Celis and Lovenduski, 2018: 161; Karam and Jamali, 2017: 463, 466; Kley, 2013: 210; Meyer and Schälin, 2019: 136). Lombardo and Meier (2015: 12) state that Allen´s (1999) concept of ´power´ is often used and discussed within feminist literature as it´s threefold approach is a way to *"comprehend, critique, and contest the subordination of women"* (Allen, 1999: 121). Allen (1999) defines ´power´ in a threefold way as ´power over´, ´power to´ and ´power with.´ For my analysis I contribute to theory development by adding a fourth category of ´power´ to the before mentioned threefold definition, thus ´power without.´ By adding ´power without´ to Allen´s (1999) concept a more coherent analysis of existing power structures is made possible. ´Power without´ is defined as having no power with others. This means having neither power nor solidarity with others to aim for a common cause. By having no solidarity with others, thus ´power without´, the leverage of ´power´ can be negatively affected. ´Power over´ defines any kind of constraints that can limit an individual in its´ decision-making power (Allen, 1999: 123). Allen (1999: 124) conceptualises ´power over´ as constraints that may inhibit an individual or a group of people in their availability of options. However, Allen (1999: 122) highlights that ´power´ is much too complex to be understood as only a form of ´power over´, thus domination, oppression or limitation. Rather, Allen (1999: 122) highlights that ´power over´ is deeply intertwined with ´power to.´ ´Power to´ highlights forms of empowerment, thus ways of resisting before mentioned domination or oppression (Allen, 1999: 122). This means women can also oppose and act against ´power over´ with ´power to.´ ´Power with´ is defined as a form of power that is triggered, thus collectively exercising power through solidarity. For the analysis, I analysed barriers women tend to face when trying to obtain a board position by using the theoretical concepts of ´power over´ and ´power without.´ I analysed ways of overcoming such barriers for female board access by using the theoretical concepts of ´power to´ and ´power with.´

The four above highlighted concepts of ´power´ each imply a different understanding of the term. However, all four are deeply interconnected and were analysed in combination when aiming for a holistic understanding of ´power´ structures. Thereby, two forms of ´power´ each are located in a particular relation to

each other. While ´power over´ and ´power to´ are mutually connected, ´power with´ and ´power without´ also pose a close relationship. Allen (1999: 51) highlights that ´power´ can be both constraining (power over) and empowering (power to) at the same time. The same analogue relation also applies to ´power without´ and ´power with.´ Thereby, having solidarity with others (power with) is crucial in order to increase one´s leverage power. Having no solidarity with others (power without) can decrease one´s leverage power. Accordingly, ´power with´ and ´power without´ are also two mutually connected concepts.

The above highlighted definition of ´power´ emerged as prior feminist studies on the matter were criticised for being too narrowly focussed and not cross-cutting enough. Thus, Allen states that feminist scholars frequently use power as either a form of domination or a form of empowerment. However, she criticises that feminist scholars rarely use the concept in a cross-cutting way, thus being both empowering and dominating. Allen therefore draws upon theoretical assumptions from Foucault (1978, 1979), Butler (1993, 1997; Benhabib, Butler and Cornell, 1995) and Arendt (1963, 1969) to create a new feminist concept of ´power.´ Drawing on Foucault, Allen (1999: 119) argues that power can be both empowering and oppressing at the same time. Allen (1999: 119) highlights that *"Foucault´s account of power offers an insight that is lacking in many of the feminist discussions of power...namely, that the domination and the empowerment of an individual are complexly intertwined."* Allen (1999) uses Foucault´s theoretical assumption to argue that ´power over´, thus highlighting forms of oppression and ´power to´, highlighting forms of empowerment can co-exist together and are mutually interconnected and interdependent. However, Allen (1999:119) criticises Foucault´s approach for not addressing the idea of agency, thus whether one can influence existing power relations by form of agency and intervention. Therefore, Allen (1999: 119-120) uses Butler (1993, 1997; Benhabib, Butler and Cornell, 1995) to resolve this Foucaultian (1978, 1979) paradox of agency. Allen (1999: 120) uses Butler´s theoretical assumption that *"subjects are compelled to cite these sex/gender norms that constrain them"* (in: Allen, 1999: 120). Thus, individuals can influence existing power relations, thus ´power over´ and ´power to´ through agency. This means one can either act in accordance with power relations and structure by maintaining their existence or one can act in discordance to them, thus changing them. Therefore, in addition to Foucault, Allen uses Butler´s theoretical assumptions on agency, thus that people are able to influence existing power relations through agency. However, Allen (1999: 120) criticises Butler´s approach for not sufficiently addressing the idea of ´power´ through solidarity. Therefore, Allen (1999: 87-88) uses Arendt to include the idea of ´power´ through solidarity. Thereby, solidarity is a *"kind of collective power that binds the feminist movement together and allies it with other social movements in such a way that we can formulate and achieve our goals"* (Allen, 1999: 126). Summarising, Allen (1999) uses Foucault, Butler and Arendt to criticise common feminist usage of ´power´ and to develop a new feminist concept of ´power.´ Allen (1999: 121) creates a new concept of ´power´ useful for analysing *"domination, resistance, and solidarity"* at the same time while highlighting *"the complex ways in which they are interrelated*."

3.2. Methodology

In this study, I analyse female board underrepresentation in Germany and China by analysing which barriers women in both countries face when trying to obtain a board position. Therefore, I conducted 31 interviews, thus 16 interviews with Chinese and 15 interviews with German female board members, CEOs, entrepreneurs and experts of the field. For the study I used Mayring´s (2015) approach to Qualitative Content Analysis and Yin´s (2018) understanding of Case Studies (Kohlbacher, 2006).

3.2.1. Case Studies: Female Board Underrepresentation in Germany and China

I use two case studies to analyse female board underrepresentation in Germany and China. I use Yin´s (2018: 15) definition of case study as *"an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident."* Using two case studies was particularly useful for the study in order to gain a deeper understanding and insight into possible barriers for female board access. Thus, the study analysed a contemporary phenomenon within a real-world context. Despite the descriptive nature of the research question I used two exploratory case studies (Yin, 2018: 9). Yin (2018: 36) states that the usage of exploratory case studies is useful when the existing knowledge base is poor and *"neither the available literature nor the prevailing practical experiences will provide any conceptual ideas or hypotheses of note."* Despite a growing body of literature existing scholarship on barriers for female board access in Germany and China is still rather scarce. Thus, scholars call for *"more in-depth investigation...beyond the statistics"* (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333). In addition, Zelechowski and Bilimoria (2004: 342) call for future research to *"specifically track the progress of women... to CEO positions, and identify the most successful paths of upward movement."* Yin (2018: 10) argues that a ´what´ research question can be among others exploratory in nature. Thereby, the aim of exploratory studies is *"to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry."* My study used a ´which´ question with two exploratory case studies in order to explore and develop further hypothesis regarding barriers for female board access. As highlighted above, I conducted a *"Cross-Case Analysis Following the Presentation"* of two separate case studies (Yin, 2018: 17, 194). In chapter four findings of the conducted interviews are presented by using two separate case studies. In chapter five a cross-case analysis is conducted by *"attempting to draw generalizable conclusions that could apply to many other"* studies (Yin, 2018: 17).

I decided to analyse female board underrepresentation in Germany because the research matter ´Women on Corporate Boards´ has triggered particular public and media debate ever since the direct aftermath as well as prior to the implementation of the law on the "equal participation of women and men in executive positions/Gesetz für die gleichberechtigte Teilhabe von Frauen und Männern an Führungspositionen (FüPoG)" in 2015 (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 7-10). Bührmann

et al. (2015: 7) trace the public debate on the matter in Germany prior to the implementation of the law finding an engaged and controversial debate concerning the topic ever since the early 2000s. In addition, I also analysed female board underrepresentation in China. My study thereby responds to current scholarship calling for more cross-national research on female board underrepresentation worldwide, among others of newly emerging powers as China or other BRICS countries (Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1186; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333). Although both countries are culturally very diverse, they also have several similarities, as for example gender equality statistical developments and similar board structures.[18] In addition, China and Germany are economically deeply intertwined with China being Germany´s most important trade partner and Germany being China´s most important trade partner in Europe (Auswärtiges Amt, 2019). Therefore, analysing ´Women on Corporate Boards´ in both countries is an up-to-date research topic.

3.2.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

For the analysis Mayring´s (2015: 85) definition and approach to inductive category building was used. As stated above, in order to respond to the research question 31 interviews were conducted. 16 interviews were conducted in China from March until July 2018 and 15 interviews in Germany from August 2018 until December 2018. Out of the 15 German interviews, four were conducted with German experts on the matter, three were conducted with German CEOs as well as board[19] and top-management[20] members of unlisted companies in Germany, and eight were conducted with German board or top-management members of publicly listed German companies. Out of the 16 Chinese interviews, five were conducted with Chinese experts on the matter, seven were conducted with Chinese CEOs of unlisted non-state-owned enterprises (non-SOEs) and four were conducted with Chinese board or top-management members of publicly listed foreign companies present in China. All interviewees only approved the interview request under the promise of utmost secrecy regarding personal identity. To guarantee the interviewees´ full anonymity all names were changed in the study. Due to the relatively small number of women on publicly listed corporate boards detailed company information would make tracing back interviewees´ identity easy. Therefore, no detailed company information was discussed in the study in order to maintain the promised anonymity.

Both Chinese and German interviewees were asked the same questions. The questionnaire of the interviews was built upon Allen´s (1999) ´power´ concept. First of all, interviewees were asked to highlight important steps in reaching their current position. Then interviewees were asked which barriers, thus forms of ´power over´, they faced when trying to reach their current position as well as

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[18] Please refer to the Introduction´s section on ´Background Information´ for a deeper discussion on the matter.

[19] Listed board members include both supervisory- as well as management board members.

[20] Listed top-management members are defined as being hierarchically directly underneath the management board.

ways of overcoming such, thus forms of empowerment ´power to.´ In addition, the interviewees were asked whether they had felt any form of support or solidarity with others when reaching their current job position, thus ´power with´ or ´power without.´ Thereby, highlighting whether interviewees had personally felt supported in their career path and whether they felt enough solidarity with other women to trigger societal change for increasing the overall number of WoB. It became apparent that many Chinese and German interviewees felt uncomfortable with the question whether they had felt support from others, thus emphasising that despite having had a mentor they had reached their current position out of their own merit. Many Chinese interviewees felt uncomfortable responding to the question whether they had felt enough societal solidarity with other women in order to trigger societal change for increasing the overall number of WoB. Some Chinese interviewees highlighted the particular role of the Chinese government as strongly influencing and regulating local feminist movements. The full list of interview questions can be found in the appendix. The questions were semi-structured and open-ended and the interviews were conducted by me in German, Mandarin and English. The Mandarin interviews were conducted with the assistance of an English-Mandarin interpreter. The majority of interviews were conducted in the respondents´ offices, some via phone and few in public places as cafés or restaurants. 30 out of 31 interviews were recorded and notes were taken also taking emotional reactions into consideration. Only one interviewee did not want to be recorded, thus I maintained a detailed written record of the interviewee´s responses. Gaining access to the interviewees proved to be particularly challenging. Therefore, several strategies were applied, as gaining access via networking, LinkedIn and conferences. The most useful way of gaining access to interviewees in both China and Germany was via networking, thus speaking to potential interviewees personally at conferences and after a successful completion of an interview asking the respondents for any further contacts. 30 interviewees were female and one interviewee was male. The recorded German interviews were translated into English and transcribed by myself. The recorded Chinese interviews were translated with the help of an interpreter and transcribed by myself. The transcription occurred very close to the spoken language recorded on tape. The computer program f4 was used in order to pursue the coding system. In order to do justice to the actual meaning of the interviews I decided to conduct an inductive content analysis with some quantitative aspects being used. The inductive content analysis used builds upon Mayring´s (2015: 85, 88) approach and definition, thus *"deriv(ing) the categories directly from the material in a generalization process, without referring to previously formulated theoretical concepts."* It thereby *"strives for a naturalistic representation of the material as close as possible to the object…"* (Mayring, 2015: 86). In line with Mayring´s (2015: 88) inductive category building approach I focused upon the aspects of the material that describe ´barriers for female board access´ and ´ways of overcoming such.´ An inductive approach thereby seems appropriate as I decided to use a ´which´ research question, thus Mayring (2015: 88) states that a *"which question always points to inductive category formation."* In line with Mayring (2015: 88) I defined the categories and the level of abstraction for the analysis as:

The categories are defined as subjective experiences highlighted by both German and Chinese interviewees as ´barriers´ that were faced when obtaining their top-management or board position as well as suggestions for ´ways of overcoming such barriers.´ The analysis is derived from Allen´s (1999) theoretical ´power´ concept highlighted above. The level of abstraction are concrete factors and measures mentioned by both Chinese and German interviewees as hindering or promoting female board access. In the units of analysis the coding unit are clear and meaningful elements within the interview transcripts (Mayring, 2015: 88). The context unit is one entire transcribed interview with one of the respondents, including notes describing the person´s behaviour. The evaluation unit includes all transcripts from the 31 conducted interviews.

In order to answer the research question: *´Which barriers do women in China and Germany face when trying to obtain a board position?´* I analysed the interview transcripts highlighting the most frequently mentioned factors and concrete measures interviewees point out as being particularly important when discussing barriers (Mayring, 2015: 65). From the analysis I derived at the five following thematic categories:

- Policies & Laws
- Compatibility: Family & Career
- Personal Initiative
- Individual Support & Networks
- Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Societal Expectations

While all five thematic categories were mentioned by both German and Chinese interviewees, each category was emphasised to a different extent by respondents. Summarised under Figure 1, I highlight to what extent each thematic category was emphasised by German and Chinese interviewees. Thereby, the blue bar shows the number of German interviewees that emphasised the category. The red bar marks the number of Chinese interviewees that emphasised the category. As summarised under Figure 1, twelve out of fifteen German interviewees and thirteen out of sixteen Chinese respondents argued that a coherent and good set of corporate and public policies addressing gender equality is crucial when trying to increase the number of WoB. Fourteen out of sixteen Chinese interviewees and fifteen out of fifteen German respondents highlighted the challenge of combining having a family and a career. Fourteen out of fifteen German respondents and thirteen out of sixteen Chinese interviewees believed that being pro-active is crucial for gaining board access. Having individual support during career development and access to powerful networks was emphasised as important by fifteen out of sixteen Chinese respondents and thirteen out of fifteen German interviewees. Societal structures as assumptions about gender roles and societal expectations were criticised by fifteen out of fifteen German interviewees and fifteen out of sixteen Chinese respondents as being influential for women´s board access.

Figure 1
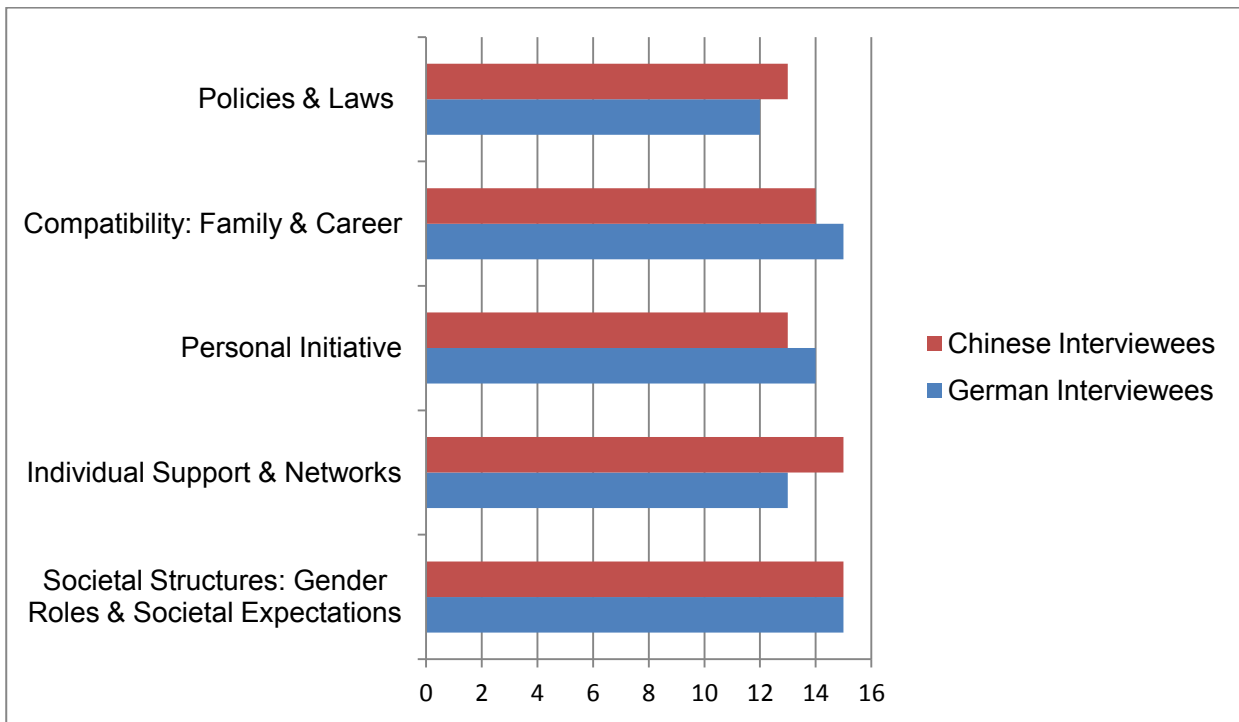
Source: Own illustration from interviews

4. Findings: Women on Corporate Boards

4.1. Findings: Women on Corporate Boards in Germany

Figure 2:

Categories	Power OVER	Power TO	Power WITH-OUT	Power WITH
Laws & Policies	-"Herdprämie" -"Ehegattensplitting" -"Müttergeld[21]"	-"Frauenquote" -Gender equality- and corporate policies		
Compatibility: Family & Career	-Insufficient childcare facilities -Childcare often associated to mothers -Double burden: childcare, household and career -Mothers longer career breaks and part-time work -Part-time work often career killer	-More flexible opening hours at childcare facilities, preferably 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. -Focus also on fathers (father-parental-leave" and "family-working-time" -Childcare mother´s and father´s responsibility		
Personal Initiative	-Lack confidence "I am not good enough…" -Undesirable management position?	-Personal initiative, pro-activeness crucial -Career needs planning -Increasing visibility by doing unique work and promoting it -STEM careers: high earning potential and increased visibility		
Individual Support & Networks			-Lack of solidarity and networks among women -"Queen bee syndrome"	-Supportive social and professional environment -Boldness from decision-makers
Societal Structures: *Gender Roles & Expectations*	-Treated differently than male colleagues: Not taken seriously -Traditional socio-cultural gender expectations: Male breadwinner, Female care taker -"Think manager think male" -Key corporate positions still male dominated	-Treated differently than male colleagues: High level of visibility, Having power to trigger change -Aim: gender equity normality, thus attention away from gender to individual characteristics		

Source: Own illustration from interviews

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[21] "Müttergeld" – A policy that is frequently used to refer to the "Mutterschaftsgeld", a maternity allowance to compensate maternity leave after a child´s birth.

Introduction

In the following Chapter, I will highlight findings from the interviews that were conducted with fifteen female CEOs, top managers and board members in Germany from August until December 2018. I cluster the interview extracts into five thematic areas: "Laws and Policies", "Compatibility: family and career", "Personal Initiative", "Individual Support and Networks" and "Societal Structures." I chose the above thematic areas as these were the most commonly referred to topics by interviewees. A clear thematic segregation of interview extracts has proven to be challenging, as some extracts are thematically overlapping. In a very limited amount of cases therefore, parts of interview extracts are listed in more than one thematic category. The interviews were conducted in German and then translated into English. In few cases the German terms are used and an English definition is given. This is the case when the English translation would cut short on the original meaning. This Chapter only collects and categorises the findings of the conducted interviews. References to previous research as well as a detailed discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 5 "Discussion."

Interview questions were drafted in line with Allen´s (1999) concept of "power", thus highlighting forms of "power over", "power to", "power with" and "power without." The listed interview extracts can be associated to different forms of "power." In each section's introduction and conclusion, I will cluster and then associate the main ideas highlighted in the interview extracts to the different forms of "power." As Allen (1999) states the different forms of power are deeply intertwined and mutually dependent on each other. At times, a clear-cut segregation would therefore cut short on the meaning of the interview extracts.

First of all, I address the issue "Laws and Policies." Interviewees argue that the policies "Herdprämie", "Ehegattensplitting" and "Müttergeld" trigger forms of "power over." They tend to reinforce traditionally established gender roles. The "Frauenquote" and other gender equality public- and corporate policies are highlighted as forms of "power to", thus triggering an empowerment and increasing the chances for female board access. Secondly, I highlight the idea of "Compatibility: Family and Career." As forms of "power over" interviewees criticise insufficient childcare facilities and that childcare responsibilities are primarily associated to mothers rather than fathers. Interviewees then highlight a double burden women frequently face. Female board members highlight that mothers tend to have longer career breaks due to childcare than fathers. In addition, after giving birth women frequently start working part-time eventually leading to a demolition of female careers. As forms of "power to" interviewees highlight the importance of longer and more flexible childcare opening hours, preferably from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Interviewees suggest not only focussing on women but instead primarily focusing on fathers when implementing "compatibility programmes." This way childcare will eventually be regarded as being both a mother´s and father´s responsibility. Thirdly, the issue of "Personal Initiative" will be discussed. Interviewees criticise as forms of "power over" a frequently experienced lack of confidence in one's own skills and lack of interest in management positions among women. Respondents then highlight forms of "power to" by stating that having personal initiative and being pro-active are particularly important for one's career

development. Increasing one's visibility by doing unique work and promoting it, are particularly crucial when aiming for a board position. Interviewees suggest aiming for a STEM career. This sector has a high earning potential and women are still largely underrepresented, thus ensuring an increased visibility. Fourthly, I address the topic of "Individual Support and Networks." As forms of "power without" interviewees highlight a commonly experienced lack of solidarity and network among women. This phenomenon is described as the "queen bee syndrome." Respondents argue that having solidarity and support, thus "power with" others, is crucial when striving for a board position. A supportive social and professional environment, i.e. family, mentor, supervisor are particularly emphasised. Furthermore, respondents underline the importance of having boldness from decision-makers. Lastly, I discuss "Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations." Here, interviewees highlight that they have experienced both positive and negative differential treatment, thus forms of "power to" and "power over." Female board members state that often they are not being taken serious, resulting in constantly having to proof themselves to others. In addition, as forms of "power over" traditional socio-cultural gender expectations are highlighted. Interviewees state that men are still often assumed to be the primary breadwinner while women tend to take up childcare- and household duties. Then the "think manager think male" phenomenon is described. Women state that people tend to associate typical manager characteristics rather with stereotypical male rather than female characteristics. A possible reason for this may be that crucial corporate positions are still largely male dominated. As forms of "power to" interviewees highlight that being a single woman among a group of men tends to increase one's visibility. Interviewees state that this visibility can be used for positive purposes as triggering change. Ultimately, female board members emphasise that their aim is achieving normality. This means that gender equity on boards to be regarded as normal. This will take away the attention from one's gender to one's actual individual characteristics. Female board members will not be primarily regarded as a woman but simply as another board member.

4.1.1. Laws and Policies

In the following section on "Laws and Policies" I will highlight interview extracts addressing the legal framework regulating gender equality and the situation of WoB in Germany. Interviewees highlight a set of incoherent policies existent in Germany triggering misleading incentives. Policies as "Herdprämie" and "Ehegattensplitting" are criticised by interviewees as triggering forms of "power over", thus reinforcing traditional stereotypical gender roles and encouraging women´s economic dependency. Furthermore, eleven of the fifteen interviewees have not felt supported by a public or corporate policy during their career path. However, as a form of "power to" many interviewees do claim that the overall public debate and pressure triggered by the implementation of gender equality policies has indirectly supported their career path. Moreover, the "gender quota" policy triggers controversial opinions among interviewees, thus highlighting both forms of "power over" and "power to". While three out of the fifteen interviewees oppose a gender quota, twelve interviewees state that they find the quota necessary and effective.

Seven out of fifteen interviewees claim that Germany does not have a single and coherent set of policies regulating women on corporate boards. Expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig argues:

> *"Politicians would be well advised to finally start making a policy from a single mould, i.e. false incentives that arise from "Ehegattensplitting" that do not allow women to have their own social security, but only through their husband, or incentives to be only part-time employed, these are all problems to get a well-paid job later on. Politics sets the framework. It supports some things and others simply not. Especially after a divorce, this can be a problem for these women because then they do not have this independent social security, they fall out of the system and have to start all over again."*

Different policies can create distinct incentives for women. "Ehegattensplitting" can create false incentives, eventually putting women into a socio-economic dependent situation; thus, possibly reinforcing already existing stereotypical gender roles. While "Ehegattensplitting" runs the risk of creating a socio-economic dependency, the implemented "Frauenquote" aims at increasing the percentage of women on corporate boards. As interviewees point out, this is a set of contradictory policies, creating different incentives.

In addition, Mrs. Weber states, "*it would be nice if we in Germany had a uniform way of thinking, because it is quite blatant if Berlin is yelling for a ´Frauenquote´ while Bavaria is paying ´Müttergeld´.*" When asked what needs to change in Germany in order to overcome the barriers that keep women from obtaining a position on a corporate board, Mrs. Walter argues, *"Taking away "Ehegattensplitting" would already be nice."* Expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig underlines the argument that certain policies as "Ehegattensplitting" degrade women to a lower position inside a family constellation:

> *"If you then look at the legislation we have in place for example the issue of "Ehegattensplitting"...it still remains and is vehemently advocated by many. From our point of view, this is a vehicle for keeping women small within the family constellation. I think it is this ambivalence. Frequently it is not expected that women must contribute their part to making the economy flourish, as it is the case in the Nordic countries for example."*

Furthermore, Mrs. Schneider argues that policies as "Ehegattensplitting" or "Herdprämie" only reinforce a system of traditionally established gender roles:

> *"On the one hand, we have a system such as "Ehegattensplitting" and "Herdprämie", which further consolidates established gender models. A system where everyone has to work for their own pension, which I would definitely prefer, would lead to a situation where women are working just like men, but providing completely different necessities and reasons."*

Policies as "Herdprämie", "Ehegattensplitting" and "Müttergeld" are criticised by interviewees as creating misleading incentives. Instead of supporting women´s independence such policies can put women in a dependent position. Thereby

reinforcing traditional stereotypical gender roles and encouraging women´s economic dependency upon their spouse.

Despite the existence of gender equal policies in Germany eleven out of fifteen interviewees argue that they have not felt supported by any policies in their career path. Thereby, some interviewees negate the question with laughter. Taking an extract from the responses, the interviewees were asked *"looking back on your career path, were there ever any public- or corporate policies that supported you on your career path?"*

"No" (Mrs. Müller)

"No" (Mrs. Schneider)

 "Not at all" (Mrs. Winkler)

"No" (Mrs. Friedrich)

"No laws or policies. Unfortunately, I did not profit of the quota." (Mrs. Krüger)

"Not really. It was rather networking and having a CEO who shaped the culture." (Mrs. Fischer)

The majority of the interviewed have not felt supported by public or corporate policies on their career path. However, interviewees do state that the implementation of public policies and having a public debate about gender equality has positively influenced the increase of WoB. However, Mrs. Winkler criticises the lack of practical implementation of gender equality policies. She states: *"And then I think what needs to change is the fact that companies, ministries or associations need to ´walk the talk´, thus yes we are family-friendly but we also want to see that in practice and not just on paper."* Furthermore, Mrs. Becker and Mrs. Walter state that they have not felt supported by any public or corporate policies during their career advancement. Mrs. Becker argues *"Well back then, there was no diversity yet."* Also Mrs. Walter states: *"Gender equality laws...including plans for the advancement of women...I didn't experience anything alike myself."* Eleven out of fifteen interviewees have not felt supported by public or corporate policies. A reason for this could be that current female board members have established their career before policies as the gender quota were implemented and actually became effective. However, one female board member claims that she did feel supported by the public debate and pressure, triggered by the adopted policies. Mrs. Schmidt highlights *"laws not so much but I would say all this legal pressure and the discussion and political pressure about equal rights and having more WoB, I would say yes that helped."* She then states, *"the threat of laws, transparency and pressure has helped me for sure. But for me it's actually 10 years too late (quota). So I envy the 45 year old women today, I think they have extremely good chances."* Although the majority of interviewees state that they did not feel supported by policies, one interviewee felt indirectly supported by the public pressure that policies triggered.

When asked whether public- or corporate policies on gender equality can help when increasing the number of women on corporate boards in Germany the responses are controversial. This clearly shows that gender policies seem to be a highly debated upon issue among the interviewed women. Mrs. Becker argues that

> *"Well, back then there was no diversity (when I was promoted); I mean being honest, I am quite happy that there were no such programs to advance women back in that time...where such appointments are made based on your gender. Regarding my promotion it was: contacts, work, network, that's nothing else what you see in the men's world as well."*

Mrs. Becker assumes that appointments tend to occur based on gender not on meritocracy. Furthermore, she states that a problem with the "diversity-wave" is that

> *"...this ´diversity-wave´ eventually leads to envy and competition. Envy and competition lead to aversion and then interest groups come together and thus it is quite normal that this small group of women tends to suffer in this conflict of interest. The others are more and therefore stronger."*

Mrs. Weber argues that the reason behind female underrepresentation on corporate boards is not the lack of policies supporting women but rather that women do not possess the necessary qualifications. Mrs. Weber argues: *"So if women have the qualification, why do they have to be specially promoted? We have to get away from promoting women; you always promote supposedly people who are not as good."*

Despite the above mentioned critical voices, twelve of fifteen women interviewed argue that gender equality policies and corporate policies aiming at gender equality are crucial when trying to increase the number of women on corporate boards. Mrs. Krüger highlights the importance of policies for altering the existing mentality, she states, *"so I once asked my former boss if he could imagine promoting a woman to the board, he then looked at me like a car. So I think laws would be good and would help exactly this sleepiness of men."*

Also in support of the implementation of gender equality policies Mrs. Walter underlines that gender equality policies set an example and have strong symbol power. She states *"Equality laws also send a signal, including women's advancement plans."* In line with the before-mentioned, Mrs. Müller states that policies aiming at gender equality are inevitable when trying to increase the number of women on corporate boards. *"Laws are unavoidable; there must be equality laws to ensure that the same work is paid equally regardless whether one is a man or a woman. Women should not be unnecessarily discriminated."* One interviewee highlights the importance of public- as well as corporate policies, stating that these create social pressure. Mrs. Walter states, *"I think it always takes a high degree of pressure or suffering for something to change. Either the pressure comes from the inside or it comes from the outside. I think pressure from the outside definitely helps to change certain things, but it simply takes years."*

Mrs. Müller argues that corporate policies can either promote or fail to promote women. She states, *"enterprises can promote the participatory approach very strongly. Corporate policies either promote or thwart such efforts. In my own company gender equality is being promoted."* In line with the before-mentioned, Mrs. Becker highlights that the corporate policies adopted in her company aiming for more gender diversity have led to an increase in the percentage of women. She states, *"Our corporate policy has definitely led to the fact that today we have far more women. Yes."* Mrs. Fischer, another female board member, highlights the importance of having diversity in one´s "corporate culture" by stating that

> *"I think the reason why I reached this position... was of course that XXX[22] is a company that had a CEO who was very supportive towards diversity. Even in the beginning when diversity wasn't yet an issue. The CEO never outed himself, but he is de facto homosexual. Due to his experience, he simply had a completely different picture of what diversity means to him. He introduced the term ´meritocracy´ to the company already back in the early 90s and said it is basically all about what you do, not what kind of gender, race or social background you have. That's all completely irrelevant, you need to perform. Of course, that was very much appealing me."*

Mrs. Fischer then highlights a top-down approach. She states that she organised a meeting with several female employees of her company. The aim of this meeting was to create a network for women, thus creating a space where female employees could exchange their experiences. Eventually, the women started to share cases they had experienced of verbal harassment at the workplace. Mrs. Fischer, then reported these cases to the company´s CEO. She highlights:

> *"The CEO then told me to organize a meeting with the women only; cause he wanted to hear these stories first-hand himself. So that was a bit of a shake-up in the company. These first-hand experiences that the women shared weren't sexual assaults, but it was a form of verbal harassment at the workplace. That (the CEO´s visit) was then actually a sign that something was changing. When the others realised that their boss was coming to Germany for a meeting that I had organized...that was of course a signal and also made the men listen quite attentively. So that was a bit of a top-down approach."*

Mrs. Fischer then highlights that her company has always been very active in supporting gender equality issues. She states, *"So our company has always been very active in Germany. We were also one of the founding members of the Charter of Diversity. So this started when our company was still "stand alone" in Germany and then continued."*

The expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig argues that while using corporate policy to increase the number of women on corporate boards it is always crucial to:

> *"look at the entire career ladder and then install women from the bottom to the top, in a flexible way and with a larger organizational volume. This way*

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[22] Interviewee refers to the name of the company.

the pool of human resources will later be large enough for women to be promoted in all areas."

This means in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards one needs to increase the talent pool of women on all hierarchical levels, not just at the top management level. Only if one starts recruiting and promoting women from the bottom onwards, thus on all corporate hierarchical levels, one will have sufficient qualified female candidates for taking up corporate board positions later on.

Fifteen out of fifteen interviewees refer to the implemented law concerning "equal participation of women and men in executive positions/Gesetz für die gleichberechtigte Teilhabe von Frauen und Männern an Führungspositionen (FüPoG)" at least once during the interview. The law is colloquially often called "Women´s Quota/Frauenquote." It is based on two pillars and was adopted in May 2015, coming into force the 1st of January 2016. It applies to all publicly listed companies in Germany. Providing background information about the policy, the expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt states:

> *"One pillar of the law, reads that from 2016 onwards 104 companies, thus the listed and fully co-determined companies, shall entail 30% of female board members in new appointments. So far, all 104 companies that had by-elections, new elections or replacements have reached the 30%. So the 30% do exist. This year we had one company, Villeroy & Boch, where the employer´s and the employee´s side could not agree and basically voted separately. All the other companies have always managed to make it together."*

Accordingly, pillar one of the law outlines that a 30 percent quota applies to publicly listed companies in Germany. These are at the moment 104 companies. In these companies, the 30 percent quota for corporate boards has been achieved. The second pillar of the law states that approximately 3500 companies in Germany are allowed to set their own targets concerning the percentage of women on their boards.

Three out of fifteen interviewees criticise the implemented gender quota. Mrs. Becker states:

> *"Diversity is best achieved when surrounding conditions are sufficiently established in everyday life and not by setting quotas. There are always two sides to quotas. If you have good childcare facilities and an understanding of giving and taking between spouses, then you reach that as well."*

Accordingly, Mrs. Becker emphasises the importance of establishing appropriate framework conditions as reliable childcare facilities and equal partnership between spouses. Furthermore, Mrs. Weber criticises the gender quota, stating, *"Well, I mean you see what happened with the quota... if the people are not properly trained then it doesn´t matter whether I have laws, because I don't want to have the wrong experience sitting at the table because of a quota."* The interviewee argues that a quota is not necessary. Rather, a person needs the necessary qualifications in order to become a board member. She fears that by impos-

ing a quota a person with the wrong experience might end up in a boardroom. Furthermore, she reinforces the importance of women holding the necessary qualifications by arguing: *"So if women have the qualifications, why do they have to be specially promoted? We have to get away from promoting women; you always promote people who aren't as good."* Mrs. Friedrich argues that in today´s corporate world companies focus on profiles and not on one´s gender. She states:

> *"Well we have the old discussions about the quota...I don't know, I don't know...so I don't want to believe it's necessary (laughing). I think in the business world...in the companies today this does not matter whether woman or man, it is about profiles. I think many companies don't need a quota."*

She states that many companies do not need a quota. Mrs. Schulz draws attention to the fact that gender quotas are frequently highly debated on. She states that *"I keep on hearing women saying: ´No, I don't want that, I don't want to be a quota woman.´"* However, she argues:

> *"But you also need self-confidence to say: ´I don't only get this job because I'm a quota woman´, there's always a performance behind it all. In the end, no company will be able to afford promoting a person to a high-level position only because she is a woman. That would be fatal for all sides afterwards. Despite the quota, you will always look for someone who fits this job. But if that's not in the focus then of course the job is always distributed between the same people and that´s usually the men."*

Mrs. Schulz argues in support of a quota stating: *"I say if we don't start making the laws and rules now, then we will still be busting a gut in I don´t know how many generations. Only with a certain degree of pressure change comes about."* Thereby, she emphasises that one needs to adopt policies in order to alter the current status quo. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of establishing pressure by adopting policies that may eventually lead to change.

Twelve out of fifteen interviewees supporting the implemented gender quota policy argue that despite their support they are not the biggest fans of the implemented quota policy. Many however argue that they do find it an effective measure to increase the number of WoB. The expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt argues that:

> *"Unfortunately, the laws are necessary. From 2001 to 2015, thus until the law (quota) came into force, we had a so-called voluntary self-commitment between the federal government and the business associations, which aimed at bringing more women into executive positions. The starting position was 75% men 25% women...then basically nothing changed."*

The expert interviewee argues, *"voluntary self-regulation really doesn't seem to be taken seriously in Germany."* Furthermore, one female board member Mrs. Schneider defines the current status quo of German corporate boards by citing the Allbright study *"Power of monoculture."* She argues that*:*

"There are more board members called Thomas and Michal on German cor-porate boards than there are women. One would think that in politics it is perhaps better, but among the secretaries of state, they call it the "Hans-Break". So there are more state secretaries called Hans than there are fe-male state secretaries. We are still very much rooted in old structures and that is why I believe we cannot do without a quota, even for the manage-ment board."

The female board member emphasises the importance of a quota, stating that without a quota change will presumably not be reached any time soon. Mrs. Müller, when asked whether change has occurred concerning the situation of female board members in Germany, states, *"We did the first important step by implementing the quota...now it will surprise you, I am not a friend of the quota, I never was, but if we have no quota nothing changes. If we have a quota then at least the pressure is on that something must happen. I think the odds are inevi-table."* Thereby the interviewee highlights the importance of having a quota to trigger change. The expert interviewee Mrs. Pohl argues that implementing a quota could aid in the short-term in order to create a Critical Mass of WoB argu-ing:

"In the short term, a quota could help, simply to establish something like a critical mass. There are also studies on this, if the critical mass is reached then you can let it (gender quota) go again, but I think it wouldn't be such a bad idea until then."

Moreover, referring to the two pillars of the implemented quota policy expert in-terviewee Mrs. Brandt argues that:

"Looking at the gender quota we see that the first pillar of the law, i.e. the fixed quota, is being adhered to. The second pillar, in which the companies can individually set their own target figures for the corporate board and management board as well as the first and second management levels, 104 companies chose the target figure 0 for the management boards when the target figures were first set. Since June/July last year, the companies have been required to set their new targets for five years. We have not yet been given all the new target figures, but, in the data that we already have, we must note that a high proportion of the management boards chose the target number 0. Also the new coalition agreement offers extremely little regarding "women in leadership". There is only one passage in it which deals with the fact that if companies do not specify the target figure, especially in the case of management boards, or if they do not explain the specified target figure, then sanctions shall be applied."

Accordingly, the expert interviewee claims that voluntary self-commitments have not been effective in Germany in order to increase the number of women on cor-porate boards. Interviewees argue that they are not the biggest fans of the im-plemented quota, however, that they do find it a powerful tool. Accordingly, Mrs. Walter states:

> *"Well, I'm not a fan of the quota, but I think it's an effective instrument and unfortunately it doesn't work without it. I would also like to tighten up the law on equal participation. I think it always takes a certain degree of pressure and suffering for change to take place."*

When asked whether public or corporate policies could assist in increasing the number of WoB, Mrs. Walter responds *"Well, it won´t work without."* Furthermore, she highlights that:

> *"Regarding the quota, there is still this misunderstanding that this person was taken only because the person is either a man or woman. It is often said, the qualification was gender. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of understanding regarding the quota. It is with the same qualification and suitability that one gender is to be preferred. This means that when having two applicants who are both suitable for the job due to their qualifications, skills and personal characteristics only then I look at the gender if I have a gender quota. Unfortunately, many still claim that this person only got the job because she is a woman or because he is a guy. The basis is unfortunately not taken into consideration. Thereby it is being implied that professionally no clue but a woman."*

Another female board member, Mrs. Fischer, argues in support of a quota. She states, *"I think this quota is right.*" However, she argues:

> *"but you can have as much quota as you want, if the CEO and the Chairman of the corporate board don't want it, then nothing works. You also need the women, who have to grow into it, so you cannot legislate all that. That has a lot to do with education, so you would have to start in kindergarten and primary school. It also has a lot to do with tolerance. Tolerance towards others and towards those who think differently."*

The interviewee states that having a quota alone will not alter the current status quo of German corporate boards. Rather, in addition to the quota policy she emphasises the importance of having a supportive CEO or a Chairman or Chairwoman in the corporate board that supports a diversity approach. Moreover, she highlights the importance of promoting women from an early stage on.

Expert interviewee Mrs. Albrecht argues that *"The quota has already shown a positive effect. We have seen that if there is a legal quota of 30%, then it becomes possible to find these 30% women. In this respect it is now more sought after and the selection is spread."*

Some interviewees admit that formerly they were opponents of the quota policy. However, stating their view has changed over time. Thereby Mrs. Schmidt states:

> *"I was an absolute opponent of quotas. I've made that public everywhere and now I'm ready to say: It won't work without a quota! What made me change my mind was the issue of corporate boards. In the corporate boards of certain companies we have the 30% quota, in the management boards*

and the levels below we don't, there we only have recommendations and transparency but there is nothing more. And within two years we can see that all the seats on corporate boards have been filled except for one company, i.e. the percentage rate has been exactly achieved but not a single bit more. At the moment I think it's 29.8%. No more seats have been created. And at the same time, the number of women on management boards has even slightly decreased during this time. I myself sit on several corporate boards and when you ask the companies about quotas or women in leadership, then you are told yes we would like to (have more women on corporate boards) but they simply do not exist. But of course you don't have them in the second management level if I don't start to employ them at the bottom after uni and start developing them. So companies still don't do it and they will only start doing it once they are legally obliged to do so. As sad as that is."

In line with the above, also Mrs. Winkler argues, *"I was quite an opponent of the women's quota for a very long time, not least because people always told me ´Well, you're in this position now cause you came in a good time...so to speak.´"* Then, she highlights that she has herself received various subliminal messages indirectly labelling her as a quota woman. However, she states that she has altered her stance towards the quota arguing that *"I think if it doesn't work differently and there was enough time given to the companies and institutions to change something, then maybe we need a quota for the time being."* The interviewee reveals that she is at times exposed to comments from colleagues labelling her a "Quotenfrau." Thereby she argues:

"Well, I think it's a bit frustrating that you always have to listen to 'Well, actually you are where you are right now because of the Quota.' I think at the end you always have to perform so I mean you don't get promoted to a position just because you are a woman and cause they simply need a woman right now. But in the end the individual performance has to measure up to the benchmark."

Furthermore, Mrs. Krüger argues:

"Yes and now the terrible thought of having a quota comes up, which I actually very much support, I must confess, although I understand all the objections. Of course I also do not need a quota. But let's say you want to fill a vacancy but unfortunately one has only two women among the applicants and eighteen men. Then it is self-evident that one of the two women must be invited for the job interview."

Concerning the quota policy the respondent argues, *"So I think a quota could help to increase the visibility of women, even if it would be uncomfortable to promote a lot of stupid women with quotas to positions and leave the men behind. But I think we have to get through that stage."* Furthermore, the interviewee refers to possible positive trickle down effects stating, *"So if on a corporate board of 15 members seven of them are women, then an increase in the number of women in management positions is guaranteed."* She underlines the idea that by increasing the number of women on corporate boards eventually the percentage

of women on lower management levels will increase accordingly.

Mrs. Weber highlights the idea that as long as the implemented gender quota policy does not have any real consequences it will only have a very limited effect. She then states, *"Well, I find the quota, well, a quota without consequence, well."* Furthermore, the expert interviewee Mrs. Weber argues that the implemented quota does not have any real penalties and only applies to very few companies, she argues: *"It has been politically enforced (quota), but no major sanctions have been implemented, well only for very few companies the ´otherwise the seat remains vacant.´"* For the others there is no consequence." Furthermore, one expert interviewee states that in order to trigger change, thus increasing the number of women on German corporate boards, one needs to expand the already implemented quota to more than just the publicly listed companies.

When asked what needs to change in Germany in order to increase the percentage of WoB, expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt responds that:

> *"In order to trigger change, we first need to adopt another law that ensures an expansion of the quota for corporate boards of listed or co-determined companies, which would be about 3000 companies. Then, from our point of view, it would have a widespread effect. Unfortunately, we also need more pressure when it comes to appointing board members. We at XXX[23] are not yet of the opinion that we should demand a fixed quota for the management boards, but if nothing happens, I think these demands will be formulated much more clearly."*

She argues in order to have a broader impact one needs to increase pressure on the appointment process of management and supervisory bodies. She points out the importance of extending the current quota policy to more companies.

Accordingly, the expert interviewee Mrs. Albrecht states that the implemented quota has had a positive impact. Furthermore, in accordance with the above mentioned she argues that one could expand the current legal regulations to more companies. She highlights that *"One could change the legal regulations by expanding them. At the moment, the 30% only apply to about 100 companies, thus this is less than 500 mandates that fall under this 30% quota."*

The female board member Mrs. Schneider argues in support of an expansion of the current legal situation concerning the quota. When asked what needs to change in Germany in order to increase the number of WoB she states that: *"The aim is achieving normality. We should have more role models regardless whether male or female so that stereotypes eventually disappear. To get to this stage I think we need quotas."* Furthermore, she highlights that the quota has been effective for the few companies for which the policy applies, thereby stating:

> *"The companies where the quota policy applies, which are only about 100 companies, there it works, there we have reached the 30%. Although in the*

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[23] Interviewee refers to the name of her institution.

beginning, it was said that there were not enough women to fill the spots. However, the companies where the quota policy does not apply there we haven't reached the 30%."

Furthermore, referring to the second pillar of the policy stating that companies may set their own target figures concerning women on corporate boards, she highlights that:

"There are companies that without any sense of shame publish the target figure zero. I believe that the situation in Germany will only change if we also change the legal situation, at least for a certain period of time. Then you automatically start looking at the CVs of women and then all of a sudden you see that there are actually capable female candidates suitable for these job posts. However, if in my mind I am convinced that women do not exist to fill these posts or that women do not want to sit on corporate boards, well then they also do not exist."

The expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig argues that the implemented gender quota is effective. She states, *"I think you can derive that the quota as a legal measure has already made a difference."* However, she questions the actual consequences of the quota asking:

"The question is rather what are the effects of the quota...because increasing the number of women by only one, two or three more women...I mean that can't be it, you want more. One wants to install women where decisions are actually being taken and in such a way that they achieve better decisions for men and women in an everyday work life."

She highlights the importance of not only having a small increase in the number of women on corporate boards in Germany but also triggering real change. She states that it is crucial to increase the number of women in relevant positions where one holds a high degree of decision-making power. She thereby implies a general structural change towards more women on corporate boards.

Summarising the above section, I highlighted the most relevant interview extracts referring to "Laws and Policies" establishing the framework for women on corporate boards in Germany. Interviewees pointed out a current set of incoherent policies in Germany, thereby running the risk of triggering misleading incentives. While the "gender quota" policy aims at increasing the number of women on corporate boards, policies as "Herdprämie", "Ehegattensplitting" and "Müttergeld" are criticised for reinforcing traditional stereotypical gender roles. While only very few of the interviewees have felt supported by public or corporate policies on their career path, many do state that the implementation of gender equality laws have triggered forms of "power to" by creating public pressure for change. Concerning the "gender quota", some interviewees argue against a gender quota describing it as a form of "power over." The majority of interviewees however find a quota necessary and effective, thus as a form of "power to", despite not being the biggest supporters of the quota policy.

4.1.2. Compatibility: Family and Career

The following section on "Compatibility: Family and Career" highlights German interview extracts primarily referring to childcare responsibilities, the double burden and alternative working models. All of the fifteen German interviewees state that ensuring compatibility between family and career can be challenging for parents during their career progression. This can pose a particular challenge to mothers aiming for a high-level career position who on average still tend to take on more child-care and household responsibility. Interviewees point out as a form of "power over" that childcare facilities still need improvement, thus more flexible opening-hours. Furthermore, also as a form of "power over", interviewees highlight that childcare is still being primarily associated to mothers. Thereby, women tend to carry a double burden, thus having a career while at the same time raising children and taking care of the household. Thereof resulting career interruptions tend to have negative consequences for one´s career development. Drawing from statistics interviewees highlight another form of "power over" by highlighting that on average more women than men start working part-time after having a child. Several interviewees underline the fact that part-time work is still largely a career killer. Several working mothers and female managers when trying to combine having a family with a career are still being labelled as a bad mother, thus "Rabenmutter."[24] This can lead to severe forms of "power over" as creating social pressure for women. Several interviewees highlight the idea of "power to" in offering alternative working models and enhancing childcare facilities. Thereby, interviewees see better compatibility possibilities of having a family and a career.

When asked what might be the reason for female underrepresentation on corporate boards, the expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig states, *"Careers are usually made in-between the age of 27 and 38 years old. That is exactly the age when women have children. Right now when you work part-time, it's still largely a career killer."* Furthermore, in accordance the female board member Mrs. Schneider states that it is particularly:

> *"in this phase when a career step takes place and one is promoted to a higher career level, eventually becoming more visible in the company. However, this is also often the family formation phase, there is real demolition in female careers."*

She underlines the phenomenon that after giving birth women on average tend to start working part-time this often leads to a decrease in their career prospects later on. Mrs. Schulz argues that after having children one is not as free and flexible anymore. Furthermore, she states, "*if I want to pursue a career, then I also have a high expenditure of time. A career working only eight hours per day is not always possible.*" Mrs. Winkler states that frequently having a career and having children is still seen as an either or question for many women. She highlights:

> *"I think if you really want to pursue a career, for many women it's still a ques-*

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[24] "Rabenmutter" frequently used to refer to an uncaring, bad and cold-hearted mother.

tion of either or, so either having a career or a family. And I can understand that you say, well, having a career and in a way being alone doesn't necessarily look like having an intact family life."

Mrs. Schmidt and Mrs. Müller argue that their careers would have been impossible if they would have had children. The female board member Mrs. Schmidt states:

"What you shouldn't underestimate is that in the decisive phase of my career I didn't have any children to go home to and take care of. So I don't have any children. I got my first management position when I was 32 years old. So I was catapulted into a management position overnight, suddenly I had a company car, suddenly I had employees, and suddenly I had a relatively high level of responsibility. I was only able to manage that because I had no other obligations. I would have failed or simply would not have accepted the offer otherwise. But the fact that I was successful in this position established the rest of my career path for me. But if I had said at that time that I had to pick up the children at kindergarten at 5:00 p.m. or at the day care centre then I wouldn't have been able to manage all of that."

Mrs. Schmidt highlights that with children she would have not been able to manage having her career. In accordance, another female board member Mrs. Müller highlights that *"I myself have no children. I wouldn't have been able to do all of this having a family. I could only do it because my husband always supported me."* The female board member highlights the importance of having support in order to pursue one´s career. Furthermore, she puts forward that she would not have been able to manage her current position on a corporate board if she would have had a family. Moreover, Mrs. Schmidt argues, *"a woman with children definitely has a harder time having a career in our society, definitely, definitely."* She highlights the reason why it is more difficult for women who have children to strive for a career. She states:

"So women with children have to share their attention between their private life and their professional life, much more than a woman without children who may have a partner and something else, but at the end of the day you only take decisions for yourself."

Furthermore, Mrs. Schmidt highlights childcare duties, by stating "*if a child has to be picked up somewhere at 5:00 p.m. and the man can't go, I often experience that women are the more responsible ones."*

The interviewee states that such circumstances can have direct effects on the career progress of women when striving for a corporate board position. She continues by saying, *"if you then compete for a career post with a man who doesn't care, who prefers to come home when the kids are already in bed, then you've already lost."*

When asked whether it is more difficult for women with children to obtain a corporate board position, Mrs. Schneider responds, *"Yes, yes I am convinced."* Thereby she shares her experience stating:

"I have seen cases…I remember this situation where the aim was filling of a partner position. So there were two candidates: a woman who was pregnant at the time and a man whose wife was pregnant and of course the man was chosen because the others said: 'No the woman is pregnant and then she will take care of her child.' So these remarks and comments are still there when it comes to employing a woman who's in her early 30s. You still hear those comments 'No we can't hire her because she will get pregnant soon.'"

The interviewee highlights that the stereotype still exists that women will end up being pregnant and then quickly dropping out of the labour market. Mrs. Krüger argues that although women frequently have the same at times even higher levels of qualifications than their male peers, assumptions still exist that a woman might "*in the worst case, still be in the childbearing age, I mean from the boss's point of view.*"

The board member Mrs. Schmidt highlights that she has a mentee who has told her that she would like to combine her career with having children. The board member states that she suggested her to:

"still do one more career step before having a child. Cause once she sits on a certain position, she's on it. Eventually she can cut a bit shorter and have children, cause then she already sits on her position and it will be easier. It will be easier as if she suddenly drops out with a child and then possibly can never take this step again, because then they say, 'Well, now she decided to have a family.'

As stated above, several interviewees have stated that their careers would not have been possible with a child. Interviewees also highlight that it can be more difficult for a mother striving for a career than for somebody without children. However, Mrs. Krüger claims that although many women see having children and a career as being mutually exclusive, she states that:

"I actually didn't really start to pursue my career until my child was born, because I knew then, what I actually wanted. So I've been a single mother ever since my pregnancy and I didn't want to end up as the classic single parent living off the welfare state."

Although she managed to have a career being a single-mom, she argues that the circumstances were always very challenging. She particularly refers to professional obligations as business dinners stating that:

"So for me these professional business dinners were always a catastrophe. At least I had to put my son to bed, so that I still remembered how he looked like. That's difficult; But then I simply had to say that that's not possible for me. However, this slows down the process until people gain confidence with you to promote you that slows down enormously."

In accordance, referring to the informal get-togethers after work also Mrs. Becker states:

"After work in the evening when you leave the office you do not have a choice should I have a beer with my colleagues or I go home ... because one thing is clear, I must go home because I must pick up the child. These are simply different basic conditions."

The interviewees argue that when having children, mothers frequently cannot join the informal get-togethers as business dinners or having a beer with colleagues in a pub because they have to go home and take care of the children. However, non-participation in these informal get-togethers vehemently slows down the process of gaining trust with superiors, thus frequently leading to a slower process of career promotion.

All of the fifteen German interviewees argue that childcare in Germany is still a major challenge for women aiming for a corporate board position. Thereby frequently childcare facilities are mentioned as being lacking and in need of improvement. Mrs. Winkler states, *"there's a lot to do in terms of childcare."* In accordance, Mrs. Schneider argues that there is still *"a lack of childcare which is simply not as easily accessible as in other countries."* Mrs. Becker states that women are still facing a lot of pressure trying to establish a balance between having a family and a career. She highlights that even if childcare facilities would be sufficiently available then it would still be:

"A very personal question, whether you want to entrust your children in the hands of other people, I mean not only for five hours or eight hours, but for 12 hours a day. That's something you have to think about. Also the question: Am I ready to lead such a life?"

Mrs. Krüger thereby recalls the times when her child was still small and was still new in his nursery stating, *"in the mornings I sometimes went to work with a half broken heart when my child wasn´t feeling well in the nursery for example."* She states, *"I have often wished to be a man, especially when your child gets days off at school again. The child's father really wasn't interested at all and always said I shouldn't make such a fuss."* As stated above several interviewees call for an improvement of childcare facilities. Mrs. Krüger and Mrs. Becker highlight that even if childcare facilities are available it can still be a very personal question whether one wants to leave one's child in the hands of others for various hours per day.

One expert interviewee Mrs. Pohl states *"And how can you improve the current situation? By improving childcare facilities. And what is not happening? Exactly that..."* When asked what needs to change in Germany in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards Mrs. Schmidt responds:

"What would help the most would be all-day childcare for children. Both in the nurseries and schools. The kindergartens have already improved a bit; they are often open until four or five o'clock. However, then the children attend first grade in elementary school and school ends at 11:30 a.m. You can't manage that. If we don't manage to fix this then it will never work. That is really a main demand for me, so that we can make women in leadership

possible. All-day childcare needs to be guaranteed until five or six o'clock, or even longer times. There are women who simply have to work until eight in the evening, but perhaps they can then come later to the office in the morning like around ten. Then I need childcare facilities that are flexible and ensure longer opening hours. A woman who wants to run a factory for example one day also needs to do night shifts at times. So we'll need a lot more there."

The female board member argues that well-developed childcare facilities are a prerequisite for having women in management positions. She believes having more opening hours in childcare facilities are necessary. Furthermore, Mrs. Friedrich states that child-care facilities need to be improved in Germany in order to increase the percentage of WoB. She argues, *"I think women should be offered more of a chance to put their children in good childcare."* Comparing childcare facilities in Germany with those in other countries she states, childcare facilities are *"somewhat better in other countries. I would wish the same for Germany, too."*

Although all interviewees believe childcare facilities in Germany should be improved, three out of the fifteen interviewees share their positive childcare experience. Mrs. Krüger argues:

"So something where I was really lucky, especially being a single mother, was that you get plus points at the kindergarten in Berlin and I had so many plus points at the kindergarten that I got a place directly after my maternity leave and then I always found kindergartens that were easily accessible. I think a good childcare is the alpha and omega and of course, the opening hours cannot be only from eight a.m. to three p.m. because those are not people's working hours. They should be open from six a.m. to eight p.m. So I often had to take advantage of the opening hours from seven a.m. in the morning until eight p.m. In Berlin, when I received the professorship, I got a kind of women's professorship so I also got a kindergarten teacher sponsored by the DFG[25]. There was a kindergarten teacher for my whole unit, but since the men always had their wives at home, I got the kindergarten teacher for my child alone. So Berlin was good for that with its whole social setting. Social support is crucial beyond the opening hours of the day care centre, otherwise you can't take up a management position, cause then work doesn't stop at four p.m. Or you're simply too inflexible."

The interviewee recalls positive experience with childcare facilities in Berlin. Furthermore, she believes more flexible and longer childcare opening hours are necessary. She states that childcare facilities should be open from six a.m. until eight p.m. to allow women striving for a career more time flexibility. Another female board member highlights the benefit of longer childcare facility opening hours in the eastern part of Berlin. Mrs. Walter argues:

"I live in the eastern part of Berlin, which was great for me, cause I found a

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[25] DFG – Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft; German Research Fundation.

nursery where the opening hours were from six a.m. to six p.m., which I did not always use. However, we always had the possibility of having our child in good hands. These are all conditions that are largely set from the outside, so by politics. I think that also makes a great difference inside the company, this is top-down."

The female board member highlights the importance of policies in establishing sufficient conditions as for example well-developed childcare facilities for women that aim for a board position.

Interviewees criticize that the responsibilities of childcare are primarily associated to mothers and not so much to fathers. Expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt argues that although certain changes are currently visible in Germany the general assumption is still persistent that *"basically only a mother can raise a child."* Furthermore, Mrs. Winkler argues that the question of compatibility between family and career is *"not only on the women's side but there are also men who are willing to live another model."* However, she states *"but I think we're still a little behind, well in a lot of societies."* She argues that the issue of compatibility between family and career is still primarily associated to women rather than to men. However, the interviewee highlights that currently a certain change in society is visible with more men and women wanting to live different life and working models. Nevertheless, Mrs. Müller states, *"as long as we still primarily assign children to their mothers, women will certainly have a harder time getting into management positions. Well, I've always believed that children always belong to both: father and mother."* She then states that in order to change the assumption that women are primarily responsible for raising the children:

> *"We need participatory and equal partnerships, which will then catapult us into the professional world, i.e. men who are willing to take on parental leave who then say I have to go home tonight because I have to put my child to bed. As long as that doesn't happen we will witness only a very limited change."*

The interviewee argues, *"it is necessary that these different expectations for women and men cease."* However, she does currently observe a change among the younger generation, arguing, *"I increasingly observe young men taking care of their children."* In addition, Mrs. Becker addresses this societal change stating *"but I think men are changing, too."* The interviewees observe a societal change among the younger generation of men, seeing childcare not primarily as only a mother´s responsibility, but both parents playing a greater role in a child´s upbringing.

Mrs. Schulz and Mrs. Schmidt claim that women carry a double burden. This means having a career while at the same time raising their children and taking care of the household. Accordingly, Mrs. Schmidt states *"then I see a double burden for women who have a career and children."* Furthermore, Mrs. Schulz argues that frequently women tend to have a *"a disadvantage because they always tend to have multiple burdens, that is, childcare and later on taking care of the elderly parents."* The interviewee underlines the fact that women are often

the primary responsible for care work. This means raising the children and at a later stage it may imply nursing one´s parents. Thereby, care work usually takes up a lot of time and within families is frequently unpaid. Furthermore, Mrs. Becker highlights the multiple burdens women are frequently facing stating, *"they (women) simply have too many other tasks to do. And who takes care of the household issues in the end?"* The interviewee implies that on average women take up more household and childcare duties.

Interviewees highlight that long interruptions due to childcare tend to have negative consequences for one´s career development. On average mothers tend to take on longer career breaks than fathers, interviewees claim. When asked why women are still underrepresented on corporate boards in Germany, Mrs. Friedrich argues:

"One reason for this is certainly long career interruptions for parental leave. There are still a lot of these traditional thoughts in Germany...so there is a young woman who has a child and then leaves the company for one, two or maybe three years and that's a break, it's simply long."

Mrs. Walter highlights the situation of fathers taking parental leave in her company stating:

"In our company we witness that men do take these two months of parental leave but not more. These two months are legally secured. But everything that goes beyond half a year...some boss may signal that they don't find it too tingling. The question is usually, is the boss him- or herself supportive towards family commitments and children? It doesn't really matter whether the boss is male or female. Well we did a survey on that once in our company."

The female board member thereby highlights a common phenomenon in the corporate world in Germany. The younger generation of men do take on parental leave but frequently only the amount of time that is legally guaranteed by the state. Women still tend to take longer career interruptions due to childcare. Also Mrs. Schulz referring to long career interruptions due to childcare highlights:

"So if a woman gives birth to a child and then raises this child, so nowadays I get three years from the government. A women fully taking advantage of these three years might then lose contact to the company. During these three years, of course, a lot can happen in a company. Especially nowadays in the age of digitalization, I lose the connection relatively fast. So you should somehow try to keep in touch with the company."

The interviewee underlines the importance of staying in touch with one´s firm during parental leave. Furthermore, she reports from a recent incident stating:

"So I had an employee, she was three years out of the office raising her child. Now after three years out of the office she came back again and said, 'Here I am.' But of course the whole development has changed, i.e. this work she used to do does not exist anymore. But I still have to keep her somehow

busy. But I don't have any other work for her to do. What do I do now? On the one hand, I have someone I really don't need anymore, on the other hand, I have a contractual obligation. Now I'm trying everything to find her some work, but of course that's not the greatest."

The interviewee highlights a common dilemma, thus, trying to reintegrate parents, frequently mothers, who have been out of the day-to-day business for several years due to childcare. These long career breaks tend to have very negative consequences for the person´s career development later on. The interviewee reemphasises that this is a common challenge in the corporate world stating, *"I have also talked to other board members about it. As a woman, we really have to make sure to get back into the company's processes relatively quickly. Even if you don't work full-time, but that you somehow remain visible in the company."* When asked how long one could be away from day-to-day's business without facing negative consequences for one´s career development, she argues, *"I think being out of office for half a year is manageable, but anything over half a year…well, I think a lot will happen in such a long time period."*

Interviewees highlight that long interruptions due to childcare tend to have negative consequences for one´s career development. Furthermore, on average there are still more mothers taking longer career breaks for parental leave than fathers do, interviewees claim.

Despite greater flexibility in today´s working models it is still a persistent phenomenon that alternative working models as for example part-time work, do not necessarily improve one´s career chances later on when aiming for a career promotion. Rather, possible consequences frequently imply having a career setback. The expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt referring to the common pitfall of part-time work states, *"the offers for women with children to manage a career working part-time are still very limited. Part-time jobs are usually offered with great pleasure, however without realizing that part-time is also an extreme trap."* The expert interviewee states that working part-time does not necessarily enhance one's career chances later on. Rather, it can be a trap for one's career development. Mrs. Walter shares her part-time work experience:

"So I've also experienced the classical when working part-time. That means one works part-time, which usually means less working time and fewer tasks. I however, perhaps typically female, had the expectation that I must get a lot of tasks done in a very limited amount of time, quasi I must justify that I was working part-time. I then made the mistake of working, working, working until it became clear that I was missing these coffee breaks."

The female board member highlights that part-time work does not necessarily mean less work but usually trying to get your tasks done in less available hours. This increases the pressure. Referring to part-time work as a career killer she states, *"part-time career killer can still be an issue up to today cause (when I was working part-time) I simply couldn't attend certain meetings."* Furthermore, she highlights that currently in German companies the belief is still persistent that*:

"This belief that presence time equals performance time, which is still something old and hierarchical, but it is still in the DNA of many. Since most men have a woman at home who covers their back, it is really not an issue (to work) until six p.m. or seven p.m. I once said to one of my colleagues: 'I don't have a wife at home; I have to do it myself.' That can cause irritation."

The female board member perceives traditional working models are slowly but steadily changing. Therefore, she argues, *"Well, today I wouldn't call (part-time) a career killer anymore per se, but it's still a challenge to deal with."* The interviewee states that thanks to digitalisation, working parents have more flexibility. She states:

"but thanks to flexibility options you now have the possibility to structure your daily tasks better, so which important meetings can I attend and where does the family have priority. That's certainly easier today than it was 20 years ago. However, part-time work being a career killer is unfortunately also a topic that exists for fathers nowadays."

Mrs. Walter highlights that part-time work still seems to be a career killer for both men and women in Germany. On average, more women than men tend to work part-time. Particularly mothers after giving birth take up part-time work. Therefore, it is more common for women to fall into the career pitfall. Mrs. Winkler states that despite great changes *"there's still a lot to do... in terms of compatibility."* Furthermore, she emphasises that when it comes to child-care facilities and alternative working models one shall not only focus on women but also on men. Thereby Mrs. Walter highlights the importance of focusing *"not only on the women's side but there are also men who are willing to live a different model, but I think we are still a little behind on that or many societies are."* She highlights that there is still a great need to catch up. Alternative working models are necessary and crucial. However, one should only offer alternative working models that can also provide people with a realistic chance of having a successful career development afterwards.

Several interviewees argue that successful female managers, trying to combine having a career with a family, are frequently stereotyped as an uncaring mother, thus a "Rabenmutter." Eventually such labelling can lead to severe social pressure for women. Mrs. Schulz argues, *"especially in Germany I still see that child-care responsibility is primarily associated to the mother. Also this picture of this bad mother, this "Rabenmutter", who goes to work, still exists."* Furthermore, another female board member Mrs. Fischer argues that:

"Well I met women here in Germany whom I asked: 'Well don´t you want to work again?' They answered: 'No, because all of my relatives are blaming me that I am a bad mother, a "Rabenmutter".' These were women who were actually highly competent but who were no longer able to withstand this social pressure they were facing. I find that quite alarming."

The interviewees refer to the social pressure that particularly working mothers can be exposed to.

Mrs. Ludwig, Mrs. Winkler and Mrs. Walter propose alternative working models. The expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig states, *"we are in favour of extending paternal leave and family working hours. Basically that it is rewarded by the state with subsidies if, for example, after birth both parents work 80% and not the woman working very little and the man working 150%."* In addition, Mrs. Winkler suggests alternative work models, for example job-sharing. She states, *"and are we really ready to think about alternative models like job sharing? I don't think it always has to be a quota or legally regulated, but I think companies could do something on their own behalf to make things easier."*

Interviewees see a necessity in having alternative working models in order to support working parents and particularly working mothers. The expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig states, *"careers are made between the age of 27 and 38, and that's exactly the age when women have children."* Thereby, interviewees see a need for more flexible working models to assist parents and especially mothers. Nevertheless, it is crucial that alternative working models can actually assist and provide parents with a real career development in the long-term. Accordingly, expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig states that currently one alternative working model is part-time work. However, she argues, *"right now when you work part-time, that's basically a career killer."* The expert calls for more *"time sovereignty for workers especially in the rush hour of life."* She defines the life rush hour as the period between the ages of 27 until 38 years old, when family planning is usually taking place. Furthermore, she points out the necessity for a change so that *"careers for older people must also be made possible, i.e. if it doesn't work out at an early age, thus at the beginning of one´s career, then one should still be able to pursue a career at a later stage in one´s life."* Nevertheless, interviewees state that today there are already more offers of alternative working models than before. Mrs. Walter recalls her own experience stating:

> *"I still remember rigid male hierarchies that I experienced when I wanted to work less after my child was born. You could only choose working either 50% or 75%. So any odd numbers were impossible. In 1995, it was still necessary to escalate this whole issue up to the management board, until the management board decided that from now on we would do it differently. None of that is an issue any more today. Today, technology facilitates to maintain many different working time models. Which is certainly positive..."*

The board member highlights that before it was much more difficult for people to work part-time, particularly when one´s desired working model did not fit into the prescribed working hour model. Today, there seems to be greater flexibility concerning alternative working models.

Summarising the section above, I highlighted interview extracts referring to the topic of "Compatibility between Family and Career." All fifteen German interviewees state that compatibility between having a family and a career can pose a challenge for people in their career development. This can be a particular challenge for working mothers that on average still tend to take on more child-care and household responsibilities. Interviewees highlight forms of "power over" by urging for an improvement of childcare facilities. Associating childcare primarily

to mothers and labelling working mothers as a bad mother further creates forms of "power over." Thereby, women still carry a double burden when trying to combine a career with childcare and household duties. Thereof resulting career interruptions tend to have negative consequences on one's career development. Particularly working part-time is still largely seen as a career killer. Interviewees highlight forms of "power to" when underlining the idea of alternative working models in order to increase the possibility of combining a family with a career.

4.1.3. Personal Initiative

The following section on "Personal Initiative" will highlight German interview extracts on the importance of pro-actively striving for one´s career development. Fourteen out of fifteen interviewees refer to forms of "power to" when highlighting that personal initiative or being pro-active is crucial for career development. Respondents then give several examples of how they reached their current board position. Eventually interviewees highlight forms of "power over", sharing their experience that women frequently tend to lack the necessary confidence when applying for management positions. Moreover, interviewees then question whether management or board positions are actually desirable. Eventually respondents highlight forms of "power to", when referring to the need of increasing one's visibility. Interviewees suggest doing unique and outstanding work and promoting it. Interviewees highlight that one way to increase one's visibility is to strive for a career path in the STEM area. Respondents highlight that STEM careers are usually in a well-paid professional sector and women are still largely underrepresented among them.

When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards in Germany, Mrs. Krüger highlights that *"I believe a lot of hurdles come from the women's world, this obsession with perfectionism."* In accordance, also Mrs. Winkler argues, *"I must say quite self-critically, to a large extent it also depends on the women themselves."* Mrs. Weber states that nowadays having female board members has become much more normal than it used to be in former times. Nevertheless, she states that in order to effectively increase the number of WoB she *"think(s) the women need to change a bit, too."* Thereby she sees the root cause of female underrepresentation in the phenomenon that *"women hold back much too often, women always strive too much for perfectionism."* Furthermore, Mrs. Krüger highlights the importance of female agency when trying to obtain a board position stating, *"its society, of course, but it also always depends on us."* Furthermore, she reinforces the idea of agency by arguing, *"Well, you need a little bit of intrinsic drive."* Also Mrs. Fischer states that one of the reasons for female underrepresentation on corporate boards comes from *"the individual women's side, and I am now generalizing, that many women don't have enough bite and stamina; they give up too quickly; they don't say what they actually want..."* Accordingly, interviewees highlight that it is crucial for women to know what one actually wants and then strategically strive for a career.

The female board members interviewed recall that their career was a set of conscious and strategic decisions, which involved careful planning. Thereby Mrs.

Müller highlights that her board appointment was primarily *"systematic work, basically how can I get there and what do I have to do in order to get there, like how to increase alliances and visibility, self-promotion."* Correspondingly, Mrs. Schulz states, *"I have always planned my professional development and career. The question was how could I get there (management position)? And then basically asking the question: How can I stand out from others?"* When asked about the crucial steps of becoming appointed to a board Mrs. Walter states:

> *"So for the first board seat, that was a deliberate decision. It was clear that elections for the corporate board were imminent and that the employees had to elect representatives for the corporate board, i.e. traditional co-determination. So it was the right thing to ask: "Do I want that or don´t I? And which way do I have to go in order to belong to those who will be elected later on?"*

Fourteen out of the fifteen interviewees argue that personal initiative and being pro-active is crucial when aiming for a career. Interviewees claim that they have experienced very diligently working women who then hope for their company to notice their efforts, eventually being promoted. However, interviewees claim that in practice things do not necessarily always work this way. Mrs. Schulz highlights that *"you have to be active yourself."* Furthermore, Mrs. Weber states that women frequently wait to be promoted instead of actively striving and demanding a career promotion. She emphasises that one has to actively strive at times even demand to be promoted. She states:

> *"So women have to make their contribution and not wait for something to happen...because we have so many support programmes that they are basically being kissed awake. That's also a bit of a problem with the quota and all the support for women. If they are not active, the programmes are useless. So I say that women have to demand that (promotion)."*

Hereby the interviewee reinforces that women need to actively work on their promotion, among others being more demanding in terms of their career. Correspondingly, Mrs. Winkler highlights:

> *"I think it's also a typical women's problem that we always think: Well, someday I´ll wake up in the morning and then my pay rise will be in my mailbox or something like that. But I think we're always a little too quiet, you sometimes have to have the courage to rub somebody up the wrong way...Otherwise I don't think it actually works, if you're always really diligent and keeping all your deadlines and are also somehow quite nice and well-behaved, then it doesn't really work out."*

Mrs. Fischer argues that she is often left with the impression that instead of actively pursuing one´s career development, women stereotypically speaking tend to *"wait for the career bus to stop in front of them, opening the door and saying, 'Hop in, I will now promote you.'"* Mrs. Fischer however states that instead of waiting for the career bus one should rather be proactive.

Several interviewees see their personal pro-activeness rooted in personality traits as being curious and constantly striving for improvement and change. It is emphasised that from their natural state of being they are curious and constantly striving for new learning opportunities in their life. Thereby, Mrs. Krüger argues, *"I usually feel bored relatively quickly and therefore have changed my position quite often, even already as a relatively established person".* Mrs. Krüger acknowledges, *"the search for change and challenge was crucial to my career."* Furthermore, also Mrs. Fischer highlights her natural curiosity when stating, *"I am someone who is very curious, I am open to new things, I am a good networker and I am ambitious. So I also want to be good at what I do."* Furthermore, Mrs. Fischer reinforces the importance of pro-actively approaching one´s career by stating, *"I'm also someone who approaches things very pro-actively."* Correspondingly, Mrs. Schmidt highlights:

> *"I usually got bored after a while when I couldn't change anything anymore and then I set off again, sometimes self-actively sometimes being directly approached by someone else to fill a new job post. However, something I have always paid particular attention to was having a decent salary raise. So I always negotiated very tough. This is why I always started new positions having a good salary. So I would say as a woman I have never earned less than the men."*

Underlining the importance of pro-activeness, she asks, *"Is somebody very active on his or her own or does somebody expect the company to come and ask you?"* This emphasises the importance of individual agency when striving for a board position.

The respondents highlight examples of their own pro-activeness when asked how they obtained their current career position. Mrs. Müller argues that the most crucial step in gaining a board position was *"becoming aware that there are things one can help shape and then systematic work, basically how can I get there and what do I have to do in order to get there, like how to increase alliances and visibility, self-promotion."* Mrs. Müller claims that in order to obtain her board position she systemically worked on how to establish alliances and increase the visibility of her profile. She then states, *"you can't just give up. I am a determined person, if I have set myself a goal then I want to achieve it, I will not let myself be pushed aside."*

When asked how she obtained her current board position Mrs. Fischer argues:

> *"I approached the former corporate board member of XXX[26], with whom I get along very well, and asked whether he would support me, he agreed. Then we worked a little bit on my international CV so that it was germanised again, and then he recommended me to a head hunter. Two weeks later, I had an interview at XXX[27]. They interviewed me for three hours and then told me, 'Mrs. Fischer, we would like to offer you the job.' So that is how I became a*

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[26] Interviewee refers to the name of the company.
[27] Interviewee refers to the name of the company she had an interview with to become a board member.

corporate board member at XXX[28]. The other mandates I also got through my networks."

Just like Mrs. Müller, Mrs. Fischer emphasises that she pro-actively looked for strategic networking partners to support her board appointment. Mrs. Winkler shares an experience of her pro-activeness at an early stage during her career. Eventually, this experience led her to her current job. She states that at an early stage in her career she had a temporary job contract, which she wanted to change into a permanent position. Eventually when her temporary contract ended and she was again offered another temporary contract from the same employer, she told her employer:

"´Well, why don´t we renegotiate my salary or my fixed term contract?´ What they didn't do...so then I quit (laughing). And that somehow drew the attention from the management board to me. That was actually the first time, I would say, that the people who were sitting at the top actually noticed me, so eventually they bought me back."

Mrs. Winkler explains that after being bought back she eventually received an international assignment to build up the company´s premises in another country. She states *"my international assignment, I kind of arranged that myself."* When asked how she managed to arrange the assignment, she states, *"Well I don't know if bold...or...(laughing)...I simply went to the CEO and said ´Well you probably don't know me but I've been working here for three years. And I'd go do a fact-finding mission in XXX[29] for you.´"* The interviewee highlights that eventually she received her international assignment to build up the company´s regional headquarters abroad. Furthermore, she states that then she received a promotion and a higher salary, stating:

"After the international assignment I got the promotion...well after nine months... also not voluntarily on part of the XXX[30] (laughing). But I had a colleague who went to XXX[31] at the same time as me, a male colleague, who then took over our already existing local office and after nine months I said 'Well, I don't quite understand…why is my colleague immediately with the secondment being promoted, although he doesn´t even have to build up the office. And I am building up the office and I am not being promoted...eventually that was corrected."

Mrs. Winkler shares an experience of the early years in her career, thus demonstrating that she pro-actively asked for a promotion. She eventually managed to get the aimed at position and was offered to build up the company´s regional headquarters abroad.

Besides pro-actively striving for one's career, interviewees argue that one has to be willing to pay a high price for one's career success. Respondents highlight

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[28] Interviewee refers to the name of the company for which she then became a board member.
[29] Interviewee refers to the name of a country.
[30] Interviewee refers to the name of the company she works for.
[31] Interviewee mentions the name of another country.

that having a successful career often implies long working hours. This frequently entails cutting short on one's personal life. Mrs. Müller states, *"So the women I have encountered in management positions have shown a certain willingness to suffer, a willingness to perform and they are ready to pay a certain price for their success. That is still demanded..."* In addition, Mrs. Krüger highlights the idea by stating:

> *"So the women I see are all very determined in their progress, that's almost all their own work. Very few of them are just pampered by a mentor, of course that helps but it doesn´t make a career, you have to do it yourself. I find that a bit difficult to tell women, cause it's a bit unpopular. It's always good to have someone else to blame."*

The interviewee critically reflects upon female agency when striving for a career. She argues that women themselves need to take the initiative to climb up the career ladder instead of blaming others for one´s career stagnation.

According to interviewees' experience, many women still lack the necessary confidence in their own skills and abilities when aiming for a corporate board position, possibly missing opportunities. One female board member, Mrs. Walter, holds true a frequently mentioned cliché:

> *"This cliché, and there is much truth to it, when men apply, even if they fulfil only very few of the requirements and say: 'I can do it.' They actually mean: 'I'll do it and then it will somehow work out.' Unfortunately, women tend to think: 'Oh, I only fulfil 80%, that can't be good enough.' And then shy away from seizing opportunities that might actually be there."*

In addition, Mrs. Schmidt shares her experience on the issue, stating:

> *"I often experience women hiding their light under a bushel. They don't do enough self-marketing. In interviews, I have experienced the woman fulfilling all application criteria, the man fulfilling a maximum of 80%. The man demands a much higher salary than the woman. The woman says: ´Well, I'm not that good yet, I can't do that, and I can't do this.´ Women are simply too stupid. Don't put your light under the bushel, go out and say: ´I can do it.´"*

Mrs. Weber citing the frequently mentioned cliché states, *"women are sometimes not brave enough to say 80% is good enough. I just dare to take the step."* The respondents recall a commonly held stereotype that women frequently assume that they are not sufficiently qualified for the job and then fail to apply; thereby, potentially missing possible career opportunities.

Mrs. Schmidt states *"speaking to women, I have often found a lack of confidence to do something when they say, ´I'm not good enough.´"* Correspondingly, Mrs. Schulz states *"the problem with women is often, I mean, just today for example, I had a job interview with a female engineer that confirms this... it's just to have confidence in oneself."*

Interviewees highlight that despite being sufficiently qualified, women still tend to

lack confidence in their own skills when it comes to career development. When asked which steps were important to obtain her current job position, Mrs. Schulz states:

> *"Determination and confidence to make decisions. I believe that women often have much greater potential. So when I see applications and then grades, on average the women are really much more committed, only they frequently don't do enough self-marketing."*

The interviewee highlights that women tend to do less self-marketing. In accordance, Mrs. Walter claims *"women often think that they still have to be more qualified before they say, 'Yes, I want the job.'"* Furthermore, highlighting the importance of daring something, Mrs. Walter states, *"What also plays a role with women, of course, is to simply dare something. Do I dare to go into an area I don't know? Do I want to deal with certain male hierarchies?"* Furthermore, then Mrs. Walter states that being confident and courageous is crucial when aiming for a board appointment. She suggests that:

> *"I should not be afraid of public speaking or public appearance. Of course, it doesn't help if I'm on a board, where I also have duties as a member, if I'm the little grey mouse in the corner that doesn't dare to open its mouth. So I think that would be counterproductive. Something that could be an issue for a woman is...if it is a male-dominated committee, which is often still the case, then to dare to open one's mouth as a woman, even though perhaps there are more men present. That can be an issue, but it doesn't have to be. So the question is how do I move in male hierarchies? Do I have any experience in this regard? Do I let myself be quickly deterred? You need the willingness to be involved."*

Mrs. Weber believes that you need to *"feel confident in a certain way in order to take responsibility and commitment."* Accordingly, Mrs. Schmidt states that *"I've always had courage; you can see from my resume that I've changed my jobs relatively often and always jumped up."* Interviewees emphasise the importance of being confident and courageous, in order to climb up the career ladder. Furthermore, underlining her pro-activeness, Mrs. Weber, when asked whether she has ever been treated differently than her male colleagues, responds *"perhaps in the very early stages. But I have always held against it. I'm an athlete, a fighter if someone treats me stupid I treat him stupid."* The statements listed above mention frequently assumed insecurities about one's skills and qualifications. Thereby feelings of not being good enough for a certain job may come up.

During the interviews, respondents presumed that management and board positions might simply not be attractive enough for women to strive for. Some of the respondents generally question women´s interest in management and board positions. Thereby Mrs. Krüger states, *"being a CEO is probably not yet really attractive enough for women."* Furthermore, she asks:

> *"So how attractive is it really to be such a strict and tired CEO? You do lose quite a bit of your looks over the years. Of course, you also make unfeminine*

decisions, rigorously and inevitably, because sometimes you simply have to make less friendly decisions for the individual. I mean when you're responsible for a whole department. So is that something that women actually find attractive? Yes, of course, it's always great to drive a nice car and be the boss, but there's a lot behind it. I mean we all know what kind of nasty characters are sometimes behind that."

Mrs. Krüger questions whether being a CEO is actually attractive enough for women to strive for. She thereby highlights the great sacrifices that people in management positions often have to endure. Furthermore, Mrs. Müller recalls the idea that a position on a corporate board means lots of personal sacrifice. According to her opinion, this could be one of the main reasons *"why some smart woman may say, ´well, why should I do that, what do I get out of it?"* Also recalling the high costs that a management and board position entails Mrs. Winkler states *"I see a tendency that a lot of women, say: 'Yes I want to have a career, but I don't want to have all the trench warfare and that's all silly.' And of course it is somehow."* Furthermore, sharing her personal career experience she recalls:

> *"Yes, I am also annoyed by these meetings, well it's all said but not yet by me. And that I'm repetitively held for my own secretary. But we have to get through this stage. I think many young women start off being highly motivated and then...well I also know these moments then after a few years you've already got a couple of bruises, then you start asking yourself the question of meaning. Ok, so is it really worth it?"*

Mrs. Winkler highlights the sacrifice on a personal level that having a successful career may entail. A sacrifice that many people might not be willing to pay. Mrs. Schmidt shares her experience on the issue stating *"Well, I keep hearing women who tell me: 'I don't want to be in your skin, I don't want to have your job position...I can't stand the politics you have to endure. I don't want that. I simply want to do my job.'"* The female board member states that many see her job as not desirable. In addition, Mrs. Becker shares her opinion on the issue, stating, *"in the past, there were fewer WoB, but not because they couldn't do it. Also because they just didn't want to."* Mrs. Becker underlines the idea of women having a lack of interest in having a board and management position. Interviewees highlight that despite having an increase in the percentage of WoB, many newly appointed women tend to quickly drop out of corporate boards. Mrs. Müller states, *"You can witness a lot of women dropping out of these positions relatively quickly...how many women were there in the last few years who had board mandates and then dropped out again? Not because they weren´t able."* She implies that the great sacrifice that having a board position entails may lead to the high drop out of female board members.

Interviewees state that one should do well and talk about it. This means one should do outstanding and unique work and then promote it accordingly. Interviewees highlight that it is crucial to increase one's visibility. One interviewee recalls that an important step in becoming Germany´s first female CFO in a DAX-

listed company was doing outstanding, unique and risky projects that eventually caught people´s attention. She states that:

> "Important steps in becoming a CFO at XXX[32] were certainly successfully accomplishing risky, outstanding projects or tasks that attracted attention in the company. So quite early on, I took up a position abroad. I took over a re-structuring case, which gave me a name and a reputation, thus the corresponding results were then known to the Board of Management and Corporate board."

Besides doing outstanding work, several interviewees claim that when aiming for a corporate board position one has to increase one´s visibility. Mrs. Winkler states, *"what's really important is to increase one´s visibility and draw the attention to you..."* In accordance, the expert interviewee, Mrs. Pohl, highlights the importance of visibility for board recruitment processes. She states it is important to analyse "*on which visibility stages am I?"* Furthermore, she underlines that *"all research states that recruitment processes run on visibility stages."* Mrs. Schulz highlights the importance of visibility by stating, "*at a certain stage you simply have to become visible somewhere, perhaps by doing something you are particularly good at."* Also Mrs. Walter stresses the importance of strategic self-marketing when stating:

> "This belief that I am good in my profession and that people should see that I am good in what I do and therefore should discover me...So how do I become visible enough and what do I do about self-marketing? Basically how do I become visible enough that someone notices me and my skills?"

The interviewees highlight that one needs to do outstanding work and then increase one´s own visibility. Outstanding work and increasing one´s visibility are mutually complementary steps when aiming for a board position.

Above I summarised statements highlighting the importance of increasing one´s visibility. One way, interviewees state, is to strive for a career in one of the traditional STEM areas; these being Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. Thereby, women are still largely underrepresented in STEM careers. The STEM sector frequently has a high earning potential. Mrs. Schulz, herself working in a STEM area, argues:

> "Well in STEM jobs...of course women are totally understaffed in these areas. Of course, you have great opportunities if you're interested in this area. But my daughters aren't too enthusiastic about it either. So I always say you can have the best careers in these STEM professions. Because in these professions I can really stand out from others."

In addition, Mrs. Becker having a STEM-focused career argues, *"in the technical areas there is still a much smaller pool of women than of men, because there are also much fewer who are interested in it."* The interviewees highlight that one opportunity for women to increase their visibility is to pursue a career in a STEM-

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[32] Interviewee mentions the name of the company she works for.

focused area.

Summarising, I highlighted interview extracts addressing the issue of "personal initiative." Highlighting forms of "power to", interviewees have underlined the importance of planning one's career and pro-actively striving for a certain career position. Highlighting forms of "power over", interviewees state that they have frequently experienced a lack of confidence in one's own qualification and skills among women, thus failing to apply for job posts. Interviewees also question whether management or board positions are actually desirable enough for women to strive for. Eventually respondents highlight forms of "power to", by underlining the importance of "doing good and talking about it." This means doing good work and then increasing one's visibility by promoting it. Interviewees then suggest that one way to increase one's visibility is to aim for a career in the STEM area.

4.1.4. Individual Support and Personal Networks

In the following section interview extracts on the topic of "Individual Support and Personal Networks" will be addressed by highlighting the importance of having a supportive social and professional environment. In addition, interviewees highlight the negative effects of the "queen bee" syndrome and an overall lack of support for the individual when striving for a board position. Thereby, support can not only emerge on an individual level but also on a national or international level for example by adopting policies that trigger pressure for increasing WoB. Thirteen out of fifteen interviewees highlight the importance of having individual support from others and personal networks when aiming for a career. Thereby interviewees underline forms of "power with" others, thus solidarity with others as particularly crucial when aiming for a management position. Interviewees highlight forms of "power without" others by referring to the current lack of solidarity among women. Many interviewees claim that although the number of female networks has been steadily increasing there is still a great lack of networks among women. This lack of solidarity among women is frequently described in the literature as the queen bee syndrome. The queen been syndrome refers to the phenomenon when women who managed to hold powerful positions, eventually fail to promote others; thereby triggering a clear form of "power without", thus having no solidarity with others. Nevertheless, during the interviews forms of "power with" became apparent. Frequently interviewees state that they act as mentors, building up female networks or willingly name other women when having to decline an offer. Interviewees highlight "power with" others when highlighting the importance of having support from one´s social environment, as from family and friends, or from the professional environment, as from direct superiors or work-related mentors. Furthermore, interviewees then highlight that having boldness from decision-makers is particularly important when aiming to increase the number of WoB.

Female board member Mrs. Schmidt mentions the lack of female networks when asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards. She argues: *"I*

think women don't network enough and don't support each other enough." Furthermore, another board member Mrs. Schneider highlights *"I think there are more women's networks nowadays and they definitely want to do something for women. That does exist in the background, but probably still too little and too little targeted."* The female interviewee observes an increase in the number of female networks, however, assumes that these are still too little targeted and goal-oriented. Mrs. Becker assumes that women tend to be too little network-driven, by stating: *"I think women are intuitively not as network-driven as men might be, because they just have too many other tasks to do. And who takes care of the household issues after all?"*

When asked what needs to change in Germany in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards, Mrs. Fischer states, *"Well, I believe that women should show more active solidarity between each other and work together. As long as we are divided apart, we'll never have a certain power to work through issues."* Furthermore, she highlights the importance of solidarity with others when aiming for cultural change, thus achieving more gender equality. She states, *"As a single individual, you cannot achieve an actual cultural change."*

In addition, Mrs. Winkler highlights the lack of solidarity among women when asked what needs to change in Germany in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards. She states that, *"I think what needs to change is the cohesion and solidarity among women. I always look quite jealously to men, who always tend to pull each other up."* Furthermore, the expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt argues, *"women's solidarity is still an issue that needs to be strengthened to the extreme."* She states *"I think this whole topic ´women are promoting women´ needs to be enlarged. Women really have to set an example, cause if we don't, then who will support us?"* The expert interviewee highlights the importance of solidarity among women.

When asked which steps were crucial to gain her current corporate board positions, Mrs. Schneider argues:

> *"In the beginning it was quite banal, I took over corporate board positions, which per se have been held by XXX[33] board members, i.e. I followed in the footsteps of predecessors and that was in the sense then the company network...you can also say Germany AG...Mr. XXX[34] was board member at XXX[35] and Mr. XXX[36] was board member at XXX[37] and when they left I got their positions. That was simply networking."*

Furthermore, when asked which suggestions interviewees had for younger gen-

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[33] Interviewee mentions the name of the company she works for.
[34] Interviewee mentions the name of a former board member of the company she works for.
[35] Interviewee mentions the name of another company for which the former board member used to be on the supervisory board.
[36] Interviewee mentions the name of a former board member of the company she works for.
[37] Interviewee mentions the name of another company for which the former board member used to be on the supervisory board.

erations aiming for a similar career position, several highlighted the importance of building up a good personal network. Mrs. Schulz states *"So you should already build up a network today and position yourself strategically...that can never be wrong."* In line with the before mentioned, Mrs. Winkler highlights that *"networking is a very important factor, both inside and outside the company."* In addition, Mrs. Friedrich states it is crucial *"to have a good network."* The expert interviewee Mrs. Pohl states, *"of course, in that context, it's important to develop something like a network that leads to people supporting each other."* In line with the before mentioned, Mrs. Schneider states, *"I always say look for someone who can open doors."* Above mentioned interviewees highlight that having a stable network is crucial for obtaining a corporate board position and developing one´s career later on.

Above, interviewees highlight a lack of solidarity among women. In the literature, this lack of solidarity is frequently described as the "queen bee syndrome." This phenomenon refers to women who already hold a powerful position, but then do not promote others, frequently younger women. Mrs. Krüger highlights *"unfortunately, you always have one of those, and that's something I'm suffering from right now as well, one of these thunderstorm witches."* In accordance, Mrs. Schmidt argues:

> *"Yes, there are a lot of them and I'm really sorry to say that, there are these mare-biters. These women who have actually come a long way, who really hold power in their hands and I often experience them wanting to be the only one on their level. They're not willing to give up any power; they don't do anything for others. They're quickly stuck to you, like bees stick to honey, when you have something to give. But they're also quickly gone when you don't have anything to give. I could tell you a few big names in the German industry."*

Underlining the queen bee syndrome Mrs. Winkler states: *"So I have experienced that when women manage to get a little further, they don't necessarily show solidarity with other women."* Explaining the phenomenon the interviewee highlights that a possible cause of such behaviour could be *"that the fights you have to fight out with men are already exhausting enough."* Furthermore, Mrs. Schmidt states, *"So as a board member, I was among the top XXX[38] of the company I was the only woman on that level in the company for three years. That's really chic if you're the only one there. Everybody knows you; everybody knows what you are saying."* The interviewee underlines the particular visibility of being the only female board member in the company. Furthermore, she states, *"I fought very hard to increase the number of women. But I think that there are also a lot of women who would say, well it´s quite nice if I am the only one here. If I have no female competition here. Not a nice move."* In accordance, Mrs. Schneider highlights the visibility one gets when being the only female board member. She states, *"As the only woman on the board, you have a completely*

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[38] Interviewee mentions the number of top managers of the company she works for.

different visibility. It happens very quickly that people look at you much more closely than at others." One interviewee assumes this particular visibility to be one of the reasons behind the queen bee syndrome. She argues:

> *"That is also the reason why some women don't want to have a woman next to them, because if they are the only woman, they are of course also treated very nicely by the group of men. So I was the only woman in the round of the Financial executive boards in the DAX. That was a very elitist position and situation to be in; well I would say there you would rather have advantages. Therefore, this bee queen syndrome exists. Some women may say, oh I feel very well here as the only woman and I do not want to share that."*

The expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt picks up on the debate of queen bee syndrome, by stating:

> *"We didn't fight to get more WoB, for them to walk through the door and simply close the door behind them. We can help to open the doors, I think this is one of our most important functions besides our political work, but it is the women themselves who have to go through and perform. But many women go through, slam the door and say: ´I did it all by myself and I am against the quota anyway.´ But here I wonder whether they are not aware of the whole movement of all the women's associations, which have worked very intensively together in recent years. The two Berlin declarations and all this voluntary commitment has generated so much movement. So women actually all have to say: ´I have come up this path, so I now have a responsibility for other women to follow me.´ Many women don't do that!"*

Above, interviewees highlight the phenomenon of queen bee syndrome, thus women in powerful positions lacking to promote other women. Nevertheless, despite the existence of the queen bee syndrome, several of the respondents show forms of solidarity with other women. Thereby some of the interviewed women actively engage in mentoring relationships. Mrs. Schulz states, *"I'm a mentor myself. First of all, you simply need support you need someone that supports you..."* Others show signs of solidarity with others by strategically using their network to promote other women. Thereby Mrs. Schneider states:

> *"Whenever I have to cancel, and I have to cancel quite frequently these days, because otherwise I have over-booking, then I always name other women that I know might be interested. And I always say to all women: "Please do me a favour, if you cancel anything, no matter if it's a board seat or a panel discussion, name another woman instead."*

Above, Mrs. Schneider shares her own personal way of promoting other women. Another female board member Mrs. Fischer highlights that she built up a women´s network in her company in order to increase the communication and networking activity among women. She highlights:

> *"So the underlying task was to build up a women's network in Germany and also to extend it a bit beyond the borders of Germany, because the women were not networking among each other. The women simply didn't talk to*

each other, so in small parts yes, but I mean over-arching and also exchanging experiences...so it was a very masculine culture (in the company) with things that I already almost would call abusive, but you just didn't talk about it. So when I came back and built up this network, I simply paid for trainings from my own department treasury...so we did a dress code consultation, we did voice training...and eventually in this way the women started talking to each other and opened up a little bit."

Above, Mrs. Fischer highlights her approach of trying to increase female solidarity by building up a women´s network in her company. In addition, Mrs. Schmidt puts the queen bee syndrome into perspective when stating:

"There are also women who support each other and who say: ´What can I do for you? What can I give you? What can I provide you with from my network?´ For example, calling someone when there is a vacancy that might be interesting for you."

Mrs. Winkler highlights that one frequently acts as a role model for others, thus having responsibility for younger generations. She states, *"I think you have to be aware of your responsibility that you function as a role model for future generations or for other women who are in a similar situation."* In accordance, the expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt picks up the idea of female board members acting as role models by stating, *"Women really have to set an example. Cause if we don't, then who will support us? In other words, demanding the support from women and the stabilisation of women's networks. This is not easy..."* Despite the existence of the queen bee syndrome, several of the above highlighted interviewees show forms of solidarity with other women.

To reach their current career position the interviewed women had to undergo great challenges in their career path. However, thirteen out of fifteen interviewees state that they have felt support from others on their career path. Mrs. Müller states that although she received a lot of support from others, she also faced *"a lot of headwind. Positive careers don't just make friends."* Mrs. Müller points out that when having a successful career one does not only receive unconditional positive feedback from everyone. Therefore, it is particularly crucial to have a strong network and support when striving for a corporate board or management position.

Thereby, Mrs. Winkler and Mrs. Müller highlight the importance of having a supportive family and social environment. Mrs. Winkler particularly highlights her parents when asked whether she has ever felt any support on her career path. Mrs. Müller underlines the impotence of having a solid family and social environment, by stating: *"It always needs a family or a social environment that holds you and supports you. Especially in the times of crisis, you need to have a stable network."* Interviewees also highlight the importance of having a mentor, frequently a direct superior at work. When asked whether she has felt support from others during her career path she states, Mrs. Schulz states:

"Support? Yes, I have experienced support...You simply need support. Basically that someone supports you, who also sees what you are doing, who

wants to promote you. And of course you also have to engage accordingly, so that the person also continues promoting you."

Mrs. Müller argues, *"I have always had, and this is important, benevolent mentors both men and women who have given me advice, i.e. older people who have been in the business longer and have given me valuable advice".* She refers to her own experience highlighting the importance of having benevolent mentors that can support one´s career path. Mrs. Friedrich, when asked whether she has ever felt any support from others during her career path, states, *"Yes, I have. At the beginning, when I took my first steps in a leadership position. There was one supervisor in particular who supported me a lot."* Reflecting upon her own experience Mrs. Weber states: *"I've had a very long mentoring relationship, over 20 years."* In addition, Mrs. Schneider argues: *"I certainly had support, mainly from men, because my superiors were always men. Not a mentor in the strict sense, but I had many supporters."* In accordance, Mrs. Becker underlines the importance of support from superiors when stating:

> *"I had a lot of support from superiors. My superiors were always the ones who supported me and promoted me. Yeah, well I didn't have any official mentor but I always had people who pulled me up and had a kind of mentoring relationship with me. I think exchange, feedback and reflection is important for a person."*

The interviewee particularly values the exchange and feedback that can emerge from a mentoring relationship. Furthermore, also Mrs. Schmidt states that she never had a single mentor but was always surrounded by a supportive environment. She argues:

> *"Because I have changed positions relatively often, I have never had a single mentor, so to say a single name or a single person who has accompanied me over several years and helped me. I did not. But I have always met people who have helped and supported me."*

Mrs. Schmidt highlights that she has always met people who supported her, although not having only a single person whom she would call her mentor. Furthermore, also Mrs. Krüger states that she has felt direct support from her boss, stating:

> *"Support, yes, from my boss. So he always was a big support. He supported me very much and was also in the position that he could support me. He told everyone that I was one of his best employees. So he sold me everywhere as his pick of the bunch."*

Then Mrs. Krüger highlights the benefit of having a mentor by stating: *"Yes, I do think a mentor is important when you're in a leadership position, simply to reflect."* In addition, Mrs. Fischer highlights the importance of having support from others. She states *"In the beginning of my career I had a board member who accompanied and supported me as a mentor for two years."* Furthermore, she highlights that throughout her entire life she has had mentors. She states, *"I simply looked for people myself."* Even today already holding seats on several cor-

porate boards, she still has a mentor. Mrs. Fischer states:

"Even now, when I started on the corporate board at XXX[39], since I don't have a background in XXX[40]...I took a look around on the board and then looked for a shareholder representative on the corporate board, who I liked and who I also consider to be competent. Then I simply told him that I think it would be great if he took on a mentoring role for me. That's what we're still doing today. There's an exchange taking place, that's very helpful."

In addition, Mrs. Friedrich highlights the importance of having a mentoring relationship when asked what she would suggest others aiming for a similar career position. She states *"ideally to find a mentor (for example, your own supervisor.)"* Also Mrs. Müller highlights that having a sparring partner can be very supportive when aiming towards a board position. She states:

"So I think it's very important to have a sparring partner, I wouldn't necessarily call it a mentor, you need benevolent people who know you and who want to support you and encourage you, from whom you accept criticism. I need someone to catch me when I fall and who can push me when I stop"

Mrs. Müller claims that having a supportive environment is of great benefit when aiming for a board position. In accordance, Mrs. Walter highlights *"I would recommend not doing the whole process alone, but getting sparring partners to support you."* Also Mrs. Schulz highlights the importance of having another person to promote and support one´s career path. She states: *"One needs a chance, you can't do that on your own, you need someone to support you."* As highlighted above when asked which suggestions the interviewees would give others also striving for a corporate board position, several suggest to look for a mentor in order to promote one´s career. In addition, Mrs. Winkler states *"looking for a mentor"* is crucial. Accordingly, the expert interviewee Mrs. Pohl suggests, *"of course, it's also about skilfully looking for mentors."* Mrs. Müller suggests engaging in alliances with others when striving for a career. She argues:

"Becoming aware that there are things you can influence and shape, then systematically planning, how can I get to a position and what things do I have to do to get there, how can I establish alliances and increase my own visibility, in other words self-advertisement."

Interviewees highlight that support from others is crucial when striving for a board position. Thereby respondents primarily highlight support from one´s family or social environment or from a direct superior at work, for example a mentor. Besides the support of family and superiors, interviewees claim that support from your own team and fellow co-workers is also crucial when striving for a career. Accordingly, Mrs. Winkler highlights:

"Career promotion...clearly you have to look up because those are the people who will pull you up. On the other side, it is also the team you come from

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[39] Interviewee mentions the name of the company she works for.
[40] Interviewee mentions a thematic background.

that lifts you up. So I think it's important not to forget that such a promotion is difficult if it's not supported by the same level."

Furthermore, drawing on her own experience the interviewee states that she has always felt full support from her team members, arguing: *"the team that I came from has shown me a lot of support and solidarity."* In line with Mrs. Winkler, Mrs. Krüger states, *"So in Germany, I have always led quite big teams and there I have always felt maximum solidarity from my teams."* Furthermore, Mrs. Schulz highlights the importance of support from colleagues, stating *"solidarity is of course always an issue; you always need the support of others like colleagues."*

Above, interviewees highlight the importance of having support from one's family, social environment, direct superiors at work and mentors. Furthermore, interviewees highlight another particular form of support from others. Respondents state that having supportive and bold decision-makers is crucial when trying to increase the number of WoB.

Interviewees claim that their direct superiors demonstrated boldness when appointing them to their current position. Mrs. Winkler states:

"Yes! I was lucky that the then XXX[41] leadership as well as the management board and the president were very courageous and bold, in their eyes to send a XXX[42] to XXX[43], and to somehow build up an office there. This decision was not only met by enthusiasm. But they simply had a lot of confidence in me and also pushed me through."

In addition, one interviewee highlights that "*Mr. XXX[44] had the courage to name me as the first female CFO in the DAX. That was quite outstanding."* In addition, Mrs. Schmidt highlights the boldness of her superiors when underlining importance of *"those who trusted me, those who had the courage to put me in a position where I could gain recognition for my work, those who told me we'd like to promote you."* When asked what needs to change in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards, Mrs. Schulz states:

"We need more courage from those decision-makers who can actually bring women into leadership positions, that they are not only looking for their fellow peers, in the sense that a man will not have children, therefore he is a safer bench than a woman who perhaps may end up getting pregnant and dropping out."

Above-mentioned interviewees highlight the importance of having bold decision-makers in order to increase the percentage of female board members. Furthermore, not only boldness from decision-makers, family, direct superiors and mentors is crucial. However, interviewees also highlight increasing solidarity and support among women themselves. Furthermore, respondents state when aiming for structural societal change, thus increasing the number of WoB, change

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[41] Interviewee mentions the name of the company she works for.
[42] Interviewee mentions background information about herself.
[43] Interviewee mentions the name of a country.
[44] Interviewee mentions the name of the company's CEO.

needs to be triggered by both men and women. Interviewees highlight that by working together change can be triggered more effectively. Mrs. Walter states, *"It would also be nice if this wouldn´t be women against men. It would be nice if both of them became aware that only together and with each other is the best possible combination to achieve equality."*

Summarising, in the above section, I highlighted interview extracts addressing the topic of "Individual Support and Personal Networks." Thirteen out of fifteen interviewees highlight the importance of having individual support from others and personal networks in their own career path. Interviewees underline forms of having "power without" others by referring to the lack of solidarity among women. Furthermore, interviewees state that women frequently tend to lack the necessary networks. The lack of solidarity among women, in the literature frequently described as the queen bee syndrome, describes a phenomenon of "power without" others, when women who have managed to hold powerful positions fail to promote others, frequently younger women. However, interviewees´ actions refute the queen bee syndrome by highlighting forms of "power with" others. Thereby, interviewees state that they act as mentors for younger generations, having built up female networks and trying to name other interested women when having to decline a career offer. Interviewees highlight the importance of having support from others and being engaged in networks. Furthermore, interviewees underline the importance of having boldness from decision-makers when aiming to increase the number of WoB.

4.1.5. Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations

In the following section, I will address German interview extracts on the topic of "Societal Structures" by highlighting the effects of societal expectations and presumed gender roles for women striving for a board position. All fifteen interviewees refer to the importance of societal structures at one point during the interviews. Thereby societal structures can play an influential role when aiming to increase the number of women on corporate boards. Particularly societal gender role expectations are pointed out. Such expectations can indirectly influence a person´s way of action. Thus, the interviewed female board members argue that such societal structures can greatly influence female career paths. In the following, I will first address whether female interviewees have ever felt that they were being treated differently than their male colleagues. Here, forms of "power over" and "power to" become apparent. Secondly, I will highlight interview extracts referring to existing socio-cultural expectations, thus which kind of expectations female interviewees are frequently confronted with in the professional world. Interviewees describe such socio-cultural expectations, frequently associating women to childcare and household responsibilities as forms of "power without." Thirdly, interviewees see the root cause of differential treatment and distinct expectations in socialisation processes. Here, I will highlight interview extracts addressing the phenomenon of "think manager, think male." This phenomenon de-

scribing a form of "power over", states that manager characteristics are frequently associated rather to stereotypical male than to stereotypical female characteristics. I will then list interview extracts describing that key decision-making positions in the corporate world are still largely male dominated, thus showing forms of "power over." I will conclude this section by highlighting interview extracts referring to "power to." Thereby interviewees highlight that the aim is having normality, thus gender equity on corporate boards.

When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards, Mrs. Schneider highlights a set of interconnected and mutually influencing factors. She states that current policies are reinforcing existing gender roles, by stating: *"We have a system of policies such as "Ehegattensplitting" and "Herdprämie", which further deepen an established traditional model".* Furthermore, Mrs. Schneider highlights:

> *"This is complemented by the social role model we have in Germany, which puts pressure on women when they try to combine having a family with a career...In addition, there are stereotypes. So men and women have in mind women are diligent and loyal, efficient and empathetic and men are determined and ambitious and assertive. If I aim to fill a position on a corporate board, then you think that person needs to be assertive and determined. We have it in our heads and therefore we always fall for our own stereotypes. And it is difficult to prove the opposite when there are only few examples around."*

Mrs. Schneider gives an overview of different societal factors that may influence the situation of female board members. Thereby she particularly highlights the following factors: current set of policies, existing gender roles and gender stereotypes as well as the lack of role models.

When asked whether the interviewees have ever felt that they were being treated differently than their male colleagues, seven of the fifteen interviewees affirmatively. Thereby five of these seven interviewees state that they have experienced this differential treatment in both a positive and negative way. Mrs. Schneider responds to the question whether she has ever been treated differently:

> *"Yes, but positive as well as negative. Some people don't perceive you as much as a competitor; there you have a different degree of freedom. So you can rather give advice to a man. When I gave advice it was perceived as advice, if a young man did that it was perceived as a know-it-all attitude."*

The interviewee highlights her experience with differential treatment. She states that she has experienced differential treatment in a positive as well as a negative way. Mrs. Schneider highlights that as a woman she was frequently not as much perceived as a competitor. On the other hand, she argues that she has also experienced negative forms of differential treatment, stating:

> *"So it is a phenomenon that every woman in Germany will be able to tell you. You state an argument and it is not being heard and five minutes later a man says exactly the same thing and the idea is perceived as being excel-*

lent. That is really the case. In men's circles women are simply overheard when they are alone. And when you say, ´I've just said that´, it comes across as being bitchy."

Mrs. Schneider highlights a negative form of differential treatment she has experienced. She states that it seems to be a common phenomenon that as a single female in a male circle one tends to be overheard. Mrs. Krüger sharing her experience with differential treatment argues:

"Treated differently? Yes always, almost always. So first of all in a positive sense, always this caring. But also in a negative sense with comments like ´this science is nothing for your sunny disposition, you will lose your playful easiness; it's a back-breaking job.´"

In line with the before mentioned, Mrs. Schmidt highlights: *"Treated differently than male colleagues? Yes definitely! Otherwise, we wouldn't have this glass ceiling. But I think you also have to see there are positive and negative sides to it."* Mrs. Schmidt then recalls her experience stating:

"Working with men, I find that men don't have that alpha dog attitude towards a woman as much. Men quickly clarify the hierarchy among each other, and that goes all the way up to the board level. Sometimes you see power struggles up there, which are hilarious to watch. Men often don´t have these sort of power struggles with women. They often don't really know how to deal with a woman. Frequently I experience that they are a bit protective. It gets difficult when you get into a conflict with them, because then they often cannot solve the conflict. Using the hierarchical power struggles, as they do in the male world, that is often not possible. I think they have a certain natural bite inhibition towards women."

The interviewee highlights her experience with differential treatment. She highlights that she has perceived a differential treatment in form of protective behaviour from her male colleagues. In addition, Mrs. Walter addresses this dichotomy of differential sex treatment. When asked whether she has ever felt that she was being treated differently than her male colleagues, she responds:

"Yes, it starts with: ´Good morning Mrs. Walter, good morning gentlemen.´ Well, that has something to do with visibility. If I am the only woman, then I am also visible...so a kind of exposed position. I am also a woman in engineering. In 1991 or 1992, I did this training course...and being an engineer I have always felt completely natural in my occupational role. Well, so I get to this training course and there's a professor looking at me and saying: ´Oh, a woman! ´ So he was fascinated to see a female engineer in front of him, because he probably hadn´t seen too many female engineers in his life. In this situation you basically think: Am I in a zoo? Of course that wouldn´t happen to men."

The interviewee highlights the particular visibility that one receives when being the only woman in a largely male dominated sector. Mrs. Schmidt also addressing the issue of visibility, stating that it can be used for something positive. She

highlights:

"As a woman, you are sometimes much more in the spotlight. Then you can do something positive with it. When I'm at an event with 100 men, then they know my name after I pose a question. However, I probably don't know a single man's name at the end because I've simply seen so many men in grey suits."

Mrs. Schmidt highlights that, as a woman in a largely male dominated area one is much more in the spotlight. She argues that this particular visibility can be used for positive purposes. Furthermore, Mrs. Schmidt then continues to highlight negative forms of differential treatment that she has experienced, stating:

"What I see as negative is the issue of being taken seriously. Often I think I've been hired because I'm such a nice, smiling, blonde. And then later they found out that there is a very hard core with very clear views inside and that I am very tough. I think there were a couple of people who were frightened once they noticed that I am not easy to be manipulated. It's exhausting always being underestimated at the beginning, to have to fight very hard, to have to prove very strongly that you can do something and that you are a specialist in your field."

Mrs. Schmidt highlighting the negative forms of differential treatment sees it as a challenge always being underestimated and constantly having to prove oneself. She then recalls a concrete experience, stating:

"I once had this case of a legal problem. I could have resolved it easily cause it was my area of expertise and I knew it like the back of my hand. But none of my executive colleagues believed me. So I hired an external expert who said exactly the same thing that I had said before. But then of course everyone had forgotten that I had said exactly the same thing before."

Above, the interviewee recalls one of her personal experiences when her colleagues preferred to take advice from an external expert than making use of her expertise. In addition, other interviewees have encountered similar experiences of not being taken seriously. The expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt recalls a situation in which her matter was not taken seriously. She recalls a conference on gender equity on corporate boards when one of the keynote speakers, a male board member, stated, "*Ladies, you must be aware that board meetings are not tea parties.*" She highlights that this event eventually triggered and promoted the founding of an initiative and association aiming to increase the number of WoB.

Mrs. Müller when asked whether she has ever experienced differential treatment argues: *"Yes, I have. Some men simply tend to overlook women for certain positions. Like: ´You?...A chairman?...A woman?...No, that is not possible!´ Well, maybe I can do it even better."* Mrs. Müller argues that this tendency of "overlooking" female candidates is not necessarily an act of conscious viciousness. Rather, she argues such behaviour is *"more like a blind spot, so not consciously. You simply cannot give up. I am a determined person, if I have a goal then I also want to achieve it, I won't be pushed aside."* The above interviewees have ex-

perienced differential treatment. Thereby the respondents recall both positive as well as negative forms of treatment. Mrs. Friedrich states that she does not recall having been treated differently than her male colleagues, only in the beginning of her career. She states:

"No, actually... not anymore...so maybe in the beginning of my career, when I was still a young woman in my late 20s and at the same management level there were only men, but they were all 10, 15 or 20 years older than me. Yes, perhaps treated a little different like along the lines of ´Oh, that young girl´ and so on. But I didn´t care and I've already forgotten all about it. I hope these times are now over. No, I don't have the feeling to be treated differently."

Contrary to Mrs. Friedrich, Mrs. Winkler responds:

"Every day (laughter). Yes, of course! For example that my colleague was transferred abroad and at the same time got promoted although he didn´t even have to build up the office by the way. But clearly also on a daily basis, I think that as a woman you have to make yourself heard again and again and again. Especially when I am in meetings with my colleagues, then it is often assumed that I am the secretary or that I will write the minutes. Then the guys are always pretty surprised once I say: ´No gentlemen, I'm chairing the meeting today.´ (laughing) I think people rather tend to listen to men talk than to women, so as a woman you always have to mention a point five times before you are being heard, with a man once or twice is often enough."

Mrs. Winkler states that she experiences differential treatment every day. She argues that in meetings people often assume that she is the secretary or that she is in charge of writing the protocol. Also highlighting the assumption that women tend to write the protocol, Mrs. Müller states:

"That is something I have understood working in my industry...so when you came to meetings in XXX[45], you could be certain that there were women sitting there, writing the minutes. Those were also the expectations. Even at the European meetings...´the women are allowed to sit here, so best you write the minutes cause you do that so well.´ When it came down to actually taking decisions, I once experienced this at a negotiation marathon, I was the one representing the majority of affected employees and then two male chairmen held summit talks and I wasn't even invited. I was per se kept out of these talks. And I would even say that that was no bad will on their part. I would say, today that would not happen like that anymore. Today we also have a different generation of men."

Mrs. Müller states that once she was simply kept out of summit talks although she was the one representing the greatest part of employees. She assumes that her male colleagues did not deliberately want to exclude her from the talks. Rather, it seemed to be a blind spot, thus out of their imagination to include a woman in the summit.

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[45] Interviewee mentions her industry.

Interviewees argue that underlying socio-cultural expectations and assumptions can greatly influence female career paths. Societal expectations can greatly influence the behaviour of men and women accordingly, thus creating pressure. Thereby subconsciously prescribing how a man or a woman shall act according to existing stereotypical masculine or feminine assumptions. Interviewees highlight that women are still frequently expected to take care of the household and children. When taking up the majority of household and childcare duties in addition striving for a career, one has unequal working conditions. This is different in comparison to a person that is only expected to focus on one's career. Highlighting this difference in working and living conditions, the expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig states:

> *"It is important to understand which burdens women are facing. When one is given the responsibility for bringing up children and caring for the elderly and for the household, then the objective* prerequisites *are different as if I, in my role as the breadwinner for the family, am freed from all these activities and am only responsible for doing my job."*

The interviewee argues that someone holding multiple responsibilities has objectively different prerequisites than someone who is solely responsible for being the breadwinner of the family. In accordance, expert interviewee Mrs. Pohl states: *"it is important to keep on looking at, and being horrified at, how different the living conditions of women and men are in such a progressive country."* Furthermore, she claims that women and men face different expectations. She argues:

> *"At the same time you have to see, many women have children and many women are held responsible for ensuring that when they are mothers, they are responsible for bringing up these children, unlike the fathers. ´They hardly care about raising their children.´ This stereotype and this expectation must stop. I think that is the key. And how can we ensure improvement? By improving childcare facilities. And what is not happening? Exactly that..."*

The expert interviewees argue that women often still face different objective prerequisites, as in living and working conditions, than men.

Several interviewees argue that women are frequently expected to be perfect. They are expected to be a perfect mother, housewife and be good at their job. When asked which expectations society has upon women in Germany, one female board member, Mrs. Walter states: *"The first thing that comes to my mind is "Eierlegende Wollmilchsau[46]", thus simply being perfect."* She then continues to explain the idea by stating: *"We still have this, and that's typically German, this "Rabenmutter." This mother image, with which you also create expectations, that if you are a mother then with all your heart."* Also drawing upon the phenomenon of perfectionism Mrs. Winkler states:

> *"So I think in the professional context the expectations in Germany are if you*

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[46] Eierlegende Wollmilchsau – Means an "egg-laying, milk-bearing woolly sow." A person satisfying all demands and being simply perfect at everything.

have a good degree and you have accomplished a successful academic path, then do everything. So please have a functioning family life but also a good job. And best of all you should still be good-looking and you shall not weigh like 10 kg too much and always have your fingernails beautifully manicured."

The interviewee recalls that women are frequently expected to be perfect, thus being successful at their job and having a happy family life, all while being pretty to look at. In addition, Mrs. Schneider refers to the idea of perfectionism. When asked what expectations society has upon women, she states:

"Perfectionism: looking good, having children and a career, but not too much career. So you also have to take care of the school bag, the kindergarten and the parents' evening. I think currently women are facing expectations that are simply not attainable. And I think many young women are really stressed out about that."

The female board member states that such expectations can create a high level of stress and pressure particularly for younger women.

Interviewees see the root cause of differential treatment in the socialisation of boys and girls. Mrs. Müller states:

"Girls are or were often brought up in line with the idea that you must please others; you must be nice and you must not rub somebody up the wrong way. So in the 60's, when I grew up, girls were brought up very streamlined. According to the idea, you have to be nice, you have to be friendly, and you have to be cute. That doesn't necessarily help in the professional world. When aiming for a career, high-heeled shoes and short skirts can help only to a certain extent. And I am not only referring to the outfit."

The interviewee highlights that girls and boys are often socialised differently. She argues that girls tend to be raised to be nice and cute. These characteristics do not necessarily help in the corporate world. Furthermore, when asked which suggestions she would give to younger women aiming for a similar career position, she states:

"Firstly, you have to get a thick skin. The moment you climb up the career ladder, you will not only have friends but there will also be many envious people. There will be many attacks and you will have to face them. Men can do that better, because they are socialized earlier to do so, us girls we are not."

Also addressing the difference in socialisation processes, Mrs. Weber states:

"I think we're still being socialized in a way...I think we still have very classical and traditional images in our heads. It needs new educational concepts, it really starts in kindergarten. And then of course there's commercials and advertising. So I think our value system is still very much associated to traditional gender role models, so the woman as the caretaker. Not much has

changed. In my opinion, we also don't have a good model in society in terms of having equal partnerships."

The interviewee states that ideas rooted in traditional gender roles are still prevalent within German society. She believes education play a crucial role when triggering societal change. In line with the before mentioned, Mrs. Schmidt states:

"Women are often supposed to be nice and lovely. Whenever a woman starts becoming tough, which is seen as something wonderful for a man, a woman is considered bitchy. Women are quickly seen as being bitchy when they know what they want, also when they want to have power and leadership, which is seen as a great characteristic for men."

She highlights that women are frequently socialised to be nice and lovely. Mrs. Friedrich highlights traditional gender role images, when asked which expectations women face in Germany.

"Somewhere I think there is still this traditional image, with woman and family. I think there are still large parts of society that have a bit of a traditional conservative image; the woman being the mother and the one organising the family. I very much hope that the younger generation will be less concerned with this traditional image. That's what I'd like to see at least."

The interviewee assumes that parts of society still hold a rather traditional image of women. However, she hopes that such expectations are changing among the younger generation. In accordance to the before mentioned, when asked which societal expectations women are frequently confronted with, Mrs. Weber argues: *"Well, I think you often see her as a caregiver, so childcare, household and parents. There is still a lot being dumped on woman."* Mrs. Schmidt also addressing traditional gender role segregation between men and women highlights the issue of childcare. She argues that childcare is still primarily being associated to mothers rather than fathers. Thereby she states:

"In our culture, it is still not normal for men to take care of children. Nevertheless, I now know more and more couples where the male partner puts his career on the back burner for the woman's career; yes, these are always fierce discussions in these families. But what is interesting is that I really don't know anybody where man and woman can equally have their careers next to each other. There is always someone who has to in a sense slow down his or her career for the other."

She highlights societal changes. She observes fathers becoming more involved in childcare responsibilities. Thereby, she states it seems to be common that one of the partners has to cut back on his or her career for the other. In addition, Mrs. Fischer highlights the importance of socio-cultural factors when asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards in Germany. She responds:

"the socio-cultural background that we have in Germany...So when you consider that not even 40 years ago women were not allowed to have a job without the husband's signature...I get goose bumps. So I think we made

some progress, but we didn't make a lot of progress. This patriarchy, that simply still exists and men will not let that be taken away very quickly, at least not as long as we women don't defend ourselves against it and unite and also treat each other with more solidarity".

The interviewee recalls that approximately 40 years ago women were still required to have the signature of their husband when wanting to work. She highlights that since then progress has been made. Nevertheless, it is still a long way in order to dismantle patriarchy and achieve actual gender equality. In line with Mrs. Fischer, Mrs. Schulz highlights:

"I believe that this older generation still has the expectation: woman equals household. The younger generation says exactly the opposite: we want to have a professional development and must also work due to financial reasons. We cannot simply live of one salary. These are, of course, processes in which a society also changes. Today, two income households are quite normal."

The interviewee sees a change of societal expectations. The interviewee segregates societal expectations into two groups: the older generation and the younger generation. She assumes that large parts of the older generation still expect women to take care of the household and childcare. She assumes that the younger generation does strive towards more gender equality. Mrs. Walter sees socio-cultural expectations and values as the main reason for the underrepresentation of women on corporate boards in Germany. Thereby she states:

"So from society and politics, there are things that are simply not supportive. We still have a West-German image in the FRG. The GDR history has been added only by accession, but unfortunately, no effective integration has taken place. The old "breadwinner" model of the Federal Republic of Germany is still formative. Although reality has already changed. That is not supportive, because it still implies, the man is the breadwinner and the woman takes care of the household, the child, the kitchen and the cellar. Also "Ehegattensplitting" is simply not supportive in this way."

The interviewee states that such segregated gender role expectations do not necessarily assist in increasing the number of women on corporate boards and achieving gender equality. When asked why women are still underrepresented on corporate boards in Germany, the expert interviewee Mrs. Pohl states, *"I believe the main reasons and obstacles are rooted in the idea of gender role stereotypes."* She highlights gender role stereotypes as being a decisive reason for female underrepresentation on boards. In addition, Mrs. Weber states, *"We have a system of social values that rather hinders than promotes."* In addition, Mrs. Winkler bluntly states, *"there's a lack of other role models, realistic role models."* She highlights *"so when you're still the only woman in the room..."* She states there are still too few women on management or corporate boards who could act as role models. She continues highlighting the lack of gender role models in our society, by stating, *"so role models for women and also for men are simply important. And also to ask how do we get to the point where there are*

more role models. Well, I think we need a few more women who are a little bit more outspoken." Mrs. Krüger also addressing the lack of role models states that her former direct superior:

> *"He never disliked me, he just didn't understand what to do with a woman who doesn't stop doing new things. That just didn't fit into his cliché. Although I don't think he had any prejudices, but he simply lacked having a comparison or a model where he could say, ´Oh, she's just like that woman was back then.´"*

The interviewee states that there is still a lack of female role models in higher management positions. When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards Mrs. Krüger asks, *"Maybe another role model problem?"* The interviewees highlight the importance of having female role models in upper management positions.

Interviewees see the root of differential treatment and expectations in a different kind of socialization. Respondents state that this is also visible in a professional context. Thereby interviewees highlight that managers are still frequently associated to stereotypical male characteristics rather than stereotypical female characteristics. Power, respondents state, tends to be primarily associated to men rather than to women. Once a woman does hold a powerful position interviewees have experienced being labelled as cold-hearted, hard-lined and uncompromising. When asked how a female board member or female manager is seen by society, Mrs. Winkler states: *"In many societies, female managers are still frowned upon."* Contrary to Mrs. Winkler´s experience, others believe female managers are acknowledged by German society. The expert interviewee Mrs. Brandt states: *"It is now taken for granted in Germany."* In line with Mrs. Brandt´s statement, Mrs. Friedrich states *"Successful female managers? I think positive."* Also Mrs. Krüger assumes that female managers are recognised. She states *"Female Managers? I think it's recognised by society. But my society is probably a different one than the Bavarian one."* While Mrs. Krüger, Mrs. Friedrich and Mrs. Brandt believe that female managers are generally recognised by German society, Mrs. Schneider would disagree, stating:

> *"Successful female managers? Rather sceptical. It is scientifically proven that career women are seen as competent but absolutely unappealing. Here, again the stereotype. A woman doing a job like this has to be tough, having no scruples, must be rather male. And in case of doubt doesn't take care of her family and children. She is judged to be very harsh and therefore unappealing."*

She states that female managers are seen as being harsh and unappealing. She refers to current research stating that career-oriented women are regarded as being competent but very unappealing. Addressing the issue of power Mrs. Schmidt states that often power is often not associated to women. She argues: *"Well, I think that people don´t like to associate power to a woman. That's some-*

thing you can't openly discuss. While men want power as a matter of course and can say it openly, women and power that always seems a little bit indecent." In line with Mrs. Schneider and Mrs. Schmidt, Mrs. Winkler has the perception that female managers are still regarded as being harsh. She states:

> *"So I think in German society it's always a bit associated with a certain degree of harshness. I think that relatively many women are assumed to be cold-hearted. I also believe that it is something that is not only seen as something positive. So asking, maybe she didn´t set her priorities correctly? Or why does she do that? Surely it always depends a bit on the social class. So you're still a bit of an exception."*

The interviewee argues that female managers are still not something common. Frequently one is confronted with stereotypes and prejudices, at times assuming that one is cold-hearted and harsh. In line with the before mentioned, Mrs. Müller argues that female managers are still predominantly viewed with scepticism. She highlights:

> *"Sceptically, mostly sceptically; cause everyone knows that in order to get there, one must have left a couple of skeletons in one´s closet; or one must have walked deliberately over others; or suspecting that it must have been something else that brought you to where you are now, i.e. the casting couch. So society has not yet reached the point where it simply takes note of this."*

The female board member analyses the reasons behind this perceived scepticism. She states that to arrive at such a high-level corporate position others usually assume that one must have left several skeletons in the closet or have done sexual favours. In addition, Mrs. Becker believes that female managers are still largely seen as something critical:

> *"I still have the impression that a woman is seen critically, often being described as being harsh. You get this stamp of harshness and being uncompromising. Or you are simply too soft. And then you are not successful and then you can forget it anyways. I am convinced that this is not true. So I personally got this title (of harshness) from the peer group or perhaps from the top. But I have not yet received this feedback from my own team. I have always felt super comfortable in my own team and don't have the impression that I am seen as being harsh. Rather as being successful, uncomplicated and visionary."*

The interviewee shares her experience that she has been labelled as being harsh and uncompromising. In line with the before mentioned interviewees, she assumes that women in leadership positions still tend to be largely regarded with scepticism. Mrs. Weber highlights the key role of press influencing the public image of female managers. She observes that the press writes differently about female than male managers. When asked how female managers are regarded by German society, she states *"very mixed. I mean you have the media...who report on women, who for certain reasons decide to not continue with their job,*

differently than on men." She perceives that female managers are seen with mixed feelings. She assumes that one part of society perceives female managers as being positive role models. Another part of society she assumes would see female managers as being irresponsible towards their children and husband, thus stating:

> *"So there are those who think it's great that there are these role models. But there are also those who say you are being irresponsible cause how can you do that? And then your family and children suffer and the man, oh the poor man...there are still those in society who live a more conservative traditional model."*

In line with Mrs. Weber, Mrs. Walter believes female managers are viewed with mixed feelings. When asked how a female manager is viewed by society, she highlights:

> *"I think still quite ambivalent. I think that depends on whom I ask. There are certainly societal layers who think it's really great. But there's also the view, well then she didn't get a man, so basically everything that denounces or devalues women. I don't think it's generally seen as a positive thing."*

The interviewee highlights that one part of society may see female managers positively, others see it rather negatively. In addition, Mrs. Schulz highlights underlying mixed feelings when stating, *"I think a bit mixed, on the one hand, certainly some envy. You certainly face much stronger observation than men do, because you just expect a lot more from a woman, so they are under an enormous amount of pressure to succeed."* The interviewee highlights that female managers are under continuous observation, which may lead to a high degree of pressure.

Above, interviewees highlight that female managers are still largely seen with mixed feelings. According to their experience, women are frequently assumed to be less capable than men working in a professional context. Mrs. Fischer highlights: *"You often trust men more than you trust women."* In addition, Mrs. Schmidt highlights the issue of trust when referring to the glass ceiling. She states, *"Well, there's still this glass ceiling in Germany and the world. Women are simply less trusted. If it´s usually men making decisions, then they just pick their own kind. That means they pick men who are similar to their own kind...basically these prejudices."* Mrs. Walter sees the root cause in unconscious gender clichés that may trigger the belief that men are more capable of holding leadership positions. She states:

> *"Also in the business world, men and women are de jure equal and have equal opportunities; I believe de facto that is not the case. I believe very deeply rooted in the unconsciousness of both men and women there are sometimes certain gender role models and clichés in which the man is associated to leadership and the woman is adjudged to subordination."*

The interviewee highlights that women and men might be de jure gender equal; but not de facto. Such underestimation can lead to women having to prove

themselves in management positions. Mrs. Schulz argues that it is exhausting constantly being underestimated. She then highlights that one constantly has to prove oneself. Mrs. Schulz then highlights a recently commonly viewed phenomenon in Germany. Several female board members, who were newly appointed, quickly left their position again. She argues:

> *"I also have to stay in these positions, because we have seen several female managers and corporate board members who were gone after a relatively short time. The question is also why do they give up these positions? Perhaps because at some point it is simply too exhausting constantly having to prove yourself over and over again. I think that's different with men. Of course, once you're in this position, you can't make any major mistakes, but I don't think it's as extreme as it is for women. Unfortunately!"*

The interviewee recalls that constantly having to proof oneself due to the fact of being underestimated is exhausting.

Above, I highlighted interview extracts addressing the "think manager, think male" phenomenon. Interviewees have experienced women to be frequently underestimated when in corporate leadership positions. Respondents claim that the corporate world is still largely focused upon male careers. Especially powerful positions in the corporate world, as for instance supervisory or management boards, still tend to be primarily male dominated. The expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig claims that one of the main reasons behind female underrepresentation on corporate boards is that *"the career path in Germany is still designed for male careers."* Furthermore, she explains this phenomenon stating, *"Careers develop between the age of 27 and 38. And that is exactly the age where women have children...So we need more time sovereignty for employees, especially in the rush hour of life. Late careers must also be made possible..."*

Other interviewees state that the fields they are working in are still largely male-dominated. Mrs. Krüger working in the pharmaceutical industry states: *"Well, we just have a male-dominated professional world...still...and in medicine quite extreme. So in medicine at a hospital, if it's not the traditional women's subjects like ophthalmology or gynaecology, its men who are always the bosses."* The interviewee highlights that in medicine, for example, men still frequently hold key positions at hospitals, unless these are stereotypical female professional fields. Mrs. Schulz working in the construction business states: *"Of course we have a very strong macho world, all these male networks."* Here the interviewee particularly refers to male networks. Thereby the classical old-men´s networks are frequently mentioned when new corporate board positions are being appointed. In addition, Mrs. Müller highlights the idea of a male-dominated corporate world, by stating:

> *"I was never a feminist until I started working at XXX[47]. So I was in an academic environment for a long time and there a lot seemed quite unproblematic to me, which was naive. This was then refuted in my profes-*

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[47] Interviewee mentions the name of the company she works for.

sional life, where I had to learn very painfully that this is a man´s world. And it is still very strongly dominated by men. That is still the case today."

The female board member argues that it was only after she started working for her current employer that she became a feminist; thus after realising that her industry was largely male-dominated. She then refers to the concept of glass ceilings, stating:

"When you hear about glass ceilings, that's something abstract. So when they don't see a glass ceiling, many say, ´Well, that's not true at all, in the end it's the women themselves who don't want to take the last step.´ But it's not like that; it's a male-dominated world."

Mrs. Müller emphasises that the corporate world is still largely male dominated. Defining the glass ceiling, she states:

"Men, who are simply sitting in the key positions, will always look for those who are similar to their own character, world view and way of living. And not the blatant opposite...They look for people, primarily other men or they look for a woman who acts like a man".

Above, Mrs. Müller describes the phenomenon of "mono-culture"; thus, when people in powerful positions looking for successors tend to choose people with similar character traits. This results in a repetitive cycle. This means people with very similar character traits occupying powerful corporate positions. Mrs. Müller however sees a possible disruption of this cycle with the newly emerging digitalisation. She states, *"It's going to change a little bit with digitalisation issues, but up to now it is like that."*

Above I have listed interview extracts highlighting that powerful corporate positions are still largely male dominated. Nevertheless, recent changes, as the increase of the percentage of female board members in Germany, are becoming apparent. Furthermore, interviewees state that the ultimate aim should be to achieve normality. This means that female board members should not be seen as a woman but rather as another board member. Interviewees highlight that the aim is to ensure gender equity on corporate boards. Despite an increase in the percentage of female board members, women still tend to be the exception on boards. Accordingly, Mrs. Schneider argues, *"The goal is normality. We should have role models, regardless whether male or female, where you can see that it works where stereotypes start disappearing; to get there I think we need quotas."* When asked how to achieve such normality, thus gender equity on corporate boards, Mrs. Becker highlights the crucial role of key decision-makers. She still sees a lack of courage among decision-makers when appointing women to powerful positions. When asked what should change in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards, she responds:

"What would have to change is having the guts to simply try it out. Because those who decide are usually still from the older generation. I think from the moment you start seeing a few women up there, things will automatically change. It's just unfamiliar. The one who decides moves on an unfamiliar ter-

rain and needs a lot of courage and willingness to take the risks because he breaks out of a familiar pattern. And with especially important positions you probably still think about it very carefully, you can understand everything very well from the point of view of the person."

The interviewee highlights that currently key decision-makers are still largely older men. She states, when appointing women instead of men to key corporate positions decision makers leave the usual terrain. The expert interviewee Mrs. Pohl believes that in order to achieve normality a general culture change is necessary. She highlights:

"I think we would need a cultural change. Yes, I really mean that. Namely a cultural change in terms of socialisation processes. These must take place differently; the idea of what women and men can do must change. And I also believe that in the short-term a quota could help. Just to create something like a critical mass. There are also studies on this, if the critical mass is reached then you can let it go again, but I don't think that is such a bad idea until then."

In line with Mrs. Pohl, Mrs. Fischer also addressing the importance of cultural and societal change, states, *"People always say: ´Now we have achieved everything, we have 30% women on corporate boards.´ Us Germany we are very good at working through figures, but that´s what´s behind these figures, these social changes, we are not keeping pace with them."* She emphasises the importance of triggering actual societal change.

Summarising the section above, I highlighted interview extracts addressing "Societal Structures." Thereby, all fifteen interviewees highlight the importance that societal structures play when trying to achieve gender board equity. First of all, I summarised interview extracts highlighting whether interviewees have ever felt that they were being treated differently than their male colleagues. Here, interviewees highlighted both forms of "power over" and "power to." I then listed statements addressing current socio-cultural expectations women and men are primarily confronted with, primarily addressing forms of "power over." Afterwards I listed statements referring to socialisation processes. I then summarised interview extracts addressing the phenomenon of "think manager, think male." Thereby interviewees underline the idea of "power over" that manager characteristics are frequently associated rather to stereotypical male than to stereotypical female characteristics. Eventually I highlighted interview extracts stating that key decision-making positions in the corporate world are still largely male dominated. Summarising the section the idea of achieving normality, thus gender equity on corporate boards, is highlighted as a form of "power to."

Summary

Above, I highlighted findings from the fifteen conducted interviews with female CEOs, top managers and board members in Germany. I summarised the interview extracts into five most frequently mentioned thematic sections. First of all, I addressed the topic of "Laws and Policies." Interviewees highlighted forms of

"power over" when referring to the policies of "Herdprämie", "Ehegattensplitting" and "Müttergeld." Thereby respondents argue that such policies tend to reinforce established gender roles. The "Frauenquote" and other gender equality public- and corporate policies are referred to as triggering forms of "power to." Secondly, I highlighted the topic of "Compatibility: Family and Career." Interviewees criticise as forms of "power over" insufficient childcare facilities. Furthermore, childcare responsibilities are primarily associated to mothers rather than fathers. Interviewees then describe a double burden women frequently have to deal with when striving for a career. This means next to their career, also being responsible for childcare and household duties. After birth, mothers still tend to take longer career breaks than fathers and are much more likely to work part-time. Part-time work is frequently seen as a career killer, eventually leading to a demolition of female careers. As forms of "power to" interviewees highlight the importance of more flexible childcare opening hours and suggest focussing "compatibility programmes" also on fathers. Thirdly, I summarised interview extracts referring to "Personal Initiative." Interviewees criticise a lack of confidence in one's own capabilities and an assumed lack of interest in management positions as forms of "power over." Respondents highlight forms of "power to" by underlining the importance of being pro-active and increasing one's visibility when striving for a career position. One way to increase one´s visibility could be striving for a STEM career. Fourthly, I addressed the topic of "Individual Support and Networks." Interviewees criticise as forms of "power over" the current lack of support and solidarity among women, by referring to the "queen bee syndrome." Then respondents highlight forms of "power to" when underlining the importance of having a supportive social and professional environment. Summarising the chapter I address "Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations." Interviewees highlight both positive and negative differential treatment, thus forms of "power to" and "power over" they have experienced. Thereby, frequently not being taken serious eventually leading to constantly having to proof oneself. Traditional socio-cultural gender expectations are highlighted. Thereby men are seen as the primary breadwinners while women tend to take of childcare- and household duties. Then the "think manager think male" phenomenon is described. Women state that people still tend to associate typical manager characteristics rather with stereotypical male than female characteristics. Forms of "power to" are mentioned when interviewees highlight women's increased visibility while being in the minority in largely male corporate boards. This visibility can also be used for positive purposes. Interviewees state the aim is achieving normality, thus having gender equality in the corporate as well as social world. Ultimately, female board members emphasise that their aim is achieving normality. This means that gender equity on boards will be as something natural and normal.

4.2. Findings: Women on Corporate Boards in China

Figure 3

Categories	Power OVER	Power TO	Power WITH-OUT	Power WITH
Laws & Policies	-lack of enforcement mechanisms -not felt supported by policies -policies sometimes have unintended side effects: earlier retirement policy for women, two-child family planning policy	-more public and corporate policies needed for regulating gender inequalities -one-child family planning policy		
Compatibility: Family & Career	-expectations family of origin: often expecting women to get married and have a baby -childcare often seen as mothers´ responsibility -Double burden: childcare, household and career -Mothers longer career breaks due to maternity leave -maternity leave seen as burden for SMEs might trigger discrimination	-grandparents often tend to take up childcare duties, therefore, interviewees do not mention improvement of childcare facilities as major aim		
Personal Initiative	-lack confidence "I am not good enough…" -undesirable management positions?	-personal initiative, pro-activeness, lifelong learning crucial -STEM careers: high earning potential and newly emerging area		
Individual Support & Networks			-women often lack of networking abilities; no access to powerful networks -no solidarity among women, ´queen bee syndrome´	-supportive social and professional environment crucial for career development - emphasise importance of support from national and international level
Societal Structures: *Gender Roles & Expectations*	-traditional socio-cultural societal gender expectations: male breadwinner, woman care taker -social labels as ´sheng nü´, leftover woman -essentialist stereotypes -think manager think male -Confucian thought	-Mao´s ´Women hold up half the sky´ described as empowering women interviewees observe -respondents observe societal change towards more gender equality and acceptance of diversity		

Source: Own Illustration from interviews

Introduction

In the following Chapter, I will highlight findings from the interviews that were conducted with sixteen female CEOs, entrepreneurs, top managers and board members in China from June until August 2018. As with the interviews conducted in Germany, I again cluster the interview extracts into five thematic areas: ´Laws and Policies´, ´Compatibility: Family and Career´, ´Personal Initiative´, ´Individual Support and Networks´ and ´Societal Structures.´ These were the most commonly referred to thematic areas by both Chinese as well as German interviewees. At times a clear segregation of interview quotes is difficult as some are thematically overlapping. Therefore, in very few I used one quote more than only in one thematic category. The interviews were conducted in English and Chinese and then translated into English. In few cases the Chinese terms are used and an English definition is given. This is the case only when the English translation would cut short on the original meaning.

Interview questions for both German as well as Chinese respondents were the same. Both were drafted in line with Allen's (1999) concept of ´power´, thus highlighting forms of ´power over´, ´power to´, ´power with´ and ´power without.´ Thereby, in each section's introduction and conclusion, the listed interview extracts will be briefly summarised and associated to the different forms of ´power.´ In the following Chapter, interview extracts are listed according to the five thematic areas and not according to the different forms of power. Listing the interview extracts according to the different forms of power would have implied a clear-cut segregation of the quotes. This would have run the risk of cutting short on the meaning of the interview extracts. Therefore, interview extracts are listed according to the five thematic areas in the following Chapter. In Chapter five ´Discussion´ the results of the interviews will then be discussed and clustered according to the different forms of power.

In the following, I will first of all address the issue ´Laws and Policies.´ Interviewees highlight the importance of corporate- and public policies regulating gender equality. Despite the existence of gender equality laws, interviewees highlight a frequent lack of enforcement mechanisms as a form of ´power over.´ Furthermore, interviewees see the one-child policy as triggering forms of ´power to´ for women in the workforce and in management positions. Respondents highlight the two-child policy as well as the early retirement scheme for women as a form of ´power over.´ Secondly, I highlight the idea of ´Compatibility: Family and Career.´ As forms of ´power over´ expectations frequently held by one´s family of origin, thus often still expecting women to get married and have a baby. Thereby, interviewees highlight that childcare duties are frequently still primarily associated to mothers rather than fathers. As a form of ´power over´ respondents highlight a double burden, thus women frequently taking care of their job as well as household and childcare duties. Interviewees then highlight that mothers are more likely to incur longer career breaks due to childcare responsibilities. As a form of ´power over´ this can negatively influence one´s career development. Interviewees highlight that maternity leave can frequently mean a great burden particularly for SMEs. Therefore, interviewees suggest that enterprises receive a compensation subsidized by the state when incurring a loss of labour due to

childcare duties. Only few interviewees specifically highlight an improvement of childcare facilities when asked what needs to change in order to increase the number of women in management positions and on corporate boards. Thereby, respondents highlight that grandparents often tend to take up childcare duties. Thirdly, the issue of "Personal Initiative" will be discussed. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees point out a frequently experienced lack of confidence in one´s own abilities among women, thus thinking that one is not good enough. Respondents also ask whether manager and board positions are truly desirable for women. As a form of ´power to´ interviewees highlight that personal initiative, particularly being pro-active, is crucial when aiming for career development. In addition to being pro-active interviewees highlight lifelong learning as important for one´s career development. Furthermore, female underrepresentation in the STEM studies is highlighted. Thereby, a career in the emerging STEM sector holds high earning potential. Fourthly, I address the topic of ´Individual Support and Networks.´ Interviewees point out as a form of ´power over´ a frequent lack of solidarity among women, thus ´queen bee syndrome.´ Respondents argue that women often lack the necessary networking abilities as well as access to powerful networks, often labelled as the ´old boys' network.´ As a form of ´power to´ interviewees highlight the importance of having a supportive social and professional environment. Having support from a mentor, professor, colleague or one´s family is particularly highlighted. Thereby eleven out of sixteen interviewees have felt supported by others during their career path, particularly when reaching their current position. In addition, interviewees also highlight the importance of receiving support from a national and international level when aiming to increase the number of WoB on a larger scale. Lastly, I discuss "Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations." Interviewees point out traditional socio-cultural societal gender expectations, assuming men to be the breadwinner and women to take up childcare and household duties, as a form of ´power over.´ Then interviewees particularly highlight societal expectations that young women tend to face. Respondents state that young women are often expected to do well at school but not to become more powerful than one´s husband. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees highlight social labelling. The social label ´shèng nǚ´ leftover woman, is emphasised as being discriminatory. Interviewees describe a ´leftover woman´ as a woman above the age of 27 years old, unmarried and professionally very successful. Furthermore, some interviewees highlight the usage of essentialist stereotypes, thus expecting women to act according to stereotypical feminine and men according to stereotypical masculine characteristics, as a form of ´power over.´ These interviewees argue that such societal expectations may limit the individual in their career development. Furthermore, such expectations could cut short on the great diversity of individual male and female characters. Other interviewees however use essentialist stereotypes as a form of ´power to.´ Thereby interviewees use essentialist stereotypes to argue in favour of female board representation. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees argue that ´think manager think male´ assumptions are still prevalent. Furthermore, interviewees highlight ideas of Confucian thought as a form of ´power over´ while ideas of Mao, particularly the slogan ´Women hold up half the sky´ are viewed as a form of ´power to.´ Ultimately, interviewees argue that despite cases of gender

discrimination they can observe a societal change towards more diversity and acceptance of gender equality.

4.2.1. Laws and Policies

In the following section on "Laws and Policies" I will highlight interview extracts addressing the legal framework for WoB and overall gender equality in China. Thereby, thirteen out of sixteen interviewees mention public- and corporate policies during their interviewees when asked how to increase the number of women in management and board positions in China. As a form of ´power to´ interviewees underline the importance of having public and corporate policies addressing gender equality in the workforce. Furthermore, respondents highlight that there is a need for more policies in China addressing the before mentioned issue. Despite the existence of certain gender equality policies, interviewees highlight the overall lack of enforcement mechanisms of such policies as a form of ´power over.´ Discriminatory job advertisements are highlighted as an example of such a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Moreover, as a form of ´power over´ only one out of sixteen interviewees argues that she has felt supported by corporate- or public policies during her career path. Interviewees then emphasise that the mere existence of gender equality policies and laws does not necessarily improve the situation of women in the workforce or for female managers or board members. Interviewees then highlight frequently unintended side effects of public policies. As a form of ´power over´ one interviewee highlights the retirement scheme[48]. Thereby, China has *"a compulsory scheme to regulate retirement age, with 60 (years old) for men, 55 (years old) for female professionals/cadres (including teachers, medical personnel, other professionals, and administrators), and 50 (years old) for the rest of the female workers"* (Feng et al., 2019: 31). This means that on average women retire five to ten years earlier than their male peers. Mrs. Li argues that this retirement scheme indirectly discriminates against women in the workforce. Furthermore, interviewees describe the one-child policy as a form of ´power to.´ Thereby arguing that the one-child family planning policy has had positive effects on the situation of women in the workforce, particularly women in leadership positions in China. The two-child policy is however criticised by interviewees as a form of ´power over´, thus implying negative effects for female labour in China as well as women in management and board positions.

When asked what needs to change in order to increase the number of women in management and board positions, one interviewee states, *"in China and in Asia in general in order for women to gain access to a high-level corporate position and to have equal opportunities we need to talk about laws and policies, employment law."* Furthermore, Mrs. Yang continues to argue that such policies and laws need to ensure gender equality throughout one´s entire career path, thus *"starting from the very beginning, which means you open the door for the women to come in. So really from the job advertisements and the hiring process…So*

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[48] Currently the retirement age in China is being adjusted. Please refer to the Introduction´s Section "Background Information" for a detailed discussion on China´s retirement scheme.

that one has fair recruitment, fair hiring practices." Furthermore, Mrs. Yang states that when aiming for gender equality on corporate boards and other management positions one needs to ensure fair recruitment processes from the very beginning onwards. In addition, interviewee Mrs. Qi highlights that *"we need this kind of anti-discrimination policy."* When asked whether public and corporate policies are crucial for increasing the number of WoB, Mrs. Li states:

> *"Of course, absolutely! I mean people still debate on whether or not to have quotas for boards in different countries and I say: ´Yeah, you´re damn right.´ Why? Cause we´re starting behind already. This just brings it up a little bit. At least equalise it a little bit."*

Mrs. Li highlights the importance of having public- and corporate policies to achieve gender equality on corporate boards. In addition, Mrs. Yang highlights gender equality laws when stating that *"companies and the government can make a great difference and support employees. That is very very important!"* Furthermore, Mrs. Chen highlights the idea of a quota when stating that *"in a lot of countries you have labour laws that lay out that you need a certain percentage of minority people or disabled people."* She then addresses China arguing that "*I don´t know whether this is possible or maybe it is just a dream to have a labour law stating that a certain percentage of management positions should be occupied by women."* In addition, also Mrs. Wang highlights the importance of having public and corporate policies for creating a supportive environment for female leadership. She argues:

> *"I think a general policy from the government in promoting a supportive environment concerning women´s leadership is important. The other thing is corporate policy in terms of women´s presence at work, so what is your corporate initiative in terms of helping women in the workspace?"*

She underlines public policy from the government as being crucial for promoting a supportive environment regarding women´s leadership. In addition to public policies she also highlights the importance of corporate policies for promoting gender equality in the workspace. In the following, she argues that nowadays young people do not focus too much on companies´ revenue or growth rate. Rather she highlights that the younger generation is primarily interested in what a company does for its´ community. She states, *"Especially for the younger generation what they focus on is not so much how much revenue a firm has or what is your growth rate. Rather, what is your vision? What do you do for your team and for your community?"* Furthermore, she highlights that "*nowadays when you talk to the leaders of organisations they don´t talk about what do you do in tax advising, they talk about diversity, they talk about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)."* She argues that today the younger generation is more interested in a company´s corporate social responsibility than in its´ revenue.

Above interviewees argue that public and corporate policies addressing gender equality are crucial when trying to increase the number of women in management and board positions. In the following, five out of fifteen interviewees believe that there is a need for more corporate- and public policies addressing gender

equality in the workforce in China. Thereby, interviewees particularly highlight the need for more policies addressing gender equality for management and board positions. Mrs. Song highlights that, *"in our country we don´t have many public policies to support women to be promoted to management positions."* She highlights that there are not a lot of public policies promoting women to get into management positions. In addition, Mrs. Yang points out, *"It is also from the management level, yes from the organization itself. They need to be consciously and intentionally making the effort and making policies saying: ´Okay in this boardroom, in this management team what percent of women do we want?´"* Mrs. Yang underlines that the company itself needs to make an effort and adopt policies when trying to increase the number of women in boardrooms and management teams. Mrs. Wang then gives an example stating, "*for example there are ten people in the boardroom, then at least two members need to be women."* She continues to highlight that companies "*need to keep that policy and this intention of actually looking for female talent."* Mrs. Wang states that companies should actively look for female talent. Furthermore, she highlights that:

> *"most enterprises simply say: ´Okay we do not have any female talent who are able to do this job.´ So at the end of the day they say: ´We don't have any capable women for this position.´ But this step is really from the organizational policy of the company. They can make an effort regarding policies and rules that can open the door for women to come in."*

She highlights that frequently companies simply state that there are no capable or talented women for the position. However, she emphasises that it is of great importance that companies make an effort to include women. Among others she highlights the importance of having policies. Mrs. Wang then shares an experience of another female CEO and friend of hers. This female CEO altered the company´s corporate policy towards increasing the number of women in management positions. She highlights:

> *"Like for example my friend XXX[49]. She is the first-ever female CEO in this listed company. She made the commitment and the promise that their company is going to hire more female talents for their management team and boardroom. She is constantly looking for female talents. And that is the first step of how they are going to get more female boardroom members. And getting more female role models as well. So there we have a female who is making a difference in the financial sector although it is a very male-dominated sector."*

Mrs. Wang shares the experience of a friend of hers. She states that this female CEO promised to increase the number of women in boardroom and management teams. Taking this as a best-practice she highlights, *"so the companies should consciously be advocating for them* (women) *to rise up. So that is from the company´s perspective."* Mrs. Wang argues that companies should actively be advocating the rise of women. In addition to the companies´ efforts she highlights the importance of "*government policy."* However, she states that "*This*

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[49] Interviewee mentions the name of her friend.

(government policy) one of course takes a longer time." Mrs. Wang underlines the importance of having both government policy and the efforts of companies when trying to increase the number of women in management and board positions. She assumes that government policy might take longer to achieve the before mentioned. In addition, also Mrs. Li emphasises possible difficulties when trying to influence government policies regulating gender equality issues in the workforce. She states *"cause the government is not very…that´s the thing in China the government is like a big black hole. How much can you influence that? Don´t know."* Expert interviewee Mrs. Shi highlights that one should try to address several different levels when aiming at increasing the number of WoB. She states:

> *"So one needs to think at different levels, not only thinking about the macro and structural level because sometimes it is very hard to change and it is very political and in the Chinese situation politics is sometimes out of your control. But I would be more optimistic in the organisational level...."*

Mrs. Shi highlights the importance of focusing on different levels when aiming at increasing the number of women in management and board positions. She is more optimistic about changing corporate rather than public policies. She highlights that public policies are at times out of one´s control. In the following, Mrs. Liu argues that according to her opinion, laws and policies addressing gender inequality issues are not among the top priority issues when looking at corporate reforms in China. She highlights:

> *"I don´t really see China being a leader in that (corporate and public policies regulating gender inequality issues). Certainly there could be public policies or regulations that drive that but that is probably not the first thing in terms of corporate reform in China that is...there are so many other things that China has to do in order to do that."*

Mrs. Liu argues that there could be regulations driving gender equality in the workforce. However, she states that policies and laws addressing gender equality issues will probably not be among the first things China would have to do.

Above, interviewees highlight the importance of having corporate and public gender equality policies when trying to increase the number of women in management and board positions. In the following, interviewees argue that although gender equality policies do exist in China there tends to be a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Expert interviewee Mrs. Xie highlights *"in China there is an institutional problem. Even though there are equal opportunity laws in many countries in reality the implementation can always be a little slippery."* Furthermore, mentioning the idea of gender quotas, she states, "*I am not aware that there is a quota as such for women* (in China) *and even if there is it will only be kind of cosmetically.*" Mrs. Xie highlights that despite the general existence of gender equality laws, the practical implementation of such laws and policies is frequently slippery. In accordance with Mrs Xie also expert interviewee Mrs. Shi states:

"At the public policy level there is gender equality policy…So you will find quite a few policies that will say men and women are equal, maybe not specifically concerning the company level but often they include that level. But in practice that is usually not the case."

In line with Mrs. Xie and Mrs. Shi, also expert interviewee Mrs. Luo addresses the lack of practical implementation when stating:

"It is not enough to say it is against the law to have gender discriminatory hiring practices, but the law needs to be enforced. And there needs to be a mechanism for enforcement and there needs to be consequences for companies that violate people employment laws."

Mrs. Luo argues that it is not enough to simply state that discriminatory hiring practices are against the law. Rather, she underlines the importance of having effective enforcement mechanisms and consequences for companies that do not comply with employment laws. Interviewees highlight an example of such when looking at discriminatory job advertisements. This means job advertisements in which employers specifically claim that they are looking for a person having a specific gender, age or physical appearance. Despite existing laws prohibiting such practices, these still existent. Laws and policies prohibiting discriminatory job advertisements frequently lack practical implementation. Expert interviewee Mrs. Luo states:

"There are still some job advertisements that say men. That say they are looking for men. And other job notices even saying that they are looking for pretty women. And even though it is technically against the law it is not being enforced and very few cases have gone to court. It is hard for women to take a case like this to court and state that they have been discriminated against. There have been a few successful cases but not very many."

Mrs. Luo highlights that discriminatory job advertisements still exist. Such job advertisements tend to outline the applicants´ gender or physical appearance as being pretty. Mrs. Luo argues that technically these kind of job advertisements are against the law. However, she highlights that they are not being enforced and that only very few cases have actually gone to court. In line with Mrs. Luo also Mrs. Yang addresses discriminatory job advertisements, arguing:

"In your advertisement you should not say this job is only for men or this job is only for women nor the age. You should not put that at all. Because one really needs to look at the job for the person. It's not about gender or age. It's about the person. Can the person do the job at this competency level? So here the government and the legislation enforcement need to protect talent and equal opportunity and equal competition. And that is something where the workforce in China is still facing challenges. In China the advertisements sometimes say this job is for men or this job is not for a woman or specify which age. So from that point onwards you are filtered out. You filter."

Mrs. Yang highlights that discriminatory job advertisements sometimes still exist in China. She argues that legislation needs to protect talent and ensure equal opportunities and competition circumstances for all, regardless of one´s gender, age or appearance.

Above, interviewees highlight that corporate and public policies regulating gender equality do exist in China. However respondents criticise a frequent lack of enforcement mechanisms. Mrs. Yang and Mrs. Luo highlight discriminatory job advertisements as an example for a lack of enforcement. In the following, interviewees were asked whether they have felt supported by any policies during their career path. Thereby, only one out of sixteen interviewees has felt supported by public or corporate policies during her career path. Nine out of sixteen interviewees argue that they have not felt supported by any public nor corporate policies and five interviewees abstained. Taking an extract from the responses, the interviewees state:

> *"No, I don´t remember any public or corporate laws supporting me in my career. (laughing) Definitely not."* (Mrs. Chen)

> *"No (laughing). I wish there could be in the future to support other women."* (Mrs. Song)

> *"I don´t think the law really supported me."* (Mrs. Zhang)

> *"It wasn´t that much policies."* (Mrs. Wang)

> *"My boss supported me and also my team members supported me, but regarding laws and policies nothing really."* (Mrs. Cheng)

> *"No. I can only say family planning policy. So my parents didn´t have sons…"* (Mrs. Qi)

> *"I didn´t benefit much from policies living here in the capital city but my friends living in the province or in the two-tier and three-tier cities, there are female entrepreneur associations they have funding and can get loans with good conditions and there is reduction of taxes for female entrepreneurs in certain cities in the countryside but not in Beijing."* (Mrs. Guo)

Nine out of sixteen interviewees argue that they have not felt supported by any public nor corporate policies and five respondents abstained. Mrs. Guo argues that she knows of female entrepreneurs living in the province that have felt supported for example by receiving special benefits. She particularly highlights benefits as tax reduction or having better conditions when getting loans or funding for starting one´s own business and becoming an entrepreneur. Mrs. Guo and Mrs. Cheng argue that gender equality policies may exist at times, however that people frequently do not know of the existence of such. When asked whether any corporate policies exist in her company to support women aiming for a management or board position, Mrs. Cheng states:

> *"I am not sure. I haven´t heard anything about it. I know there are rules that the company should have a certain percentage of women and men in the*

company but I am not sure whether there are any policies regarding female leadership in the company."

Mrs. Cheng states that she has heard about rules how many women and men the company should employ. However, she states that she has not heard about the existence of corporate policies addressing the female leadership in her company.

Above, only one out of sixteen interviewees argues that they felt supported by public- or corporate policies during her career path. Some interviewees however highlight that policies regulating gender equality issues might exist, however that they might simply not know of the existence of such. Although expert interviewee Mrs. Qi argues *"we need this kind of anti-discrimination policy."* It still becomes apparent that the mere existence of public and corporate policies addressing gender equality issues does not necessarily always improve the situation of gender equality in the workforce. This is particularly the case when there is a lack of enforcement mechanisms or when people simply have no knowledge about the existence of such policies.

In the following, expert interviewees Mrs. Qi and Mr. Peng highlight policies and laws addressing maternity leave. Thereby, interviewees demonstrate that policies initially adopted to protect female employees may not necessarily improve the situation for women in the workforce. Expert interviewee Mrs. Qi starts off by highlighting possible costs employers might have to endure when having a pregnant employee. Sharing the experience of a friend of hers, Mrs. Qi argues:

> *"A friend of mine he is the Dean of a university. He told me that one of his staff got pregnant. So he told her to not work that hard and that she could be a little bit late. After one month she told him that she has to stay at home, otherwise she might risk to have a miscarriage. So he said: ´Ok.´ But what about her job? He couldn´t employ another person to do her job. So he had to assign her job to the other people. So people really complained. Then he had to force them to do her job and at the same time he still had to continue paying her salary because we cannot discriminate. And once we start having several of such kind of employees then we really have troubles."*

Mrs. Qi highlights an example of her friend to demonstrate possible costs an employer may entail when having a pregnant employee. Despite the existence of such policies discrimination against women in the workforce may still prevail and at times might even be reinforced. Mrs. Qi argues that another friend of hers who is leading a Human Resource Department said *´Once you got three pregnant women, what can I do? I need to get a male.´"* In the following, Mrs. Qi continues to take up the employers´´ perspective when stating:

> *"So every time when the Chinese All Women´s Federation says: ´You guys are really discriminating women.´ The entrepreneurs state: ´Ok, if the government gives us compensation, we can hire women. You say we can´t fire pregnant women, we can´t fire women who have babies or who have children younger than the age of one year old… So then who will pay for that?´"*

Mrs. Qi underlines the employers´ perspective when arguing that companies would like to receive compensation from the government for any labour loss due to maternal leave. She reinforces her argument stating that whenever companies have a loss of female labour due to maternity or childcare duties *"the government should give us* (companies) *compensation because we sacrifice. So this* (policies protecting pregnant women and maternity leave) *is kind of like a double sword."* In addition, Mr. Peng uses very drastic words and relies on essentialist assumptions when stating:

> *"maternal leave…so six months…private firms dislike hiring women because they give birth when she (female employee) is taking care of her family and child and doesn´t focus on the job many times. In China some dislike hiring females and want to hire men due to this reason. When women have a child then they dedicate more time to their child than to their job."*

Mr. Peng highlights that some companies dislike hiring women due to a possible loss of labour that may occur once the employee is on maternity leave. Above, Mrs. Qi argues that one could possibly counteract such discriminatory assumptions and practices by paying compensation to companies when having a loss of labour due to employees´ childcare duties.

In the following, interviewees highlight specific public policies, often unintended, consequences for gender equality. Thereby, interviewees highlight the retirement scheme as well as the one-child and two-child policy.

As pointed out above, China has *"a compulsory scheme to regulate retirement age, with 60 (years old) for men, 55 (years old) for female professionals/cadres (including teachers, medical personnel, other professionals, and administrators), and 50 (years old) for the rest of the female workers"* (Feng et al., 2019: 31). This means that women tend to retire five to ten years earlier than their male peers. In the following, Mrs. Li highlights that this early retirement scheme is a form of indirect discrimination against women in the workforce. Mrs. Li states, *"when a government says: ´Ahhh you can´t work anymore cause you are 55 years old´, then there is a problem. The good news is that they are not saying: ´You can´t start your own business.´ Is it fair? No!"* Mrs. Li highlights that women in China retire earlier than men. At first sight this might look appealing, however Mrs. Li argues that this policy is set to lose female talent. She states:

> *"Well guess what your policy* (early retirement for women) *is set to lose the top women here in China. Why? Because they don´t have to put up with this shit, they will just go and start their own company and will compete with you. If that is what you want, then fine."*

Mrs. Li argues that the early retirement policy is set to lose the top women in China. However, she states that when having to retire women can simply start their own business. She states, *"What we need to do is to start our own company. If I am not wanted here then I will use my time somewhere else."* Furthermore, Mrs. Li underlines that *"Ultimately companies will lose out if they don´t find a way to include women. Meaning helping women not only giving them the posi-*

tion but helping them and allowing them to feel that they are truly valued and as important and have a voice at the table."

Above, Mrs. Li highlights possible unintended effects of the early retirement policy for women. In the following, interviewees highlight possible unintended effects of the one-child and two-child family planning policy. Mrs. Luo, Mrs. Qi, Mrs. Zhang and Mrs Yang argue that the one-child policy has been beneficial for increasing the number of women in management and board positions in China. Mrs. Zhang argues, *"China being a Communist country and having that one-child policy, a lot of women, because they were the only child, their parents have really done a lot for them. So, you can really see some middle-aged women in leadership positions."* Mrs. Zhang underlines the importance of China being a Communist country and having had the one-child policy. She highlights that many parents greatly invested in their daughters, thus their only child. In addition, Mrs. Qi is grateful to the one-child policy, stating:

> *"So, I always say I really thank this kind of one-child policy. No matter how people approach it with human rights and everything. But once the parents only have a daughter, they have to put everything and invest everything in the daughter, right? They have no choice."*

Mrs. Qi underlines a possible benefit of the one-child family policy for women. She argues once the only child is a girl parents tend to invest everything in their daughter. Sharing her own personal experience, she argues:

> *"Just like my mother she really wanted to have a boy. Both her and my dad they are from a rural family. They really wanted a boy, but they got two daughters. And they were not allowed to have a third child. Then they had to invest everything in us. Although till now they still regret that they couldn´t have a boy. (laughing) So I always think about that, if I would have had a brother I don´t think I would have been able to get this education because you need to share the resources with them. You would have to let them go first. At least in urban areas this kind of one-child policy really contributed to gender equality."*

Mrs. Qi argues that the one-child policy contributed to more gender equality in urban areas. In addition, also Mrs. Zhang highlights her own personal experience with the one-child policy when stating:

> *"Oh well at least for my generation, I am now 54 years old, when I was growing up I was never encouraged even to do anything professionally, being a woman or being a girl. I was the youngest of four and my parents really focused on trying to put their energy in the boy. I have one brother."*

Mrs. Zhang argues that her parents tried to put all their energy in her brother instead of her or her sisters. Mrs. Qi argues that in order to trigger effective societal change she would have liked seeing the one-child policy for a little bit longer. She states:

"I really feel that this Chinese one-child policy should have lasted maybe a little bit longer, at least force one generation to change. Otherwise they don´t change. And now they have a chance to have a second baby. We see a lot of families that if their first child is a boy they just give up. If their first one is a daughter a lot of them will try a second time."

In addition to Mrs. Qi also Mrs. Yang shares her own personal experience with the one-child policy, stating, *"I was born in a village in China…my dad wanted to have a boy. Many of the girls in the village didn´t have a chance to go to school, but my dad put all his investments into me to go to university abroad."* Mrs. Yang argues that she was born in rural China. She states that her dad would have wanted to have a son instead of a daughter. Nevertheless, she states having no brothers her dad invested everything in her and she was able to go to university abroad. In line with the before mentioned also expert interviewee Mrs. Luo states:

"Overall I would say it (one-child policy) *was a gain for urban women because if they were an only daughter their parents invested everything in them and they wouldn´t have to compete with any brother for attention or investment. While in the past, daughters definitely were competing against their brothers. And families would traditionally prioritise brothers over sisters."*

Despite international controversies over the one-child policy, above mentioned interviewees underline that the policy can be seen as a gain for urban women in China. Respondents argue that once parents´ only child under the one-child policy was a daughter; they invested everything in their daughter. Without this policy, interviewees argue, daughters would have been competing with their brothers for their parents´ attention and investments. Traditionally, Mrs. Luo argues brothers would be prioritised over sisters.

In the following, interviewees also address the current two-child policy. Thereby, interviewees highlight possible negative consequences of the two-child policy for gender equality. Mrs. Qi states, *"Now China has the two-child policy. So once you get the first child you can have another one."* Expert interviewee Mrs. Xie argues that nowadays the situation for women in the workforce, particularly women aiming for a management or board position is, *"actually worse now than it used to be. With the two-child policy it becomes more difficult for women to work and also trying to progress with their career. I would say the two-child policy may have negative implications."* Mrs. Xie argues that with the two-child policy it becomes more difficult for women in the workforce and also progressing with their career. She assumes that the two-child policy can have negative implications. In addition, addressing the loss of the one-child policy and consequences of the newly adopted two-child policy, Mrs. Song argues:

"We have lost the one-child policy. So women can now have a second child. This means that at the working place when employers are trying to choose their employees they would prefer men. This is a very very particular situation and it is probably only here in China. In recent years, here in China

there have been many employers who, when recruiting female employees, tend to assume that they will only care about their families and get pregnant. So they prefer not to promote female employees."

Mrs. Song deduces that the newly implemented two-child policy may possibly lead to employers preferring to employ male rather than female employees. Summarising, interviewees highlight the two-child policy as having possible negative consequences for women in the workforce as well as for female career development.

Summarising the above section, I have highlighted interview extracts addressing relevant "Laws and Policies" mentioned by respondents during their interviews. Thereby, thirteen out of sixteen interviewees believe that public- and corporate policies are crucial when aiming to increase the number of women in management and board positions. As a form of ´power to´ interviewees highlight the importance of having public and corporate policies when trying to address gender inequality in the workforce. Despite the existence of gender equality laws and policies, interviewees criticise the lack of enforcement mechanisms as a form of ´power over.´ Thereby, discriminatory job advertisements are highlighted as an example of such. The majority of interviewees have not felt supported by corporate or public policies during their career paths. Respondents argue that the mere existence of gender equality policies and laws does not necessarily always improve the overall situation for women. Interviewees then highlight the early retirement scheme for women as a form of ´power over.´ This means women are expected to retire five to ten years earlier than their male peers. Mrs. Li sees a discrimination of this early retirement scheme for women in the workforce. Interviewees then highlight the one-child policy as a form of ´power to´ and the two-child policy as a form of ´power over.´

4.2.2. Compatibility: Family and Career

The following section on "Compatibility: Family and Career" I will highlight interview extracts primarily addressing childcare responsibilities, the double burden and maternity leave. Fourteen out of sixteen interviewees highlight that the topic of combining one´s career with having a family is crucial when analysing female board presence. As forms of ´power over´ interviewees highlight expectations frequently held by the women´s family of origin, thus expecting women to get married and have a baby. In addition, respondents state that on average women tend to take on more household and childcare responsibilities. As a form of ´power over´ ten out of sixteen interviewees highlight that women frequently face a ´double burden´, thus being the primary responsible for childcare and household duties as well as having a professional job. Moreover, respondents highlight that on average women are much more likely to endure a career break due to maternity leave or childcare responsibilities than men. This is highlighted as a form of ´power over´ as it can have negative effects on one´s career development. Interviewees highlight that the question of maternity leave is currently particularly relevant in China as many employees are deciding to have a second child following the implemented two-child policy. When asked what needs to

change in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards only three out of sixteen interviewees demand an improvement of childcare facilities. Interviewees conclude that it is very common in China that grandparents take over childcare duties.

Mrs. Zhang claims that women in China frequently tend to face expectations from their parents and their family of origin to find a husband, get married and have a baby. She states:

> *"The pressure is still so high, like with the traditional role for women, like going to university and then finding a husband, getting an apartment, a car and then a child. Still a high percentage of grandparents have such expectations. It is definitely a good culture and a good value, but I think sometimes some of the women they may feel that they cannot fully devote themselves to get ahead (in their career)."*

Mrs. Zhang underlines the expectations frequently held by one´s family of origin. Women are expected to get married and have a baby. In addition, also Mrs. Yang highlights the importance and influence of the family of origin in Asian cultures. She highlights:

> *"In Asia, different than in the West, men and women are often still very much dependent on their family. My dad for example didn´t speak to me for one year after I failed my first business. He didn´t want me to have my own business he wanted me to get married and have a child. I said: ´I am an adult now and I am taking my own decisions.´ Today, my dad still doesn´t know what I am doing."*

Mrs. Yang states that men and women are frequently still very much dependent on their family of origin in Asian countries. Furthermore, she states that in her case her dad wanted her to get married and have a child instead of having her own business. Mrs. Yang continues by stating, *"Do not try to change the family, you cannot. Simply deal with it."* In addition, Mrs. Guo argues that one of the main barriers for female underrepresentation in management and board positions *"is the family."* When asked whether she feels accepted by her colleagues and family, Mrs. Cheng argues, *"Sometimes my family says that I am too busy and they fear that sometime in the future when I have kids…well, they don´t want me to be so busy. Some of my family members think I should quit my job and find me another one, an easier job."* Mrs. Cheng highlights that at times her family worries that she might be too busy due to her job to have children in the future. She states that some family members believe she should quit her current job and find an easier one. She states, *"my family? They have no idea about my current life and my career."* Also Mrs. Zhang highlights that her family of origin never really encouraged her to pursue any professional career. When asked why

women are underrepresented on management and board positions, she states:

> *"Oh well at least for my generation, I am now 54 years old, when I was grow-ing up I was never encouraged even to do anything professionally, being a woman or being a girl. I was the youngest of four and my parents really fo-cused on trying to put their energy on the boy. I have one brother."*

Mrs. Zhang argues that she was never encouraged to strive for any professional career development. She highlights that her parents focused all their energy on their only son and not on their daughters.

Above, interviewees highlight that their family of origin usually expects them to get married and have a baby. In addition, respondents state that on average women are expected to take on more household and childcare responsibilities. Interviewees argue that this can easily lead to a situation in which women may face a double-burden, thus having to take care of their job, household and child-care duties. Interviewee Mrs. Li uses the metaphor of a race to underline the unequal conditions men and women face in the workforce. She states, *"A race, a man and a woman start off at exactly the same point. They got the same poten-tial, they got the same education, they start the race out, but in reality…they ac-tually already have their deficit. They are asked to go back two steps…"* Mrs. Li highlights that it may seem that men and women are starting off at exactly the same point in their career development, thus having equal education and equal potential. In reality however women often have to face a deficit. She continues to discuss her idea, by stating:

> *"So you are walking along and then the first thing that comes in as a deficit for women is when they get married. Why? Cause the statistics have shown that they take on the majority of the domestic work. So they are working an extra two hours for free for their husband. So she is behind. Then when they have their first child, again the time is less, less and less. So the race, she is like so far behind already. She has to do so much more to keep up with the guy, who just keeps on going and going. She is exhausted by the time. She finally says at a certain point: ´I give up, I don´t care, I don´t even want it, I am just exhausted.´ And the guilt is there: ´I am not a good mother, I am not a good wife, I don´t sufficiently support my parents.´ So that is really a pro-fessional and personal deficit that you are just behind."*

Mrs. Li underlines that despite the appearance of having equal opportunities and conditions when striving for a career, in reality women may face a deficit com-pared to men. She highlights that women tend to take on more domestic house work than their partner. Furthermore, she argues that the same usually applies to childcare responsibilities. Mrs. Li states that with this extra burden of household and childcare responsibilities one can easily become exhausted. This means by the time one gets an opportunity for a career promotion, which frequently entails having a greater workload and working more hours, one might reject such an opportunity due to the exhaustion. Also Mrs. Yang highlights why some women might not want to take on a career promotion. She states:

"Family takes up a huge time for women. So if you are going to say to the woman: ´I want to give you a promotion and an opportunity´, the female says: ´No, no, I don´t want to do it, because I get even more pressure. I get more stress. I´d rather not do it. I stay where I am today, where I am comfortable. I do not want to rise up, because when I rise up I need to take on more responsibility. I do not know whether I'm going to be able to do that."

In line with Mrs. Li also Mrs. Yang underlines the reason why some women may not want to take up a career promotion even if they are faced with an opportunity. She highlights that women frequently take up a lot of childcare and household duties. This means they have less time available for career progression. In addition, also expert interviewee Mrs. Luo argues:

"On average Chinese women do three times more unpaid work than Chinese men that is childcare, household and elderly care. So knowing that they have this burden many women are themselves making the choice for a less high powered career because they want to have the flexibility to spend more time at home or they know they have to be home by 6 p.m. to cook dinner. So they don´t want to work late or they don´t want to have a job where they are travelling a lot cause they might have a child, so all these decisions are factoring into women´s own choices not only the choices of employers."

Mrs. Luo highlights that women might consciously decide not to take on a high-level career position, even if an opportunity were to emerge, as they might be exhausted due to bearing a double burden. In addition, also expert interviewee Mrs. Qi sees the double burden as a major obstacle for female representation in management and board positions. She highlights, "*So this kind of double burden. Yes, I got out (of the home and into the workforce), but I still have this burden inside the family. I didn´t get rid of that. Instead of being liberated you actually get even more things to do, right?"* Mrs. Qi underlines the difficulty when facing a double burden, thus trying to combine a career with taking care of household and childcare responsibilities. In addition, expert interviewee Mrs. Chen argues that this phenomenon is not only limited to China. Rather, it is an international phenomenon. She states:

"In the majority of countries in the world women are assumed to take on more responsibility at home than at work. So there are a lot of limitations already when you think about personal life you have to spend a lot of time…you have to deal with a lot of challenges which men don´t need to."

In addition, Mrs. Li underlines that when being responsible for childcare and household duties one automatically cuts short on one´s time availability for career progression. She argues, *"First the most important thing is time. If women are doing anywhere between 15 to 25 percent more work than men, on a daily basis, so how are they able to find the time to network, to self improve, to play politics?"* Also Mrs. Yang states, "*(B)oth men and women have a full-time job. But women are probably having two. Because in Asian countries it's mostly the women who take care of the household and the children."* In addition, when

asked why women are underrepresented on management and board positions she states:

> *"Family!...(B)oth men and women are having a full-time job. So, the man is really a hundred percent on that full-time job, but the woman has two: One is the full-time job, the other one is the family, childcare and household. Women are doing three times more than men..."*

Mrs. Yang underlines that women tend to have two full-time jobs. Moreover, Mrs. Song argues that *"compared to men, women prefer not to be working extra long hours...many women have to spend a lot of time at home taking care of the kids. So compared to men, lots of their energy will be taken over by the family work."* Mrs. Song argues that on average women spend more time taking care of household and childcare duties than their partners. In addition, expert interviewee Mrs. Xie highlights that often, *"women have more family responsibility. So women will take career breaks or work part-time and that will really eat into their career, big time."* Women are more likely to take career breaks or work part-time due to childcare responsibilities. However, she highlights that *"In China career breaks have not yet been the norm, but still women need to prioritise..."* Sharing her own personal experience of dealing with the double burden Mrs. Zhao states:

> *"I´m married, I have one boy. I have to take care of my family. I have to take care of my boy. I have to take care of my job. I don´t mean that my husband doesn´t take care of my son and doesn´t take care of my family, but from my point of view, I always say that I contribute more than him."*

In addition she argues that trying to combine having a family with a career:

> *"has been a lot of pressure. Sometimes you have to give up, sometimes you have to carry on or sometimes you have to insist. You need to find what kind of things you can give up and what kind of things you can´t give up, sometimes you have to sacrifice and sometimes you can´t sacrifice. How to judge this or how to measure this, it depends on the person."*

However, Mrs. Wang is particularly grateful to her parents for taking care of her daughter, stating:

> *"I am very grateful to my parents, especially to my mom who looks after my daughter most of the time. I think the family support is very important. Otherwise I wouldn´t have gone as fast back to work...I think having parent´s support is very valuable."*

Nevertheless, due to the still prevalent difficulty of balancing a career and a family, Mrs. Zhang states that she consciously decided not to have any children. She argues:

> *"For myself really being able to develop a career, I chose not to have a child, in a conscious way. Even in my 20s, because I felt I couldn't have it all. I couldn´t have balanced having a family and a career. I want to do well. I do believe that having it all isn´t the best."*

Mrs. Zhang states that in order to develop her career she decided not to have any children. Just like Mrs. Zhang also Mrs. Huang argues that she was facing "*that struggle a few years ago (compatibility of family and career)…You really do need to understand that when you grow (career-wise) you will have more responsibility. You know when you have children you can´t just...*" Also Mrs. Huang decided not to have any children. She argues that once one grows career-wise one will end up having more responsibilities in one´s job. Trying to combine a management or board position with children could bring about challenges.

Above interviewees highlight that women may face pressure from their family of origin expecting them to get married and to have a baby. Furthermore, respondents argue that on average women take on more childcare and household responsibilities than men. This frequently leads to a double burden. Expert interviewee Mrs. Xie states that working mothers may also face pressure from their working environment. She states that one´s "*The organisational levels will almost automatically write you off thinking that you should spend more time on the family and will give you less opportunity.*" She highlights that colleagues might argue that one should spend more time on the family. Mrs. Xie states that this assumption may lead to a situation in which working mothers are given fewer opportunities in terms of career development than her male colleagues. In line with Mrs. Xie also Mrs. Guo highlights a differential treatment, when stating that "*as a man you are asked: ´How did you achieve this leadership position? ´ As a woman you are asked: ´How do you balance a career and a family? ´* Furthermore, Mrs. Guo continues by stating, "*But men are related to the family as well. So why is it that we don´t ask men the same question? So from the very beginning women and men are not put in the same position.*" Mrs. Guo highlights that men and women are not asked the same questions. Rather, women are frequently asked how they manage having a family with having a career. Sharing her own experience she states that in the workforce, "*They tend to give the important jobs to people who do not have kids, especially not to women with children.*" Trying to analyse the reason behind such a phenomenon, she states, "*Women with kids will be reluctant to work extra hours and also to go on business trips.*" Mrs. Guo highlights that "*Compared to men, women tend to sacrifice their career and tend to give up their promotion in order to care for the family. Also employers tend to think that women will have maternity leave and also marriage leave. They tend to take this more than men.*" Mrs. Guo argues that on average women tend to take up more household and childcare responsibilities, thereby frequently sacrificing their career. With employers assuming that women might take on more family responsibilities, they might end up becoming reluctant to employ female employees. Expert interviewee Mrs. Luo argues that one way to counteract such developments would be to trigger

> "*encouragement for men to take on more family responsibilities…Until we see more men stepping up and taking up more family responsibilities this will likely continue. In some countries around the world in companies they have policies to promote parental leave for fathers or other measures like subsidizing child-care to help alleviate the double burden on women and encourage men to take on some of those responsibilities. But China is not yet*

there. There are a few companies that maybe are starting to experiment with a little more parental leave for fathers maybe like a week or a couple of weeks but that´s it. There is also a big change that needs to take place the assumption of who is responsible for the household and children."

Mrs. Luo argues that one could encourage more fathers taking on family responsibilities. Rather, than only mothers taking on the majority of childcare and household responsibilities. She states that some companies have started to experiment a little with parental leave for fathers. However, she argues that such a system is not yet fully implemented in China. She continues to highlight that "*there are several companies that are trying to get more women into leadership positions…that have some impressive work in terms of support for parents and encouragement for women."* Mrs. Guo underlines that some Chinese companies have done impressive work in terms female leadership and compatibility of family and career. Also Mrs. Shi addresses efforts by Chinese companies to better combine having a family and a career. She states:

"In China there are different types of companies. For example there are state-owned and there are private companies and usually the situation is quite different towards women´s role and opportunities. For example when we look at some international companies the situation usually will be different to state-owned; cause the state-owned is much more political. So there are differences across different workplaces. Also like the new emerging agents like new media, NGOs. Especially when you look at the new emerging agents and their new working models like working hours are more flexible. That is important especially when you have a baby, right? You can work from home, you can work at night. So that is also a big change compared to when you have to go to work from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. So I think these kind of new changes will also bring changes towards having more women working in the new technology sectors."

Mrs. Shi argues that particularly the newly emerging sectors in China are offering more flexible working models. She argues that more working models, as for example flexible working hours, may increase the female workforce due to better compatibility possibilities of having children and a career. She assumes an increase of female labour participation force in the new technology areas compared to other more traditional sectors. Furthermore, Mrs. Guo highlights that "*Some big companies in China have shown their support for women like having kindergartens for their employees. So if these female entrepreneurs have to work extra hours their children are being taken care of."* Mrs. Guo highlights that some companies in China have kindergartens to support their employees and take care of them.

Above, interviewees highlight that some companies in China have shown support for working parents, for example by offering flexible working hours or childcare facilities.

In the following, interviewees highlight that on average women are much more likely to incur career breaks due to maternity leave or childcare duties than men.

When asked why women are underrepresented in management and board positions, Mrs. Wang argues, *"There are several factors affecting women while trying to progress. One is an external factor: For example career breaks, when you have a baby. Then the family will take priority at certain times."* Mrs. Wang argues that career breaks, for example due to childcare responsibilities, may affect women aiming for career development. Mrs. Wang continues by stating, *"When it comes down to promotion, if you want to take a whole year off, of course your progression will to some extent be slowed down. But on the other hand you will have a family and a work-life-balance from a family perspective."* Mrs. Wang argues that if one decides to take a year off work due to childcare duties, this will most likely influence one´s career progression. However, one will be able to take care of one´s family. Also Mrs. Yang addresses the idea of maternity leave. She argues that on one hand, maternity leave may give parents the opportunity to take care and raise their children without fearing to lose their job. On the other hand, it may also create challenges especially for SMEs. Mrs. Yang argues:

> *"there is a big challenge for the small and medium size companies, the SMEs. They know that they have to go for gender equality to get more females in the workforce. But there are very realistic challenges that they are facing. Number one is maternity leave…In China, for example if they (pregnant employees) take about one year for pregnancy and two months or four months for delivery before coming back to the workforce. So that is about one and a half years of cost for the company that the company has to bear. And that comes as a big burden and big pressure for the SMEs. So from a business perspective, which we also understand, when they say: ´Okay, I am going to hire a female and then she gets pregnant and leaves work for one and a half years and I have to be without her for one and a half years. That is a large burden.´ So the company does not want to hire a woman."*

Mrs. Yang argues that maternity leave can be challenging for SMEs. She continues to underline her argument by stating:

> *"so that's one of the biggest challenges for both females and businesses. So from the business perspective, they think: ´Okay I'm going to hire this female. But at the end of the day one and a half years paying for nothing. And I have to pay for her maternity leave.´ And of course females they worry as well…"*

She highlights that maternity leave can cause challenges. On the one hand, business owners might worry about having a loss of labour while having to pay the salary for employees on maternity leave. This might be particularly challenging for SMEs. On the other hand, particularly younger women might also be worried of not being able to find a job. One might assume that employers could prefer hiring a male than a female employee, due to the assumption that male employees will not get pregnant and the company will not have a loss of labour. In addition, also Mrs. Wang highlights the aspect of maternity leave. She argues that questions regarding maternity leave are currently particularly apparent in China due to the recently adopted two-child policy. Reflecting upon the current situation in her company, she states:

"So one of the big things, particularly in China with the two-child policy, more and more female staff are planning on having a second child or already have a second child. So the question is how to provide a very supportive environment. So when they are back, how to make them get back to the stage where they can effectively do their work and also allow for more flexibility, like flexible working arrangements or working from home, I think that is very important."

Mrs. Wang argues that currently with the two-child policy many of her female staff are planning to have a second child. She believes that it is also up to the company to provide women coming back from maternity leave with a supportive work environment, thus offering flexible work models and working hours. Another way to support working parents could be to improve childcare facilities. When asked what needs to change in order to increase the number of women in management and board positions, expert interviewee Mrs. Qi states, *"I think childcare facilities. That is another problem. We don´t have baby care facilities. Child-care facilities usually take the kids from three years old."* Mrs. Qi argues in support of having childcare facilities for children younger than three years old. Furthermore, she highlights that "*Our primary school starts at 8 a.m. but it ends at 4 p.m. So who is going to pick up the kids and where are the kids going to go?"* Mrs. Qi urges for longer opening hours of childcare facilities particularly for primary school children. She argues that, *"When I was a baby I was taken care of by the babysitter. It is really hard to get a babysitter now, as babysitters have become really expensive and also there is not this kind of trust anymore."* Mrs. Qi highlights the high costs of childcare nowadays. In addition, also expert interviewee Mrs. Luo highlights that nowadays *"There is no longer subsidized childcare only in very few companies. And childcare costs a lot now in Chinese cities. So if childcare costs the same as the salary then they (women) opt to stay home."* Mrs. Luo underlines the expensive childcare costs nowadays in China. She states that in former times, childcare used to be subsided by the state. Today, Mrs. Luo says that especially in Chinese cities childcare costs have become very expensive. Mrs. Qi argues that in China frequently the grandparents take care of their grandchildren while the parents are at work. She states that when it comes to childcare young parents usually *"ask for help from (grand)parents."* Accordingly, Mrs. Wang highlights:

"I am very grateful to my parents, especially to my mom who looks after my daughter most of the time. I think the family support is very important. Otherwise I wouldn´t have gone as fast back to work…I think having parent´s support is very valuable."

Mrs. Wang states without her parents´ support she would not have been able to go back to work as quickly as she did.

Summarising the above section, I have highlighted interview extracts referring to the issue of combining one´s career with having a family. Thereby, fourteen out of sixteen interviewees have highlighted that compatibility as an important issue when dealing with female board presence. Respondents highlight as forms of ´power over´ frequently held expectations towards women by their family of ori-

gin. Such expectations often imply that women should get married and have a baby. Furthermore, interviewees highlight that on average women tend to take on more housework and childcare responsibilities than men. Accordingly, ten out of sixteen interviewees highlight a frequently faced ´double burden´ by women as a form of ´power over.´ Interviewees describe the ´double burden´ as an attempt to combine one´s job with childcare and household responsibilities. In addition, respondents highlight that women are more likely to have career breaks due to for example maternity leave or childcare responsibilities than men. As forms of ´power over´, this can trigger negative career development effects. Interviewees discuss possible negative effects of maternity leave for SMEs. Respondents argue that with the implemented two-child policy the question of maternity leave is currently particularly relevant in China. When asked what needs to change in order to increase the number of WoB, only three out of sixteen interviewees demand an improvement of childcare facilities. Furthermore, interviewees highlight that it is a common phenomenon that grand-parents take on childcare responsibilities.

4.2.3. Personal Initiative

In the following section on "Personal Initiative" Chinese interview extracts on the importance of pro-actively striving for career development, of doing good work and promoting one´s visibility will be addressed. In addition, the negative effects of having a lack of confidence in one´s own abilities and assumptions presuming women to not want to have a board position will be highlighted. Thereby, thirteen out of sixteen interviewees underline the importance of "Personal Initiative" when analysing female board presence. Interviewees emphasise that being pro-active and showing agency when aiming for a management or board position as forms of ´power to´. Furthermore, interviewees believe that one needs to be professionally competent, thus doing good work and being able to promote one´s work, in order to be successful. Respondents highlight as forms of ´power to´ that one needs to raise one´s hand and grab opportunities once they come up. One field of opportunity could be the well-paid but by women still largely underrepresented STEM area. Expert interviewee Mrs. Qi highlights that an educational reform is needed in order to increase students´ interest in the STEM studies. Interviewees continue by underlining forms of ´power to´ when highlighting examples of their own pro-activeness. Then interviewees point out as forms of ´power to´ the importance of lifelong learning. As forms of ´power over´ interviewees see a frequent lack of confidence in one´s own abilities among women, thus thinking that one is not good enough. In addition, also as a form of ´power over´ respondents discuss whether management and board positions are truly desirable for women.

Interviewees highlight the importance of being pro-active and taking initiative when aiming for a management or board position in China. Mrs. Huang bluntly states *"meaning you have to take action."* In line with Mrs. Huang also Mrs. Yang points out that *"when someone gives you an opportunity, just take it."* In addition, Mrs. Wang highlights *"when the opportunity comes up, you just put up your hand and say: ´Ok, I want to have a try´ and then you go and grab it."* Also Mrs. Zhang underlines pro-activeness when she highlights the importance of using resources

and being creative. She states, *"Really try to use resources and be creative at the best you can."* Mrs. Yang criticises that women frequently tend to wait to be promoted by their boss instead of pro-actively taking the initiative. She states:

> *"Women often wait until the boss comes, to be promoted. My friend knocked at the door of her boss and said if you are leaving (the company) put my name on your successor list. You have to claim for it and put a foot in and then keep your foot in that door. Yes, I can do the job."*

Mrs. Yang takes the example of a friend of hers to underline the importance of pro-actively working on one´s career promotion. In line with the before mentioned also Mrs. Wang highlights, *"I think you, first of all, you have to step outside of your comfort zone…"* She points out that it is crucial to step out of one´s comfort zone and pro-actively striving for one´s career progression. Also Mrs. Huang underlines the importance of taking initiative by stating, *"I do think you do have to take the initiative and make sure you deliver."* Mrs. Huang points out that one needs to take personal initiative and be pro-active while at the same time doing good work and delivering adequate results.

Interviewees highlight that it is crucial to take initiative and pro-actively strive for one´s career development. Moreover, interviewees state that one needs to do good and diligent work and not give up easily. When opportunities come up, interviewees argue, one should take the chance. Ultimately, it is mentioned that one should actively promote one´s work. When asked which suggestions she would give to other women aiming for a similar career position, Mrs. Wang states, *"I think once you do something you need to stick to it...and find out how you can make the most of it. Do not easily give up."* Mrs. Wang suggests others to not easily give up when it comes to their career. In addition, Mrs. Zhao, when asked what she would suggest other women aiming for a similar position states:

> *"Don´t easily give up. Cause today, everything is very fast, change happens very fast. Everybody is chasing money, chasing a good life, chasing a wealthy life, so how can you get this life? You should never give up. It is easy to give up...oh too far...oh too long...oh too tired...oh too easy. The management position isn´t there waiting for you, you know, you have to do something to achieve that position, especially females."*

Mrs. Zhao states that one should not easily give up when aiming for a management position. She highlights that one needs to actively strive for such positions. Also Mrs. Wang underlines that *"women have to put forward, be assertive and know what you want and not just holding back because you are a woman and you might feel intimidated because you are a female in a male dominated board room."* She underlines the importance of being assertive and putting forward. When asked for the reasons behind female underrepresentation on corporate boards, she also highlights the before mentioned character traits and states, *"I think females need to be very tough. You need to make very tough decisions sometimes. You need to get things done and sometimes you need to rule over other male voices then you need them to respect you."* Respondents underline the importance of agency. Expert interviewee Mrs. Shi states, *"At the individual*

level it is about how can women self-empower?" When asked how one can overcome the barriers that keep women from obtaining a management and board position in China, also Mrs. Zhang underlines female agency and advocacy, stating:

> *"I think advocacy for ourselves, so talking about ourselves, promoting, pointing out the abilities that we have. But also when we don´t see something as being an equal opportunity we really need to voice it out but also teach the men. Overall in the whole world with the Me Too Movement, we really need to educate and train men about how to respect each other..."*

Mrs. Zhang highlights the importance of advocacy and agency. She states that it is crucial to promote oneself, for example by pointing out one´s abilities. Ultimately, she argues that one needs to speak up. In addition, Mrs. Li addresses the idea of speaking up and having a voice by stating, *"It is really for women elevating their voice. Girls we are just so well behaved, so nice. That´s where the fight needs to happen. Standing up for ourselves."* She highlights that women need to have a voice and stand up for themselves, thus pro-actively working on their career progression. When asked what Mrs. Li would suggest other women aiming for a similar position, she states, "*Have a voice and be strong to stand up for yourself. What´s right and what´s not right for yourself?"* Furthermore, Mrs. Lui states that it is crucial to let people know what you want. She states, *"I think women should let people know and let their company know and express interest in taking on challenging roles and moving forward…"* In line with Mrs. Li and Mrs. Lui also Mrs. Song highlights the importance of having agency and an inner drive. She states, "*have the inner drive and inner growth to make sure that we are not limited…get rid of the thoughts which are being pushed into our minds and strive for it, there is no point in being perfect, just do it."* Mrs. Song underlines pro-activeness and not being bound by the thought that one needs to be perfect. Mrs. Li suggests other women when striving for a management or board position to:

> "*get rid of the fear and don´t worry about being liked. It´s hard. Yes, I don´t like being called a bitch or aggressive or whatever but I don´t really give a shit what you think. Am I qualified? Did I work hard? Am I smart? I ask myself all those questions. If it's all yes then why shouldn´t I get that job or that promotion? Being able to express yourself and having a voice and believing in that voice it's very important and you got to work on it and cultivate it."*

Mrs. Li points out the importance of having a voice and having self-confidence. She states that it is not important whether one is liked or not. Rather, she states one should know one´s aim and then strive for it. Besides having a voice and actively pursuing one´s career progression, interviewees highlight that one needs to be professionally competent and deliver good work. Mrs. Chen states:

> *"First of all, it is professional competence, it is a must. You need to be professionally very competent. You should be the expert in your area. This is one thing. Second thing is leadership… And of course you need to work very*

hard; I think nobody can be successful without working hard and much harder than the others."

Mrs. Chen highlights the importance of diligent work and being professionally competent. In addition, when asked how women can be empowered, Mrs. Guo states, "*Actions speak louder than words especially in the beginning when you are facing distrust. All I could do was doing good work to get credit. This was a lot of pressure.*" She underlines that it is crucial to do good work and have good results, when aiming for a management or board position. Also Mrs. Cheng addresses this line of argumentation. Coming from the technical sector she takes herself as an example when stating, "*if you have been an engineer before then make sure that you really know your engineer stuff and skills. Secondly, bring out your status.*" Mrs. Cheng highlights that in order to gain a management or board position one needs to be technically competent and then actively promote one´s status.

Above, interviewees argue that one needs to proactively strive for one´s career development. Furthermore, respondents highlight that one needs to do diligent work, be professionally competent and actively promote one´s work. Moreover, interviewees point out that when one is offered an opportunity one should grab it and take advantage of it. One such opportunity could be to strive for a career in the well-paid and emerging STEM sector. Women are frequently still underrepresented in the STEM sector. Mrs. Qi highlights that despite an overall improvement of education for Chinese girls, women are still largely underrepresented in STEM studies. She states "*but girls still don´t have that much interest in the STEM majors. I think we need an education reform how to teach the kids to get interested and then…like later on in their career they can be a CEO or something.*" Mrs. Qi observes a lack of interest particularly among girls in the STEM majors. She believes one should have an educational reform to teach the younger generation to be interested in STEM majors.

Interviewees underline the importance of pro-activeness by sharing personal experiences of agency. Mrs. Guo highlights her career path of becoming a CEO in her current company. She states that her colleagues:

> "*were giving me a very difficult time. I admit women in management do face gender inequality and gender discrimination towards them. There are a lot of difficulties in terms of promotion for women in companies. My suggestion for women is you have to show that you can fight like a man.*"

Mrs. Guo shares her experience of becoming a CEO. She argues that in the beginning, when she was still member of the upper management level, she did face a hard time with some of her fellow male colleagues. She suggests that women should not give up and be able to fight for their aims. In line with the above, also Mrs. Wang shares a personal experience of pro-activeness. She highlights:

> "*After my maternity leave, at that time I was an assistant manager and about to be promoted to a manager, a partner (of the company) said to me: ´We think you would benefit of staying an assistant manager for another year, be-*

cause you have taken four months maternity leave and you didn´t work a lot one month before you were due.´ And I said: ´No, I don´t agree with you. That is not fair. Why should I stay home because of this? I did some projects and got a lot of good feedback, so why?´ And the partner said: ´Yes, I agree with you.´ So sometimes I think you just need to say no. It is not just about accepting everything."

Mrs. Wang shares her personal experience when coming back from maternity leave. She then continues to underline personal agency and ability to act, by stating:

"I think a lot of things lay in you, like when I returned from maternity leave and they didn´t want to promote me immediately, I said: ´No.´ I think you need to pursue what you want to achieve and on the other hand, you need to say ´No I don´t want it. I should deserve something better.´ I think you need self-drive to do things and you need to know to push back and to say: ´No, I am not comfortable with this.´ At times you need to say ´No´ and that is something culturally not very common in China."

Mrs. Wang underlines the importance of pro-activeness and at times having the courage to simply disagree even if such habit is rather culturally atypical. In addition, Mrs. Yang shares an experience of pro-activeness of one of her friends, stating:

"Let me share with you an example. It´s a real example from my friend. Now she is a CEO or Chief Operating Officer with XXX[50] she started her career as a sales woman. She was selling hardware products and going from door to door and then worked herself up to the director level. And when she was working as a director, she wanted to become Senior Vice-President. And how she made it was…So her boss, he was going to resign. And what she did, oh my God every time I share that story with all the ladies, what she did is that she knocked at the door of her boss the Senior Vice-President and she said: ´If you're going to resign from the company please put my name on your succession list.´ And the man looks at her and says: ´Are you sure that you are able to do that?´ And she says: ´Yes, I want to do that. I want to take the challenge.´ So the first thing for women to rise up, first thing they really need to step up, get out of that comfort zone."

Mrs. Yang shares her friend´s experience of becoming first Senior Vice-President and now CEO in her company. Mrs. Yang points out that stepping out of one´s comfort zone is crucial when aiming for a management or board position. Also Mrs. Cheng shares her experience of obtaining her current management position, stating, *"Then I thought I will take the chance and the challenge and I took the chance."* In addition, another interviewee shares her personal experience of pro-actively climbing the career ladder from being a Human Resource assistant to joining the corporate board and eventually becoming an entrepreneur herself. She highlights:

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[50] Interviewee mentions the name of the company her friend works for.

"I am very honoured to have received the award ´Asia-Pacific Top 50 Women Leaders.´ My background I was born in (rural) China and I got an opportunity to participate in an international student program, I moved abroad. So I started as an intern at the very entry-level in the corporate world as an HR assistant. I learned English from zero. And that´s how I have been climbing up the corporate ladder as a foreigner in a foreign country. I always felt something stronger inside of me which I was not able to fulfil in the organization and I quit the job and I started my own business. First one failed, second one failed again. But in fact when I look back I am very grateful for that opportunity because everything is what we learn and also from the failures that´s how I shift myself up."

The interviewee shares her own personal experience of pro-actively working herself up in the corporate world. She highlights that she started off at the very entry-level as an intern, climbing up the corporate ladder, eventually starting her own business. She states that even after failing two businesses she did not give up and continued to work hard on her aims. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of lifelong-learning. Also Mrs. Song states that a continuous learning process is crucial to grow. Mrs. Song states:

"You have to keep on learning. Everything develops really really fast every minute. So you have to make sure that you keep on learning the latest things to make sure that you are not being replaced. Women are often facing more difficulties than men at the workplace so you have to be brave and dare to jump outside of your comfort zones."

She highlights the importance of a constant learning process. Furthermore, she highlights that it is crucial to always be updated about the latest developments in one´s sector. Mrs. Song states that at times one needs to be brave and jump out of one´s comfort zone. In addition, Mrs. Huang underlines the idea of growing by stating, *"You need to know where you can grow and also to know how to grow…"* Furthermore, she also addresses the idea of lifelong-learning. She argues that one needs to be updated about the latest developments in one´s sector. She states, *"You need to update yourself in terms of the current market situation."* In addition, Mrs. Huang picks up on the idea of growing and learning when stating:

"I would suggest women to grow into a CEO path and explore oneself what one wants to be. I mean do you really understand what a high level position what that means? What it takes? Are you willing to be that type of person? If you do feel that you want to be a CEO, instead of being for example the assistant to your husband, well then you will be a CEO. Then you will definitely have a tough mentality that might be seen as a threat to your partner as you will be decisive, you move things differently, you think things differently."

Mrs. Huang believes that one should grow into a CEO path. In addition, Mrs. Yang and Mrs. Zhao also underline the idea of lifelong-learning. Mrs. Zhao, although already being the General Manager of her company, states, *"It has been a long journey (to my current position). But I am still not finished I am still on it (laughing)."* She highlights that she is constantly aiming for more in terms of her

career development and that she is not yet done. In line with Mrs. Zhao also Mrs. Yang highlights examples of life-long learning. She states:

"For example when we look back at my friend who is now the CEO of XXX[51]. She is already on a CEO level but she still keeps on learning. She's very interested in international policy-making and in law. And now she's taking an online degree course in London in law. And I think a lot of people once they start reaching a certain level they stop growing and stop learning and then the glass ceiling comes in."

Mrs. Yang states that her friend who is already the CEO of an international publicly listed company still continues to learn and grow. She argues that she is currently doing a degree in law next to her CEO position. She states that frequently when people reach a certain level they will stop growing and learning. Mrs. Yang associates the termination of one´s learning and growing process with the glass ceiling. She states that once one stops learning and growing the glass ceiling kicks in. She highlights another example stating:

"For example, XXX[52] my friend…She's very very successful in her career. She is the Vice President of the XXX[53]. And she still keeps on learning. She attends seminars at University. She attends different workshops and now she's learning English. So that comes from the attitude from the mindset. Cause you know once you stop learning the competition no matter where you are which level, the competition is always there. It's always there. But once you keep up and you keep your head up on the competition because you keep on learning. Then you can keep ahead of the competition and you can enjoy that. Once you reach a certain point and you say: ´Okay I cannot break through this glass ceiling and that's the end of the world.´ That's a personal attitude. I always encourage people who really want to make a difference to keep on learning. It's lifetime learning."

Mrs. Yang gives an example of lifelong learning. She recalls the experience of a friend, stating that her friend already has an outstanding management position. Nevertheless, she does not sit back and relax. Rather, she continues to learn and grow. Again Mrs. Yang associates the idea of a glass ceiling with a learning and growing process. She states, "*You keep on learning, you never stop learning and that´s how you get yourself a chance to get into the boardroom.*" She highlights that if a person continues to learn and grow one can get a chance to become a board member. Although this might at times be the case at times, this can also give an illusionary idea. This may give the impression that if people only diligently enough keep on learning and growing they will eventually break through the glass ceiling. This may not necessarily always be the case and resemble reality.

Interviewees argue that one reason for female underrepresentation in management and board positions could be the lack of confidence in one´s own abilities.

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[51] Interviewee mentions the name of the company for which her friend works.
[52] Interviewee mentions the name of her friend.
[53] Interviewee mentions the name of the company for which her friend is the CEO.

When asked what needs to change in order to overcome the barriers that keep women from obtaining management or board positions, Mrs. Yang states, *"the first one is definitely start with the women themselves. Often they think that they cannot do more."* She continues to explain the idea by highlighting the so-called confidence gap. She argues:

> *"Let´s come to the confidence gap. For men who might only have 70 percent of competency but can take a hundred percent confidence or even 200 hundred percent because they just wanna take it. But for women who might have one hundred percent of competency, if someone comes and offers you the job, they might say: ´Oh no no! I wanna think about it again. I´m not sure I can take it.´ And that´s the difference. That´s why yeah there are so many men in the boardroom. So that comes from women themselves. Women need to boldly ask for that opportunity. And then once they get themselves in the door they need to prove themselves to stay in the door. Otherwise you get kicked out, right? (laughter)"*

The interviewee highlights that she has experienced a confidence gap between men and women. Furthermore, she assumes that one reason for female board underrepresentation might be women themselves. She argues that on average women do not boldly enough ask for opportunities. When asked what would need to change in order to increase the number of WoB, Mrs. Yang states:

> "*Number one is self-awareness. For women themselves they need to be aware of what their ability is, what their potential is and being able to boldly ask for that. Raise your hand. I wanna get that opportunity because if you do not raise your hand for yourself you are waiting for people to come and promote you or for people to come and say: ´Hey I want to raise your pay.´*"

The interviewee highlights the importance of self-awareness, thus becoming aware of one´s ability and potential. Mrs. Yang states that when aiming for career development it is not enough to wait to be promoted or get a salary rise. Rather, she argues it is crucial to boldly and pro-actively take opportunities and use them. As Mrs. Liu points out one should be aware of one´s qualities and abilities. Taking the lead she states "*I am here because I am good.*"

Mrs. Huang and Mrs. Qi question to what extent management- or board positions are truly desirable. Accordingly, Mrs. Huang states that being in a management position, *"…you will definitely have a tough mentality that might be seen as a threat to your partner, as you will be decisive, you move things differently, you think things differently."* She then questions, "*how many women really want to be that?...There is a lot of sacrifice involved.*" Mrs. Huang questions whether women truly want to be a manager or corporate board member. Furthermore, she argues, "*If women are underrepresented then I would say not a lot of women really want that (management or board position). I mean life is always a trade-off, so do you really want that?*" Mrs. Huang assumes that women are underrepresented on corporate and management positions due to a deliberate decision by women. She presumes that women might not actually want to accept the trade-off that a management position may entail. She continues to highlight her argu-

ment by stating:

> "When people say there are only few women in senior positions then I ask, at least for China, how many women actually have the aspiration and the interest to do so?...Do you want to be a CEO? Do you want to have your own firm? Do you want to have a senior position? Of course I want to be a CEO. I want to be in charge but it is not as simple as that. How many women say that they want to be a CEO? I mean do you understand? Do you really want to take on that responsibility? Being a CEO means: Can you handle the leadership? Can you handle the responsibility?"

Mrs. Huang questions whether women truly want to be a CEO, thus whether they want to bear all the responsibilities that being a CEO entails. She continues to describe the younger generation, when arguing:

> "I think nowadays we have to see what women want to be. I mean do they want to take on the CEO responsibilities? To be honest I don´t see this in China, not among the young generations. I think they just want an easy life...like finding their husband, they like to travel the world, having fancy dresses. If you want to have the responsibilities of a CEO then you are fully occupied and you have other things on your mind. You are not in the mood to show off all the fancy dresses."

Mrs. Huang assumes that the younger female Chinese generation have a lack of interest in becoming a CEO. Using essentialism she presumes that young women are more interested in finding a husband, travelling and having fancy dresses than actually taking on CEO responsibilities. In line with Mrs. Huang also Mrs. Qi sees a major barrier in women themselves when analysing female board underrepresentation. She states, "*I think the most serious barriers come from women themselves.*" Recalling her experience she argues, "*a lot of my friends I feel lack the motivation to work themselves up. Even though they work really hard, but they don´t want to. Sometimes even when they have the chance of being promoted their first reaction is complaining.*" Mrs. Qi takes her friends as an example stating that she thinks they sometimes lack the motivation when it comes to their career progression. Nevertheless, she highlights that "*if women themselves realise that they have to fight and they have to do something then of course they can do that.*" Mrs. Qi argues that if women truly wanted to be professionally successful then they could certainly achieve their aim.

Summarising the above section, I have highlighted interview extracts addressing the issue of ´Personal Initiative.´ Thereby thirteen out of sixteen interviewees have underlined the importance of ´Personal Initiative´ when analysing female board presence. Interviewees underlined personal initiative particularly being pro-active as forms of ´power to.´ Respondents highlight that one needs to be professionally competent, thus doing diligent and good work, but one also needs to be able to promote one´s work in a successful way. Furthermore, interviewees highlight that one needs to raise one´s hand and grab opportunities once they come up. One field of opportunity could be the well-paid and by women still largely underrepresented STEM area. Expert interviewee Mrs. Qi urges for an

educational reform in order to increase students´ interest in the STEM studies. As forms of ´power to´ interviewees then give examples of their own pro-activeness in their career development. Respondents underline the importance of constantly learning. As forms of ´power over´ interviewees refer to the lack of confidence in one´s own abilities. Furthermore, also the question whether management and board positions are truly desirable for women are discussed as a form of ´power over.´

4.2.4. Individual Support and Networks

In the following section interview extracts on the topic of "Individual Support and Personal Networks" will be addressed by highlighting the importance of having a supportive social and professional environment. In addition, Chinese interviewees highlight the negative effects of having an overall lack of support for the individual when striving for a board position as well as a lack of support from a national or international level. A lack of support from a national level can thereby limit female movements. Fifteen out of sixteen interviewees emphasise as a form of ´power to´ the importance of having support and networks when aiming for a high-level corporate position. Interviewees highlight as a form of ´power over´ the frequently assumed lack of networking skills and lack of access to powerful networks by women. Interviewees emphasise that having access to powerful networks, often labelled the ´old boys´ network´, is crucial. Furthermore, a lack of female solidarity is highlighted as a form of ´power over´, thus women failing to support other women. In the literature frequently defined as the ´Queen Bee Syndrome.´ This means women who have already achieved to gain a powerful corporate position failing to promote other women from younger generations. Interviewees highlight that it is crucial to include men in one´s struggle when aiming to increase gender equality in management and board positions. As a form of ´power to´ respondents mention having a supportive environment. Hereby interviewees particularly highlight the importance of having support from a mentor, professor, colleagues, a team, friends and family. Eleven out of sixteen interviewees highlight that they themselves have felt support and solidarity from others during their career path when reaching their current position. Respondents underline that not only support on an individual level is crucial when aiming for more gender equality on boards, thus having support from one´s professional or social environment, but also support from a national and international level. Interviewees point out the importance of having support from a national or international level for triggering gender equality in the workforce on a larger scale and increasing the number of WoB and management positions on a larger scope. Initiatives from a national or international level can thereby trigger social pressure towards more gender equality, eventually achieving societal change.

In the following, respondents argue that having access to powerful networks is crucial when aiming for a management or board position in China. Furthermore, interviewees mention that women frequently lack access to the necessary and influential networks. Thereby, expert interviewee Mrs. Xie particularly highlights the importance of the old boys' networks. Furthermore, Mrs. Li argues that often women do not only lack access to the powerful networks but also lack the nec-

essary networking skills. Mrs. Yang highlights *"Guanxi is important in China! Networks are important for being successful!"* She underlines the importance of having guanxi, thus access to social networks and influential relationships that may support and facilitate one´s business relations. She underlines that having necessary and influential networks is crucial when aiming to be successful. In addition, also expert interviewee Mrs. Xie underlines the importance of having access to powerful networks when aiming for a management or board position. She states, *"you also need to have the network."* Furthermore, addressing women´s networking skills she states*, "And women tend to network less than men. Especially in the top management it is very much an old-boy´s network."* Mrs. Xie states that in top management positions the old boys´ network is still very persistent. Moreover, Mrs. Li argues:

> *"Why do positions never even show up? That´s because they are already filled. Men go out they have drinks, they bond and they go: ´Oh there is a new job by the way I think you should go after.´ Women are not even in the game. So it´s more and more prevalent when you get higher and higher. Women just think that by my own merit, my good work, I should get jobs. And I think that works very well with jobs on lower ranks to the middle management, but anytime you get to a higher level like executive level that goes out the window it´s all about politics. It's all about power. It´s all about who you know and who actually will sponsor you, that´s it."*

In addition, Mrs. Li highlights "*I think women don´t network well. It is kind of like a vicious circle."* She underlines the importance of networking and states that according to her experience women frequently do not network well enough.

Above Mrs. Li, Mrs. Xie and Mrs. Yang highlight the importance of networking skills and having access to powerful networks, frequently the old boys´ network. Having support particularly from such powerful networks seems to be crucial when aiming for a high-level career position. Interviewees criticise that women frequently lack access to such powerful networks and often do not network well enough. In the following, respondents argue that frequently they have experienced a lack of support among women themselves. In scholarly literature this phenomenon is described as the ´Queen bee syndrome.´ This means women who have already achieved a high-level career position not promoting other women, particularly younger generations. In line Mrs. Li states, "*So there is no competition but there is back stabbing. Women backstab each other. So it is not enough that we already have competition with men, but we are being backstabbed by our own gender."* Mrs. Li highlights that at times instead of offering support women tend to backstab each other. When asked how the number of women in management and board positions could be increased, she states:

> *"I think first women need to support women. We (women) are already fighting the other 50 percent but we are also fighting among ourselves. That is just a fact. Why should men crack it (glass ceiling)? They are already winning. So it needs women to crack that."*

Mrs. Li underlines that women need to support women in order to crack the glass

ceiling. In line with Mrs. Li also Mrs. Yang highlights *"Women should support other women, cause we share certain struggles."* Mrs. Yang emphasises the importance of female solidarity. In addition, Mrs. Song states that women should unite and work together in order to overcome barriers that may keep women from obtaining high-level career positions. She states, *"women should unite together."* Furthermore, she underlines the power and strength that can emerge when having solidarity with others, arguing, *"When we unite together and link together that is the time when women altogether will have more energy to combat with this world."* In addition, also expert interviewee Mrs. Shi underlines female solidarity when stating, *"There are companies for example where women are in management positions. Then how can these women support other women, like peer support. This peer support is important and is also part of women´s empowerment."* Mrs. Shi highlights the importance of peer support among women in order to achieve female empowerment.

Above, interviewees have highlighted the importance of female solidarity, thus women supporting each other. When aiming for gender equality it is not only crucial working together with other women, but one should also include men. Mrs. Song and Mrs. Li argue that in one´s struggle for gender equality in management and board positions one should not exclude men. Mrs. Song highlights that one needs to work together *"with men. The relationship should not be anti. It should not be us women against men. We should learn to work harmoniously together with men, not against men, when we want to reach very high management positions."* In addition, also Mrs. Li states that *"As soon as we make men enemies of women, then we are in trouble. That is not what we want, never."* Interviewees highlight the importance of working together with men when aiming for more gender equality.

Furthermore, respondents state that having a general supportive environment is crucial when aiming for a high-level career position. Thereby, interviewees particularly mention having a mentor. Accordingly, Mrs. Yang underlines that *"We cannot grow by ourselves, we need a mentor. So get someone to mentor you."* She states that one cannot grow alone. Therefore, she suggests that one should look for a mentor. In addition, Mrs. Guo states that *"This support is very important."* Also Mrs. Zhang underlines the importance of mentorship and support by others when stating, *"if there are other people available for feedback or mentorship use this, to know we are not alone."* Mrs. Zhang highlights the importance of having support from others and knowing that one is not alone. However, she states, *"Some women don´t have that type of mentorship."* When asked what she would suggest others aiming for a similar career position, Mrs. Huang states, *"I would suggest you to have a mentor in your corporation because sometimes you need support."* Mrs. Huang argues that one should find a mentor in one´s corporation for support. Also Mrs. Wang highlights the importance of having a mentor by stating, *"I can see how important it is to have mentors. You don´t need to have very many people but you need a number of people that can give you some advice who can change the course how you navigate your career."* Mrs. Yang states

"One thing, in fact for a lot of women, before they rise up, before they do

something, someone is behind them to support and encourage them. Say-
ing: ´Keep on going, I am always here.´ And you know that makes a huge
difference because you do not need to worry about if I will do this then
somebody will be pissed off. You will have a lot of personal struggles, but if
you have cleared that out that is a great way to start and empower our-
selves."

Mrs. Yang states that to be successful you should have a person that has your back. This means someone that encourages and supports you and your career path. Furthermore, Mrs. Yang states that one cannot change alone. She argues that one needs the support of others, "*There are lots of people that can support you. And that really makes the difference. It's all about people. We cannot live alone, we cannot change alone. It's all about the right people.*" She states:

> "*…that's why I always say if you want to be successful surround yourself by people who want you to be successful. Otherwise being successful will be very difficult. Because if the people around you do not want you to be suc-cessful or do not support you, your success will be very difficult. But when you surround yourself with people who support you, who mentor you and who lift you up, your success will come easier and faster as well.*"

Mrs. Yang argues that it is important to surround yourself with people that want you to be successful and that are willing to support you. She states that other-wise career success will be very difficult to achieve. Just like Mrs. Yang also Mrs. Wang highlights the importance of having a supportive mentor. She states, "*I think for every successful woman there must be at least one or two mentors to help her going through some difficult times.*" When asked how the number of women in management and board positions could be increased, she states, "*I think one of the things, I have mentioned publicly, is that a lot of organisations are still quite male dominated. So one of the suggestions is to get a mentor. A male can be a good mentor to a female. So I think that is very important.*" She states that corporations are still largely male dominated. Therefore, she reasons that a man could be a good mentor for a woman. Mrs. Wang points out the gen-der of a mentor. Mrs. Liu and Mrs. Cheng however underline personal character-istics as trustworthiness for a well-functioning mentoring relationship. Mrs. Liu states that "*When you work in a corporation you don´t work by yourself. So you do want to have a trusting relationship with the people around you, above you and below you. So I think having this trusting relationship is important to build.*" Furthermore, when asked whether support from others is important when aiming for a management or board position, Mrs. Cheng states, "*Yes, of course. If you want to get into the position you need to show your ability and when you show ability and your colleagues and boss support you that means you have the ability and you can do this job.*" Mrs. Cheng highlights that support from others is par-ticularly important when striving for a leadership position.

Above, interviewees have highlighted that having support from others is crucial when aiming for a high-level career position. In the interviews, eleven out of six-teen respondents state that they have felt support and solidarity from others while on their career path, particularly reaching their current career position. Mrs.

Wang responds, "*I have been very lucky to have very good mentors and partners and senior people protecting me and supporting me.*" She underlines the importance of her personal mentoring relationships when stating that:

> "*whenever I had problems, doubts and concerns, I would always talk to him (mentor). And he would say: ´Ok, this is what we will do and I will help you to talk to other people to get things done. I will give you a face. I will give you esteem. I will support you to be on the stage, don´t be afraid to fail, it will be ok.´*"

She continues to reflect upon her own mentoring relationship when stating, "*So I think this mentorship in an organisation is important whether it is male or female...actually sometimes I think a male can be better help to the female to guide them as they go through the journey and give them confidence.*" Mrs. Wang highlights the importance of having a trustful mentoring relationship within one´s organisation. She again particularly points out the mentor´s gender. Mrs. Yang states, "*Wow, there was so much support. I cannot change, I cannot rise up, I cannot transform by myself.*" Mrs. Yang highlights that support from others is crucial when trying to develop one´s career. Moreover, also Mrs. Chen responds affirmatively when asked whether she has felt any support from others when obtaining her current career position. She states:

> "*Yes, sure. I have worked for quite a few companies. I have to say all my bosses have been great mentors. Through these three executives I learned a lot and I grew a lot under their guidance and coaching. In my former companies there were also career managers to support each individual.*"

Mrs. Chen highlights that all her former superiors have been excellent mentors to her. In addition, Mrs. Li states, "*I have always had really good men mentors, more so than I have had women, just because there are less women.*" In line with Mrs. Chen also Mrs. Li states that she has had supportive mentors. She states that her mentors have been primarily male rather than female however simply due to the fact that women still tend to be underrepresented on corporate boards. In contrast to the before mentioned, Mrs. Huang states that she has not had a single person that she could call a mentor. However, she argues that she has learned a lot from others. She states, "*I don´t have like a single mentor but I do learn a lot from other people. Me, I like to learn. I look at how other CEOs handle things. I talk to people that I respect.*" Moreover, Mrs. Zhang states that looking back on her career path she would have liked to have a support group. She argues:

> "*For me, looking back, it would have been really good to have a cohort group. A group of women, a little bit like a support group and a sisterhood group. Sometimes we need to share some of our experience with someone without feeling shame or feeling guilty, like having this unbiased approach to each other.*"

Although Mrs. Zhang and Mrs. Huang did not have a single mentor, both recognise the importance of having a supportive environment. Mrs. Zhao argues that

she had mentors during her career path. When asked whether she has felt support from others, she states:

> *"Yes, mentors. During different times of my career and at different levels I have always had very very good mentors. They always cared about me and they know me. So mentors are good. And I learn from my team. I learn from them I ask them a lot of questions."*

In addition, also Mrs. Cheng highlights her experience with team support. She states that she has received a lot of support from her colleagues, arguing:

> *"…a lot of my colleagues have supported me. I am very lucky that I have a lot of people supporting me at work. I have a colleague who is an expert in my area, he knew that my boss was pushing me to do this position and that I was willing to do this. So he pushed with me and he thought I had the ability to do this job. Yes, he encouraged me a lot. Also the other group leaders from the other teams supported me a lot. Especially when I was under big pressure they encouraged me a lot."*

Mrs. Cheng highlights her personal experience, stating that she has felt supported by her own colleagues, her boss and other group leaders. Furthermore, also Mrs. Liu argues, "*Clearly there have been people that have been helpful that have suggested me for roles. I have had encouragement from the people I work with, also colleagues oversea in the company.*" In line with the before mentioned, also Mrs. Guo has felt support. She argues that she herself has "*a very experienced mentor from business.*" Others, as Mrs. Shi have felt support from their professor. She states, "*My professor. His support was very important also to get this position. So basically the people around you can give you big support and that is very important for a career.*" In addition, Mrs. Qi underlines the importance of receiving support from her friends and professors:

> "*Yes, friends and advisors. My advisors are very important for me. My advisor at XXX[54] was a very strong woman. I think she pushed me. We all need this kind of social capital. But in my case this social capital is not from my family, but from my friends and professors. So in this way I really thank my professors and my friends."*

In Mrs. Qi´s case the social capital[55] has not come from her family, but rather from her advisors.

Above, interviewees particularly highlight the support of mentors, as for example professional superiors in their own company. Others mention their professors, colleagues, friends or their own team as being supportive. In the following, interviewees argue that they have felt not only supported by their professional environment but particularly by their family. Mrs. Yang argues that "*Get(ting) the*

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[54] Interviewee mentions the name of the institution for which her advisor works.
[55] Stevenson and Radin (2008: 4) define "social capital" as one´s investments in social relations with others, when one is expecting returns. For a detailed discussion on "social capital" please refer to the Literature Review under section 1.1. "Demographics, Human- and Social Capital."

support from the family and from the close relationships is very very important.” In addition, also Mrs. Zhao highlights that *“I am very very lucky cause my mom and dad they are very healthy and they are open-minded and they are very helpful. When I need help they come immediately.”* In line with Mrs. Yang and Mrs. Zhao also Mrs. Wang states that:

> *“Family is also important. To have a really supportive family. So not only parents looking after your child but also support from your spouse who is willing to share the workload at home or will give you emotional support especially when you want to go that extra mile at work.”*

Mrs. Wang highlights that having family support is crucial when aiming for a management or board position. Both Mrs. Wang and Mrs. Liu particularly highlight their husband as being a crucial mentor for their career development. Mrs. Wang states, *“My husband is also a great mentor for me. He is also a partner at XXX[56]. From a family perspective a husband can also be a good mentor.”* In addition, Mrs. Liu states:

> *“I did have a lot of support also from my husband for the hours that I work, for the travels that I do. He has to accept that in order for me to be successful here. If he was one of those guys that I go home and cook him dinner, then clearly this would not have worked. So he is very supportive. So it wouldn´t have happened if your family would not agree that this is any important thing to spend time on. But we just both agreed that this was an important goal to achieve for the family. Essentially being successful in the corporate world also means that you have high earning power and that economically was important to the family.”*

Mrs. Liu states that if one´s family is not supporting one´s career ambitions achieving a high-level corporate career can be quite difficult. Above, interviewees have highlighted the importance of having a supportive environment, thus a well-meaning mentor or family. This means when striving for a management or board position support on an individual and personal level is crucial. However, interviewees point out that in addition to having support on an individual level one also needs to feel supported from a national and international level in order to effectively increase the overall number of women in management and board positions on a greater scheme. In the following, respondents highlight the importance of national and international initiatives aiming for more gender equality in the workforce and in management positions. Accordingly, Mrs. Yang states that:

> *“In fact I think UN Women is doing a great job in China and also international brands and other international organizations…So there are lots of initiatives. I believe that now in the government, non-profit and business sectors there is more and more awareness and a bigger female voice…That starts to get people aware (…) of empower(ing) them (women) to rise up.”*

Mrs. Yang highlights that lots of initiatives have been implemented to achieve gender equality. She has the impression that public awareness regarding gender

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[56] Interviewee mentions the name of a company her husband is a partner at.

equality is increasing. Furthermore, expert interviewee Mrs. Luo emphasises the importance of the organisation:

> "'Lean In.[57]' They are doing a lot of good work on young professional women and university women who are soon to graduate. Encouraging them to consider stronger careers and then doing events to raise awareness about gender equality and starting to talk to companies about women's leadership in the workplace."

In addition, Mrs. Song, foundress of a Chinese NGO working for the empowerment of women in the workforce, particularly encouraging female entrepreneurs in rural areas of China, states that her NGO is: "*a platform that is trying to provide women with resources and capital for them to develop their programs. There are two programs running: One are social events, the other are business courses.*" She continues by highlighting that she:

> "*want(s) to help improving the situation for women especially in rural areas like Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou. Women there often do not have good working opportunities, they often have to stay at home and take care of the family. I want (…) to provide many good working opportunities for them and for them to promote themselves by giving them learning opportunities so that they can get a management position and take better care of their families. The most important things are resources and capital.*"

Mrs. Song highlights that her NGO "*would like to search for support from the international society all over the world. We know that women will be able to empower themselves better once they get the expertise and the experience.*" In addition, Mrs. Guo explains that there are various national platforms available in China that urge for the empowerment of female entrepreneurs. She states, "*There are some national platforms and there are Women's Unions that organise conferences and workshops for female entrepreneurs.*" However, she argues that societal change is not easily achieved and at times may take years. She highlights: "*But of course it's not that easy. It's not done in one night. It's a consistent journey.*" In addition, also Mrs. Li addresses societal change when stating that ultimately it comes down to the question, *"How willing is a society?"* She asks, *"So what kind of pain points can be pressured? So the pain points we can utilise: Women have the perfect opportunity nowadays but they don't quite recognise it: Voice in conjunction with their purchasing power."* Mrs. Li believes that women can have a voice through purchasing power. She explains that if all women across the world would stop buying from a certain shop this shop would quickly go bankrupt. She states that purchasing power can trigger greater leverage and a greater voice. She further explains the idea of voice and purchasing power, when stating:

> "*If we (women) would actually come together and we were, for example, not going to go to Walmart and buying anything, Walmart would go out of busi-*

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[57] "Lean In" China is an organisation aimed at improving the situation of women in China, thus empowering them. It provides women with a platform for exchange and includes more than 100,000 members in 25 Chinese cities (Lean In China, 2019).

ness just like that. It is only when we come together as a voice things can change. But we are very segmented and very separated, it´s very difficult. I mean it took a lot to only get our votes and it wasn´t even that long ago. We forget so easily. So it takes will power, it takes all of us coming together, there needs to be a pain point."

She states that when working together as a group one can achieve a lot, thus triggering societal change towards more gender equality. Being segmented and separated among each other will make things more difficult. Mrs. Li sees great potential in entrepreneurship, thus women being entrepreneurs and owning companies. She states:

"The only way to actually have power is to actually own something. So this is where the purchasing power or the entrepreneurship is really truly a viable, valuable thing. If more and more women become entrepreneurs and we all support those entrepreneurs to be a big company now that is meaningful. China for me the way out (of gender inequality) is the entrepreneurship side. Changing the culture will hopefully mean very strong women owning companies."

She underlines the power that would emerge if women were to work in solidarity together. However, the idea of coming and working together as a group, thus jointly aiming for gender equality, can also be quite difficult. In the following, interviewees[58] highlight that working on gender equality issues in China can at times be challenging. One interviewee states:

"for example in Canada when people talk about gender inequality they are not monitored or regulated by the authority. But here in China when we talk about it (gender inequality) we are in serious problems and we are monitored by the government and by the authorities everywhere."

She describes the difficulties she has been facing when working on gender inequality issues in China. In addition, another interviewee highlights that recently feminist movements have started to become more public. She argues:

"In recent years this idea of feminist movements has become more public (than) in previous years. Feminism was only debated upon in the academic area. However, in recent years feminism is becoming more visible, basically bringing these gender equality issues more public."

She highlights that in former times feminism was primarily an issue of discussion in academic circles. Today, she can perceive a change towards having increasingly more visibility and sensitivity concerning gender equality issues in the Chinese public discourse. She explains the emerging feminist movements in China, when stating:

"We call it new feminist movements, which are usually considered to be young women quite a few are actually lesbians and they have been very ac-

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[58] To ensure interviewees´ full anonymity no names will be used in this section.

tively advocating for gender equality, like writing articles on new media and making this a more public issue. They even sued the Education Department on some discriminatory issues which makes the gender issue more public and more sensitive to a lot more people."

She explains that members of the new feminist movements are frequently young women who are actively advocating for more gender equality. She argues that with certain actions like suing the Education Department on discriminatory issues, the movement has received more public attention. Moreover, she argues:

"But the thing is that now the feminists or especially the new feminist movements are becoming more sensitive towards...more sensitive...well because you criticise things, right? And sometimes you have these public activities like suing the Education Department. You can imagine, I mean China, the authority won´t like it, right? So the government I would say feels this is a sensitive issue. So it is not easy for you to do feminist movements or these kinds of things. So, I don´t know what will happen in the future, because sometimes you will see on the internet some advocacy work, it would be very easily banned. So it is hard to say. I am not being very optimistic..."

The interviewee highlights the difficulty of working on feminist or gender issues in China. In addition, another interviewee states, *"I don´t think there is really an overall government cry out about this (gender inequality issues)."*

Summarising the above section, I highlighted interview extracts addressing ´Individual Support and Networks.´ Fifteen out of sixteen interviewees emphasised that having access to powerful networks and support from others is crucial when aiming for a management or board position. Thereby interviewees highlight a supportive environment as a form of ´power to.´ Interviewees highlight as a form of ´power over´ that women often lack access to such powerful networks and often lack the necessary networking skills. Moreover, also as a form of ´power over´, interviewees mention a lack of solidarity among women themselves. Interviewees argue that not only support from an individual level, thus from one´s professional or social environment, is crucial when aiming for gender equality in management and board positions, but also having support from a national or international level. Thereby interviewees underline that support on a national and international level can trigger a greater leverage towards achieving gender equality in the workforce on a larger scale and increasing the number of WoB and management positions on a larger scope. Initiatives from a national or international level can thereby trigger social pressure towards more gender equality, eventually achieving societal change.

4.2.5. Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations

In the following section, I will address Chinese interview extracts on the topic of "Societal Structures" by highlighting the effects of societal expectations and presumed gender roles for women striving for a board position. Fifteen out of sixteen interviewees highlight the importance of societal structures during their interviews. Thereby, respondents particularly point out societal expectations. Thus,

respondents argue that societal expectations can greatly influence individuals' actions and their decision-making process. Thereby interviewees state that societal expectations are often rooted in traditional beliefs. Respondents highlight as forms of ´power over´ that in former times women were frequently expected to work inside the home while men were expected to work outside the home. Seven of sixteen interviewees highlight as forms of ´power over´ when arguing that often women were supposed to be responsible for household and childcare duties, while men were supposed to be the primary breadwinner. Despite great societal changes, interviewees argue that societal expectations are still be persistent. Then six out of sixteen interviewees highlight societal expectations young Chinese women tend to face. As forms of ´power to´ it is argued that young women are frequently expected to do well at school and at university. However, as a form of ´power over´ they should not be professionally too successful or earn too much money as they might face difficulty when trying to find a husband. Accordingly, interviewees point out as a form of ´power over´ that too successful young women, thus women above the age of 27 years old, having too many high degrees and earning too much money, may easily end up being socially labelled a sheng nü, thus a leftover woman. Interviewees highlight such social labelling as a form of ´power over´ when stating that this can trigger pressure upon the individual. Underlying such societal expectations are frequently presumed assumptions that tend to attach one´s biological sex[59] to stereotypical masculine or feminine character traits. Accordingly, interviewees highlight as a form of ´power over´ that often girls are still raised to be grateful, pretty and nice. While some interviewees criticise such stereotypical assumptions as limiting the individual, other interviewees use such essentialist assumptions to argue in support of female managers and board members. Furthermore, interviewees point out as a form of ´power over´ that stereotypical manager and leader characteristics are often primarily associated with stereotypical masculine rather than feminine characteristics. Thereby seven out of sixteen interviewees underline ´think manager think male´ assumptions. As forms of ´power over´ interviewees highlight that they have felt differential treatment due to their gender, others argue that they have felt being treated differently due to their age. When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards, interviewees highlight the importance of culture and history. Thereby, culture and history are described as including both forms of ´power over´ and ´power to.´ Interviewees particularly mention the influence of Confucian thought as well as Mao´s slogan ´Women hold up half the sky.´ Interviewees then highlight cases of son preference as a form of ´power over´. Despite listing cases of gender inequality, interviewees conclude by highlighting forms of ´power to´, thus observing an increasing societal change towards more acceptance of diversity and gender equality.

When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards interviewees underline the importance of societal structures. Thereby, respondents particularly point out societal expectations as greatly influencing women and men in

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[59] For a detailed explanation of "sex" and "gender" please refer to the section 3.1.2. "Sex, Gender, Power" under "Theory & Methodology." For a detailed discussion of "sex" and "gender" in relation with the findings of the conducted interviews please refer to the section "Power over, Power to: Societal Structures" under "Chapter 5: Discussion."

their everyday life. Mrs. Cheng underlines the importance of societal expectations. She highlights that being a professional man or woman nowadays is not easy. Thereby she particularly addresses the societal expectations that men and women tend to face in their everyday life. Mrs. Cheng states, *"I think it is very challenging to be both a professional man and woman in the Chinese society."* She continues to highlight societal expectations when stating:

> *"If you are a Chinese woman in a professional world and you are interested in having a strong career then you have to first of all to deal with the expectations around your personal life, right? Like how much time you spend with your family and with your parents…In some ways there are some societal expectations."*

Mrs. Cheng highlights that being a professional woman one has to primarily deal with societal expectations regarding one´s personal life. These expectations frequently refer to the amount of time one spends taking care of one´s family or parents. Such societal expectations can trigger pressure for the individual. Societal expectations can often be rooted in traditional cultural beliefs. Accordingly, Mrs. Guo and Mrs. Shi argue that traditionally men were expected to work outside of the home while women were expected to work inside the home. Mrs. Guo highlights that traditionally *"men would go outside of the home and work and women would work inside of the home."* In addition, Mrs. Shi highlights *"The idea that the male will handle the outside issues, outside of the household and the woman will handle the family issue, this idea is still strong."* Interviewees point out traditional beliefs concerning the division of labour between men and women. Accordingly, women were expected to take care of work inside the home, thus primarily being responsible of childcare and household duties. Men were expected to take care of work outside the home, thus primarily being the breadwinner of the family. Mrs. Shi argues that this idea is at times still strong.

In the following, interviewees point out that women are often still expected to be the primary responsible for childcare and household duties. Although interview extracts in this section are similar to the section highlighted above under "Compatibility: Family & Career" this part primarily lists societal expectations upon women while the section on "Compatibility" primarily summarised expectations held by the woman´s family of origin. At times a clear-cut segregation of interviewee extracts however proves to be difficult. The most important interview extracts have been segregated accordingly. When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards and in management positions, Mrs. Song sees barriers in *"deeply rooted thoughts in Chinese people´s mind, they think women are supposed to be at home giving birth to kids and also being at home taking care of the family."* Mrs. Song underlines that women are often still expected to take care of household and childcare responsibilities. In addition, also Mrs. Qi highlights, *"I think currently they (Chinese society) still want women to take care of the family and be a good wife and good mother."* Furthermore, just like Mrs. Qi also Mrs. Wang states that *"They (Chinese society) still expect women to take on more family responsibilities in the Chinese society. It is usually the husband who works and the wife who looks after the kids…"* Mrs. Yang argues that frequently one´s family and husband *"expect women to take care of the family and of the*

household." When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards, Mrs. Cheng states that, *"I think one reason is the society. They believe women should be at home raising the kids and doing the housework…"* In addition to Mrs. Cheng also expert interviewee Mrs. Shi states, *"Well I guess there are still quite a few people who still want women to take care of the family."* In addition, Mrs. Song highlights:

> *"The bigger and richer the family the more they want to control women, to make sure they stay at home. If they go out to work they might fear that they will lose the family´s face. ´We have money to care for you, why do you still have to go outside and work?´"*

Above interviewees have highlighted societal expectations women and men tend to face. Interviewees have highlighted societal expectations regarding men and women. In the following, interviewees particularly point out expectations young women tend to face. Mrs. Liu argues:

> *"I think there is an expectation for young women to marry early and then take care of the child and be supportive of their husbands. So a lot of these traditional cultural roles of what a woman should be whether it is in China or the West is still very heavily felt in China. There are some expectations that women are still the primary caregiver in the home if there are any issues around that it is usually the woman who take time for that."*

Mrs. Liu argues that frequently young women are expected to marry early and then take care of their child and support their husband. She then highlights possible consequences of such societal expectations:

> *"That essentially means for a period of time you may not be able to thrive as hard and as focused as you really would like to in your career and in your advancement. So usually then you just slow down or women often then chose an easier job in order to be able to handle that. If you choose to have less responsibility in a corporate setting then it will take you longer to get to higher management positions and then also be noticed for boards."*

Mrs. Liu highlights that when expected to be the primary caregiver in one´s family, one may have less time and energy available for one´s professional career development. Spending less time in a professional context can mean taking longer to reach a high-level career position. In addition, Mrs. Luo argues that young women nowadays are faced with different, at times even contradicting, societal expectations and mixed messages. She states:

> *"From what I understand from young women is that there are a lot of mixed messages, particularly when they are urban they are encouraged to do well in school and go to university. But then at university graduation you start getting a lot of different messages. So you need to start finding a husband, you need to start settling down, you need to get married and get a kid. So a lot of young women are saying: ´I want a career but my own mother is telling me that I should be looking for a husband and get married.´ So it is sort of a lot of mixed messages and inflicting messages: You should do really well at*

> *school, you should get educated so that you could have a career but you don´t want a too demanding career and you don´t want too many high degrees, just enough to find a job and a husband."*

In addition, also Mrs. Cheng underlines this dichotomy when stating, *"Then you (young Chinese women) also have to be smart and intelligent but perhaps you cannot be smarter or cannot make more money than your husband."* She states:

> *"The parents now they would like to give their daughters the best education, but they don´t want their daughter to be too capable, because they feel if the woman is too capable it is hard to get married. So we still give a lot of value to the family, you have to get married, you should have a baby. So for a woman to get married, you shouldn´t be too strong, right? Otherwise, no man will dare to marry you…That is why we have this kind of discrimination against female PhDs, right? Our female PhDs also feel this kind of pressure. It is really hard to get a boyfriend and get married."*

In line with the before mentioned, also Mrs. Liu underlines the societal pressure young women tend to face. She states, *"So I can see a lot of women kind of walking that line. If you are a young woman and you feel you are too smart or you make too much money then you can´t get a boyfriend. If that is a concern then I think people individually could be held back."* Mrs. Liu highlights that young women are walking a fine line nowadays. She argues that if as a young woman one is too smart or earns too much money it might become difficult to find a boyfriend. She highlights that this could result in holding back and limiting the development of people´s potential. Interviewees presume that if a woman is too smart, professionally too successful or earning too much money, she might face difficulties when trying to find a husband. Accordingly, Mrs. Wang argues that too successful young women might easily end up being labelled a sheng nü, thus a ´leftover woman.´ She continues to argue *"this kind of social labelling creates pressure."* In addition, also interviewees Mrs. Qi and Mrs. Yang address the idea of too successful, too strong and too ambitious women. Expert interviewee Mrs. Qi argues that, *"Actually I think we don´t really appreciate, we call them too strong women."* Furthermore, Mrs. Qi continues to highlight that successful women in high-level career positions are regarded as *"really too successful, because these kind of women…it means they don´t take good care of the family, right? Of course once you turn too much of your attention to your job of course you spend so much time there. Who is going to take care of the kid?´"* Furthermore, Mrs. Yang argues that *"Women who are successful or who want to rise up, people usually say: ´Oh, you are too ambitious.´ Men would never receive this…"* Correspondingly, Mrs. Zhang argues, *"I think women are still expected to hold kind of feminine positions, you know like looking pretty."* Mrs. Zhang argues that frequently women are expected to comply with stereotypical feminine positions as for example being pretty. Furthermore, Mrs. Guo highlights that women are often expected to be a little shy and introverted. She argues, *"Especially here in China we have this culture that women tend to be shy and women tend to be very introverted, we don´t express our feelings that much to the people outside."* In addition, Mrs. Zhang highlights that frequently women are raised to be grateful. She highlights:

> *"I have experienced that we (women) are really not aggressive in our way of thinking. We are always more about: ´Oh, what have I done wrong?´ We think more reactionary and I know from me I wouldn´t be the first one to negotiate a better job schedule, or a higher salary. It is always rather: ´Oh hush, hush, be grateful that you got a job.´"*

Societal expectations as well as societal beliefs are frequently rooted in traditional ideas. At times such expectations and beliefs can include biases. Accordingly, Mrs. Li argues *"We know that there are deep rooted biases."* Occasionally societal expectations and beliefs are deeply rooted in essentialist stereotypes. Such societal expectations, thus naturally assuming women to take care of childcare and household duties while men being the natural breadwinner, limit the individual in their development, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. While some interviewees criticise such societal expectations, others use biological determinism[60] to support the idea of having female managers and board members. Some respondents tend to assume that women might have a different, thus a female management style. Interviewees frequently believe that such a female management style will result in female managers acting differently than their male peers, thus acting according to stereotypical feminine character traits. Often it is presumed that female managers might be more caring than male managers, simply due to the fact that they are women. Although at times this may be possible, the belief still cuts short on the great diversity of individual male and female characters. Mrs. Chen addresses the idea of having a female perspective when stating:

> *"Women´s perspective and also the way we (women) deal with problems or we deal with tasks or deal with employees is different from men. In fact this gives a very good diversification and also compensation to some topics when men only look from men´s perspective."*

Mrs. Chen argues that women have a different perspective than men, thus a women´s perspective. Furthermore, she argues that women tend to deal with problems, tasks and employees different than their male peers. In addition, also drawing on stereotypes, Mrs. Guo highlights:

> *"Women are quite emotional. So the big companies pay special attention to this. They exaggerate this part and make very good use of this. So for example since women are very emotional this means they are less likely to leave their job, they will have a special attachment to the company and will be very loyal to the company. So compared to men, men might leave this job immediately without any hesitance but for women they have a special attachment. They will feel grateful. They do not want to leave their colleagues that they have been working with."*

Emphasising a natural difference between men and women Mrs. Zhao argues, *"You know women our body our chemicals are different...because we are moms."* When asked why women are underrepresented on board positions Mrs. Chen highlights that *"I think historically and also by nature women have more*

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[60] Please refer to the section 3.1.2. "Sex, Gender, Power" under "Theory & Methodology" for a discussion on "Biological Determinism."

physical challenges to face, right? During the time when we are growing up, we have the monthly period, which men don´t have, this can create a monthly physical disability for quite some women." In addition, Mrs. Guo shares a personal experience from an earlier job. She highlights that she was about to go on a business trip when she was feeling a little sick at work. Accordingly her boss deduced that she was feeling sick because of her menstruation. She highlights that her boss concluded that if *"I had my menstruation I could not perform 100 percent to the best."* Moreover, Mrs. Guo argues that *"my boss changed my plans"* and gave her business trip *"to one of the male colleagues."* She argues, *"So my boss was saying if I had my menstruation it would be a waste of flight tickets and also hotel bookings"* to send her off to the business trip. She continues that *"my boss changed the tickets not because of empathy but because he thought it was a waste of money."*

Above, interviewees point out physical and emotional differences between men and women. Some interviewees, as Mrs. Guo and Mrs. Chen, use such assumed differences between men and women to argue in favour of female board presence. The physical aspects are naturally given differences, thus only the conclusions are manmade. In the following, Mrs. Cheng exemplifies this by stating that *"sometimes women easily get emotional and sometimes you can lose control when you have pressure on you and that is not good. When that happens people will not trust you."* In addition, also expert interviewee Mr. Peng uses stereotypical arguments to argue against the idea of female board presence. When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards, Mr. Peng argues*, "Women are less productive and they work less efficient and are less ambitious."* Furthermore, he states that "*Business should be about efficiency not about democracy and equality that is part of politics*, *not business. If women were more ambitious then they would also get onto a board."* Ultimately, he thinks that "*Women should take care of the family. There is no discrimination towards females."* He assumes that men and women naturally differ in their character traits and behaviour by stating:

> *"Women and men can do different jobs. Females are more diligent and they have a better moral…But I don´t know whether women can improve the proficiency of a firm. There are only few females that are different and that put a lot of time and effort in their jobs they might make it to the top because they are different from the average female."*

Interviewees highlight frequently held assumptions attaching stereotypical manager characteristics to stereotypical masculine character traits. Respondents argue that the idea of ´think manager think male´ is still prevalent. Accordingly, Mrs. Cheng highlights that "*they often don´t think women can do leadership."* In addition, also Mrs. Song highlights the idea of ´think manager, think male´ when asked for the reasons behind female board underrepresentation. She states, *"a lot of people especially men in management positions, they´re deep conscious says that women do not have the energy, do not have the capability of being CEOs and managing a company at such big scales."* Mrs. Wang highlights that "*I think in China traditionally it (management and board rooms) is still quite male-dominated."* In addition, also expert interviewee Mrs. Luo highlights that there

are:

> *"many barriers, cultural and social. I think underlying all of this is basically cultural attitude about who deserves to be a leader, who would make a good leader and towards who doesn´t. Despite now almost 70 years of the People´s Republic there is still lots of patriarchal attitudes here that men make better leaders. A lot of messages that are given to young boys and girls from a young age regarding what they should aspire to be with boys encouraged to go for status careers more than girls."*

Mrs. Luo believes that a cultural attitude towards who deserves to be a leader is still largely persistent. Furthermore, she highlights that already from an early age onwards young boys and girls receive different messages regarding what each should aspire to go for. In addition, Mrs. Zhang argues that "*Culturally...I would say it is an overall male working environment.*" When asked how a successful manager is perceived by society, Mrs. Zhang responds, "*It is a mixed bag. Like with my friend who is also a CEO in China. She would tell me that it is quite common that when she gets on a plane to go to a business meeting, people will assume that she is the wife of a CEO. People wouldn´t assume that she is the CEO.*" Mrs. Zhang continues by stating that "*I don´t think that they are promoting women into leadership positions that much…*" She highlights that the idea of women in leadership positions is not yet sufficiently being promoted. Mrs. Guo states that "*There are prejudices at the workplace. They believe that women can only manage a small team of people they don´t believe that women can manage an entire company.*" Mrs. Guo argues that successful female managers are frequently faced with discrimination. She states:

> *"Chinese housewives tend to discriminate towards successful women. They think that you must have sacrificed your family. You will not have any time for the family as you spend your entire time work(ing). For men there are two groups: One group of men they will give you recognition so actually give you credit for your good performance and your work. They think that you deserve this position, they give you credit for it. The other group of men they think that you got this position probably because of your good looks or because you have taken advantage of your female competitiveness like sexual advantage. They can attack you with this."*

Mrs. Guo argues that at times female managers can face discrimination. She argues that some will value your work and achievements while others might assume that you do not spend enough time with your family. Ultimately, Mrs. Zhao highlights that trying to change others is very difficult. Therefore, she suggests that one should simply learn to deal with people who believe that women are bad managers. She states:

> *"Once you get to the upper management level you have to learn...how to protect yourself, you have to learn how to manage these political thing(s)...you have to learn how to manage all those people thinking: ´Oh females are not good managers.´ Those are from the outside...Can you change the outside, can you change someone else? It´s hard, right? What*

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you can change is yourself."

In the following, interviewees highlight possible consequences that can emerge for the individual when faced with ´think manager think male´ stereotypes. Accordingly, Mrs. Guo highlights, "*Men are taken more seriously as us women.*" Furthermore, Mrs. Wang highlights that as a woman one often has to prove that one is actually capable of doing one´s work. She argues that:

> "*the female is asked: ´Can you prove that you can achieve this?´ So you need to prove something to win the respect, you need to prove that you have the track-record to make things happen…They will always look into what have you already done to make sure that she is not a customary kind of woman-type.*"

In addition, Mrs. Li argues that it can become tiring when constantly being underestimated. She uses a metaphor to highlight, "*You are always kind of swimming up the stream and this is why women just kind of give up, because it is tiring. At a certain point in your life you are like: ´I don´t need this shit.´*" In the following, Mrs. Li continues to argue that at times women are simply disregarded. She argues, "*I think there are times when they disregard you. That is where the voice comes in. Especially when there are only men then your voice becomes smaller. That is why I think it is so important to set the quota.*" Mrs. Li continues to highlight the importance of having a critical mass of women in a boardroom. She argues:

> "*Now there are like two lines of thinking: One line of thinking is that you just keep pushing and keep trying and try to get more women in a boardroom and it is a slow process, right? So this process it allows you to fail over and over again because you only get one woman in. I have read studies that when you put one woman into a boardroom of 12 men you are setting that woman up almost not to succeed. I think there needs to be rules. Men will talk louder than you, they will disregard you, cut you off, so you almost have to really fight. Then they call you a bitch…If you have three or four women what happens is it evens things out a lot better. They don´t cut you out as easily because they would have to cut four or five of us.*"

Mrs. Li highlights the importance of having a critical mass of women in the boardroom. She states when having four or five women in a boardroom of twelve members, things will be better evened out.

Above, interviewees have highlighted frequently held assumptions female managers tend to face. Thereby respondents address ´think manager, think male´ ideas. Furthermore, interviewees highlight possible consequences for the individual when faced with such stereotypical beliefs. In the following, respondents highlight their experience when not complying with stereotypical feminine character traits. When asked whether she has have ever felt that she was being treated differently than her male colleagues Mrs. Zhang states, "*Like being a woman, they would call me aggressive or too straight forward. But for a man they call him able or in a positive kind of annotation but for a woman it is still kind of described*

with a negative kind of annotation.” She highlights that she has been called aggressive or too straight forward. Furthermore, she argues that if a man were to act according to the same characteristics, she believes that he would be described as being able. In addition, Mrs. Liu highlights that *“if you kind of stand your ground then you come across as being extremely aggressive, right? Whereas if a man behaves according to the same characteristics they wouldn´t”* call him aggressive. Mrs. Zhang states that she would like to be a role model for other women, emphasising that:

> *“you can be confident. You don´t need to keep on apologising. I have felt sometimes we (women) say something and we immediately think: ´Oh was I too aggressive or was I too rude?´ We are constantly having these second doubts. I have found men that they just don´t…even if they were not appropriate they don´t get caught upon.”*

Mrs. Zhang argues that she would like to act as a role model for other women to show them that as a woman one can be confident. Furthermore, she states that one does not constantly have to apologise. In addition, Mrs. Li argues:

> *“I always had more masculine traits, as we said more vocal, more aggressive. I didn´t really care if I was liked or disliked. I just had a goal and I was going to achieve it and I think that is how men play. So I am used to competing. Men from a very young age were encouraged to compete, women from little girls are taught to play well together.”*

Above, Mrs. Li, Mrs. Liu and Mrs. Zhang argue that they have felt being treated differently than their male colleagues due to their gender. In the following, interviewees also address differential treatment. Thereby, respondents argue that they have experienced differential treatment but not because of their gender but because of their age, thus being younger than their peers. Mrs. Yang argues, *“I was the youngest member and the only female in the boardroom. The others said: ´Can this girl do it?´”* She highlights:

> *“One challenge in fact that I did face was my age. Because when I stepped on the management team I was the youngest in the team and people said: ´Oh she is so young. Will she be able to do the job? And can she do that?´ But I just kept my head up and I worked really hard to prove myself that I can do that. My fellow managers and my team saw how I worked and how I proved myself, so I earned respect…We all more or less depending where we are may receive unfair treatment or bias. It doesn't matter. It's simply how people are and how they treat other people. It´s the way they are. It is about us how we respond, how we react.”*

Mrs. Guo also highlights challenges she faced due to her younger age. She argues:

> *“When I first came into this company I still wasn´t the CEO. I only had a position in the upper management level. All of them were men except me. So all the other men were looking at me and saying: ´How can you sit at the same table and in the same position as us? You are a girl!´”*

Mrs. Guo highlights challenges she was facing when she first came to the company. In addition, when asked whether she feels accepted by her colleagues Mrs. Zhang responds:

"Yes, in most cases yes. I mean I am older too, so that is another piece. I know some of my younger colleagues will be questioned by the clients. You know because they appear younger, so they will say: ´Oh, they are so young.´ Cause in China the culture they honour youth but then when it comes to work you want someone older. It sort of is like a little contradictory."

Mrs. Zhang highlights that in most cases she feels accepted by her fellow colleagues. She points out that she is also older. In addition, when asked whether she has ever felt that she was being treated differently than her male colleagues, Mrs. Cheng states:

"In my department I haven´t felt that I was ever being treated differently. But when I work with some of the other departments, some of my colleagues there they sometimes give me the feeling that I am a girl. I am a woman so I am not really powerful. And sometimes they think they can ignore me."

When asked why women are underrepresented on corporate boards, interviewees highlight the importance of traditionally rooted ideas in culture and history. Accordingly, Mrs. Shi argues:

"I think it has a lot to do with traditional culture, for example with Confucian culture. We also have some other beliefs. But Confucianism has a pretty strong influence onto people´s beliefs, onto men and women and onto what kind of role men should play and what kind of role women should play. I think the reasons for this are not only found in contemporary China in cultural and political factors, but more historically speaking."

Mrs. Shi underlines the importance of the country´s traditional culture and history when asked for the reasons of female board underrepresentation. In addition, also Mrs. Yang responds to the question by pointing out the importance of traditional culture. She states:

"it´s something very very unique about the Chinese culture. 5000 years of Chinese culture and tradition is not easy to change…it's thousands and thousands of years from Confucius and from the very old society. The nature of the country, the nature of the history is not able to change…"

In addition, also Mrs. Chen and Mrs. Song argue that trying to change deeply rooted societal beliefs and expectations is not easy and can take up a long time to alter. Mrs. Chen argues, *"It is not very easy to change this* (gender inequality) *shortly because this has already been a problem for several thousands of years. It cannot be changed overnight."* In line with Mrs. Chen also Mrs. Song argues that *"masculinity thoughts and hierarchy* (have been) *built over thousands of years."*

One such societal belief that interviewees repetitively mention during their interviews is son preference. Mrs. Yang highlights, *"I am the third child in the one-child-policy, my dad wanted to have a boy."* She continues to state that *"In China the boy is very precious. In China the parents will teach everything like to do the household or to cook or whatever to the girl. But they will not teach the boy to do that because he is too precious. That comes from the traditional history and the social context."* In line with Mrs. Yang also Mrs. Xie highlights the importance of a baby´s gender when stating that *"If it is a son it is very precious if it´s a girl maybe not so precious."* Sharing her own family experience she states:

> *"My mom would always say: ´Why should I work so hard? Why should I earn that much money? There is no boy to inherit. I have no son to inherit anything. Why should I work so hard?´ That generation is the same, even now those rural women it is still the same, like from these villages women around their 30s they still try everything to have a son. Having a son is giving you a face. Although now they start valuing girls but you should at least have one son to earn your reputation. That´s why I really feel that this Chinese single child policy should have lasted maybe a little bit longer, at least like force one generation to change."*

Expert interviewee Mrs. Shi argues that although in theory one might have gender equality, in practice she states this may not necessarily always be the case. She highlights *"usually they don´t think that they have a different attitude towards men and women in management they would say: ´You all have the same opportunity.´ But actually in practice that is not the truth."* In line with Mrs. Shi also Mrs. Qi argues that:

> *"this kind of gender discrimination is still very very serious in China. Especially a lot of these middle-aged men they still don´t trust women and they don´t believe in the ability of women. They feel that once women get married and have a baby they will not work very hard anymore."*

Comparing the situation of gender equality in China with the situation in other countries, Mrs. Chen argues:

> *"In China the situation (gender equality) is different compared to other countries. When the People´s Republic of China was set up, the first leader Chairman Mao he already had the slogan ´Women hold up half the sky´ with a lot of activities to support this slogan. After this slogan he created for women across the whole country a lot of job opportunities, a lot of projects, a lot of positions for women to work. That was 1949 so until now for more than half a century Chinese women are treated…or are supposed to be equal to men in their work."*

She argues that many activities were introduced to support women, for example increasing female labour participation force. In addition, expert interviewee Mrs. Shi states that some people would argue that the situation of gender equality in China used to be better in former times. She states, *"since Mao´s era one has been saying ´Women hold up half of the sky.´ Some people say that in that era*

gender equality used to be better in terms of one´s income and one´s job. But because it was a national enforcement." Furthermore, Mrs. Shi specifies that *"maybe after the economic reforms some people found that it is not as equal anymore as previously."* However, then critically reflecting upon the idea she states that *"people argue that this is not really empowerment because it is from the top to the bottom and not from the bottom to the top. It is like the national or the top level that says: ´ok you should be equal.´ And so you are equal."* However, Mrs. critically states that it is not true empowerment if one is empowered from the top to the bottom instead of the bottom to the top. Mrs. Wang argues *"I think in China traditionally it (management and board rooms) is still quite male-dominated. Even though Chairman Mao said, ´Women hold up half of the sky.´ But still perception-wise you would consider a leader as a male."* Also addressing the perception of a female leader Mrs. Song argues that in former times:

> *"a successful woman would be pictured as having a failed family relationship, who is very very strong to aggressive at home, that her relationship with her husband has kind of failed. But in recent years the entire social cognition has changed towards very successful women. They are being recognised, what they have achieved, we praise them and we encourage them to be very successful leaders. Here in China the entire social cognition has changed, so this is a big change for us."*

Mrs. Song argues that she can observe a societal change towards more acceptance of female leaders. Furthermore, also expert interviewee Mrs. Shi observes a societal change, arguing:

> *"I would say this (gender inequality) is changing, especially in big cities among the young generation, yes this is changing. Like currently big cities and rural areas there are big differences and also the old generation and the young generation there are also quite a lot of differences, so changes are happening."*

Mrs. Shi observes a societal change towards more gender equality. When asked what needs to change in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards, Mrs. Liu argues:

> *"Clearly there are many many capable women in China. I guess there needs to be some attitudinal adjustments around whether women can do it (corporate board positions) or not, do not assume that the woman wouldn´t be able to do certain roles because let´s say it requires travel or other things."*

In line with Mrs. Liu also Mrs. Shi argues that *"Theoretically speaking we can say we have to change the structure or we can change the culture."* Mrs. Shi believes that in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards and in management positions one would need to change the structure or culture. However, she reckons that *"It is hard to change structural things for gender equality issues. It is at different levels…"* Mrs. Cheng argues that ultimately one´s aim should be *"I think, first of all, there needs to be more respect."*

Summarising the above section, I highlighted interview extracts addressing the

issue of ´Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations.´ Thereby, fifteen out of sixteen interviewees highlight the importance of societal structures during their interviews. Furthermore, interviewees particularly highlight that societal expectations can greatly influence individuals' actions and decision-making processes. These tend to be rooted in traditional and cultural beliefs. Seven out of sixteen interviewees point out forms of ´power over´ when stating that traditionally women were expected to work inside the home, thus being a housewife and mother, while men were expected to work outside the home, thus being the family's breadwinner. Then six out of sixteen respondents highlight the particular expectations that young women tend to face. They highlight forms of ´power to´ when arguing that young women are often expected to do well at school. Interviewees also underline forms of ´power over´ when arguing that they are expected to find a husband and have a baby. Interviewees highlight that if young women are too successful and earn too much money they might end up being labelled a sheng nü, thus a leftover woman. Interviewees criticise social labelling as a form of ´power over´, thus possibly limiting the individual. Respondents state that such societal expectations are frequently rooted in assumptions that tend to attach one´s biological sex to stereotypical masculine or feminine character traits. Interviewees then highlight as a form of ´power over´ that often girls are still raised to be grateful, pretty and nice. Then some interviewees criticise stereotypical assumptions as limiting the individual, while other interviewees use such assumptions to underline their arguments. Thereby, while some respondents use biological determinism to argue in support of female board members, others use such to argue against female board presence. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees underline frequently faced presumptions associating stereotypical manager characteristics with stereotypical masculine characteristics. Thereby, seven out of sixteen interviewees underline ´think manager think male´ assumptions. Interviewees then highlight as a form of ´power over´ that they have felt differential treatment due to either their gender or age. Moreover, when asked for the reason behind female board underrepresentation, interviewees highlight the importance of culture and history as both entailing forms of ´power over´ and ´power to.´ Thereby, interviewees point out the importance of Confucianism as well as Mao´s slogan ´Women hold up half the sky.´ As a form of ´power over´ interviewees highlight cases of son preference. Interviewees state that despite cases of gender inequality, they do observe an increasing societal change towards more acceptance of diversity and gender equality.

Summary

Above, I highlighted the interview findings that were conducted with sixteen female CEOs, entrepreneurs, top managers and board members in China from June until August 2018. First of all, the issue of ´Laws and Policies´ was addressed. Thereby, interviewees highlight the importance of corporate and public laws when trying to regulate gender inequality issues. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees underline a frequent lack of enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, the one-child policy is emphasised as form of ´power to´ while the two-child policy is regarded as a form of ´power over.´ Secondly, I highlighted the idea of ´Compatibility: Family and Career.´ As forms of ´power over´ interviewees

underline expectations frequently held by one´s family of origin. Interviewees highlight that while men are often expected to be the breadwinner, women are expected to take up childcare and household duties. As a form of ´power over´ respondents describe the double burden. Interviewees state that frequently women face a double burden when trying to take care of their job as well as the household and childcare duties. Interviewees highlight that mothers tend to take more and longer career breaks due to childcare duties than fathers. This can have negative influences on one´s career development. Furthermore, interviewees highlight possible negative consequences of maternity for SMEs. Accordingly, as a form of ´power to´ it is suggested that enterprises receive a compensation subsidized by the state when incurring a loss of labour of their employees due to childcare duties. Furthermore, respondents highlight that as a form of ´power to´ grandparents often tend to take up childcare duties. Thirdly, the issue of ´Personal Initiative´ is discussed. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees point out a frequently experienced lack of confidence in one´s own abilities, thereby assuming that one is not good enough to do the job. Furthermore, respondents also question whether being a manager or board member is truly desirable for women. As a form of ´power to´ interviewees highlight the importance of being pro-active when striving for career development. In addition, interviewees underline lifelong learning when striving for a management or board position. Furthermore, female underrepresentation in the STEM studies is highlighted. Fourthly, the topic ´Individual Support and Networks´ was addressed. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees point out a frequently experienced lack of solidarity among women, thus ´queen bee syndrome.´ In addition, respondents believe that women often lack the necessary networking abilities as well as access to powerful networks, often labelled the ´old boys' network.´ Interviewees underline the importance of having a supportive social and professional environment as a form of ´power to´, thus having a supportive mentor, professor, colleagues or family. In addition, interviewees also argue that receiving support from a national and international level is crucial when aiming to increase the overall number of WoB on a larger scale. Fifthly, ´Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations´ were discussed. As a form of ´power over´, interviewees point out traditional socio-cultural societal gender expectations. Interviewees argue that frequently men are assumed to be the primary breadwinner of the family while women should take over childcare and household duties. In addition, interviewees highlight societal expectations frequently held towards young women, thus to do well at school but not to become too powerful. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees highlight social labelling as the expression ´sheng nü´, leftover woman. Interviewees use this social label to refer to a woman above the age of 27 years old, being unmarried and professionally very successful. Then interviewees use stereotypes both as a form of ´power over´ and ´power to.´ Thereby women are expected to act according to stereotypical feminine while men according to stereotypical masculine characteristics. While some interviewees argue that such stereotypes may limit the individual in one´s development, others use such stereotypes to underline the benefit of having female managers and board members. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees argue that ´think manager think male´ assumptions are often still prevalent. Furthermore, interviewees argue that societal expectations are frequently rooted in cultural ideas. Thereby interview-

ees describe ideas of Confucian thought possibly triggering forms of ´power over´ while Mao´s ´Women hold up half the sky´ is primarily described as triggering forms of ´power to.´ Despite cases of gender inequality and discrimination, interviewees observe societal change towards more inclusion of diversity and acceptance of gender equality.

5. Discussion: Women on Corporate Boards in Germany and China

Introduction

Internationally women are still largely underrepresented in top-management positions in the corporate world. Terjesen and Singh (2008: 55) highlight that particularly the lack of women on corporate boards can be seen as a global phenomenon. The literature usually defines this phenomenon as the so-called ´glass ceiling.´ Holst (2006: 124) defines the ´glass ceiling´ as *"invisible barrier(s) blocking the rise of women to top jobs."* Thereby, the ´glass ceiling´ highlights the phenomenon that women often stop progressing any further than middle management positions (Macarie and Moldovan, 2012: 157). In my analysis I will focus upon the ´glass ceiling´ in China and Germany. I will address the research question: *´Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Which barriers do women in China and Germany face when trying to reach a board position?´*

The above highlighted research question is useful for addressing existing research gaps in the literature on WoB. I have thoroughly described existing research gaps in the ´Literature Review.´ In the following, I will briefly highlight three major gaps and point out how my research addresses them.

First of all, existing literature is criticised for being too limited in its geographical scope. Current scholarship addressing the issue of WoB primarily analyses the situation of female board members in Western countries (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 324). Kirsch (2018: 348) highlights that the vast majority of articles published on the research topic have been studies focusing on: the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Australia and Spain. In addition, also Liu, Wei and Xie (2014: 170) state that current empirical evidence addressing female board members in existing literature is inconclusive due to the fact that most studies focus on American firms or other developed economies. In addition, also Campbell and Minguez-Vera (2008: 435) argue that *"most empirical results are based on U.S. data."* Therefore, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) call for further research analysing the situation of female board members in other, particularly non-Western countries. Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) call for future research to focus upon newly emerging powers as the BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. – In addition, also Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1186) call for future research to analyse the situation of women trying to reach a board position in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Furthermore, Kirsch (2018: 348) highlights that the vast majority of articles published on the issue have been single country studies. Thereby, Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer (2016: 1158) highlight that only a very limited amount of comparative cross-national research exists to uncover factors that may hinder or facilitate women´s access to boards across countries. In addition, also Terjesen and Singh (2008: 62) call for more cross-national research concerning the research topic.

I respond to the above mentioned call, having analysed female career development in China and Germany. By focusing on China I respond to the above mentioned calls for further research addressing Asian countries, particularly China. My research addresses a cross-national analysis highlighting a similar phenomenon, thus the international ´glass ceiling´, in two diverse countries as China and Germany. Thereby, I highlight which barriers women in both countries tend to face when trying to reach a board position.

Secondly, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 323) highlight that *"truly innovative research"* within the area of WoB would mean drawing from female board member´s first-hand experience, thus analysing their career path. Thereby, Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 333) call for *"more in-depth investigation...beyond the statistics."* This means conducting interviews with female board members. In addition, also Singh and Vinnicombe (2004: 486) criticise existing scholarship for lacking qualitative data and urge for more interviews beyond the *"vast flood"* of quantitative data (Zelechowski and Bilimoria, 2004: 337; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333; Bührmann, 2014: 97; Kirsch, 2018: 348).

I respond to this call, having conducted 31 interviews with female board members, CEOs and top-level managers in both Germany and China. During the interviews I asked respondents regarding possible barriers they were facing during their personal career path and how they were able to overcome such barriers. My research adds primary interview data to an emerging set of qualitative research within the literature on WoB.

Thirdly, current scholarship published on the issue of WoB is criticised for applying too little theory and being simply too descriptive (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 320; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1181). Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 320) highlight in their comprehensive literature review that the vast majority of academic articles published on the research topic do not use a theoretical framework. They argue that existing literature is too descriptive in its´ nature and call for more theoretical development in this area (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 334). In addition, Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016) highlight the importance of underlying power structures when analysing female board appointments. They argue that the *"presence of women in top corporate positions can be conceived as a subset of the overall power structure"* (Iannotta, Gatti and Huse, 2016: 408).

I respond to the above highlighted research gap by including a theoretical framework in the analysis of ´Women on Corporate Boards´ by adding to Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016) argument addressing underlying power structures. Thus, in my analysis I analysed power structures that may influence female board appointments in Germany and China. I thereby use Allen´s (1999) feminist concept of ´power´[61] for the sake of my analysis. Allen (1999) defines ´power´ as being threefold: ´power over´, ´power to´ and ´power with.´ For my analysis I add a fourth category of ´power´ to the before mentioned threefold

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[61] For a detailed discussion of Allen´s (1999) feminist ´power´ concept as well as the emergence of the concept please refer to section 3.1.3. "Allen´s (1999) power concept" under "Theory & Methodology."

definition, thus ´power without.´ I argue that by adding a fourth category, thus ´power without´, to Allen´s (1999) concept a more coherent analysis of power structures will be made possible. Thereby, I define ´power over´ as describing possible barriers women might face when trying to obtain a board position, ´power to´ highlights ways of overcoming such barriers. ´Power with´ highlights having power with others, thus solidarity with others. Thereby, ´power with´ can mean having solidarity with others when aiming for a common cause. This implies having enough solidarity with others in order to trigger social pressure when trying to improve the overall situation of WoB. In addition, ´power with´ can also mean that the individual woman has ´power with´ others. This means that a woman striving for a board position feels solidarity with and from others, thus having a supportive social and professional environment, during her career path. In a way ´power with´ aims into the same direction as ´power to.´ This means both concepts highlight ways of overcoming possible barriers that women may face when trying to obtain a board position. A fourth category of ´power without´, thus describing having no power with others when trying to obtain a board position, would make the above highlighted analysis more comprehensive. This would imply having no power with others, thus having no societal pressure and greater leverage when trying to increase the overall number of WoB. In addition, ´power without´ means that the individual woman aiming for a board position does not have a supportive professional or social environment. Thereby, ´power without´ aims into the same direction as ´power over´ as both concepts highlight possible barriers that women may face when trying to obtain a board position. Above, I defined ´power over´ and ´power without´ as possible barriers for female career development while ´power to´ and ´power with´ as possible ways overcoming such barriers. Accordingly, under Figure 4 I have positioned ´power over´ and ´power without´ under ´Barriers´ and ´power to´ as well as ´power with´ under ´Empowerment.´ In the following, I will briefly discuss the four different forms of ´power´ in more detail.

Each of the four before mentioned forms describes a different approach to and understanding of ´power.´ Although each form highlights a different understanding of ´power´ it is only when combining all forms together that one can get a deeper insight into ´power´ structures. Focusing merely upon one form of ´power´ runs the risk of cutting short on one´s analysis of ´power´ structures. In addition, other theoretical approaches will be included in the following discussion of the findings.

First of all, I will describe the four different definitions of ´power.´ ´Power over´ is defined as constraints that may limit *"the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way"* (Allen, 1999: 123). Allen (1999: 124) conceptualises ´power over´ as possible constraints that may inhibit an individual or a group of individuals´ in their options or their decision-making process. These constraints for the individual can emerge out of a relationship with another actor. Or such constraints can also develop or be enforced through cultural, institutional, structural or social relations. For example this means exercising power over an individual or a group of individuals with the usage of cultural values. Allen (1999: 124) highlights that ´power over´, thus constraining individuals in their options

does not necessarily always have to be internationally. Rather, she highlights that this form of power frequently emerges out of unintentional actions. Allen (1999: 122) highlights that a feminist understanding of ´power´ needs to be able *"to illuminate a complex and interrelated array of systems of domination…"* She states that such an interrelated array of systems *"require(s) an adequate feminist analysis of power to shed light on the concept of domination more generally"* (Allen, 1999: 122). In my analysis I use ´power over´ to highlight barriers and constraints that may limit women when trying to obtain a board position in Germany and China. However, Allen (1999: 122) highlights that ´power´ is too complex to be understood only as a form of domination, oppression and limitation. Rather, she highlights that ´power over´ is deeply intertwined with ´power to.´ ´Power to´ can be understood as highlighting forms of empowerment. Emphasising the deep interconnectedness between the different forms of ´power´, Allen (1999: 124) highlights that *"power is fundamentally relational."* While ´power over´ describes domination, limitations and oppression women may face, ´power to´ highlights forms of empowerment, thus ways of resisting before mentioned domination (Allen, 1999: 122). This means women can oppose and act against ´power over´ with the usage of ´power to.´ Allen (1999: 122) highlights that ´power to´, thus empowerment, is a response to the before mentioned form of ´power over´, thus domination. In addition, Allen (1999: 122, 123) defines a third form of ´power´, thus ´power with.´ She highlights that ´power with´ is *"the kind of power that a diverse group of women can exercise collectively when we work together to define, and strive to achieve, feminist aims."* She highlights that ´power with´ describes a form of *"collective power that can bridge the diversity of individuals who make up the feminist movement"* (Allen, 1999: 122). She argues that ´power with´ implies acting in feminist solidarity with others, thus building coalitions with others, for a common aim (Allen, 1999: 123). Working in solidarity with others, thus having ´power with´, is crucial in order to achieve collective power (Allen, 1999: 126). Allen (1999: 100) states that *"the strength of even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many."* By acting in solidarity with others, thus having ´power with´ others, means triggering enough social pressure to achieve societal change. When having enough social pressure, thus having ´power with´ others, greater leverage for empowerment, thus ´power to´, will be triggered in order to resist against forms of oppression and limitations, thus ´power over.´ As briefly stated above, I add a fourth category to Allen´s (1999) feminist concept of ´power´, ´power without.´ ´Power without´ assumes having no power with others. This means in a sense being alone in one´s struggle when aiming for one´s cause. Thereby, one does not have solidarity with others to jointly aim for a common cause. By having no solidarity with others, thus ´power without´, the leverage of ´power´ can be negatively affected. Allen´s (1999) feminist concept of ´power´ proves useful for my analysis when trying to highlight the barriers that women may face when reaching a board position in Germany and China. This concept proves useful as it can highlight different forms of power that may limit or enable female career development. In addition, also Allen (1999: 121) and Lombardo and Meier (2015: 12) argue that the above highlighted definition of power is *"useful for feminist theorists who seek to comprehend, critique, and contest the subordination of women"* in their analysis.

In the following, I will discuss the before mentioned four different forms by highlighting the relationship between them. When using the above highlighted feminist concept of ´power´ it is crucial to note that the four different forms of ´power´ are interconnected and mutually dependent on each other. This means that the different forms of ´power´ cannot be analysed apart from each other. They do not co-exist in segregation. Rather, it is only in combination and relation to each other that the overall concept of ´power´ has meaning. Although all four forms of ´power´ are interconnected, two forms of ´power´ each have a particular relation between each other. On the one hand, ´power over´ and ´power to´ are closely connected with one another. On the other hand, ´power with´ and ´power without´ are closely related. Highlighting the close connection between ´power over´ and ´power to´, Allen (1999: 3, 4, 53) states that ´power´ can be both oppressive and empowering at the same time. Accordingly, Allen (1999: 51) uses Foucault to underline interconnectedness between ´power over´ and ´power to´ when stating that the exercise of power *"incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely…"* Allen (1999: 51) criticises common feminist understandings of ´power´ as being too narrowly focused and limited in their analysis. She highlights that common feminist debates usually focus on either ´power over´ or ´power to.´ Thereby, however failing to highlight their deep interconnectedness and mutual dependence. She states that by using Foucault's understanding of ´power´ one can highlight both ways in which ´power´ can be constraining and empowering for an individual at the same time (Allen, 1999: 51). Allen (1999: 52) continues to highlight that:

> *"Foucault's conceptualization of power allows for the fact that, although power-over and power-to are useful analytical categories, they represent features of social relationships that are more often than not intimately connected with one another rather than easily separable. Foucault's conception enables—indeed, requires—us to view the same action or relationship simultaneously in terms of power-over and in terms of power-to."*

This means that ´power over´ and ´power to´ are two analytical categories that should however not be analysed apart from each other. Rather, ´power over´ and ´power to´ are deeply interconnected, mutually dependent and not easily separable from each other. This implies that only when analysing ´power over´ and ´power to´ in combination and in relation to each other a thorough analysis of ´power´ structures becomes possible. The same analogue relation highlighted above between ´power over´ and ´power to´ also applies to ´power without´ and ´power with.´ This means when aiming for empowerment, thus ´power to´, while resisting to oppression, ´power over´, having solidarity with others, thus ´power with´, is crucial in order to increase the leverage of one´s power. Having ´power without´, thus having no power with others, can greatly inhibit one´s leverage effect of power. Accordingly, ´power with´ and ´power without´ are mutually connected concepts, even appearing to be opposites. In line the above highlighted relation between ´power over´ and ´power to´, also the relationship between ´power without´ and ´power with´ is relational and mutually dependent. This implies that ´power without´ cannot clearly be separated from ´power with´ as only in combination and in relation to each other a thorough analysis of ´power´ struc-

tures becomes possible. All four concepts combined however then give a thorough understanding of ´power´, thus illuminating *"domination, resistance, and solidarity"* and *"the complex ways in which they are interrelated"* (Allen, 1999: 120). Accordingly, in Figure 4 I have connected the two mutually dependent and connected pairs of concepts. Thus, I connected ´power over´ with ´power to´ and ´power without´ and ´power with´ with an arrow pointing into both directions.

Above, I defined and explained the relationship between the four different forms of ´power´ according to Allen´s (1999) feminist theoretical concept. In this Chapter, I will use her theoretical concept in order to discuss the findings of my conducted interviews in both Germany and China. In addition to Allen´s (1999) feminist concept also other theoretical approaches from different disciplines will be used for the analysis, among others: Critical mass theory, tokenism, think manager think male phenomenon and social identity theories (Byrne, 1971; Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001; Kantner, 1977; Schein *et al.*, 1996). I have segregated my findings into five thematic categories, including: ´Policies & Laws´, ´Compatibility: Family & Career´, ´Personal Initiative´, ´Individual Support & Networks´ and ´Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Societal Expectations.´ These five thematic categories were the most frequently mentioned topics during the 31 conducted interviews in both China and Germany. Thereby, twelve out of fifteen German interviewees and thirteen out of sixteen Chinese respondents believe that a coherent and good set of corporate and public policies regulating gender equality is crucial when trying to increase the number of WoB. In addition, fourteen out of sixteen Chinese interviewees and all of the fifteen German respondents highlight the difficulty of trying to combine having a family and a career when striving for a board position. Furthermore, fourteen out of fifteen German respondents and thirteen out of sixteen Chinese interviewees believe that pro-actively striving for career development and showing personal initiative is crucial for career development. Feeling supported, thus having individual support and access to powerful networks is stated by fifteen out of sixteen Chinese respondents and thirteen out of fifteen German interviewees. Societal structures including gender roles and societal expectations are emphasised by all fifteen German interviewees and fifteen out of sixteen Chinese respondents as influencing women´s board access.

As highlighted above, all five thematic categories were more or less equally mentioned by both Chinese and German respondents during the interviews. Greatest disparity exists in the category of "Individual Support & Networks." Thereby, 15 out of 16 Chinese interviewees and 13 out of 15 German respondents highlighted the category. Greatest agreement exists in the category of "Societal Structures." Thus, 15 out of 15 German interviewees and 15 out of 16 Chinese interviewees highlighted the category. The more or less overall agreement among German and Chinese interviewees regarding thematic categories when asked for barriers for female board access is surprising and unexpected. Great cultural differences between the countries could have suggested great differences in the barriers for female board access. This agreement between German and Chinese interviewees underlines the "glass ceiling´s" international characteristic. Nevertheless, although similar barriers are mentioned by German and Chi-

nese interviewees as forming the "glass ceiling", the barriers are emphasised differently across countries. The overall agreement among interviewees in the category "Societal Structures" was expected since prior studies have found that stereotypes and gender expectations can greatly impede women´s career development (Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001; Antal and Izraeli, 1993; Schein *et al.*, 1996; Heilman, 2012). In addition, also the categories "Compatibility: Family & Career" and "Policies & Laws" were expected. Prior studies have found negative consequences for female career development triggered by the Chinese early-retirement scheme and the two-child policy (Cooke, 2001; Attané, 2013; Cooke, 2017) and by the German "Herdprämie" and "Ehegattensplitting" (Sacksovsky, 2010; Spangenberg, 2016; Wersig, 2019). Prior literature on the "Compatibility: Family & Career" have found that limited access to childcare can create barriers for women in their career development. Furthermore, also initiatives creating incentives for women to not enter full-time employment can limit women´s access to powerful positions in the labour market (Holst and Wieber, 2014; Wippermann, 2015; Iannotta, Gatti and Huse, 2016; Hipp, 2018). The category "Personal Initiative", thus when aiming for a board position having to pro-actively strive for one´s career development, seems to be self-evident. Nevertheless, this category was unexpected as literature on WoB tends to primarily focus upon environmental factors influencing female board access (Terjesen and Singh, 2008; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016). In addition, prior research has found influential and powerful networks as the "old boys´ network" to be crucial for career development (Burke, 1997; Scheidegger and Osterloh, 2004; Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014). However, the emphasis on individual support especially from a national and international level by interviewees has been unexpected. The greatest disparity between responses exists in the category "Individual Support & Networks", thus German interviewees highlight the category´s importance less than Chinese interviewees. One reason for this disparity could be traced back to the importance of guanxi, thus personal networks, which were repetitively mentioned by Chinese interviewees as being crucial for career development.
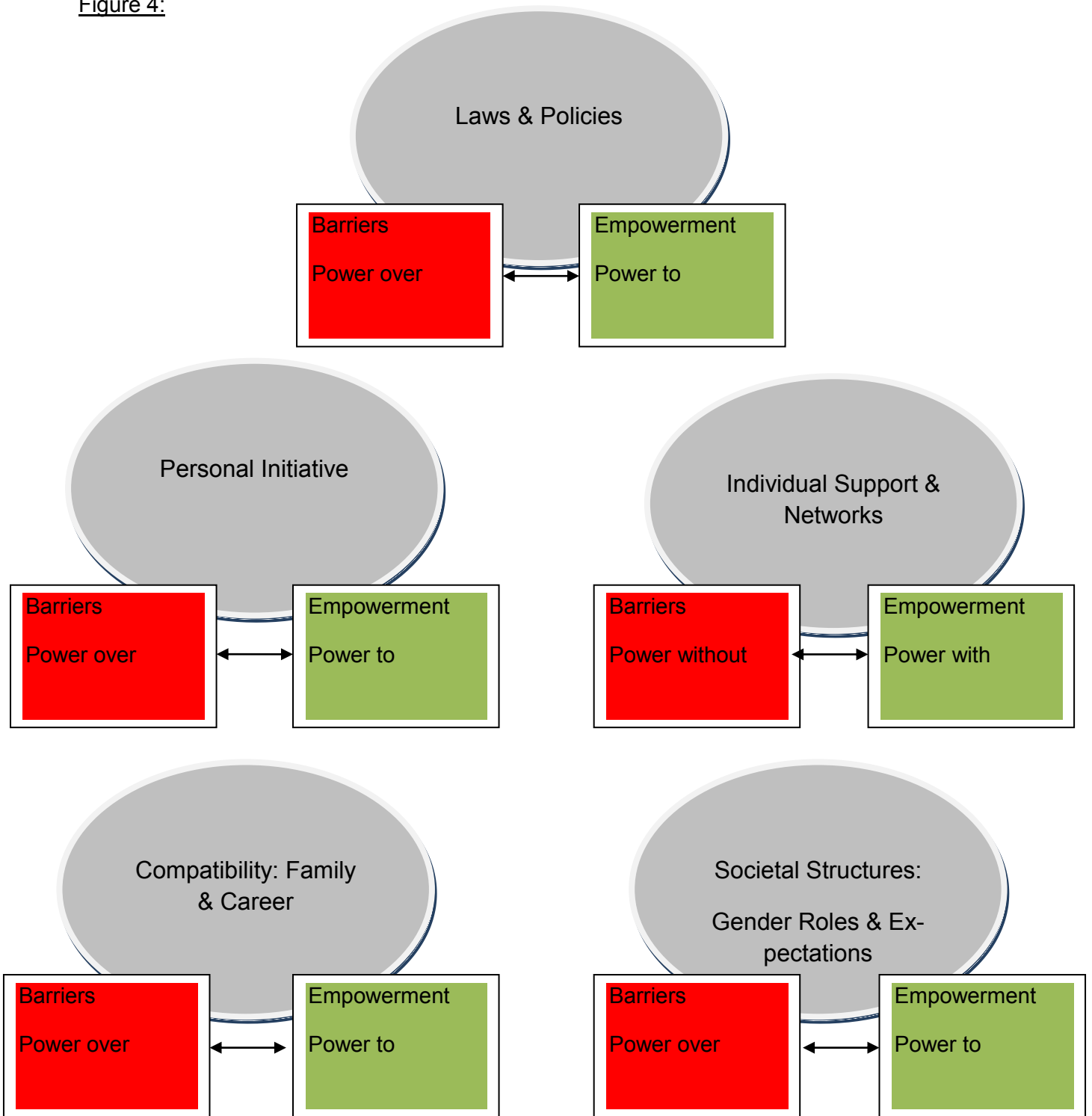
As stated, the five thematic categories were repetitively mentioned by both Chinese and German respondents during the interviews. These thematic categories are not necessarily always clear-cut and are at times even overlapping. In addition, the categories are not chronologically ordered. In Figure 4, I have therefore positioned the five thematic categories in circular form. The fact that some categories are located at the top and others at the bottom of the circle is only for illustrational purposes. This means all five categories in combination are important when trying to explain factors influencing female career progression. Within each of these thematic categories German and Chinese interviewees highlight both factors limiting and promoting women´s board access. Therefore, in Figure 4 I highlight under each thematic category barriers as well as forms of empowerment that may influence women´s board access. As highlighted under Figure 4, I use the theoretical concepts of ´power without´ and ´power with´ in order to analyse the thematic category of ´Individual Support & Networks.´ The concepts of ´power without´ and ´power with´ are crucial for analysing the above highlighted thematic category as they particularly address the question whether women have

felt solidarity with and support from others on their career path. The other four thematic categories do not address forms of solidarity with others. Rather, they simply highlight barriers and ways of overcoming them. Therefore, I use ´power over´ and ´power to´ to analyse which barriers women aiming for a board position may face as well as forms of overcoming them. As highlighted under Figure 4, I will use the concepts of ´power over´ and ´power to´ in order to analyse the thematic categories of ´Laws & Policies´, ´Compatibility: Family & Career´, ´Personal Initiative´ and ´Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Societal Expectations.´

The barriers that interviewees mention can be understood as forming the ´glass ceiling´ in both China and Germany, thus posing *"invisible barrier(s) blocking the rise of women to top jobs",* as corporate board positions (Holst, 2006: 124). Interviewees also mention ways of overcoming these barriers, thus attempts to crack the ´glass ceiling.´ My findings from China and Germany suggest that the international ´glass ceiling´ is complex in its constitution, thus making it a particularly challenging phenomenon to grasp and tackle. Reasons for such complexity could be that under each of the five thematic categories, forming the ´glass ceiling´, both barriers as well as ways of overcoming such barriers co-exist. These barriers and ways of overcoming barriers are deeply interconnected and mutually dependent on each other. Furthermore, the five thematic categories found to form the ´glass ceiling´ in both countries are not necessarily always clear-cut and may at times even overlap. In addition, the lack of hierarchy between the different thematic categories can increase the phenomenon´s complexity.

In the following, I will use Allen´s (1999) theoretical concept of ´power´ to analyse my interview findings from China and Germany. The findings will be segregated into the five above highlighted thematic categories. Under each thematic category I will first of all, highlight barriers women tend to face when trying to gain board access in China and Germany. Secondly, I will address ways of overcoming such barriers. Thereby, in line with Allen´s (1999) theoretical approach I will use each of the two mutually dependent and interconnected pairs of ´power´ categories for the discussion. This means that I will use the concepts of ´power over´ and ´power to´ in order to discuss the thematic categories of ´Laws & Policies´, ´Compatibility: Family and Career´, ´Personal Initiative´ and ´Societal Structures: Gender Roles and Expectations.´ In addition, I will use the concepts of ´power without´ and ´power with´ to discuss the thematic category of ´Individual Support and Networks.´ After highlighting under each thematic category, barriers and ways of overcoming barriers, I will thirdly relate my findings to existing literature on ´Women on Corporate Boards.´

Laws & Policies

Barriers
Power over

Empowerment
Power to

Personal Initiative

Barriers
Power over

Empowerment
Power to

Individual Support & Networks

Barriers
Power without

Empowerment
Power with

Compatibility: Family & Career

Barriers
Power over

Empowerment
Power to

Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Expectations

Barriers
Power over

Empowerment
Power to

Source: Own illustration from interviews

5.1. Power over, Power to: Laws & Policies

In the following, I use ´power over´ and ´power to´ to highlight which forms of barriers and ways of overcoming such barriers, German and Chinese female respondents mentioned during the interviews when asked about female board access. In this section I will highlight forms of ´power over´ and ´power to´ mentioned by interviewees when addressing the thematic category of ´Laws & Policies.´ My findings segregated into ´power over´, barriers, and ´power to´, overcoming barriers, are briefly listed in the table above each new section. The thematic category is located on the left and marked in grey. ´Power over´ is marked in red while ´power to´ is marked in green. Within the sections of ´power over´ and ´power to´ findings written in *italics* highlight what *German interviewees* stated. Findings written in **bold** list what both **German and Chinese interviewees** highlighted as important. Findings that are underlined describe the most frequently mentioned factors by Chinese interviewees.

Figure 5

Category	Power OVER	Power TO
Laws & Policies	• *"Herdprämie"* • *"Ehegattensplitting"* • **Lack of enforcement mechanisms** • **Not felt supported by policies** • Side effects of policies: retirement policy, two-child policy	• *"Frauenquote"* • *Gender equality- and corporate policies* • **Public and corporate policies addressing female leadership in corporate world crucial** • One-child policy

Source: Own illustration from interviews

In this section, I will briefly describe forms of ´power over´ listed by both German and Chinese interviewees when addressing ´Laws & Policies.´ As highlighted in figure 5, German interviewees state the country´s incoherent set of policies regulating gender equality. German interviewees argue that this incoherent set of policies triggers misleading at times even opposing incentives. Also Chinese interviewees emphasise forms of ´power over´ when observing a lack of enforcement mechanisms of current gender equality policies as well as an overall lack of policies regulating female leadership in China. The majority of both German and Chinese interviewees have not felt supported by any public nor corporate policies during their career path. Although both German and Chinese interviewees highlight gender equality policies as being important, respondents argue that the mere existence of such policies does not necessarily increase the number of women on corporate boards nor improve gender equality in the workforce. Chinese and German interviewees highlight frequently unintended side effects of implemented public policies. Chinese interviewees mention the early retirement scheme for women and the two-child family planning policy as possibly triggering negative side effects for women aiming for a board position. German interview-

ees highlight that policies such as ´Herdprämie´ and ´Ehegattensplitting´ tend to reinforce traditional stereotypical gender roles and encourage women´s economic dependency.

I will briefly describe forms of ´power to´ listed by both German and Chinese interviewees when addressing ´Laws & Policies.´ As forms of ´power to´ twelve out of fifteen German interviewees and thirteen out of sixteen Chinese respondents believe that a coherent and good set of corporate and public policies regulating gender equality is crucial when trying to increase the number of WoB. German interviewees argue that the pressure of laws and public debate has supported them on their career path. German interviewees particularly highlight the ´Frauenquote´ during their interviews. Thereby, twelve interviewees find the quota necessary and effective. Chinese respondents particularly highlight the importance of the one-child policy during their interviews. Thereby, Chinese interviewees argue that the one-child family planning policy has had positive effects upon the situation of women in leadership positions in China. Above, I have briefly listed my findings segregated into ´power over´, thus barriers women face when trying to reach a board position, as well as ´power to´, ways of overcoming such barriers. In the following, I will discuss these findings by relating them to existing literature on the research issue.

My findings support Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016) as well as Grosvold and Brammer´s (2011) research, stating that legal institutional factors are crucial when trying to increase female board representation. In line with Grosvold and Brammer´s (2011: 129) research I also find that female board presence across countries is greatly attributable to institutional factors, thereby primarily highlighting legal and cultural institutions of the respective country. In addition, my findings support Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016: 407) suggesting that formal constraints as for example, laws and constitutions, can greatly influence and limit the individual. Both German and Chinese interviewees believe that gender equality laws and policies are crucial when trying to increase the number of WoB. Nevertheless, my results suggest limitations to the rule. This means not all policies and laws regulating gender equality are necessarily always empowering the situation of women. As a form of ´power over´ interviewees state that policies regulating gender equality can also have negative side effects for women. My findings therefore suggest that the mere existence of institutional factors is not necessarily always positively related to female board representation. Instead of merely analysing the quantitative existence of gender equality policies, my findings suggest analysing public policies´ specific meanings, intentions and effects.

In line with the before mentioned, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that public policies regulating gender equality can trigger both positive as well as negative effects for gender equality in the workforce. My findings support, Grosvold and Brammer (2011: 131) arguing that countries with *"greater legislative safeguards designed to assure women´s employment rights and professional career opportunities"* tend to have fewer women on corporate boards. In addition, also Mandel and Semyonov (2006: 1941) highlight that progressive welfare states, frequently having policies safeguarding women´s employment

rights, tend to have a higher representation of female labour participation force but a disproportional underrepresentation of women in management positions. In line with Grosvold and Brammer (2011) as well as Mandel and Semyonov (2006) my findings suggest that policies aimed at safeguarding family-friendly rights can trigger different effects for different groups of women in the workforce. German interviewees exemplify this when addressing part-time work. On the one hand, policies regulating part-time work may improve the compatibility of having a career and a family. This means policies ensuring part-time work can assist parents trying to combine having a job with taking care of their family. Thus, part-time work seems to be a particular asset for working parents, thus seeming to be a form of ´power to.´ On the other hand, German interviewees define part-time work as a career killer, thus triggering forms of ´power over.´ Furthermore, interviewees state that on average more women than men tend to work part-time. Thereby, women frequently start working part-time after giving birth. Although working part-time may assist combining one´s job with having a family, interviewees highlight that part-time work is a career killer. This means corporate and public policies safeguarding part-time work may, on the one hand, assist parents, particularly mothers of combining their job with taking care of household and childcare duties. On the other hand however, it can negatively influence one´s chances of career development. Since women on average are more likely to work part-time this can pose a particular challenge for women aiming for a board or management position. This means alternative working models and policies safeguarding such do not seem as actual alternatives if they do not offer equal opportunities, thus rather limiting and punishing the individual later on. German interviewees highlight that certain policies safeguarding family-friendly policies, as for example part-time work, may ensure ´power to´, thus increasing the likelihood of women re-entering the labour market after maternity leave. However, respondents highlight a form of ´power over´ highlighting that certain types of alternative working models, as part-time work, instead of assisting working mothers in their career development tend to limit their chances of obtaining a board position later on.

In addition to part-time work, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight the same paradox to be true for maternity leave. This means policies ensuring an extended maternal leave can, on the one hand, safeguard women to not lose their job when taking off work for maternal care. On the other hand, extended maternal leave can also result in longer career breaks due to childcare duties. Longer career breaks however tend to have negative consequences for one´s career development. Interviewees state that women are more likely to take a career break due to childcare duties than men. This can pose a particular challenge for women aiming at a board or management position later on. Mandel and Semyonov (2006: 1941) argue that policies safeguarding family-friendly policies or women´s employment rights tend to rely upon the assumption that women are the primary family caretaker. Thereby above mentioned scholars argue that such policies are designed for women to take time off work in order to pursue their childcare and household duties. Mandel and Semyonov (2006) find that such policies are frequently not intended to change traditional gender roles. Rather, above mentioned policies tend to further reinforce traditional gender roles, thus

expecting women to be the primary caretaker of the family and household and men to be the primary breadwinner. In addition, in China companies are the primary responsible for paying maternal allowance during the employee's maternal or parental leave. In Germany however the companies do not bear all the costs of paying maternal allowance on their own. Rather, in Germany the allowance is subsidized by the state. Thereby, a substitute can be employed by a company during a person's maternal or parental leave in Germany. A lack of financial support for Chinese companies creates incentive for them to not hire young women in the first place. In Germany the phenomenon is moderated through state subsidies. My findings support Mandel and Semyonov's (2006) research. Interviewees highlight that certain apparently family-friendly policies are a big pitfall for women. Thereby, respondents highlight that instead of ensuring more gender equality in the workforce, certain family-friendly policies tend to rather limit the individual, in most cases women, taking advantage of them. In line with Mandel and Semyonov's (2006) research, interviewees argue that certain family-friendly policies reinforce traditional gender roles. Accordingly, German respondents highlight that the ´Herdprämie´ and the ´Ehegattensplitting´ reinforce traditional gender roles. German interviewees criticise the ´Herdprämie´ for triggering incentives as receiving a bonus when parents of young children decide not to send their child off to day-care but rather take up childcare duties themselves. Since on average women are more likely to stay at home due to childcare duties, such a policy can create incentives for women to stay at home and take care of childcare duties. Such an incentive is contra productive for increasing female labour participation force. Rather, it creates incentives for women to stay at home, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles of women being the primary caretaker and men the primary breadwinner. Such incentives trigger forms of ´power over´, thus limiting women´s board access. In addition, also ´Ehegattensplitting´ is criticised by German interviewees for reinforcing traditional gender roles. My findings support Wersig (2019: 16) who argues that assumed neutrality behind ´Ehegattensplitting´ is an illusion. Sacksovsky (2010) finds that in a married couple the person with the higher income, often still men, tend to have more advantages of ´Ehegattensplitting´ than the person with a lower income. As the person with the lower income will on average have a comparatively very high taxation. This leads to a correspondingly lower net salary. Wersig (2019: 16) and Spangenberg (2016: 3) highlight that this frequently results in negative effects for women´s income. My findings support Wersig (2019: 17) Spangenberg (2016: 3) and Sacksovsky (2010) arguing that ´Ehegattensplitting´ tends to trigger misleading incentives by discouraging second earners, frequently women, to take up a full-time job. This creates forms of ´power over´ for women, thus limiting women´s full-time access to the labour market and thereby decreasing the probability of increasing the number of WoB. Addressing the effects of so-called family-friendly policies Mandel and Semyonov (2006: 1911) argue that by:

> *"adjusting the demands of employment to women's home duties or allowing working mothers reduced working hours and long leaves from work are likely to preserve women's dominant roles as mothers and wives. As such, these interventions impede women's abilities to compete successfully with men for powerful and lucrative occupational positions."*

My findings from the conducted interviews in Germany support Mandel and Semyonov (2006) as well as Grosvold and Brammer (2011) highlighting that family-friendly or women´s employment policies aimed at customising employment conditions to women's childcare and household duties may assist women when trying to combine a job with one´s care duties. However, in line with before mentioned scholars I find that such policies may trigger ´power over´, thus limiting women´s board access by reinforcing traditional gender roles, assuming women to be the primary caretaker. Furthermore, when taking advantage of such policies employees will most likely face more difficulties when trying to achieve a management or board position later on. This means family-friendly policies may increase the overall female labour participation force, while at the same time limiting the chances of achieving a high-level corporate position for employees taking advantage of such policies. Alternative working models are not actual alternatives if they incorporate hidden pitfalls.

In line with the before mentioned, Chinese interviewees highlight as a form of ´power over´ the currently changing Chinese retirement scheme[62]. Interviewees state that this can trigger negative effects upon the situation of women in the workforce, particularly for women aiming for a management or board position. According to this scheme female workers shall retire five years earlier than their male peers. Interviewees argue that this retirement scheme may trigger gender inequality by making women retire at an earlier age than men. My findings support Cooke´s (2001: 343) and Attané´s (2012: 8) research suggesting that the early retirement scheme can be seen as a penalty for women, particularly for women aiming at a board or management position. This means the early retirement scheme tends to trigger discrimination at an elite level (Cooke, 2001: 343). In the following I will discuss possible discrimination triggered by the retirement scheme by taking the example of highly educated Chinese women. Highly educated Chinese women, depending on their academic degree, tend to enter the workforce five to ten years later than unqualified labour. With the early retirement scheme female labour will retire five years earlier than their male peers. This results in shorter work life for female labour. This means highly educated women can have an, in an extreme case, up to 15 years shorter work life than unqualified male labour. Having a shorter work life not only means having a huge waste of expertise and resources for labour market, but may also trigger discrimination against women. This discrimination may particularly become apparent when looking at the situation of women aiming for a management or board position. Highly qualified women aiming for a management or board position will have five years less time available in order to reach a management or board position than their male peers. Even if women in a shorter amount of time were to mange to make it to a board or management position they will most likely not stay on this position for very long. In line with Cooke´s analysis (2001: 343) my findings suggest that this can trigger companies to have less incentive when it comes to investing in female leadership, thus making it less likely for women to be promoted to a high-level management or board position. Since companies will lose female

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[62] Please refer to "Background Information" under "Introduction" for further information on the Chinese retirement scheme.

employees at an earlier stage than men, companies might invest and promote rather in male than in female employees´ career progression. Investing in the career development of female labour could prove to be cost inefficient for companies. As stated, women have less time available in order to reach their board position, thus making female board access less likely. Even if women were to reach a board position in a shorter amount of time, they will be asked to leave the company at an earlier stage than their male peers, thus triggering a higher staff turnover in the corporate boards. Summarising, the early retirement scheme can trigger effects of ´power over´, thus barriers for women trying to obtain a board position.

In addition to the early retirement scheme, Chinese interviewees also highlight the implemented two-child[63] family planning policy as possibly triggering gender discrimination towards women aiming at a board position. My interview findings support Cooke´s (2017: 20) research highlighting that the two-child policy can possibly trigger negative consequences for gender equality in China. Cooke (2017: 20) assumes an exacerbation of labour market discrimination against female graduates as a result of the implemented two-child policy. In line with Cooke (2017: 20) findings in my analysis Chinese interviewees also see the two-child policy with great concern. Unlike Cooke´s (2017) findings however my research suggests a more widespread societal impact than only discrimination against female graduates. In my findings Chinese interviewees assume that the two-child policy can possibly reinforce a son preference. Chinese respondents argue that currently they have witnessed that parents´ if their first born is a daughter then they tend to have a second child, hoping for a son. Interviewees have observed that if parents´ first born is a son they will simply stop trying, thus seeming that they have already reached their aim. This means that under the one-child policy if parents had a daughter they usually were not allowed to have a second child. Thus, they would most likely invest all their funding and attention in their daughter. However, with the second-child policy and an assumed son preference interviewees highlight that it becomes more likely for daughters having to compete over resources, attention and funding with their brothers. Summarising, Chinese interviewees see the implemented two-child policy as a form of ´power over´, thus triggering possible barriers for women´s career development. However, I argue that actual societal consequences of the two-child policy cannot yet clearly be estimated as it is still too early to observe any long-term effects of the policy.

Above, I highlighted forms of ´power over´ when discussing negative effects of certain German and Chinese public policies limiting women in their career development. I argued that certain policies despite having the intention of ensuring family-friendliness may create challenges for the person taking advantage when re-entering the labour market. Although certain public policies are highlighted as triggering negative effects upon female career development, both German and Chinese interviewees suggest that policies ensuring gender equality are crucial

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[63] Please refer to "Background Information" under "Introduction" for further information on the two-child and one-child policy.

when trying to increase female board representation. However, they argue that it is crucial to analyse their actual intentions and affects.

As a form of ´power to´ Chinese interviewees particularly underline the importance of the one-child family planning policy for female leadership in China. Thereby interviewees highlight that the one-child policy has trigger positive effects for Chinese women aiming at a management or board position. Exemplifying this idea Mrs. Qi highlights that she, "*really thank(s) this kind of one-child family policy. No matter how people approach it with human rights and everything. But once the parents only have a daughter, they have to put everything and invest everything in the daughter…*" Existing research addressing the Chinese one-child policy has not only been focusing upon the reduction of fertility rates but also on the "*unintended consequence of exacerbating the distortion in the country's sex ratio*" (Ebenstein, 2010: 87-88). Thereby, scholars frequently refer to the ´missing girls´ in Chinese society triggered by sex-selective abortions under the one-child family planning policy. Fong´s (2002: 1098) findings however suggest that "*urban daughters born under China's one-child policy have benefited from the demographic pattern*" triggered by the one-child family planning policy. My findings support Fong´s (2002) research suggesting that the one-child policy has had positive effects upon the empowerment of female leadership in China. As highlighted above, Chinese interviewees state that before the implementation of the one-child policy, daughters were more likely to compete with their brothers over resources, funding and their parent´s attention. Thereby, interviewees highlight that an overall son-preference was persistent, thus suggesting that parents were more likely to invest in a son than in a daughter. Thereby, interviewees state that with the one-child policy parents had no option than to invest all their resources and attention in their only child, if it was a girl, thus in their daughter. As highlighted above, with the newly implemented two-child policy interviewees fear a fall back to son preference. Fong (2002: 1099) finds that the one-child policy and low fertility rates primarily empowered daughters in urban areas, thus areas where resources and higher education and employment opportunities were already existent and available for girls. However, Fong (2002: 1099) underlines that in Chinese rural areas the one-child policy triggered rather frustration than actual empowerment for women. Many Chinese interviewees point out the benefit of the one-child policy for women in China. Thereby, interviewees do not address Fong´s (2002: 1099) findings underlining that the one-child policy has triggered rather frustration than empowerment in Chinese rural areas. Thereby it is crucial to note that the majority of female respondents interviewed for my research in China were raised in urban areas. This could imply why the majority of female interviewees argued that the one-child policy greatly benefitted gender equality in China, particularly in improving the situation for female leadership. Summarising, Chinese interviewees highlight the two-child policy as a form of ´power over´, thus limiting female career development, while the one-child policy is seen as a great achievement for female leadership.

My findings from Chinese and German interviews suggest that policies regulating gender equality, for example aiming at increasing the number of WoB, tend to be more effective if they have strong enforcement mechanisms. Adams and

Kirchmaier (2013: 6) find that policies matter even if they are voluntary. In line with Obermeyer and Reibold´s (2011: 23) findings my research suggests that laws and policies without any true consequences for non-compliance have shown only very limited to no effects upon gender equality in Germany. Adding to before mentioned scholars´ research my findings suggest that voluntary self-regulations are not taken seriously in Germany. To exemplify this idea Mrs. Schulz argues in support of a gender quota stating, *"I say if we don't start making the laws and rules now, then we will still be busting a gut in I don´t know how many generations."* My findings suggest the importance of implementing policies that have strong law enforcement mechanisms. I argue in line with Obermeyer and Reibold (2011: 23) that the effectiveness of policies regulating gender equality can be negatively influenced when there is a lack of enforcement mechanisms. According to my findings, both German and Chinese interviewees criticise an overall lack of enforcement mechanisms of gender equality policies. This means despite the existence of gender equality laws in the respective countries their effects are limited if there is a lack of enforcement mechanisms. If gender equality policies have no real consequences for the lawbreaker their influence remains limited. As an example for a lack of enforcement mechanism Chinese interviewees highlight discriminatory job advertisements, thus laying out the applicant´s gender, age or physical appearance in the advertisement. Interviewees argue that discriminatory job advertisements are technically against the law; however the law is often not being enforced. Furthermore, Chinese expert interviewees argue that it is very difficult for women to bring such discriminatory cases to court and only very few cases have been successful. In addition, also German interviewees highlight a lack of enforcement mechanisms regarding gender equality laws. Thereby, interviewees state it is crucial for companies to actually ´*walk the talk*´, thus ensuring practical implementation of gender equality laws. As a way of increasing the number of female board members German interviewees particularly highlight the ´Frauenquote.´ In line with Adams and Kirchmaier (2013) my findings suggest that gender quotas are crucial when trying to increase the number of women on corporate boards. Despite overall positive perceptions of the ´Frauenquote´ however German interviewees criticise that the quota provides few to no major sanctions for non-compliance. Furthermore, respondents state that the 30 percent quota only applies to about 100 companies, thus a little less than 500 board mandates. Interviewees highlight that more than 3000 companies can set their own target number for female board representation. Thereby, interviewees state that several companies bluntly name the target number zero for female board representation without having to fear any harsh consequences. As highlighted above, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that the effectiveness of policies regulating gender equality can be negatively influenced, thus triggering forms of ´power over´, when no strong enforcement mechanisms are in place.

In addition, both Chinese and German interviewees highlight that despite the overall existence of gender equality policies in the respective countries the majority have not felt supported by such. This could either imply a lack of policies addressing female leadership in the corporate world in China and Germany. In line with this assumption particularly Chinese interviewees highlight a need for

further policies addressing female leadership. However, this could also imply the existence of policies regulating female board membership, as it is the case in Germany, however due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms, women might not have felt sufficiently supported by policies. Or this could also mean policies addressing gender equality on boards have been only very recently adopted, thus interviewees have already made their career before the implemented policies were adopted. This is confirmed by German interviewees stating that the newly implemented quota is too late for their career development. Not feeling supported by public policies could also result from a lack of knowledge regarding the existence of gender equality laws. In line with this assumption, Chinese interviewees highlight that they have heard of policies regulating gender equality, particularly facilitating female entrepreneurship however that they have no clear knowledge of their existence.

One way German interviewees exemplify the importance of enforcement mechanisms is by highlighting the different effects of the ´Frauenquote.´ My findings suggest that the quota is necessary in order to increase the number of women on corporate boards. My findings contradict Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 417) research suggesting that *"board gender quotas are found not to be a necessary condition to achieve a higher number of WoB."* My findings suggest the contrary to Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016) research. Thereby my findings resulting from the interviews conducted with German respondents suggest that a gender quota is a necessary condition to increase the number of WoB. Interviewees highlight statistical developments of the percentage of female board members in Germany since the implementation of the quota to underline their point of view that the quota has been effective. Mrs. Schmidt exemplifies this idea by stating:

> *"…It won't work without a quota!...In the corporate boards of certain companies we have the 30% quota, in the management boards and the levels below we don't, there we only have recommendations and transparency but there is nothing more. And within two years we can see that all the seats on corporate boards have been filled except for one company, i.e. the percentage rate has been exactly achieved but not a single bit more. At the moment I think it's 29.8%. No more seats have been created. And at the same time, the number of women on management boards has even slightly decreased during this time."*

In the debate addressing the effects of the ´Frauenquote´ it is frequently assumed that it is yet too early to anticipate any structural changes regarding female board representation in Germany. Contrary to this assumption however my findings suggest that a quota is necessary in order to achieve structural change, thus increasing the percentage of WoB. Mrs. Schulz exemplifies this finding by stating that supervisory boards of publicly listed companies in Germany for which the 30 percent quota applies have almost all managed to achieve the before mentioned percentage of female board members. However, the management boards of these companies do not fall under the 30 percent quota. She highlights that at the same time the percentage of women in management boards has slightly decreased. German interviewees argue that without legal pressure, for

example by adopting a quota, the percentage of female board members will not change. Despite the still lately implemented ´Frauenquote´ German interviewees highlight that the quota has been effective in increasing the number of WoB. Adams and Kirchmaier (2013: 1) highlight that gender quotas might overcome certain forms of discrimination; however they argue that they are frequently too narrow to actually address all causes of female underrepresentation in management positions. In line with Adams and Kirchmaier (2013: 1) three out of fifteen German interviewees criticise the implemented gender quota. Thereby, interviewees argue that female board representation, thus diversity, is best achieved when altering everyday conditions not by setting a quota. Mrs. Becker highlights that *"Diversity is best achieved when surrounding conditions are sufficiently established in everyday life and not by setting quotas…"* Although three interviewees argue against the adopted quota, twelve out of fifteen German interviewees believe that the ´Frauenquote´ has been effective in increasing the number of WoB. However, in line with Adams and Kirchmaier (2013: 1) interviewees highlight that in addition to a quota also everyday conditions need to be changed in order to effectively increase the number of WoB.

However, Adams and Kirchmaier (2013: 5) as well as Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016: 418) highlight that if gender board quotas trigger and reinforce negative rather than positive attitudes towards women, then their effectiveness is limited. My findings however suggest the contrary to above highlighted scholars´ arguments. The majority of German interviewees highlight that possible negative attitudes towards women triggered by the implementation of a gender quota are inevitable. Interviewees see such negative attitudes as normal and a necessary evil. Interviewees argue that one simply has to get through this in order to trigger overall structural and societal change. Interviewees highlight that no one wants to be called a quota woman. However, without a ´Frauenquote´ German interviewees argue change will not come about. In addition, Terjesen and Sealy (2016: 46) find that there is still little understanding regarding which factors may or may not affect a possible success of gender quotas. My findings add to Terjesen and Sealy´s (2016) call suggesting that an increase in the number of women on corporate boards is largely dependent upon an implemented board gender quota with harsh enforcement mechanisms and sanctions in case of non-compliance. Bøhren and Staubo (2014: 152) analysing the effects of the Norwegian gender quota upon companies find that approximately half of the companies affected by the gender quota tried to avoid the legislation by changing their organisational form. I cannot draw from my qualitative data whether affected German companies have tried to change their organisational form in order to avoid the implemented gender quota. However, in line with Bøhren and Staubo (2014) my findings suggest that management boards of German companies that were not obliged by the gender quota have not experienced the same increase in female board percentage as supervisory boards of listed companies for which the quota applies. Summarising, German interviewees highlight as a form of ´power to´ the implemented ´Frauenquote.´ However, such incentives of increasing the number of WoB can also be limited when at the same time contradictory incentives are triggered by other policies. German interviewees criticise as a form of ´power over´ that their country has no single and coherent set of policies regulat-

ing WoB. Rather, interviewees highlight that implemented German policies tend to trigger different often even contradictory incentives. While the ´Frauenquote´ aims at increasing the number of WoB, policies as ´Herdprämie´ and ´Ehegattensplitting´ tend to reinforce traditional stereotypical gender roles. Respondents argue that a policy from a single mould is crucial when aiming to increase the number of WoB. Thereby, policies triggering contradictory incentives highlight forms of ´power over´ by cutting short on the policies´ effectiveness.

As highlighted above, both Chinese and German interviewees emphasise the importance of having effective ´Laws & Policies´ when trying to increase the number of WoB. ´Laws & Policies´ can also greatly influence the ´Compatibility of Family & Career.´ Thereby, ´Laws & Policies´ can establish the structural legal framework for ´Compatibility´ purposes as for example creating the legal framework for parental leave. In the following, I will therefore discuss in greater detail the findings addressing ´Compatibility of Family & Career.´

5.2. Power over, Power to: Compatibility: Family & Career

Figure 6

Categories	Power OVER	Power TO
Compatibility: Family & Career	• *Insufficient childcare facilities and part-time work* • **Childcare duties often associated to mothers** • **Double burden: childcare, household and career** • **Mothers longer career breaks** • Expectations family of origin: often expecting women to get married and have a baby • Maternity leave seen as burden for SMEs	• *More flexible opening hours at childcare facilities, preferably 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.* • **Focus also on fathers ("paternal leave" and "family-working-time")** • **Childcare mother´s and father´s responsibility** • Grandparents often tend to take up childcare duties, therefore Chinese interviewees do not mention improvement of childcare facilities as a major aim

Source: Own illustration from interviews

In the following, I will briefly describe forms of ´power over´ listed by both German and Chinese interviewees when addressing ´Compatibility: Family & Career.´ Below discussed findings are highlighted in brief in Figure 6. As forms of ´power over´ all of the fifteen German interviewees and fourteen out of sixteen Chinese interviewees highlight that ensuring compatibility between having a family and a career can be particularly challenging for women when aiming for a management or board position. German interviewees highlight that people usually enhance their career path between the age of 27 until 38 years old. German respondents highlight that this is the same age in which women usually have children, thus frequently dropping out of the labour market due to childcare duties. Both German and Chinese interviewees state that on average women tend to take on more household and childcare duties. This frequently leads to a so-called double burden, thus women trying to manage having a job while taking care of household and childcare responsibilities at the same time. Both German and Chinese respondents highlight that childcare is often being associated to the mother rather than the father of the child. Thereby German and Chinese interviewees both highlight frequent stigmatisation against women, particularly mothers. German interviewees argue that women aiming for career development while having children are at times labelled as a bad mother, thus "Rabenmutter."[64] This can lead to social pressure against mothers. In addition, also Chinese interviewees highlight as ´power over´ expectations frequently held by the

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[64] "Rabenmutter" frequently used to refer to an uncaring, bad and cold-hearted mother.

women´s family of origin, thus expecting women to get married and have a baby. Particularly German interviewees with children highlight the difficulty of attending informal after work get-togethers that bond people tighter together like business dinners or having a beer after work with colleagues. Interviewees state that such after-work informal get-togethers are a catastrophe for them as they have to take care of their children. German interviewees highlight that this makes the process of creating mutual trust with supervisors more difficult. German interviewees argue that this can decrease one´s chances of being promoted. Furthermore, both German and Chinese interviewees recall that after giving birth women are more likely to endure longer career breaks than fathers. A particular challenge mentioned by German interviewees is part-time work. Thereby German respondents argue that after giving birth mothers are more likely to work part-time than fathers. Long career breaks and part-time work can as a form of ´power over´ have negative effects upon one´s career development. If women are more likely to endure longer career breaks and work part-time due to childcare responsibilities, this means that one´s chances of being promoted to a management or board position decreases. In addition, also Chinese respondents highlight as a form of ´power over´ that mothers are more likely to take longer career breaks. Contrary to German interviewees Chinese interviewees do not mention part-time work at all. German and Chinese interviewees argue that the belief that presence time equals working time is still largely prevalent in the corporate sector. Chinese interviewees highlight that maternity leave is a particular burden for SMEs in China. In case of maternity leave SMEs have a loss of labour without any immediate compensation. Chinese respondents argue that this can lead to a situation in which companies might prefer to employ male employees rather than female employees as they cannot get pregnant and the company will not incur any loss of labour. In addition, German interviewees highlight insufficient childcare facilities and too little flexibility in their opening hours as one of the major obstacles for female leadership in the corporate world.

In the following, I will briefly describe forms of ´power to´ listed by both German and Chinese interviewees when addressing ´Compatibility: Family & Career.´ As summarised in Figure 6 under ´power to´ addressing the idea of compatibility German interviewees highlight that childcare opening hours should be longer and more flexible. Thereby, German interviewees argue that childcare facilities should be open at least from 6 a.m. until 8 p.m. This can create greater flexibility for working parents, particularly working mothers who on average still take up more childcare duties. Although the majority of German interviewees underline the importance of improving childcare only three out of sixteen Chinese interviewees see this as a major aim when trying to increase the number of women on corporate boards and management positions. A reason for this could be as Chinese interviewees highlight that it is very common in China for grandparents to take up childcare duties. Furthermore, both Chinese and German interviewees highlight the importance of expanding paternal leave, thus creating more initiatives for fathers to share childcare duties. In addition, German interviewees suggest as a form of ´power to´ a so-called family working time. This means that after having a child both parents work about 80 percent. German interviewees argue that both parents working about the same amount of time is preferred in-

stead of the current model, thus fathers having a very high working time in the labour market and mother a very low working time in the labour market. Furthermore, German interviewees highlight for example job sharing for managers as alternative working models that could give the employee a chance later on to be promoted. Thereby, both Chinese and German interviewees highlight that due to digitalisation more alternative working models exist. Employees can for example do home office. However, as mentioned above, many of these alternative working models are still to the detriment of the person concerned. As highlighted above under ´power over´ Chinese interviewees mention that maternity leave can be a particular burden for SMEs. Therefore, Chinese interviewees suggest that maternity leave shall be at least partly state subsidized. This could prevent companies from having a burden due to a loss of labour due to childcare duties and decrease current discrimination against women in the job market based on the idea that women will get pregnant and drop out. German interviewees highlight that ´late careers´, thus after the typical age of 27 until 38 years old, need to be possible and encouraged by companies.

In the following, I will discuss above highlighted findings addressing ´Compatibility: Family & Career´ by relating them to current literature. My interview findings with German respondents suggest that in Germany women are more likely to work part-time after giving birth. My German findings thereby support current research underlining that women are much more likely to work part-time after giving birth than men (Holst and Wieber, 2014: 33; Grabka, 2018).This however does not seem to be the case with Chinese interviewees. Chinese interviewees do not mention part-time work during the interviews at all. This might be the case as the concept of part-time work is not really implemented in China. My Chinese findings support Cooke (2003: 230) highlighting that the majority of working women in China tend to work full-time rather than part-time, as part-time working models are usually not being offered. German interviewees argue that despite being generously offered part-time work is a great pitfall as it is a career killer. My findings support Hipp (2018) who highlights that part-time work is still largely a career killer. As already highlighted under ´Laws & Policies´ employees taking advantage of such offers, for example part-time work, will most likely face more difficulties when trying to achieve a management or board position later on. This means for achieving compatibility between having a family and job part-time work can be considered as a form of ´power to.´ However, when trying to increase the number of women on corporate boards part-time work should be regarded as a form of ´power over.´

Due to the difficulty of trying to combine having a family and a career several German and Chinese interviewees state that they have deliberately decided not to have any children in order to pursue their career. This means that having children could still be considered as a barrier, thus a form of ´power over´, for female career development. Thereby, my findings are in line with Wippermann (2015: 29) highlighting that women´s career development and having children are often considered to be exclusionary. In addition, Busch and Holst (2012) find that the majority of German male and female managers live in households without children up to an age of 16 years old. My findings are also in line with the case of

Swedish female corporate directors as Adams and Kirchmaier (2013: 7) find that Swedish female corporate directors tend to have fewer children than other women in the Swedish population. Also Kricheldorff and Schramkowski (2015: 7) highlight that managers are frequently still confronted with the question of either pursuing a career or having children. Although my findings largely support above highlighted research, thus both German and Chinese interviewees stating that they have deliberately decided not to have any children in order to pursue their career, one German interviewee contradicts these findings. Mrs. Krüger highlights that it was only after having her child that she actually really started to pursue her career since she was a single mother and knew she would have the be the primary care- and breadwinner. Having to combine one´s job in addition to taking care of household and childcare duties can quickly result in a so-called double burden. Both Chinese and German interviewees highlight that women frequently face a double burden. The double burden is thereby described as a form of ´power over´ for women. A double burden can create more work and pressure for women when striving for career development. This means a double burden can trigger forms of ´power over´ for women as it can pose barriers, thus limiting female career development. Both interviewees from Germany and China highlight that this may be a major barrier for women when trying to aim for a management and board position.

Both Chinese and German interviewees point out that one way of decreasing the double burden for women could be by equally sharing childcare and household duties between the couple. Respondents from both countries suggest an expansion of paternity leave as a form of ´power to.´ This means both Chinese and German interviewees suggest that by increasing initiatives for paternity leave, not only mothers but also fathers will most likely take up childcare duties. This could result in a more even division of labour between mothers and fathers. This could decrease the double burden for women by sharing care duties. Both German and Chinese interviewees believe that an increase for paternity leave would empower women, by evenly distributing care duties, thus possibly resulting in an increase in the number of female board members. In addition, German interviewees urge for a family working time, thus suggesting that parents start working both 80 percent after a child´s birth. German interviewees believe that a family working time is a better model than the current one. Interviewees highlight that currently after giving birth women are primarily at home taking care childcare duties, often only working part-time in the labour work while men still tend to be the primary breadwinner. Both Chinese and German interviewees highlight the importance of equalising parental leave. My findings support Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 406, 416) research suggesting that increasing paternity leave while decreasing maternity leave and equalising parental leave while improving childcare facilities are crucial when trying to increase the number of WoB. In line with Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 406, 416) findings German interviewees particularly highlight the importance of improving childcare facilities when trying to increase the number of women on corporate boards. This means German interviewees see a lack of childcare facilities as well as their inflexible opening hours as a major barrier, thus ´power over´, for female career development. German respondents argue in favour of longer and more flexible opening hours

of childcare facilities and all-day schools. However, this finding is contrary to responses by Chinese interviewees. Only three out of sixteen Chinese interviewees highlight improving childcare facilities as a major necessity in order to increase the number of WoB. This means the majority, thus thirteen out of sixteen Chinese interviewees, do not address childcare facilities. Accordingly, my findings from interviews conducted in China only partly support Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 406, 416) research, thus excluding the importance of childcare facilities. As stated, women on average still tend to take up more childcare duties than men. This can limit women´s career development, thus triggering forms of ´power over.´ However, this also implies that if women are sufficiently supported in childcare duties, regardless whether by the state, grandparents or childcare facilities, they will be more flexible in their career development, thus triggering forms of ´power to.´ One reason why Chinese interviewees do not mention an improvement of childcare facilities to be necessary in order to increase the number of WoB could be because often Chinese grandparents take up childcare duties to a large extent. My findings are in line with Liu (2013: 489) arguing that traditionally Chinese grandparents tend to assist with childcare duties and domestic work, thereby particularly helping women to focus on their profession. Chinese interviewees state that in former times childcare was very much subsidized by the Chinese state. This made childcare facilities more easily accessible for working women. Currently, Chinese interviewees highlight that childcare costs have increased primarily in urban areas. Thus, Chinese respondents state that higher childcare costs can trigger initiatives for women to stay home and take up childcare duties themselves. Subsidized childcare is a frequently seen phenomenon in Communist states. One reason behind such subsidized childcare interviewees highlight was the aim of increasing female labour force participation.

Although well-developed childcare facilities can increase female labour force participation, the number of women in management or board positions does not necessarily always increase proportionally. This contradicts Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 406, 416) findings suggesting that a higher female labour force participation rate will have a positive impact on the percentage of female board members. Although China has had one of the highest female labour participation rates in the world the number of female managers or board members has not developed proportionally. Although my research is qualitative in its nature, thus not providing me with a large set of data and statistics, I find contradictions in the findings of existing literature. Contrary to Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 406, 416) findings, Cooke (2003: 231) highlights that although Chinese female labour participation force is and has been very high only few female managers exist. The interviews conducted with Chinese respondents support Attané (2012: 9) and Cooke (2003: 231) when arguing that one reason for this could be an occupational segregation. Thus, in the case of China Cooke (2003: 230) finds a lower proportion of female managers and professionals, however a higher proportion of women to be working in lower income careers as manual professions. Cooke (2003: 230) highlights that despite Chinese state intervention on behalf of women's employment, such intervention has largely aimed at quantitatively increasing female labour participation force and protecting female employment

rights rather than improving female employment prospects. Although years of Chinese state intervention has triggered benefits for gender equality as having a high female labour participation force and low gender pay gap, the number of female managers is not proportionally high as before mentioned rates. This means Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 406, 416) as well as Cooke´s (2003: 231) findings contradict each other. A higher female labour participation force does not necessarily imply a form of ´power to´, thus increasing the number of female managers in the country. One of the contradictory findings could be that Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016) primarily focused their analysis on the 27 member states of the European Union while Cooke (2003) primarily analysed the situation in China. This implies that depending on the country one aims to analyse one´s results can differ. Comparing countries from different regions, as Germany and China, might pose challenges regarding the comparability of the findings. Nevertheless, in this case it becomes apparent that when focusing only upon countries located in the same region, as Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016) findings demonstrate that generalising one´s results might become difficult as findings might only apply to a specific region, as highlighted above with the example of female labour participation force.

Both German and Chinese interviewees argue that childcare is primarily associated to the mother rather than the father. As highlighted above, on average women tend to take up more childcare duties than men. Both German and Chinese interviewees point out that primarily young women may face difficulties when trying to aim for a management or board position due to the assumption that she might get pregnant and then fall out of the workforce. As stated above, long career breaks may limit women´s chance of being promoted to a board or management position later on. Chinese interviewees highlight that they are often faced with expectations from their family of origin, thus expecting them to settle down, get married and have a baby. These findings are in line with Adams and Kirchmaier´s (2013: 9, 23) research underlining the importance that culture and family attitudes may play when analysing female labour. Family attitudes become particularly apparent among conducted Chinese interviewees. Thereby, Chinese interviewees highlight that if one´s family of origin expects women to be in charge of childcare duties, thus taking time off work, possible barriers for women's career development, thus forms of ´power over´, are triggered.

When discussing maternal leave both German and Chinese interviewees argue that it is crucial that mothers do not incur too long career breaks as this might have negative effects upon one´s career development. Particularly German interviewees suggest not taking more than six months off for childcare duties, as anything beyond that time might have negative implications for one´s career development. Contrary to my findings however Hipp (2018: 28) finds that even if women were to re-enter the labour market relatively quickly after taking time off work for maternity leave they are still more likely to face discrimination than men. According to Hipp´s (2018: 28) findings mothers face greater disadvantages compared to women without children. In addition, Hipp (2018) finds that women with children face more discrimination in the job market than men with children. According to her findings maternity leave, regardless whether short or long,

tends to have negative effects upon women´s career development. Hipp (2018) highlights that a too short maternity leave could imply being an irresponsible mother, thus lacking to take care of one´s child. On the other hand, having a too long maternity leave could mean prioritising family over career. This implies that regardless whether mothers take a long or a short maternity leave they are doomed to lose. This suggests forms of ´power over´, thus limitations for mothers re-entering the job market. My findings from conducted interviews suggest that a shorter maternity leave will be beneficial for one´s career development. Contrary to my findings however statistical results from the literature suggest that regardless whether a mother takes a longer or a shorter maternity leave, ultimately any kind whether long or short maternal leave will have negative consequences for a working mother (Hipp, 2018). In addition, Hipp (2018) finds that fathers are not negatively affected by parenthood. Rather, she finds that on average fathers´ tend to receive a higher salary and have better chances of career development than men without children. One reason for this phenomenon could be a traditional belief, both Chinese and German interviewees repetitively mention, stating that men are often expected to be the primary breadwinner of the family.

Both Chinese and German respondents state that when striving for a board or management position it is crucial to be aware that this might cut short on one´s time availability for family or leisure. Interviewees highlight that working long hours is still seen to be the norm among top-level managers and board members in both countries. German and Chinese interviewees particularly highlight workplace presence culture. Thereby, respondents state that it is still frequently assumed that presence time equals working. My findings from both Germany and China support existing research highlighting that the prevalent workplace presence culture is still present and often rests upon a traditional model defining men as the breadwinner and women as the caretaker of the family (Hofbauer, 2014: 146; Busch and Holst, 2012). In addition, also Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 30) find that the expectation of being continuously available at the workplace rests upon a gender segregated division of labour. My findings support above highlighted scholar´s research underlining the still prevalent workplace presence culture. In addition, particularly German interviewees point out that this workplace presence culture can trigger forms of ´power over´, thus limitation for female career development. German interviewees argue that women are still often the primary caretaker. This means that if they are not sufficiently supported in childcare duties, for example by grandparents or having flexible opening hours in childcare facilities, they will end up not being as flexible in their working time as employees without childcare responsibilities. Less flexibility in their working time can have negative effects upon their career development. If workplace presence culture is still seen as the norm particularly among high-level corporate jobs and parents do not have sufficient support in terms of childcare duties the career development of working parents, in most cases working mothers, can be limited. In addition to a still prevalent workplace presence culture, particularly German interviewees underline the difficulty of attending after work informal get-togethers with colleagues. German interviewees underline that such after work informal get-togethers are frequently difficult to attend for parents having to pick up their children from childcare facilities. However, German interviewees point out that such

informal get-togethers are often important for bonding with superiors or colleagues, thus triggering mutual trust. German interviewees point out that this bonding and trust with superiors can facilitate one´s career development. Thereby, Mrs. Krüger states *"So for me these professional business dinners were always a catastrophe…But then I simply had to say that that's not possible for me. However, this slows down the process until people gain confidence with you to promote you that slows down enormously."* Also Mrs. Becker recalls that *"After work in the evening when you leave the office you do not have a choice should I have a beer with my colleagues or I go home ... because one thing is clear, I must go home because I must pick up the child. These are simply different basic conditions."* Interviewees exemplify that when having children it can be difficult to join informal after work get-togethers that may slow down the process of gaining trust with superiors, thus possibly leading to a slower process of career promotion by triggering forms of ´power over.´

As stated above, both German and Chinese interviewees point out as a form of ´power over´ the difficulty of trying to combine having a family with pursuing a career. However, both respondents believe that current digital transformations in the labour market could trigger forms of ´power to´, thus overcoming such barriers for female career development. Thereby, both German and Chinese interviewees believe that current digital transformations could improve the situation of compatibility. Therefore, my findings support Sorgner, Bode and Krieder-Boden (2017: 42) underlining positive effects of the digital transformation for female labour. Both German and Chinese interviewees argue that due to digitalisation employees will be able to work irrespective of one´s location. My findings support Bultemeier and Marrs (2016) and Sorgner, Bode and Krieder-Boden (2017) research highlighting positive developments in the course of digitalisation. Unlike Carstensen (2015) however my findings do not support his research underlining that digitalisation may lead to an even greater double burden. Rather, both German and Chinese interviewees are positively inclined towards digitalization. Furthermore, just like Franke (2013: 196) both German and Chinese interviewees point out that in order to stay competitive companies will need to adapt to societal needs and demands, thus offering more alternative working models. However, particularly German respondents highlight that alternative working models are only real alternatives if they offer equal job opportunities and do not create ´power over´, thus limitations for the individual taking advantage of them. Hipp and Stuth (2013: 4) propose the part-time-manager model as one possibility of an alternative working model for managers. A part-time-manager model could increase the possibility of female access to high-level corporate jobs, thus triggering forms of ´power to´. This means that by sharing a manager position with someone else, parents and most likely mothers having less time availability due to childcare duties, could have a chance of obtaining a management position. This could increase the number of women in management posts. In addition, this could decrease the still prevalent workplace presence culture by equalising tasks and working time among two managers. However, it is questionable whether a part-time manager model alone would alter the double burden frequently faced by women. This assumption is supported by a study conducted in Germany on part-time work (Wippermann, 2018). The study found that part-time employed

married women with children are the primary care-taker of household and childcare duties (Wippermann, 2018: 8-9). Thus, this suggests that part-time working models do not necessarily reduce the double burden on women. Accordingly, a part-time manager model does not automatically improve the double burden on women. This means that the part-time manager model might increase the number of women in management positions, thus triggering ´power to´, but might not necessarily alter that women on average are still more likely to take up care duties than men. This could lead to a situation in which women might increasingly obtain management positions; however it does not necessarily need to change the fact that women are still largely faced with a double burden, thus triggering forms of ´power over.´ In addition, although the part-time manager model might be a good idea for working parents to combine having a family with a manager post the model is not yet being applied on a large scale.

Above, interviewees highlight that the ´Compatibility of Family and Career´ is often a great struggle for women when aiming for a board position in Germany and China, particularly when having children. Thereby, interviewees highlight that structural circumstances ensuring ´Compatibility of Family and Career´ is crucial when trying to increase the number of WoB. German interviewees particularly highlight improving childcare facilities while Chinese interviewees highlight the importance of having grandparents taking up childcare duties. In addition, to creating structural framework conditions female interviewees also highlight the importance of showing personal initiative when trying to aim for a board position. In the following, I will discuss the issue of ´Personal Initiative´ in greater detail.

5.3. <u>Power over, Power to: Personal Initiative</u>

Figure 7

Categories	Power OVER	Power TO
Personal Initiative	**Lack confidence "I am not good enough…"** **Undesirable management positions?**	**Personal initiative** **Pro-activeness** **STEM careers: high earning potential** *Career needs planning* *Increasing visibility by doing unique work and promoting it*

Source: Own illustration from the interviews

As demonstrated in figure 7, I will list findings highlighted as forms of ´power over´ by both Chinese and German interviewees when discussing ´Personal Initiative.´ As a form of ´power over´ both German and Chinese interviewees underline a generally perceived lack of confidence among women. Interviewees argue that they have frequently experienced women to lack confidence in their own abilities and skills, thus assuming that they are simply not good enough for a board or management position. In addition, both German and Chinese interviewees argue that they perceive women to see management or board positions as undesirable. Thereby, several interviewees see one reason in female board underrepresentation to lie in women´s lack of interest in board or management positions. Both German and Chinese interviewees argue that they have experienced that even if women get an opportunity to be promoted they frequently refuse the offer. Interviewees argue that one reason for this to be that board positions as well as other high-level management jobs usually imply great sacrifice on one´s personal life. In addition, interviewees criticise that women are often not proactive enough when striving for career development. One German interviewee uses the metaphor of a career bus to highlight that women tend to wait for a career bus or superior to come stop by and promote them. Both German and Chinese interviewees argue that this however does not resemble reality.

Highlighting findings as forms of ´power to´ by both Chinese and German interviewees when discussing ´Personal Initiative.´ As a form of ´power to´ both German and Chinese interviewees underline the importance of being pro-active when it comes to career development. This means pro-actively planning and striving for one´s career promotion. Both German and Chinese highlight that one needs to be professionally competent, thus doing good and diligent work and actively strive for one´s career development. Particularly Chinese interviewees highlight the importance of lifelong learning. Furthermore, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that it is crucial to promote one´s work and increase one´s visibility by raising one´s hand and grabbing opportunities that might come

up. One way of increasing one´s visibility is by taking up risky and important projects. Another way of increasing one´s visibility is by taking up a career in the emerging STEM sector. Both Chinese and German interviewees argue that the STEM sector has high earning potential and women are still largely underrepresented in it. This could imply increased visibility for women entering the STEM sector as well as a high salary. Although respondents highlight the importance of doing diligent and hard work, they argue that this alone will not bring an individual to a corporate or management board. Rather, interviewees suggest being confident, even if this means rubbing somebody up the wrong way or saying ´no´ to people. Interviewees thereby highlight the example of tough bargaining for a salary raise.

Both Chinese and German interviewees repetitively highlight certain character traits among them which they believe are crucial when trying to obtain a board position. Thereby, both Chinese and German respondents argue that they are particularly ambitious, competitive, curious, striving for change and looking for improvement. Also Terjesen and Singh (2008: 56) argue that a huge body of literature on ´Women on Corporate Boards´ has been written on person-centred research, thus addressing individual characteristics of female board members. Terjesen and Singh (2008: 56) highlight that studies addressing the individual characteristics of female board members frequently analyse female board members´ work experience, education as well as social networks. Unlike existing literature addressing person-centred research in terms of work experience, education and social networks, German and Chinese interviewees highlight the importance of having above mentioned character traits when striving for a board position. In addition, Chinese and German interviewees also underline the importance of being pro-active and showing personal initiative when aiming for career development. Interviewees believe that when pro-actively striving for career development forms of ´power to´ will be triggered, thus increasing the number of WoB.

As highlighted above, Terjesen and Singh (2008: 56) summarise studies highlighting female board member´s work experience, education and social networks. Thereby, studies often apply among others human capital theory[65] in order to explain female board underrepresentation. Thereby, one reason for female board underrepresentation is that women might lack the necessary human capital in order to successfully obtain a board or management position. The majority of Chinese and German interviewees however do not believe that women generally lack the necessary human capital in order to become a board member. However, both German and Chinese interviewees point out female underrepresentation in the STEM sector. Thereby, German and Chinese interviewees argue that the newly emerging STEM sector has high earning potential and could result in an increased visibility of women due to their overall underrepresentation in the sector. With the exception of the STEM sector, however, both German and Chinese

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[65] Becker (1964) defines "human capital" as referring to an individual´s set of education, experience and skills that can enhance one´s productive capabilities for the person itself and the firm he or she works in. For a detailed discussion please refer to the section 1.1. "Demographics, Human- and Social Capital" under "Literature Review."

interviewees do not believe that women generally lack the necessary qualifications and skills. Pajo, McGregor and Cleland´s (1997: 176) research confirms a "*high educational status of female directors.*" Furthermore, Pajo, McGregor and Cleland´s (1997: 176) findings suggest that despite an average younger age of female directors they do not tend to lack experience. In addition, also Zelechowski and Bilimoria´s (2004: 337) research finds no differences between men and women corporate inside directors of the American Fortune 1000 firms in terms of corporate or board tenure experience. My findings from Chinese and German interviewees largely supports above highlighted scholars arguing that women are not less qualified than their male peers. Both Chinese and German respondents rather mention a lack of character traits, as being pro-active, ambitious and competitive, to be a reason for female board underrepresentation, not however seeing women to be less qualified than their male peers. Rather, several German and Chinese interviewees believe that women are on average more qualified than men when it comes to educational degrees and marks. My findings are contrary to Ruigrok, Peck and Tacheva´s (2007: 555) research finding Swiss female directors to have lower education degrees than their male peers. Contrary to Ruigrok, Peck and Tacheva´s (2007: 555) research, Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008: 11) find that newly appointed female directors in the United Kingdom had a similar set of human capital compared to their male peers. Furthermore, my qualitative findings from Chinese and German interviews support Singh, Terjesen and Vinnicombe (2008: 11) arguing that at times female directors might even hold additional human capital compared to male directors. Peterson and Philpot (2007: 190) find that even when controlling for experience, men were still more likely than women to be a member of the executive committee. German and Chinese interviewees do not believe that women have less human capital than their male peers. Rather, interviewees believe men and women on average to be equally qualified. Nevertheless, Chinese and German interviewees argue that they have experienced an overall lack of female pro-activeness and personal initiative when it comes to career development. Thereby, interviewees believe that when failing to pro-actively strive for one´s career development and not showing sufficient personal initiative, forms of ´power over´ might be triggered, thus limiting women´s board access. Terjesen and Singh (2008: 56) use Powell (1999) to underline that in the past "*women were said to lack the necessary qualities such as ambition and confidence in comparison to men…*" Contrary to Terjesen and Singh´s (2008) argument both Chinese and German interviewees presume women to lack the necessary confidence and ambition to obtain a board position. Thereby, both German and Chinese respondents see one of the main barriers for female board underrepresentation in women´s lack of confidence in their own abilities and in possibly seeing high-level corporate positions as undesirable. Both German and Chinese interviewees underline the particular importance of being pro-active and demonstrating personal initiative when aiming for a board or management position. Interviewee Mrs. Fischer highlights that often women tend to "*wait for the career bus to stop in front of them, opening the door and saying, ´Hop in, I will now promote you.´*" In addition, also Mrs. Yang argues that, "*women often wait until the boss comes, to be promoted.*" Interviewees argue that they frequently experience women to work very diligently and hard, however instead of pro-actively taking

the initiative rather waiting for a career promotion or salary rise to happen. Interviewees highlight that this is not how reality works. German and Chinese interviewees believe that one needs to do good work and then increase one´s visibility. However, interviewees criticise women´s overall lack of confidence in their own abilities. Both German and Chinese respondents believe that women´s lack of confidence in their own abilities could be rooted in different socialisation processes between boys and girls in their childhood. Thereby, interviewees assume that girls and boys are being raised differently. Interviewees assume that boys are still predominantly raised to be competitive and ambitious, while girls tend to be raised to be nice, cute and pacific.

Singh and Vinnicombe (2004: 479) state that female board underrepresentation is frequently explained by *"women's lack of ambition, lack of experience and lack of commitment."* However, they argue that these explanations have largely been disapproved by current research. In addition, they state that frequently it is argued that women tend to refrain from the usage of impression management, thus not using strategic forms as self-promotion of ambition and achievements in order to increase one´s visibility. In line with Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) I argue that many studies have proved above mentioned explanations for female board underrepresentation to be untrue. Nevertheless, my findings suggest that assumptions perceiving women to have a lack of ambition and lack of commitment for career development are still prevalent. Both German and Chinese interviewees believe that one reason for female board underrepresentation lies within women themselves. Thereby, respondents argue that women´s lack of confidence in their own abilities and a possible lack of interest in obtaining a board or management position to be a major barrier for female board access. Thereby, it appears as if female interviewees were extracting, thus distancing themselves from the overall group of women. Interviewees believe that women are not pro-actively enough striving for career development. They themselves however emphasise that they have been demonstrating lots of personal initiative and have very pro-actively striving for their career development. Thereby, interviewees underline that they have used self-promotion and personal initiative in order to increase their own visibility. Interviewees clarify that they themselves have actively planned and pursued their career development. This form of distancing oneself from other women appears to be in line with the ´queen bee syndrome.´ Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers (2016: 457) define a ´queen bee´ as a label that:

> *"is given to women who pursue individual success in male-dominated work settings (organizations in which men hold most executive positions) by adjusting to the masculine culture and by distancing themselves from other women (Kanter, 1977; Staines, Tavris, & Jayaratne, 1974)."*

Above, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight forms of ´power over´ when addressing a frequently experienced lack of personal initiative among women, thus failing to pro-actively strive for one´s career development. Interviewees point out the importance for doing outstanding work and increasing one´s visibility when trying to obtain a high-level board or management position. Interviewees highlight that one way of increasing one´s visibility could be by successfully completing risky outstanding projects. Exemplifying the before men-

tioned, in the following one German interviewee describes her career path of becoming the first female CFO in a German publicly listed company. She states:

> "Important steps in becoming a CFO at XXX[66] were certainly successfully accomplishing risky, outstanding projects or tasks that attracted attention in the company. So quite early on, I took up a position abroad. I took over a restructuring case, which gave me a name and a reputation, thus the corresponding results were then known to the Board of Management and Corporate Board."

The interviewee particularly underlines the importance of successfully completing risky and outstanding projects. She highlights that this accomplishment eventually attracted attention within the company from the management and corporate board. This means that by successfully accomplishing risky and outstanding projects one can receive increased visibility within one´s company, particularly from the management and corporate board. Underlining the importance of successfully completing risky and outstanding projects reminds of the ´Glass Cliff´ phenomenon. Morgenroth *et al.* (2015: 128) argue that the ´glass cliff´ phenomenon describes a situation in which women who manage to break through the glass ceiling often *"disproportionally occupy risky and precarious leadership positions."* Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 35) states that the ´Glass Cliff´ is a phenomenon that *"in times of crisis women are more likely to be perceived as suitable managers"* than during easy times. When taking up risky and outstanding projects one may, on the one hand, increase one´s visibility within the firm, thus triggering forms of ´power to´. This appears to be the case with the above mentioned female board member. On the other hand, however taking up risky projects also implies a much greater risk of failure, thus triggering forms of ´power over.´

Above, interviewees particularly point out the importance of ´Personal Initiative´, thus pro-actively striving for and planning one´s career. Interviewees highlight that ´Personal Initiative´ is indispensible when aiming for a board position. In addition, to intrinsic ´Personal Initiative´ interviewees also point out having a supportive social and professional environment when striving for a position on a corporate board. In the following, I will discuss in greater detail ´Societal Structures.´

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[66] Interviewee mentions the name of the company she works for.

5.4. Power over, Power to: Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Expectations

Figure 8

Categories	Power OVER	Power TO
Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Expectations	• **Treated differently: Not taken seriously, constantly having to proof oneself** • **Traditional socio-cultural gender expectations:** • **Male breadwinner, Female childcare and household duties** • **"Think manager think male" still persistent** • **Key corporate positions still male dominated** • **Social labels as, leftover woman (sheng nü), Rabenmutter** • **Stereotypes** • <u>Confucian thought</u>	• **Respondents observe societal change towards more gender equality and acceptance of diversity** • **Aim: gender equity normality and more respect towards each other** • <u>Mao´s ´Women hold up half the sky´ described as empowering women interviewees observe</u> • *Treated differently: High level of visibility, having power to trigger change*

Source: Own illustration from interviews

In the following, I will highlight forms of ´power over´ that were mentioned by both Chinese and German interviewees when discussing ´Societal Structures´ and are summarised above in Figure 8. Both German and Chinese interviewees highlight as a form of ´power over´ that they have experienced differential treatment either due to their gender or due to their younger age. Particularly Chinese interviewees highlight differential treatment due to a relatively younger age than their male peers. Both German and Chinese respondents highlight that such differential treatment often implies not being taken seriously and constantly having to proof oneself. Chinese and German respondents assume that differential treatment is often rooted in socio-cultural gender expectations. These often lay in stereotypes about men and women. Both interviewees point out that often women are expected to be the primary caretaker of housework and childcare duties, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinner of the family. Both

interviewees from Germany and China confirm that the ´think manager think male´ attitude is still prevalent. The ´think manager think male´ phenomena describes that typical manager characteristics are often primarily associated with stereotypical masculine rather than feminine characteristics. Respondents highlight that being a woman they are often expected to embody stereotypical feminine characteristics as being cute, sweet, nice and caring. Interviewees from both China and Germany state that such characteristics are however not necessarily always helpful in the professional world. Although female board members might not even embody such before mentioned stereotypical feminine characteristics they are still assumed to do o. Interviewees state that such assumptions frequently lead to an underestimation of their skills and qualities. Both interviewees highlight that they often have to be twice as good as their male peers and constantly have to prove themselves in order to be recognised. Both German and Chinese respondents highlight that key corporate positions are still largely male dominated. Particularly German interviewees highlight the also under ´Individual Support & Networks´ referred to phenomenon of ´similarity-attraction´ that can limit women´s access to powerful networks and decision-making positions. In addition, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight as a form of ´power over´ social labelling. German interviewees highlight for example the label of ´Rabenmutter.´ Thereby, interviewees state that one easily gets called a bad and uncaring mother, thus a ´Rabenmutter´, if one tries to combine having a successful professional career with having a family. Also Chinese interviewees highlight social labelling as a form of ´power over.´ Respondents highlight that professionally successful but unmarried women above the age of 27 years old are at times labelled a ´sheng nü´, thus a leftover woman. Interviewees state that if a young woman is too successful or smart it might become difficult to get a partner. Both German and Chinese interviewees argue that this social labelling can trigger severe social pressure for the individual. Thereby, indirectly prescribing how the individual should act accordingly. Chinese and German respondents see the root cause of social labelling in societal expectations towards the individual. German and Chinese interviewees see the root cause of societal expectations to lie in gender stereotypes about men and women. Both respondents highlight that such stereotypes and expectations are frequently rooted in a country´s culture and history. Thereby, two Chinese interviewees point out Confucian thought as a form of ´power over.´ Thus, both Chinese interviewees assume that Confucian thought outlines distinct gender roles for men and women, thereby creating societal expectations. One German interviewee points out as a form of ´power over´ the traditional ´breadwinner model´ of the Federal Republic of Germany as not being conducive in increasing the number of WoB.

In the following, I will highlight forms of ´power to´ that were discussed by both Chinese and German interviewees when addressing ´Societal Structures´ and are summarised in Figure 8. As a form of ´power to´ German interviewees highlight that they have not only experienced negative forms of differential treatment but also positive forms. German interviewees state that when being the only female in a male-dominated board room one enjoys increased visibility. German interviewees highlight that this visibility can be used for positive purposes as try-

ing to increase the number of WoB. Although under ´Individual Support & Networks´ I discussed challenges that the feminist movements in Germany and China are currently facing, overall both German and Chinese interviewees have observed an increase in the number of WoB. Three Chinese interviewees highlight as a form of ´power to´ Mao´s slogan ´Women hold up half of the sky.´ These three Chinese interviewees particularly emphasise the positive effects of this slogan as well as associated programs for women in China.

I will use ´power over´ and ´power to´ in order to discuss the findings of Chinese and German interviews addressing ´Societal Structures.´ Both German and Chinese interviewees argue that men and women are de jure equal but not de facto. Thereby, interviewees form both China and Germany highlight that men and women often do not face the same living and working conditions. Interviewees from both countries argue that on average women tend to take up more household and childcare duties than men. In line with existing literature, respondents from both China and Germany highlight that on average women tend to spend much more time on household duties than their male partners (Attané, 2012: 12; Samtleben, 2019). By spending more time on household and care work, one tends to have less time and energy available for focusing on one´s professional career. This can be true for both men and women. Nevertheless, since women on average tend to spend more time taking on household and childcare duties than men, this affects women disproportionally more than men. Thereby, it is crucial to note that household and care work are frequently unvalued as well as under- or even unpaid. Interviewees highlight that this unequal segregation of work triggers different preconditions for women in the workforce. Respondents underline different living and working preconditions between a person that can primarily focus upon one´s career development, in contrast to a person that tries to combine one´s career with taking care of household and childcare duties. Thereby, often unpaid care and household work can cut short on one´s time availability in one´s professional career development and vice versa. This means that if women on average take up more household and childcare duties than men this can limit their time availability thus creating a double burden for women which results in ´power over´, thus negatively influencing female board access.

Although women on average are still regarded as the primary caretaker of childcare and household duties, German interviewees highlight that nowadays it is considered normal for women to work. Mrs. Schulz highlights:

> *"I believe that this older generation still has the expectation: woman equals household. The younger generation says exactly the opposite: we want to have a professional development and must also work due to financial reasons. We cannot simply live of one salary. These are, of course, processes in which a society also changes. Today, two income households are quite normal."*

Mrs. Schulz argues that a two-income household has become quite normal nowadays in Germany. Thereby, she presumes that nowadays it is considered

normal for women to have their own profession. Chinese interviewees do not address the above highlighted issue presumably because Chinese female participation force has been among the highest in the world throughout many years. However, Chinese interviewees do observe a change in social cognition towards female managers. Accordingly, Mrs. Song states that *"…in recent years the entire social cognition has changed towards very successful women. They are being recognised…"* Mrs. Song argues that she can observe a change towards more acceptance of professional successful women in China. Also expert interviewee Mrs. Shi observes a societal change, arguing, *"I would say this (gender inequality) is changing, especially in big cities among the young generation, yes this is changing."* In addition, Mrs. Fischer highlighting the situation of gender equality in Germany states that:

> *"the socio-cultural background that we have in Germany...So when you consider that not even 40 years ago women were not allowed to have a job without the husband's signature...I get goose bumps. So I think we made some progress, but we didn't make a lot of progress. This patriarchy, that simply still exists…"*

Despite overall societal changes and progress towards more gender equality, Mrs. Schulz states that patriarchy still exists. She states that despite some progress a lot has remained unchanged. Both Chinese and German interviewees state that powerful corporate positions are still largely male dominated. In addition, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight women´s overall underrepresentation on corporate boards and in management positions. Thereby, respondents see a main barrier for women´s access to powerful corporate positions to lay in societal expectations, assuming women to be the primary caretaker and lacking management qualities. When asked why women on average still tend to take up more unpaid household and care work even though it means more unpaid work for them, interviewees see the root cause in societal expectations and stereotypes. Chinese interviewees state that traditionally women were expected to work inside the home, while men were expected to work outside the home. Despite overall societal changes, both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that such societal expectations often rooted in stereotypical gender roles, thus indirectly prescribing men and women how to act accordingly, are at times still prevalent today. My findings add to Bührmann *et al.*´s (2015: 28, 29) research stating that existing gender beliefs and expectations can in a way prescribe how men and women shall act accordingly. My findings are also in line with Heilman´s (2012: 113) findings that gender stereotypes, thus assumptions about how men and women are or should be like, can impede women´s career advancement. Interviewees both from Germany and China highlight that societal expectations and beliefs about appropriate gender roles arise from different forms of socialisation already from an early age onwards. Interviewees highlight that girls tend to be raised to be caring, nice and pretty while boys tend to be raised to be competitive, strong and courageous. Both Chinese and German interviewees believe that different socialisation processes can trigger different societal expectations towards men and women. Both German and Chinese re-

spondents exemplify this by arguing that children are primarily being associated to their mother rather than their father. This means that mothers tend to be expected to be the primary caretaker of children. Both German and Chinese interviewees criticise that female and male managers are often asked different questions. To exemplify this Mrs. Guo highlights that *"as a man you are asked: ´How did you achieve this leadership position?´ As a woman you are asked: ´How do you balance a career and a family? ´* Mrs. Guo continues by stating, "*But men are related to the family as well. So why is it that we don´t ask men the same question? So from the very beginning women and men are not put in the same position."* The female manager is asked regarding her ability of combining having a family and a career because it is assumed that being a woman she will be the primary caretaker of her family, thus taking up childcare and household duties. In addition, also Mrs. Schneider highlights that children and childcare are primarily associated to mothers. She shares an experience when stating:

> *"…I remember this situation where the aim was filling of a partner position. So there were two candidates: a woman who was pregnant at the time and a man whose wife was pregnant and of course the man was chosen because the others said: 'No the woman is pregnant and then she will take care of her child.' So these remarks and comments are still there when it comes to employing a woman who's in her early 30s…"*

Mrs. Schneider´s experience highlights that childcare is primarily still being associated to the mother rather than to the father. This becomes apparent when Mrs. Schneider sharing her experience states that the man with the pregnant wife was chosen over the pregnant woman for the partner position, as it was assumed that the pregnant woman would take care of her child afterwards instead of focusing on her job. Again such decision is most likely rooted in the unconscious assumption that mothers rather than fathers are responsible for childcare duties. My findings support Cook and Glass (2018: 901) stating that stereotypical *"Gender role expectations posit that women are kind, friendly and community-oriented."* In case of non-compliance with such gender role expectations the individual can face societal pressure. This means societal pressure towards the individual can trigger forms of ´power over´, thus limiting the individual in its´ decision-making ability. If women are expected to be the primary caretaker of household and childcare duties, this may result, as highlighted above in Mrs. Schneider´s example, that a man with a pregnant wife is preferred over a pregnant woman for a high-level career position.

Above, I briefly stated that social labelling may trigger societal pressure for the individual. Both German and Chinese interviewees underline negative effects of social labelling. Again taking the example of childcare being primarily associated to mothers rather than to fathers, German interviewees have experienced that professionally successful women with children frequently run the risk of being criticised for not spending enough time with their children and family. Thereby, it is assumed that the professionally successful woman must be a bad and uncaring mother who spends more time at her job than taking care of her family. This

means professionally successful mothers easily face great societal criticism. German interviewees argue that successful female managers are often penalised with the social label ´Rabenmutter.´ Mrs. Schulz argues, *"especially in Germany I still see that childcare responsibility is primarily associated to the mother. Also this picture of this bad mother, this ´Rabenmutter´, who goes to work, still exists."* In addition, also Mrs. Fischer highlights the idea of ´Rabenmutter´ when stating, *"Well I met women here in Germany whom I asked: 'Well don´t you want to come back to work again?' They answered: 'No, because all of my relatives are blaming me that I am a bad mother, a ´Rabenmutter´.'"* As stated, this kind of social labelling can create social pressure thus ´power over´ for the individual. Through social labelling and social pressure the individual is indirectly pushed to comply according to stereotypical societal beliefs, expectations and norms. Non-compliance of such societal expectations can trigger societal rejection. In addition, also Chinese interviewees underline negative consequences of social labelling. Chinese interviewees particularly highlight the concept of ´sheng nü´ thus ´leftover woman.´ Fincher (2012) states that the All-China Women´s Federation defined the term ´leftover women´ (sheng nü) in 2007. Thereby, the term describes professionally very successful women, above the age of 27 years old and unmarried (Fincher, 2014). Fincher (2012) highlights that this social labelling has triggered severe forms of discrimination by *"stigmatizing educated women who are still single."* Mrs. Wang states that in China, *"…we have these labels as sheng nü. It is kind of a prejudice which is increasing...So the parents will get anxious if you don´t get married by the time you are 30."* She continues to argue that *"this kind of social labelling creates pressure."* Also underlining the idea of ´sheng nü´ Mrs. Liu argues, *"…If you are a young woman and you feel you are too smart or you make too much money then you can´t get a boyfriend. If that is a concern then I think people individually could be held back."* Mrs. Li particularly highlights that if a young woman is considered to be too smart or make too much money, it might be difficult for her to find a partner. Mrs. Li states that such concerns might trigger ´power over´ for the individual woman, thus she might start limiting herself in her success and career development. This means due to fear that one might become a ´leftover woman´ one might try not to be too successful or too smart. During the interviews Chinese respondents particularly point out societal beliefs held towards young women. Respondents argue that young Chinese women are supposed to do well at school but not to be too smart or too successful. Otherwise interviewees argue finding a partner might become difficult for the women, thus she might end up being a ´sheng nü.´ In addition, also German interviewees highlight contradictory expectations towards women. Respondents state that women are expected to have a job and do well, but should not be professionally too successful. Such societal expectations can trigger forms of ´power over´, thus limitations for women´s carer development in both Germany and China. Both Chinese and German interviewees experience female managers to walk a thin line between being socially accepted or rejected. Thus, my findings support the ´double-bind dilemma´, which Oakley (2000: 324) defines as creating an inescapable situation *"where a person cannot win no matter what she does."* Interviewees from both countries underline that women are expected to have a job and do well but not to be too successful, as one might end up being labelled a ´sheng nü´ or a ´Rabenmutter.´ My findings suggest that women both

in Germany and in China are expected to work and do well in a professional context, however women should also be a good mother and housewife. One is left with the impression that at the end of the day women are expected to be simply perfect, or as German interviewees state an ´Eierlegende Wollmilchsau[67].´ Thus, being a caring mother, responsible housewife and being good at doing one´s job. Extrapolating societal expectations and beliefs held towards women in both China and Germany from merely 31 conducted interviewees cuts short on the great diversity of beliefs and expectations within Chinese and German society. Nevertheless, both Chinese and German interviewees particularly emphasise societal structures as gender roles, social beliefs and societal expectations to be one of the root causes for female board underrepresentation. My qualitative findings from 31 conducted interviews only give a small insight into the overall picture of existing gender roles, social beliefs and societal expectations held in both China and Germany and by no means are limited to the one´s highlighted above. However, discussing above highlighted ´Societal Structures´ are still crucial for the analysis, particularly due to the reason that both Chinese and German respondents pay great attention to such.

Above, I discussed stereotypical gender assumptions held towards women. Such stereotypical gender assumptions frequently rest upon feminist essentialism expecting a natural attachment between one´s sex and gender behaviour. This means presuming that women naturally embody supposedly naturally given feminine behaviour. Stone (2004: 4) defines essentialism within feminism as *"the view that there are properties essential to women, in that any woman must necessarily have those properties to be a woman at all. So defined, essentialism entails a closely related view, universalism: that there are some properties shared by, or common to, all women…"* Thereby, such essentialist assumptions underline the ´business case´ for female board representation. Supporters of the ´business case´ for board diversity tend to argue that corporate governance and firm´s financial output can be improved by increasing the number of WoB, thus also by including a wider range of views and experiences (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004: 481). While some of the above mentioned assumptions might be true, Bührmann (2014: 100) as well as Simpson, Carter and D´Souza (2010: 27) state that ultimately the ´business case´ for greater gender diversity on corporate boards rests upon stereotypical gender assumptions, thus presuming that men and women are not equal, but rather different. In my interview findings particularly Chinese interviewees use the ´business case´ to argue in support of greater female representation on boards and in management teams. These interviewees highlight that women must be good managers due to their stereotypically held feminine characteristics as being caring, nice and compassionate. In line with the ´business case´ Chinese interviewees emphasise women´s difference from men, for example by outlining that women have a ´women´s perspective.´ Mrs. Chen addresses the idea of having a female perspective that is naturally different from a male perspective. During the interviews several Chinese

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[67] Eierlegende Wollmilchsau – Means an "egg-laying, milk-bearing woolly sow." A person satisfying all demand and being simply perfect at everything.

respondents naturally associate physical differences to behavioural differences. Thereby, using the before mentioned to argue in favour of the ´business case´ for female board representation. Mrs. Guo underlines that companies in China often use the ´business case´ to argue in favour of employing women. Mrs. Guo highlights that often women are believed to be naturally emotional, thus assuming that they will be less likely to leave their job and be very loyal to their company. Although this might be true for some women it cuts short on the great diversity of people and their individual characteristics. Furthermore, Chinese interviewees particularly emphasise physical differences between men and women. Mrs. Zhao argues, *"You know women our body our chemicals are different...because we are moms."* In addition, Mrs. Chen argues that women are underrepresented on boards because *"historically and also by nature women have more physical challenges to face, right? During the time when we are growing up, we have the monthly period, which men don´t have, this can create a monthly physical disability for quite some women."* Above highlighted interviewees particularly underline physical differences between men and women. Often it is assumed that such physical differences are naturally accompanied by a specific gender behaviour. While some interviewees use such essentialist arguments in favour of the ´business case´ for greater board diversity, others use essentialist assumptions to argue against female board representation.

Bührmann (2014: 103) states that focusing primarily upon the ´business case´ for female board diversity proves to be particularly risky. Despite the ´business case´ having the intention of supporting greater female board diversity, it ultimately reinforces traditionally held gender stereotypes about men and women. It emphasises differences between men and women. Thereby, assuming that women must be good managers as they are caring, nice and sweet. Although the ´business case´ can be used to argue in favour of female board representation, underlying essentialist stereotypes can also be used to argue against it. Again using the above highlighted stereotype of women being emotional, Mrs. Cheng states that *"sometimes women easily get emotional and sometimes you can lose control when you have pressure on you and that is not good..."* She uses essentialist assumptions about women to argue against female board representation. Thereby, forms of ´power over´, thus barriers for female career development are being reinforced. In addition, also expert interviewee Mr. Peng uses stereotypical essentialist arguments to argue against female board diversity when stating that *"Women are less productive and they work less efficient and are less ambitious."* He underlines assumingly natural character differences between men and women when stating:

> *"Women and men can do different jobs. Females are more diligent and they have a better moral. They can do jobs that require these characteristics. But I don´t know whether women can improve the proficiency of a firm. There are only few females that are different and that put a lot of time and effort in their jobs they might make it to the top because they are different from the average female."*

Mr. Peng believes that men and women are not only biologically but also in their characteristics different from each other. He believes that both can do different jobs depending on their supposedly naturally given characteristics. My findings primarily from interviews conducted in China highlight that essentialist stereotypes about female managers or board members having distinct characteristics to men are still prevalent. As stated above, some interviewees use such essentialist stereotypes to argue in favour of the ´business case´ for female board representation. Other interviewees use such stereotypes to argue against the ´business case´ of female board representation. My findings contradict Kirsch (2018: 350) highlighting that studies analysing female directors having distinct character or personality traits to be extremely rare. Assuming naturally given gender differences in people´s behaviour simply by attaching such to people´s sex, cuts short on the great diversity of individuals and their characteristics. Nevertheless, as highlighted above my findings suggest that such essentialist assumptions about women and men do exist.

Above highlighted assumptions can trigger forms of ´power over´, thus barriers, for women when trying to aim for a management or board position as typical manager characteristics are frequently not being associated to stereotypical feminine characteristics. My interview results from both Germany and China support Cook and Glass´ (2018: 901) findings suggesting that stereotypical feminine gender role expectations are often in contrast to typical leadership characteristics. This predicts that women can be perceived as unsuitable leaders simply because they are presumed to embody stereotypical feminine characteristics. If female managers however do not behave according to stereotypical feminine characteristics, this may violate existing gender expectations. Accordingly, Mrs. Schmidt states, *"Women are often supposed to be nice and lovely. Whenever a woman starts becoming tough, which is seen as something wonderful for a man, a woman is considered bitchy..."* In addition, also Mrs. Li argues that as a single woman in a boardroom "*you almost have to really fight. Then they call you a bitch…"* My findings support Oakley´s (2000: 324) research on the ´double bind dilemma´ stating that female managers *"must be tough and authoritative (like men) to be taken seriously, but they will be perceived as "bitches" if they act too aggressively."* This again highlights the thin line that female managers walk between social recognition and rejection. The above highlighted ´double bind dilemma´ suggests that whichever way women act, it will most likely be considered wrong.

Both German and Chinese respondents highlight that typical manager characteristics often tend to be associated rather to stereotypical masculine than stereotypical feminine character traits. My findings support Schein ´s (1973, 1975, 2001; Schein *et al.*, 1996) ´think manager think male´ phenomenon. Schein´s (1973, 1975, 2001; Schein *et al.*, 1996) findings highlight that typical characteristics of a successful manager are often related to stereotypical masculine characteristics. In addition, Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 26) argue that only people embodying specific characteristics are recognised as managers by society. Bührmann *et*

al. (2015: 26) highlight frequently that male managers tend to be seen as the norm while female managers are constructed as ´the other.´ In their study of women in worldwide management, Antal and Izraeli (1993: 63) argue that *"the single most important hurdle for women in management in all industrialized countries is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male."* My findings support above highlighted scholars´ as well as Schein´s (2001: 676) research stating that psychological barriers as for example the ´think manager think male´ phenomenon can further consolidate already existing gender bias against women in the workforce. Such stereotypical assumptions associating typical manager with stereotypical masculine characteristics can trigger forms of ´power over´, thus barriers for female career development. This possibly poses more barriers for women trying to obtain a board position. The ´think manager think male´ phenomenon also becomes apparent when asking Chinese and German interviewees whether they feel that female managers are being recognised by society. Thereby only few interviewees believe that female managers are recognised by society, the majority of German and Chinese respondents have experienced successful female managers are judged with scepticism. Again, extrapolating societal beliefs about female managers from merely 31 interviews cuts short on the great diversity of societal beliefs existent in China and Germany. Nevertheless, discussing societal beliefs about female managers within the respective country is crucial in order to understand above highlighted psychological barriers that may trigger ´power over´, thus creating limitations for women´s career development (Schein, 2001: 676). Overall, German interviewees argue that female managers are frequently regarded as being cold-hearted, harsh and uncompromising. Mrs. Schneider states that a successful female manager tends to be seen:

> *"…Rather sceptical. It is scientifically proven that career women are seen as competent but absolutely unappealing. Here, again the stereotype. A woman doing a job like this has to be tough, having no scruples, must be rather male. And in case of doubt doesn't take care of her family and children. She is judged to be very harsh and therefore unappealing."*

Mrs. Schneider´s quote supports the above highlighted ´think manager think male´ phenomenon. She states that a career woman tends to be seen as tough, having no scruples and in case of doubt not caring enough for her children, rather focusing upon her career. In addition, also Mrs. Qi highlights that successful female managers are seen as *"really too successful, because these kind of women…it means they don´t take good care of the family, right? Of course once you turn too much of your attention to your job of course you spend so much time there. Who is going to take care of the kid?´"* German and Chinese interviewees highlight that successful female managers tend to be seen rather sceptical. Above, Mrs. Schneider points out that a successful career woman is often seen as being competent but absolutely unappealing. This supports Anderson and Flynn´s (2003) findings in the ´Heidi Roizen´ experiment (Agarwal, 2018). Thereby, finding that successful female managers are seen as competent but

selfish. In their experiment a group of MBA students were divided into two groups. Both groups received the same Harvard Business School case study, thus describing the career path of a successful entrepreneur, ´Heidi Roizen.´ One half of the group received the case study with the name ´Heidi´ written on it while the other group received the same case study only with a male name written on it, thus ´Howard´ (Agarwal, 2018). The students perceived both ´Howard´ and ´Heidi´ to be equally competent but ´Howard´ was regarded as an appealing boss, while ´Heidi´ was seen as being selfish and simply not *"the type of person you would want to hire or work for."* In line with the ´Heidi Roizen´ experiment both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that female managers are frequently seen as being harsh, cold-hearted and uncaring towards their family.

Above highlighted stereotypes as the ´think manager think male´ phenomenon are frequently rooted in traditional socio-cultural gender expectations, beliefs and societal norms. Thereby, a person´s sex tends to be attached to a specific gender behaviour. It often appears as if sex and gender were naturally attached to each other. Such stereotypical gender assumptions frequently rest upon essentialist beliefs, thus assuming that men and women embody different and naturally given gender behaviour. Carver (2014: 114, 115) highlights that gender does not *"presume that behaviour proceeds naturally from particular bodily organs or sex hormones."* While many German and Chinese interviewees see one of the main reasons for female board underrepresentation to lay in different socio-cultural expectations and values, only few highlight the actual origin of such. One German interviewee assumes that the sources of above mentioned socio-cultural expectations to lie in the Western German ´breadwinner´ model. Mrs. Walter states, *"We still have a West-German image in the FRG. The GDR history has been added only by accession, but unfortunately, no effective integration has taken place. The old "breadwinner" model of the Federal Republic of Germany is still formative."* Mrs. Walter states that the old breadwinner model, assumingly arising out of the FRG is still formative. This implies that the ´breadwinner model´ as well as attached societal expectations might trigger forms of ´power over´ for female career development. This means men are expected to be the breadwinner and women the caretaker. As a form of ´power to´, thus increasing overall female empowerment three Chinese interviewees underline the importance of Mao´s slogan ´Women hold up half of the sky´ accompanied by programmes for improving gender equality. Mrs. Chen recalls that when the People´s Republic of China was set up, Mao promoted the slogan ´Women hold up half the sky.´ She highlights that this created many job opportunities for women across China, thus increasing female labour participation force. She states that ever since 1949 Chinese women *"are",* then she rephrases to *"are supposed to be equal to men in their work."* This reminds of the earlier discussion in this section stating that women are de jure equal to men however often not de facto. Chinese expert interviewee Mrs. Shi states that some people would argue that the situation of gender equality in China used to be better in former times. She states, "*since Mao´s era one has been saying ´Women hold up half of the sky.´ Some people say that in that era gender equality used to be better in terms of one´s income and one´s job. But because it was a national enforcement."* Furthermore, Mrs. Shi specifies that "*maybe after the economic reforms some people found that it is*

not as equal anymore as previously." Above, the German interviewee mentions forms of ´power over´ to lie in the assumed FRG´s ´breadwinner model.´ Three Chinese interviewees see forms of ´power to´ to lie in Mao´s slogan ´Women hold up half of the sky.´ Above highlighted quotes are in line with Terjesen, Sealy and Singh´s (2009: 327) argument highlighting that *"Under communism, women worked and had families. Highly subsidized childcare was the norm, and in an egalitarian social system, women gained relatively powerful social and economic positions."* Since the founding of the PRC, the Chinese government among others aimed at increasing female labour participation force (Liu, Li and Yang, 2014: 5). This led to China having one of the highest female labour participation rates in the world and a low gender pay gap (Attané, 2012: 7). Ever since the early 1990s when market-oriented economic reforms kicked in and many state-owned enterprises were privatised, China has been witnessing a decrease in female labour participation force, particularly a decrease in labour force among mothers with young children (Liu, Li and Yang, 2014: 5; Chen *et al.*, 2013: 258; Attané, 2012: 7). One reason for such could be that subsidies for childcare facilities decreased. Although both male and female labour participation force has been decreasing in China since the economic reforms, the female labour participation rate has been decreasing to a greater extent (Liu, Li and Yang, 2014: 5). Despite overall controversial findings, Chen *et al.* (2013: 258) and Attané (2012: 8, 9) argue that ever since the early 1990s China has been witnessing an overall worsening in its´ gender pay gap. Also in Germany the gender pay gap differs between Eastern and Western Germany. Before reunification the gender pay gap in Western Germanys was worse than in Eastern Germany (Wippermann, 2015: 10). After reunification the gender pay gap in Western Germany has slowly been improving while the gap in Eastern Germany is worsening, however the latter has been lately improving again. Still up to today Eastern Germany has a better gender pay gap than Western Germany (Wippermann, 2015: 10). The same holds true for female labour participation force. Before reunification Eastern Germany had more women in employment than Western Germany (Holst and Wieber, 2014: 33). Today, although the disparity is almost marginal, Eastern Germany still has a higher female labour participation force than Western Germany. Although the GDR before reunification and the PRC before economic reforms have had a very high female labour participation rate, both countries did not have an equally high rate of female top managers (Cooke, 2003: 231; Wippermann, 2015: 10). The above highlighted data does not support Adams and Kirchmaier´s (2013: 1) findings stating that female labour participation force is greatly related to the female board representation, if unemployed and part-time workers are precluded. Above mentioned findings also do not support Iannotta, Gatti and Huse´s (2016: 416) research arguing that among other factors a high level of female labour participation force tends to lead to a higher number of female board members. One reason for these different findings could be the country samples. Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016: 407) focus their study on the 27 countries of the European Union. Also Adams and Kirchmaier´s (2013: 3) country sample differs from mine, as they primarily focus upon Western countries. An analysis of the above highlighted quantitative data is not the primary purpose of my qualitative research. Nevertheless, including such an overview of important gender equality statistics for both Germany and China is crucial. The above

briefly addressed overall statistical trends provide the reader with a greater and more holistic picture of the situation of gender equality in China and Germany. In addition, it gives insight into any major historical statistical changes regarding gender equality in both countries. Although this statistical overview could also be positioned at another location within this analysis I have deliberately positioned it under ´Societal Structures.´ The above highlighted data seems useful for giving background information regarding the statistical situation of gender equality in Germany before and after reunification as well as in China before and after economic reforms.

When asked which barriers women might face when trying to obtain a board position, two Chinese interviewees see main barriers to lie in societal beliefs addressing appropriate gender roles. Both interviewees assume that such societal beliefs to be deeply rooted in Confucian culture and thought. Accordingly, Mrs. Shi highlights that Confucianism has had a strong influence upon people´s beliefs, particularly regarding the role of men and women. This goes in line with Kung, Hung and Chan´s (2004: 46) findings suggesting that traditional beliefs can greatly influence women´s decision-making power. As stated above, both Chinese and German interviewees highlight that societal expectations, beliefs and norms might hamper women´s career development, thus triggering forms of ´power over.´ Thereby, respondents from both countries see the root cause of the before mentioned in their country´s culture and history. Despite great cultural differences between both countries the same phenomenon, thus the underrepresentation of WoB, occurs in both very diverse countries. This implies that Confucian culture alone, as highlighted by interviewees, is not the only reason for female board underrepresentation. Although interviewees repetitively mention the importance of a country´s culture and history when analysing female board underrepresentation only very few actually trace and name the origins of such. This means in order to further trace possible historical and cultural explanations influencing the situation of women in the respective country more in-depth interviews focusing particularly on this aspect would be needed.

During the interviews both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that they have faced differential treatment during their career path. The respondents that have faced differential treatment believe that either their sex or their age to be the reason for such. Particularly Chinese interviewees believe that the reason for such differential treatment to lie in their relatively younger age than their male peers. This adds to the overall common findings in the literature on the research issue that female directors tend to be younger than their male peers (Kirsch, 2018: 350). German interviewees argue that such differential treatment can be both positive as well as negative in its´ nature. Thereby, German interviewees state that differential treatment can be positive because women are still largely underrepresented on corporate boards, thus women in management positions have an increased visibility. Interviewees argue that women can use this visibility for triggering positive purposes, thus forms of ´power to.´ On the other hand, this visibility can also be a burden for female managers, as it implies being constantly in the spot-light. German interviewees highlight that a female board member or

manager tends to be much more in the spot-light than a male manager. This means any mistake by a female board member will be immediately observed. Accordingly, Mrs. Schulz states that *"You certainly face much stronger observation than men do, because you just expect a lot more from a woman, so they are under an enormous amount of pressure to succeed."* This means that women already having increased visibility will be even more in the spotlight when being a manager in risky times. This also implies having a greater risk of failure.

Above, I discussed whether German and Chinese interviewees have experienced differential treatment. It was stated that interviewees have experienced both positive as well as negative differential treatment. Both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that frequently men are taken more seriously than women. Interviewees highlight that constantly being underestimated is tiring. This leads to a situation in which women feel that they constantly have to prove that they are capable of doing the job. My findings support Fu and Ma´s (2012: 5) research stating that the success of female managers frequently requires *"doing better than men."* German and Chinese interviewees highlight that although female board members usually have the same at times even higher qualifications than men, they are often perceived as being less capable of doing a management job. Such stereotypical barriers remind of the above highlighted ´think manager think male phenomenon.´ My findings therefore support Pajo, McGregor and Cleland´s (1997: 177) research suggesting a major reason for female board underrepresentation to lie in perceptions assuming women not to be sufficiently qualified for the boardroom. Such stereotypical perceptions can again trigger forms of ´power over´ by greatly limiting women´s career development.

Both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that high-level corporate positions are still largely male dominated and argue that career paths are designed for male careers. Expert interviewee Mrs. Ludwig states that *"the career path in Germany is still designed for male careers."* Furthermore, she explains that *"Careers develop between the age of 27 and 38. And that is exactly the age where women have children...So we need more time sovereignty for employees, especially in the rush hour of life. Late careers must also be made possible..."* In addition, Mrs. Müller states that key positions in the corporate world are still largely male dominated. She highlights that:

> *"Men, who are simply sitting in the key positions, will always look for those who are similar to their own character, world view and way of living. And not the blatant opposite...They look for people, primarily other men or they look for a woman who acts like a man".*

Above, Mrs. Müller describes the before discussed phenomenon of ´similarity-attraction´, thus presuming that people in powerful positions tend to look for successors with similar character traits to their own. This can easily result in a repetitive cycle of people occupying powerful positions who embody always very

similar character traits, thus creating a so-called ´mono-culture.´ As already high-lighted above, my interview findings support social identity theories exploring that people tend to surround themselves with others who tend to share similarities in terms of world view, perspectives, values and demographic background (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 322). This frequently rests upon the assumption that a person may feel more connected to someone with similar characteristics to oneself (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 39). Social identity theories frequently use terms as: "similarity-attraction" (Byrne, 1971), "homosocial reproduction" (Kantner, 1977) or "self-cloning" (see also: Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014: 1; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 39,45, 46; Kirsch, 2018: 351, 352). The phenomenon of ´similarity-attraction´ can trigger a monoculture on boards by supporting a repetition of newly appointed board members with similar characteristics regarding *"gender, nationality, age, origin and educational background"* of board members (AllBright Foundation, 2018: 7).

In order to break through the above mentioned repetitive cycle triggered by ´similarity-attraction´ both German and Chinese interviewees highlight the importance of having a critical mass of female board members. Both respondents underline that as a single woman in a male dominated board room one´s voice often becomes overheard. This supports critical mass theory. Exemplifying the importance of having a critical mass Mrs. Li argues:

> *"…when you put one woman into a boardroom of 12 men you are setting that woman up almost not to succeed. I think there needs to be rules. Men will talk louder than you, they will dismiss you, cut you off, so you almost have to really fight. Then they call you a bitch…If you have three or four women what happens is it evens things out a lot better. They don´t cut you out as easily because they would have to cut four or five of us."*

My findings support Cook and Glass (2018: 903) highlighting that token female leaders tend to have less influence. In addition, Cook and Glass (2018: 903) find female leaders to have a lower status than their male peers. Chinese and German interviewees argue that by simply adding a single woman to an existing board structure most likely only very little to nothing will change. Therefore, it is crucial to have a critical mass in order to trigger change. Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 328) drawing from Kantner (1977) define ´tokenism´ as a phenomenon when a *"dominant group tends to see women first as female, embodying the sex role stereotype, and only later as individuals."* This implies that without having a critical mass of female board members, the few existing ones will always remain tokens. Thus, they will be perceived as the exception to the norm. German interviewees highlight that the ultimate aim should be regarding gender equality on corporate boards to be something normal. Bilimoria (2006: 49, 50) argues that having a critical mass of women on the senior management level, thus having 25 percent or more female members in top management, *"serves as measure whether women are considered real, not token…"*. Having a critical mass of women on corporate boards could lead to female board members being considered normal and not token anymore. My research supports Gamba and Goldstein´s (2009: 203) findings underlining the importance of having a critical

mass of women on corporate boards, thus stating that *"a critical mass of WDBs is necessary to realize the positive impact of board diversity."* Gamba and Goldstein (2009: 203) highlight that once a critical mass of women is reached among corporate boards, they will be able to voice their opinions without fearing of being overheard or not taken seriously. My findings from both Chinese and German interviews highlight that a critical mass of female board members is crucial for triggering forms of ´power to.´ Female board members will then be simply another board member instead of primarily being perceived as a woman and only then as a board member. A critical mass of WoB could trigger a situation in which primarily female board members´ qualifications, skills and background is highlighted rather than the fact of being a woman. My findings imply that a critical mass of WoB is necessary in order to normalise processes and move women outside of the spotlight. By being simply another qualified board member, thus focusing upon their qualifications instead of their sex, women will stop having to feel the pressure of being particularly visible and in the spotlight, thus having to be better than their male peers. In addition, a critical mass of female board members could also tackle existing stereotypes about female managers. As German interviewees point out there are still too few female board members to effectively tackle existing gender stereotypes about female managers. Having a critical mass of WoB could assist in tackling stereotypes as the ´think manager think male´ phenomenon. Both German and Chinese interviewees believe that more female board members would also mean having more role models for younger generations showing that women can also be capable managers. Interviewees argue that more female board members are needed in order to change existing societal stereotypes, beliefs and expectations assuming that women cannot be successful managers. My findings support Singh´s (2008: iii) research highlighting positive effects of having a higher number of senior female executives on more junior women in the organisation. Thereby, highlighting that female senior executives could act as role models for younger generations of women. Also Bilimoria (2006) highlights that female board members can act as role models for younger women by symbolising career possibilities. As stated above, German interviewees highlight the importance of a critical mass of female board members in order to achieve normality, thus women on corporate boards not being the exception anymore. Chinese interviewees particularly highlight a need for more mutual respect, thus accepting people the way they are even if they do not comply with mainstream societal expectations.

5.5. Power without, Power with: Individual Support & Networks

Figure 9

Categories	Power WITHOUT	Power WITH
Individual Support & Networks	• **Women often lack networking skills and tend to have no access to powerful, often ´old boys', networks´** • **No solidarity among women, thus ´queen bee syndrome´**	• **Having a supportive social and professional environment, i.e. family, mentor, supervisor** • **Having support from a national and international level, thus triggering societal pressure** • *Boldness from decisionmakers when appointing women to powerful positions*

Source: Own illustration from the interviews

The following section is structured differently than the previous ones. Above, the concepts of ´power over´ and ´power to´ were used to discuss the findings addressing ´Laws & Policies´, ´Compatibility: Family & Career´ and ´Personal Initiative.´ Above, the findings were briefly summarised under each section according to the respective ´power´ category and then discussed. In the following section Allen´s (1999: 3) concept of ´power with´ and ´power without´ will be discussed and then it will be used to analyse findings segregated under the thematic category of ´Individual Support & Networks.´ Allen (1999: 3, 4) using Arendt´s approach to ´power´, thus highlighting that the concept of ´power with´ is useful *"for thinking through the collective power of feminist solidarity."* Thereby Allen (1999: 95) highlights that ´power with´ addresses the *"capacity to act collectively"* to effectively *"exercise power."* This means that collective action ultimately gives rise to the idea of power. Furthermore, Allen (1999: 99-100) states that power is always a collective phenomenon, thus citing Arendt that *"Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."* This underlines the importance of having power with others, thus jointly working together in solidarity with others in order to effectively trigger change. Underlining the importance of having solidarity with others, Allen (1999: 100) states that *"the strength of even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many."* This means that power can increase when many people come together to support a common cause. Power emerges when having solidarity with others, jointly working for a common goal, and may disperse when people stop acting together with others, thus having ´power without.´

As highlighted above, having ´power with´ others, thus working together in solidarity with other people for a common cause, gives power more leverage.

´Power with´ others can thereby be beneficial for the individual women striving for a board position. In addition, ´power with´ others can also trigger overall social pressure in order to trigger an overall increase in the number of women on corporate boards. On the other hand, ´power without´, thus having no power with others and no solidarity with or from others can limit the effectiveness of power. When trying to use power to trigger societal change, collective action for example in form of social movements can increase its leverage effect. Both German and Chinese interviewees highlight the importance of having solidarity with others in order to effectively increase the number of women on corporate boards. In line with the above highlighted theoretical approach by Allen (1999: 100), Mrs. Song states, *"women should unite together."* She highlights that *"When we unite together and link together that is the time when women altogether will have more energy to combat with this world."* In addition, Mrs. Li states *"…It is only when we come together as a voice things can change."* She argues that "*But we are very segmented and very separated, it´s very difficult…it takes all of us coming together, there needs to be a pain point."* Also German interviewees highlight that women need to work together in order to trigger change. Mrs. Fischer states *"…I believe that women should show solidarity among each other and work together. So as long as we are divided apart, we'll never have a certain power to work through issues."* In addition, Mrs. Winkler highlights the importance of having solidarity with others when stating, *"I think what needs to change is the cohesion and solidarity among women…"* Both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that having solidarity with others and working together with other people is crucial in order to trigger societal change. My findings add to Allen ´s (1999: 3, 4) theoretical approach, thus underlining the importance of having collective power and feminist solidarity in order to trigger overall societal change towards increasing the number of WoB. In addition, respondents from both China and Germany also emphasise the importance of having support from a national and international level in order to trigger societal pressure. Mrs. Schmidt highlights support from a national level when stating that the threat of legal pressure from the government has helped her and the overall cause for more gender diversity on corporate boards. She highlights that *"I would say all this legal pressure and the discussion and political pressure about equal rights and having more WoB, I would say yes that helped."* She continues by underlining that *"the threat of laws, transparency and pressure has helped me for sure…"* My findings add to Allen´s (1999: 3, 4) theoretical approach by not only underlining the importance of having collective power among individuals but also having solidarity with and support from a national level. Support from a national level could entail adopting policies that may trigger legal pressure for increasing the number of WoB. This means having solidarity with others or support from others, regardless whether on an individual or a national or international level, can trigger forms of ´power with.´ ´Power with´ others can support the individual woman striving for a corporate board position by providing her with a supportive social and professional environment. In addition, ´power with´ can also trigger forms of greater societal change, thus enhancing the likelihood of increasing the number of WoB. Having ´power without´, thus having no power with others, can trigger the opposite.

When asked whether the overall situation of gender equality in Germany has

improved, interviewees highlight that overall statistics have improved, thus observing an increase of women on publicly listed corporate boards. Nevertheless, many interviewees argue that besides statical improvements they have not observed too many major societal changes. Rather, both Chinese and German interviewees argue that powerful positions in the corporate world are still largely male dominated. In addition, German interviewees argue that the situation in their industry is rather sobering. Thereby, some German interviewees observe a current step back from gender equality, thus a deterioration of gender equality. My findings support theoretical debates on post-feminism (McRobbie, 2004: 255). McRobbie (2004: 255) defines post-feminism as *"an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined."* Thereby, feminism is portrayed as being redundant due to the assumption that gender equality has already been achieved. In line with post-feminist assumptions some German interviewees observe the above highlighted step backwards. Thereby interviewees state that despite an overall increase in the number of WoB underlying power structures have largely remained untouched. German interviewees highlight that it is often assumed that gender equality has already been achieved. Thereby, interviewees state that a frequently held argument in Germany is that the 30 percent quota of female supervisory board members on publicly listed firms has already been achieved. Interviewees state that it is frequently argued that there is no more need striving for further improvement of the situation of gender equality on corporate boards since the 30 percent quota has already been achieved. Instead of triggering ´power with´ others, ´power without´ others is being enforced. This means holding the assumption that gender equality on boards and in society has already been achieved, thus implying that any kind of further societal pressure and societal force aiming at more gender equality becomes obsolete. Such assumptions could possibly lead to less people joining societal movements striving for gender equality, thus triggering less ´power with´ others. Having less ´power with´ others can negatively influence societal pressure for change aiming at gender board diversity. In addition, also Chinese interviewees highlight their current experience of social movements aiming at gender equality in China. Sharing her experience one interviewee states:

> *"for example in Canada when people talk about gender inequality they are not monitored or regulated by the authority. But here in China when we talk about it (gender inequality) we are in serious problems and we are monitored by the government and by the authorities everywhere."*

She describes difficulties she and others have been facing when working on gender inequality issues in China. By limiting feminist social movements from a national level, governments can trigger forms of ´power without´ for activists striving for more gender equality on corporate boards and among the overall society. This way a government can pose barriers for overall social movements striving towards more gender equality. This can negatively influence feminist social movements. Chinese and German interviewees do not only highlight the importance of having support from a national level but also from an international level when striving towards more gender equality. Support from an international level can imply among others support from other activists in foreign countries,

from social movements, from NGOs or from international organisations. Feminist movements facing ´power without´ from a national level will have more barriers and limitations in order to pursue their aspiration. However, even if feminist movements are being hampered in their efforts for gender equality, it does not necessarily imply the movements' dissolution. One interviewee highlights that the status quo that *"new feminist movements are becoming more sensitive to-wards...more sensitive...well because you criticise things, right?"* She states that it is currently not easy to pursue feminist movements or anything alike in the country. Above highlighted findings support Allen´s (1999) theoretical approach of ´power with.´ Both Chinese and German interviewees underline the impor-tance of having ´power with´, thus having solidarity with others in order to trigger societal change. It is argued that having collective power with others is crucial in order to strive for overall change towards more gender equality. Interviewees highlight that ´power without´, thus having no power with others, can negatively influence the leverage power of feminist social movements. Thereby, both Chi-nese and German interviewees underline the importance of having support from a national and international level.

Above, both German and Chinese interviewees underline the importance of hav-ing ´power with´ particularly from a national and international level when trying to enhance gender equality and increase the number of WoB. In the following, both Chinese and German interviewees point out that female solidarity, thus women showing solidarity with other women, still needs improvement. Both respondents from Germany and China criticise the overall lack of solidarity among women themselves. Interviewees highlight that when having no solidarity with others, triggering societal change will be very challenging. This lack of solidarity behav-iour among women reminds of the ´queen bee syndrome.´ Mavin (2008: 75) de-fines this as a phenomenon in which individual women are blamed for failing to support other women. German interviewees highlight the existence of ´queen bees´ as Mrs. Krüger states, *"unfortunately, you always have one of those…thunderstorm witches."* In accordance, also Mrs. Schmidt argues*:*

> *"…I'm really sorry to say that, there are these mare-biters. These women who have actually come a long way, who really hold power in their hands and I often experience them wanting to be the only one on their level. They're not willing to give up any power; they don't do anything for others…I could tell you a few big names in the German industry."*

Also underlining the ´queen bee syndrome´ Mrs. Winkler states, *"So I have ex-perienced that when women manage to get a little further, they don't necessarily show solidarity with other women."* Above, particularly German interviewees highlight cases of ´queen bees´ that they have experienced in their career path. Furthermore, some German and Chinese interviewees demonstrate behaviour of ´queen bees´ themselves when, as discussed under ´Personal Initiative´, dis-tancing themselves from other women during the interviews. As highlighted un-der ´Personal Initiative´, several interviewees state that they have gained their current career position primarily due to their own merit, thus hard-work, personal initiative and successful networks. They then distance themselves from other women by assuming that one reason for female board underrepresentation to lie

in women´s lack of initiative and lack of interest in management positions. Thereby, interviewees assume that they are different from the group of ´other´ women. In addition, as highlighted above, German and Chinese interviewees highlight a lack of solidarity among women to be a major obstacle for female board presence. Although above findings support the ´queen bee syndrome´, my research also finds opposite results. This means my findings suggest contradictory results regarding the ´queen bee syndrome.´ Although several interviewees have observed cases of the ´queen bee syndrome´, at times possibly acting as a ´queen bee´ themselves, many of the interviewees are also diversity supporters. This means their actions contradict the ´queen bee syndrome.´ During the interviews both Chinese and German respondents mention own examples in which they support other women. German interviewees particularly highlight that they are mentors for younger women. Both German and Chinese interviewees also mention NGOs and other initiatives they have founded in order to jointly work together to support and empower women. Furthermore, German respondents highlight that whenever they are overbooked for events, they suggest another woman as a substitute. Although many of the German and Chinese interviewees are diversity supporters, the sample of the interviewed seem too small than to draw any greater conclusions on whether female board members are generally diversity supporters. Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 328) find that a frequent assumption seems to be that female board members must also be diversity supporters. However, they argue that this is not always the case (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 328). In addition, Mavin (2008: 75) criticises the concept of ´queen bees´ stating that it naturally assumes female solidarity behaviour among women. When individual women do not comply with such behaviour they are immediately criticised and labelled as a ´queen bee.´ Mavin (2008: 82) states that this relies on very unrealistic and unfair expectations being imposed upon female managers. Although female board members are not necessarily always diversity supporters my findings suggest that the majority of both German and Chinese interviewees were diversity supporters. However, it could be that only female board members who were already interested in the topic of diversity actually accepted my interview request. Overall generalisations whether female board members are generally diversity supporters or not would need further quantitative research. On the one hand, some scholars argue that female directors on boards can maintain gender diversity as a topic on the executive agenda (Bilimoria and Wheeler, 2000; Bilimoria, 2006: 47). On the other hand, Bradshaw and Wicks (2000) highlight that female board members do not always hold a "feminist agenda." They argue that Canadian female board members primarily focus on safeguarding stakeholder´s value just as male board members do as well. Thereby Canadian female board members do not necessarily always comply with a "feminist agenda" (Bradshaw and Wicks, 2000). My findings however suggest that the majority of Chinese and German respondents were diversity supporters aiming at increasing the number of WoB. Above, both Chinese and German interviewees argue that having ´power with´ others is crucial for triggering societal change towards more gender equality. In addition, interviewees highlight that ´power with´ others is not only important on a national and international level but also on an individual level. This implies having a supportive social and professional environment when aiming for a board position. Interviewees high-

light cases of the ´queen bee syndrome´ thus triggering forms of ´power without.´ This means such circumstances can limit female career development.

Above, I primarily highlighted a lack of female solidarity. This means having ´power without´, thus having no power with other women. In the following, I will discuss women´s assumed lack of access to powerful networks as the ´old boys' network.´ This means I will analyse to which extent women have ´power without´, thus no power with others in high-level corporate positions. Respondents both from Germany and China state that powerful corporate positions are still largely male dominated and tend to be an ´old boy´s network.´ Accordingly, Mrs. Xie outlines "…*Especially in the top management it is very much an old-boy´s network.*" Mrs. Xie states that high-level corporate jobs do not even show up in the job market as powerful corporate positions are usually already filled on the quiet with members of one´s circle of acquaintance, often the old boy´s network. People not being part of such powerful networks, can face more challenges when trying to obtain a powerful corporate position. Burke (1997) states that newly appointed board members usually tend to follow recommendations from other board members. In addition, also Rowley, Lee and Lan (2014) highlight that corporate boards often heavily rely on the recommendation of already existing board members for the selection of new ones. Apportioning new board members frequently means relying on the "old boys' network" when looking for new members (Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014). My findings support above mentioned scholars´ research underlining the prevalence of the "old boys' network" when making recommendation for new board members. When appointing new board members based on recommendations it presumes that the new members are in some way already known to some of the current board members. This can create an elite circle of always appointing board members with very similar characteristics. This can lead to a monoculture among corporate boards, thus lacking any kind of diversity. My findings support the AllBright Foundation´s (2018) report describing an existing monoculture among German supervisory boards.

In addition, to recommendations already established board members usually chose new members along the lines of ´similarity-attraction.´ This is based on the assumption that individuals tend to surround themselves with people embodying similar characteristics to themselves (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 322). In addition, also members of the same networks, usually tend to share certain characteristics. Accordingly, this also applies for members of the ´old boys' ´network.´ This means when appointing new board members, thus drawing from recommendations, it is very likely that the newly appointed member will have similar characteristics and background to current board members. This can make it difficult for people who are not part of an ´old boy´s network´ to gain access to powerful corporate positions (Kantner, 1977). Since powerful corporate positions are still largely male dominated, German interviewees state that successors of powerful corporate positions will most likely again be male with very similar characteristics. German interviewees state that in few cases a successor might also be a woman embodying similar characteristics. In line with Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009: 322) my findings suggest that this can lead to a situation in which women or other people not embodying similar characteristics to powerful people

can have only very limited access to high-level corporate jobs. In line with existing research my findings support the idea that social capital is particularly crucial when trying to increase one´s chances of obtaining a powerful corporate board or management position. Thereby, Stevenson and Radin (2008: 4) define social capital as one´s investments in social relations with others, when one is expecting returns. Both German and Chinese interviewees highlight that women tend to have a lack of social capital. Respondents from both countries underline the importance of having access to the right social networks when trying to develop one´s career. Exemplifying the importance of having access to influential contacts and networks, Mrs. Schneider states, "*I always say look for someone who can open doors."* My findings from both German and Chinese interviewees support Scheidegger and Osterloh (2004: 202), thus highlighting that it is not what but rather whom you know. Interviewees highlight that besides being professionally competent, it is crucial to have influential contacts. Thereby, both Chinese and German interviewees particularly highlight the importance of having a benevolent mentor. Also networks are crucial when striving for one´s career development. My findings support Scheidegger and Osterloh, (2004: 201) when claiming that one´s career success tends to be connected with one´s social networks. In addition, my findings support Gamba and Goldstein (2009: 202) highlighting that besides expertise and records of accomplishment, personal relationships are important when aiming for a board position. Also Hodigere and Bilimoria (2015) find that the intensity and number of network ties is greatly connected to women´s appointment to corporate boards. Both German and Chinese interviewees argue that they have experienced women to often lack access to powerful networks. My findings support Peters, Schmicker and Weinert´s (2004: 64) research highlighting that female managers are less likely than male managers to have *"strong ties."*. Above, interviewees from China and Germany have highlighted that having a lack of access to powerful networks, as the ´old boys' network´, can trigger forms of ´power without.´ This means having no power from powerful networks and influential actors can limit one´s career development. In addition, my findings obtained from interviews with both German and Chinese respondents highlight that women frequently tend to not only lack access to powerful networks, but also often lack the necessary networking skills.

Above, I highlighted the importance of having access to powerful networks when striving for career development. One way of gaining access to powerful networks could be by receiving support from influential contacts who are already members of such networks. One form of gaining support from influential contacts could be by looking for a powerful mentor (Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 42, 43). Dolff and Hansen (2002: 32, 33) find and list several benefits of a well-functioning mentoring relationship. My findings from both Chinese and German interviewees support above highlighted scholars´ arguments underlining the importance of having a mentor when striving for career development. The majority of both Chinese and German interviewees highlight that they were supported by a mentor during their career path. Interviewees state that their mentor was crucial for their career development, particularly of obtaining their current job position. Interviewees state that their mentor was often a superior in a professional context. Other interviewees highlight support from their team, colleagues, professor, friends and

family. Mrs. Schulz states, *"You simply need support. Basically that someone supports you, who also sees what you are doing, who wants to promote you…"* In addition, also Mrs. Yang underlines that "*We cannot grow by ourselves, we need a mentor. So get someone to mentor you.*" When asked what Chinese and German interviewees would suggest younger women when aiming for a similar career position, the majority suggested getting a mentor. My findings add to above mentioned literature by highlighting the particular importance of having a mentor when striving for career development. A mentor can be a sparring partner or someone that can even open doors and facilitate one´s career development. A mentor can also assist the mentee in getting access to powerful networks that can be crucial for career development later on. Overall, my findings add to existing literature suggesting that social capital, thus having access to powerful contacts and networks, is crucial when aiming for a board position in both Germany and China (Burgess and Tharenou, 2002: 43; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 331; Rowley, Lee and Lan, 2014; Bührmann *et al.*, 2015: 41). Accordingly, one interviewee highlights the importance of having social capital and being part of powerful networks when explaining how she obtained board positions: *"In the beginning it was quite banal, I took over corporate board positions, which per se have been held by XXX[68] board members, i.e. I followed in the footsteps of predecessors and that was in the sense then the company network...you can also say Germany AG..."*

Mrs. Schneider demonstrates the importance of having social capital and being part of powerful networks. She explains that in the beginning she obtained her board positions simply taking over board positions that were already held by her predecessors. Her predecessors were members of the management board of one publicly listed company while at the same time being supervisory board members of several other publicly listed German firms. When Mrs. Schneider took over her predecessors´ management board position she automatically also obtained the supervisory board positions from the other publicly listed German firms that her predecessors had already obtained as well. She highlights that these supervisory board positions were per se held by members of the management board of her company, although these different companies do not come from the same sector or are necessarily content wise interlinked. This means that above mentioned supervisory board positions were per se simply passed on among the already established network, thus Germany AG. Mrs. Schneider highlights that certain board positions are per se distributed among members of the "Germany AG." The "Germany AG" describes a:

> *"mutual capital participation of large German stock corporations. For decades, German corporations, in particular banks, insurance companies and companies from various industrial sectors, had a system of reciprocal equity investments which had led to a finely meshed network of financial dependencies and mutual influence through the filling of executive board positions and supervisory board seats"* (bpb, 2016).

Mrs. Schneider exemplifies the great interconnectedness between different influ-

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[68] Interviewee mentions the name of the company she works for.

ential companies. This often leads to a situation of mutual influence, among others during the appointment of new executive board positions and supervisory board posts. My findings suggest that by being part of powerful networks as the ´Germany AG´ or the ´old boys' network´ one can increase one´s chances of obtaining a powerful corporate board position. The literature highlights that this can frequently lead to a situation in which ´corporate elite networks´ are being consolidated (McDonald and Westphal, 2013).

Above highlighted ´corporate elite networks´ can be further reinforced by a multiple board membership. Despite not directly asking female interviewees about the number of board memberships, it became apparent during the interviews that many of the interviewees hold more than only one board post. Huse (2011: 5) defines the concept of ´Golden Skirts.´ This concept states that female board members often hold various board positions at the same time. In the case of Norway, Huse (2011: 5) finds that by increasing the number of female board members also the number of multiple-board-membership increased. This means that despite increasing the overall percentage of WoB the overall number of female board members does not necessarily increase proportionally. In addition, Huse´s (2011: 5) findings analysing Norwegian boards find that the so-called ´Golden Skirts´ are thereby replacing the ´old boys' networks.´ To make an overall judgement of the existence of ´Golden Skirts´ in China and Germany more quantitative research regarding this matter is needed. Nevertheless, my qualitative interview data from both countries highlights that interviewees hold more than just one board position. My interview findings from Germany and China fit into the larger picture of literature highlighting interlocking directorates in both countries (bpb, 2016; Tang and Li, 2017). Literature addressing Germany frequently refers to the "Germany AG" to discuss the country´s interlocking directorates (bpb, 2016). In addition, also Tang and Li (2017: 8) find *"a densification of a social network that connects decision makers on corporate boards"* when studying corporate boards of Chinese publicly listed companies from 2000 to 2012. Interlocking directorates describe a situation in which different boards of various companies or organisations in a country have common board members (Ma and DeDeo, 2018: 291). However, unlike Huse´s (2011) findings my research does not suggest that ´old boys' networks´ are being replaced by ´Golden Skirts.´ Rather, I find that ´old boys' networks´ are still very prevalent in both Germany and China. In addition, I find that women obtaining various powerful board positions might be ´Golden Skirts´, but at the same time are often also part of an overall ´old boys' network.´ Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 45) defines multiple-board-membership as "interlocking directorates." Thereby, once a person holds one board seat it becomes more likely for the person to become appointed to another corporate board position. Interviewees suggest that obtaining their first board position was more challenging than obtaining the subsequent positions. My findings support Bührmann *et al.* (2015: 45) when highlighting that obtaining the first board position was frequently more difficult than obtaining the following ones. McDonald and Westphal (2013) find that multiple-board-membership can result in a so-called *"corporate elite."* In addition, Terjesen and Singh (2008: 10) refer to this phenomenon as the *"'recycling' of a small group of experienced directors" regardless whether female or male; thus instead of leading to greater*

board diversity, only a small number of elite people become empowered." This process ultimately creates a monopoly of power in the hands of very few. In line with before mentioned research, my findings suggest that female interviewees hold several board positions at the same time. In addition, during the interviews it became apparent that many of the interviewed female respondents knew each other, often being part of the same network or organisation. This underlines the interconnectedness of members belonging to an elite network.

Above, interviewees emphasise the importance of having a supportive social and professional environment when striving for career development. Thereby, respondents state that having individual support is indispensable when striving for a board position. Interviewees also urge having support from a national and international level when aiming for overall societal change towards more gender equality. In addition, interviewees emphasise the importance of having access to powerful networks and having the necessary network skills when aiming for a high-level corporate position.

In the following, I will briefly describe the limitations of my study. First of all, the four different forms of ´power´ have proven useful for establishing the questionnaires of my interviews. In addition, Allen´s (1999) concept has assisted in adding a theoretical approach to current scholarship written on the issue of ´Women on Corporate Boards´ which has frequently been criticised for applying too little theory and being too descriptive (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 320; Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1181). However, since the four different forms of ´power´ are deeply interconnected and mutually dependent on each other a clear-cut segregation of the four concepts as well as an isolated analysis of each has proven to be difficult. A second limitation to my analysis is the comparability of findings. Comparing the situation of WoB in two diverse countries from different continents can be difficult. My intention was to highlight the same phenomenon, thus the international ´glass ceiling´, in two diverse countries as Germany and China. By analysing female board access in both countries I respond to calls within the literature urging for more cross-national research as well as focusing upon Asian countries, particularly China (Grosvold, Rayton and Brammer, 2016: 1158; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333). Van Evera (1997: 57) highlights that *"(c)ase selection follows John Stuart Mill´s "method of difference" or method of agreement.""* Nevertheless, according to Mill´s (1843: 455) method of most similar systems design within comparative politics comparing a phenomenon in two very diverse countries can pose challenges. Thereby, it is assumed that when a phenomenon occurs in one system but not in another, and the two systems have all circumstances in common except for one, then this single exception will be the cause or effect that may trigger the phenomenon. However, my research suggests that when comparing a phenomenon among countries having very similar circumstances, for example countries from the same region, one´s findings might only be true for this specific region. Such findings might be falsified when analysing the same phenomenon in a different region.[69] A third limitation to my analysis is the difficulty of drawing generalisations

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[69] See above highlighted contradiction between Iannotta, Gatti and Huse (2016) and Cooke (2003).

from a limited amount of conducted interviews. This is a frequent limitation of qualitative research. Thus, 31 conducted interviews give only limited insight into the overall situation of female board access in Germany and China. By conducting interviews with female board members I respond to calls by the literature urging for more qualitative research regarding the matter (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333; Kirsch, 2018: 348). In addition, when highlighting the overall scarcity of female board members in both countries it becomes apparent that even a small number of conducted interviews with powerful corporate board members can already provide some thorough insight into the situation of female board access. A fourth limitation to my research is that in the discussion I primarily relate my findings to quantitative data analysing the issue of ´Women on Corporate Boards.´ I relate my qualitative data to quantitative data analysing the issue as the vast majority of data addressing the situation of ´Women on Corporate Boards´ is quantitative in its´ nature (Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009: 333; Kirsch, 2018: 348). Therefore, I call for further qualitative research on the matter.

Summary

Summarising the above discussion my findings confirm the existence of a ´glass ceiling´ in both China and Germany. The ´glass ceiling´ is defined as invisible barriers that may limit women´s access to corporate board positions (Holst, 2006: 124). Although my findings from China and Germany support the argument that it is an international phenomenon, my findings suggest that the ´glass ceiling´ is composed differently in both countries. Above, I analysed the research question: ´*Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Which barriers do women in China and Germany face when trying to reach a corporate board position?´*

I used Allen´s (1999) theoretical feminist concept of ´power´ to analyse my findings from 31 conducted interviews with Chinese and German respondents. Using Allen´s (1999) theoretical approach I discussed my findings segregated into five thematic categories: ´Laws & Policies´, ´Compatibility: Family & Career´, ´Personal Initiative´, ´Individual Support & Networks´ and ´Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Expectations.´ Above, I used Allen´s (1999) theoretical approach to analyse the before mentioned five thematic categories. Accordingly, under each thematic category I highlighted barriers women tend to face when trying to gain board access in China and Germany. Then I addressed ways of overcoming barriers that may limit women´s board access. Thirdly, I related my findings to existing literature written on WoB.

6. Conclusion

Internationally women are still largely underrepresented in top-management positions in the corporate world. Despite improvements for gender equality, this phenomenon becomes particularly apparent when studying the underrepresentation of women on corporate boards. In this study I analysed female board underrepresentation in Germany and China. I conducted 31 interviews in both countries with female board members, CEOs, entrepreneurs and experts. The aim of this study was to analyse the research question: *´Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Which barriers do women in China and Germany face when trying to reach a board position?´* By highlighting barriers for female board access my intention was to shed light upon the constitution of the *"glass ceiling"* in both countries. Analysing the transcribed interviews in an inductive manner the most frequently mentioned and particularly emphasised factors by German and Chinese interviewees were summarised and revealed the following five thematic categories:

- Policies & Laws
- Compatibility: Family & Career
- Personal Initiative
- Individual Support & Networks
- Societal Structures: Gender Roles & Societal Expectations

All five thematic categories include both inhibiting barriers and fostering factors. Thus, each category contains both barriers for female board access as well as ways of overcoming them. These factors create power relations that can either limit or promote women when striving for a board position in Germany and China. All five thematic categories were mentioned by interviewees from both Germany and China. However, each category was emphasised to a different extent. My findings, based on the conducted interviews in both countries, suggest the following five-fold results:

First of all, I find that policies aimed at promoting and safeguarding women can have opposite effects. This means policies triggering contradictory results can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, thereby posing barriers for female board access in both China and Germany. Barriers are policies that create incentives for women to not work. German interviewees highlight the *"Herdprämie"* and *"Ehegattensplitting"* while Chinese interviewees mention the *"early retirement scheme"* and *"two-child policy"* as not being conducive when trying to increase the number of WoB.

Secondly, I find that measures encouraging alternative working models, as for example part-time work, can improve the compatibility of having a family and career. However, such models are not necessarily always career enhancing. This is particularly the case when a person is penalised in his or her career development after taking advantage of alternative working models. Insufficient childcare facilities, mentioned by German interviewees and a lack of governmental support for SMEs during employees' maternity leave, mentioned by Chinese interviewees, are barriers for women´s board access. In addition, insufficient

framework structures and societal expectations leading to a double burden for women can limit female board access in both countries.

Thirdly, I find that a lack of confidence in one´s own abilities in addition to societal stereotypes assuming women to not have any interest in a board or management position to be a barrier in Germany and China.

Fourthly, limited access to powerful often *"old boys´ networks"* and a lack of networking skills are barriers for female board access in both countries. Interviewees argue that a non-existent social and professional environment can hinder women when aiming for a board position. In addition, having no social, national or international pressure to improve structural framework conditions for female board access is a barrier. Women´s overall board access can be further hampered when national actors limit social efforts aimed at improving structural framework conditions of gender equality, as mentioned by Chinese interviewees.

Fifthly, societal expectations expecting women to naturally embody stereotypical feminine characteristics are a barrier for women´s board access in both countries. Interviewees criticise societal expectations presuming women to be the primary caretaker of household and childcare duties. I find that societal expectations can lead to an underestimation of women´s abilities in the professional world. Thus, it can lead to a situation in which women are constantly trying to prove themselves and their abilities in order to be taken seriously.

For this study I used Yin´s (2018: 17, 194) *"Cross-Case Analysis Following the Presentation"* of two separate case studies. In addition, I applied an inductive way of category building using Mayring´s (2015: 85) Qualitative Content Analysis. Moreover, I used Allen´s (1999) theoretical concept of ´power´ to analyse the findings of the conducted interviews.

My analysis adds to the greater theoretical debate on *"Global Sisterhood."* The debate rests upon the assumption that women across the world share the experience of suffering oppression from patriarchy (Adams and Thomas, 2018: 4). Thereby, *"Global Sisterhood"* addresses the idea that this shared experience of oppression may bind women together forming a kind of ´sister-solidarity-bond´ across borders (Allen, 1999: 103, 104). Women across the world are thereby perceived as a single and coherent female group. Scholars of third wave feminism however criticised *"Global Sisterhood"* for failing to recognise women´s diversity. Critics argue that despite assumingly well-meant intentions behind *"Global Sisterhood"* it fails to highlight different forms of oppression and empowerment women may face across the world. This becomes apparent when highlighting the different experiences of women depending on one´s culture, ethnical background or class. In addition, critics argue that the idea of *"Global Sisterhood"* privileges some women over others thereby it appears to be primarily white, Western and upper-middle class women speaking on behalf of other women, thus triggering new forms of oppression. Adams and Thomas (2018: 4) argue that nowadays scholars prefer using the term *"Transnational Sisterhood"* instead of *"Global Sisterhood"* as the former recognises limitations of the latter. Thus, *"Transnational Sisterhood"* recognises differences between women across the

world while at the same time acknowledging the existence of cross-border feminism. Allen (1999: 104) states that the idea of *"Sisterhood"* often assumes having a common identity and experiences. However, instead of focusing upon a common identity she suggests to focus upon agency. She highlights that *"Sisterhood"* can emerge when individuals across borders join together to work in solidarity for a common political aim (Allen, 1999: 105).

In line with *"Global Sisterhood"* I find that the international *"glass ceiling"* exists in both China and Germany. Thus, women are still largely underrepresented on publicly listed corporate boards in both countries. In addition, my findings suggest that Chinese and German interviewees mention similar barriers when aiming for board access, thus trying to crack the *"glass ceiling."* These similar findings were unexpected and surprising. Greater differences in terms of findings were expected primarily due to the two diverse cultural backgrounds of both groups of interviewees. However, at a second thought these similar findings are not as surprising anymore when focusing not merely upon the groups´ cultural differences but highlighting their commonalities. Despite great cultural differences between Germany and China both groups of interviewees work and move in a similar economic elite working environment in their respective country. Thereby, their professional working context shows certain similarities. However, unlike *"Global Sisterhood"* my findings do not suggest that all women across the world have equal working or living conditions. Rather, depending on their socio-economic and cultural background women can face different barriers when trying to reach a board position. In line with *"Transnational Sisterhood"* my research suggests that the international *"glass ceiling"* exists in both Germany and China, however is composed differently. This becomes particularly apparent when German and Chinese interviewees highlight similar barriers for board access but emphasise them differently.

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Appendix

1. <u>Interview Guide China</u>
- Could you briefly describe your current position and career path?
- What would you suggest other women that are also aiming for a similar position?
- Women are frequently underrepresented on board positions: What do you think are the main barriers for women?
- What are the reasons for these barriers?
- What needs to change in order to overcome these barriers?
- Do you think public policies could support women when trying to get a management position?
- Looking back, have there been any public policies that have supported you on your career path?
- Has the situation changed for WoB in China throughout the years?
- Looking back on your career path, have you felt any support from others in reaching your career path?
- What expectations does society have onto women in China?
- How is a successful female manager seen by Chinese society?
- Have you ever felt that you were being treated differently than your male colleagues because of your gender?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

2. <u>Interview Guide Germany</u>

- Können Sie kurz Ihre aktuelle Position und Ihren beruflichen Werdegang erläutern?
- Was würden Sie anderen Frauen raten, die eine ähnliche Position anstreben?
- Frauen sind in Vorstands- und Aufsichtsratspositionen oftmals unterrepräsentiert: Was sind Ihrer Meinung nach die Haupthindernisse für Frauen?
- Was denken Sie müsste sich ändern, um diese Hindernisse zu überwinden?
- Denken Sie, dass Gesetze oder Unternehmenspolitik Frauen unterstützen könnten eine Vorstands- oder Aufsichtsratsposition zu erlangen?
- Auf Ihren Karriereweg zurückschauend, gab es Gesetze die Sie unterstützt haben?
- Hat sich die Situation für Frauen in Vorstands- und Aufsichtsratspositionen über die Jahre verändert?
- Zurückschauend auf Ihren Karriereweg, haben Sie Unterstützung und Solidarität von anderen erfahren?
- Was würden Sie sagen: Welche Erwartungen stellt die deutsche Gesellschaft an Frauen?
- Wie wird eine erfolgreiche Managerin in der deutschen Gesellschaft wahrgenommen?
- Haben Sie jemals in Ihrem beruflichen Werdegang erlebt, dass Sie, aufgrund Ihres Geschlechts, anders als Ihre männlichen Kollegen behandelt wurden?
- Gibt es noch etwas, dass Sie gerne hinzufügen möchten?

Eigenständigkeitserklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertation mit dem Thema „Cracking the Glass Ceiling: Women on Corporate Boards in Germany and China" selbstständig und ohne unerlaubte fremde Hilfe angefertigt habe. Es wurden von mir ausschließlich die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfen in Anspruch genommen. Eine Promotionsarbeit über dieses Thema liegt noch nicht vor.

Berlin, den 18.06.2020

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