

MEDIA AND WOMEN IN TOP POSITIONS: THE EFFECTS OF GENDERED MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS ON WOMEN'S CAREER CHOICES

A Bachelor's thesis

Anu Rantama

Bachelor's thesis
Instructor: Kristie Collins
Date of submission: 07.04.2018

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ABSTRACT OF
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Objectives

The main objectives of this study were to explore the media representations of women leaders, how the representations link to traditional gender stereotypes and the effects of those representations on how women see their careers opportunities. In addition, the thesis studied how the representations affect women's choices and decisions on their career paths.

Summary

Media representations are discussed a lot these days and gender equality has taken some big steps for the better in the Western countries. To explore the representations and their affects, two focus groups of business students were interviewed for this thesis. The focus groups were shown two selected episodes from the television series 'The Office', both the U.S. and UK versions. Findings indicate that media still portrays women with traditional stereotypes and roles, but younger generations seem to be aware of the issues and see how they are affected by the media.

Conclusions

Based on the focus groups, young business are aware of the issue and see the effects the media representations can have. Media still portrays traditional gender stereotypes and gender roles and women are seen as representatives of their gender. Women are seen either as incompetent leaders or as cold and distant ones. Women are made fun of in the media and it is hard for women to find role models to inspire them to apply for leadership positions.

Key words: *gender, women, media, leadership*

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1. INTRODUCTION

All the way from the cartoons we watched as kids to the news we read today, we are affected by the representations media shows to us. Gender equality is discussed a lot in the media these days, but the representations still tend to portray quite traditional gender roles and stereotypes on different platforms. As media continues to push these gendered media representations to people, it makes the present stereotypes in the society stronger, and they may affect people's decisions unconsciously.

Even though gender equality in Western countries has taken big steps for the better over the past decades, women who make up a half of the world's population are still very underrepresented in top leadership positions of political, private and public sector organizations (Simon & Hoyt, 2012; Bligh et al., 2012). As media representations of women may affect our perceptions of women in the workplace (Cheryan et al., 2013; Eikhof et al., 2013; Simon & Hoyt, 2012), it is important to study these depictions and the effects they have. Changing these media representations may even help closing the gender gap.

This thesis will explore the media representations of female leaders and how they affect women's career paths. This chapter will give reasoning and background to this subject, as well as the research questions and objectives. Then this thesis will move on to literature review, which will focus on what has been previously said about the subject in the industry. After the literature review chapter, methodology of the research and its findings will be presented before the discussion and analysis. Finally, the thesis will conclude with main findings, implications for international business and suggestions for future research.

1.1. Background

Stereotypes and media representations of women in different platforms have been studied a lot in the past years. However, much of the research can be either considered outdated or is very specific to a certain magazine or movie. Also, the

studies made on effects of these media representations are mainly focused on how the stereotypical depictions affect women. Simon and Hoyt (2012: 236) state that no study to date has studied if the impact of counterstereotypical media images of women could have effects on women's achievement aspirations in leadership positions:

To date, no research that we are aware of has directly examined the effect of media images depicting women in counterstereotypical, nontraditional gender roles on women's responses in leadership situations. However, the fact that exposure to neutral advertisements (i.e., advertisements displaying only products and not people) did not result in stereotype threat effects in Davies et al.'s (2005) research suggests that advertisements depicting counterstereotypical roles may also have a buffering effect for women in leadership situations.

A great deal of the research done to date state that media representations of women highlight their feminine traits and even show them only as representatives of their gender (Eikhof et al., 2013; Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002; Sung, 2013). When a woman achieves something, the news might for example publish an interview about how she handles her career with motherhood. Similar kinds of topics are rarely discussed with men in the media (Simon & Hoyt, 2012).

Many newspapers report on women's personal issues such as appearance, number of children and marital status while men are usually reported on their achievements and careers (e.g. Robinson & Saint-Jean, 1995; Collins, 2011). These differences in media coverage between men and women may affect people's perceptions on gender roles and how they see their own opportunities in their career paths.

1.2. Research Problem

Media representations of women leaders have in the recent years caused a lot of conversations in Finland. For example, in summer 2017 a Finnish member of parliament and president of a municipality, Hanna Kosonen, met Vladimir Putin, and

instead of her impressive job title, she was titled in the news as ‘a lady in yellow dress.’ These kinds of news headlines of women’s achievements have drawn attention and this thesis wants to explore these representations even further – how are women in leader positions depicted in the media and what effects might these representations have on women’s career choices?

Media representations of women leaders can affect the way girls and women see themselves in the workforce. Certain stereotypes and expectations can state the way they are expected to behave. Lämsä et. al (2002) summarize that a woman leader is mainly seen as a representative of her own gender while men are seen as ‘neutral’ leaders. Articles with interviews from female leaders often involve questions like ‘How do you manage to both take care of the family and proceed in your career?’ and ‘Is it hard to be a woman in your industry?’ (Eikhof et al., 2013; Lämsä et al., 2002). These type of questions asked only from female leaders can give people expectations of work life and strengthen gender roles and/or stereotypes.

Sung (2013) also found that a combination of masculine and feminine discourse features while doing leadership is presented most favorably in the American television show ‘The Apprentice’. However, this combination of both leadership styles were judged more positively when it was done by men. Katila and Meriläinen (1999) had similar results, since they concluded that feminine traits and discourse features are presented negatively in leadership positions held by women. These judgements might be some of the reasons causing the famous glass-ceiling and affecting women’s careers.

This thesis is going to compare the representations between two countries, the United Kingdom and the United States, to see if these representations still apply in these countries, countries which appreciate equality. The countries were chosen because both have a significant amount of secondary resources and the focus group demanded a series created and played in the countries this thesis is doing the comparison with.

1.3. Research Questions

To approach the defined research problem, the following four research questions have been formed:

1. What are the main differences between the media representations of male and female leaders?
2. How do these media representations link to traditional gender stereotypes and gender roles?
3. Do these media representations affect the way women see their career opportunities and how they can proceed in their careers?
4. Are the media representations of women in leadership positions different in the United Kingdom and the United States based on the depictions on the television series *The Office*?

The purpose is to find answers to these four questions with the help of review of literature and the qualitative research done for this thesis. The qualitative research involves two focus groups, which aim to find out how young business students see the media representations and their effects.

1.4. Research Objectives

On the basis of the research questions, the aim of this thesis is to follow these four objectives:

1. To discuss how women leaders are depicted in media, such as television series, news and articles.
2. To discuss how the media representations link back to traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes.

3. To explore the effects of these media representations on women and their career choices, and to complete a research on this through a qualitative research method.
4. To compare the media representations of women leaders in the United Kingdom and the United States.

With the help of these research objectives, this thesis will next present the literature review of relevant literature written to date. Then it will move on to discuss the methodology used in the research, the research findings and discussion and analysis of the findings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on the literature that has been published before on the pertinent literature in the field. The studies discussed are made in Western countries, mainly in the United States, the United Kingdom or Finland, from the 1990s to date. This literature review will use the thematic approach and combine the relevant literature in three themes: gender stereotypes, gendered media representations and the effects these representations have on women. After that, it will present the conceptual framework on the basis of these themes and then conclude with a research statement for the thesis.

2.1. Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are still very present in today's world and they are affecting how we perceive genders and what we expect from them. Eagly and Carli (2007) state that negative stereotypes of women leaders are some of the main factors leading to the large inequality that remains between women and men in top-level leadership positions. These negative stereotypes of women in leadership positions are present in the workplace and can be seen very closely related to traditional gender roles of women and men (Simon & Hoyt, 2012).

Gender stereotypes can be divided into prescriptive and descriptive components (e.g. Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Prescriptive stereotypes are like social norms for behavior that can be defined as 'gender-appropriate' (Tyler & McCullough, 2009). From these social norms and rules, people differentiate behaviors that they as members of a group generally think are acceptable for a certain gender within a particular situation (Argyle, 1985; Wilson et. al, 2003; Tyler & McCullough, 2009). Hence, prescriptive gender stereotypes state what behaviors are right and wrong for a man or a woman to engage in (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007).

Descriptive stereotypes are described by Heilman and Parks-Stamm (2007: 51) as follows:

Because descriptive stereotypes about women create expectations that they are unlikely to successfully perform male gender-typed jobs, these performance expectations can influence the way information about a target individual is processed.

In other words, descriptive stereotypes about women give them expectations that they most likely are not going to perform successfully in male gender-typed jobs, and prescriptive stereotypes tell them how they should be in opposition to who they are. As stated, the descriptive stereotypes, which create expectations, can influence the way the a target person is perceived and processed as a leader (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). Thus, these social rules create situations where women or men are 'disliked or sanctioned' when they do not follow these traditional gender roles (Fiske, 1998).

As these gender stereotypes affect our expectations, in many situations we expect women to be nice but incompetent and men the opposite – competent but maybe not so nice (Fiske, 1998). Nevertheless, women also tend to describe themselves with modesty and attribute their success to fate or luck, while men usually see their success as a direct result of their own achievements (Davis & Astin, 1990). Katila and Meriläinen (1999) support this and add that women also tend to 'keep a low profile

even in cases of apparent discrimination' (p. 136). Therefore, women are not seen as competent in leadership positions as men.

Values and traits, such as being nurturing, intuitive, emotional and passive, that are traditionally linked to females, are not as appreciated or admired in the business world as are values like being independent, rational and intellectual, which are traditionally associated with males (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999). In male-dominated occupations, the criteria for choosing a new employee is based on masculine stereotypes and it has an adverse impact on women, who are not likely to fill these stereotypes as well as men do (Fiske et al., 1991). This is one of the factors causing the lack of women in high leadership positions, since those have been traditionally filled by men and it is easier to stick to the traditions than change the customs and practices.

A model that is used to explain gender inequality in the workplace is the lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983), which states that there is a 'lack of fit' between women's assumed capabilities and the requirements of a position, which is caused by descriptive stereotypes and it may cause problems in the workplace. Burgess and Borgida (1999) state that the descriptive stereotypes tend to lead to workplace discrimination in many cases. Supporting these statements, Heilman and Parks-Stamm (2007: 50) conclude:

This perceived lack of fit between female stereotypic attributes and male gender-typed job requirements leads to the conclusion that women are not equipped to handle these jobs, and the expectation that they are not likely to succeed in positions that are traditionally considered male.

2.2. Gendered Media Representations

Media representations of women leaders are different from men leaders in many ways (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002; Eikhof et al., 2013; Sung, 2013; Bligh et al., 2012). Media representations still link quite often to traditional gender roles and stereotypes (ibid). Furthermore, the media coverage of men leaders is bigger and has more

variety than women leaders' media coverage does (Kahn, 1994; Helsingin Sanomat, 2018).

Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) investigated representations of women leaders in Finnish business media articles and found that when interviewing a woman leader, the questions involved a lot of questions about her gender, equality and discrimination. Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002: 363) state:

What surprised us was that if the leader happened to be a woman, she was asked questions such as whether she felt that being a woman leader was an advantage or disadvantage, or whether she experienced equality or discrimination in her work. Male managers were not asked similar questions. They did not have to answer questions about whether they felt that it was an advantage or disadvantage to be a man in managerial position or whether they encountered discrimination because of their gender. What we found confusing was that the subject of gender emerged only when a woman leader was in focus.

Kahn (1994) adds that newspapers report personal issues (such as attire, personality, appearance, marital/parental status) more frequently about female candidates than male candidates in political elections. In comparison, men are more likely to be reported in the news by their profession, achievements or experience (Robinson & Saint-Jean, 1995; Bligh et al., 2012; Collins, 2011).

Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) also found that women are seen as representatives of their gender, while men are seen as representatives of a 'neutral gender.' Similar results were also generated by Jamieson (1995) cited in Bligh et al. (2012), who concluded that women are less likely to be called in gender-neutral terms in the media as are men. All in all, it seems that women are often referred to as females while men are treated as individuals, not as representatives of their gender.

In addition, Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) divide female media representations to three discourses, which are a patriarchal discourse, a victim discourse and a professional discourse. They suggest that a woman leader is either depicted as a subordinate in

importance to the concept of her male counterpart (patriarchal), as a victim in relation to the advancement of her career (victim) or as a competent professional as her male counterparts (professional). The patriarchal and victim discourses are supported by Bligh et al. (2012) and Eikhof et al. (2013), which both state that females are often depicted as universal types of woman leader and not as a specific woman leader. In other words, females are portrayed as representatives of their gender and not as individuals.

Figure 1 The summary of the three discourses (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002)

	Patriarchal discourse	Victim discourse	Professional discourse
What kind of representations of the woman leader are produced?	A stereotypical and general representative of her gender which is subordinated to masculinity.	A victim in relation to her career advancement. Possibly a potential hero in the future.	A competence and valuable human resource.
What is the content of the writing?	Different leadership styles.	Equality vs. discrimination between the genders.	Organizational success and a woman leader's competence.
How is the writing legitimated?	Through "natural and innate" gender differences.	Through a moral claim for equality.	Through economic rationality.
What assumption is made of the reader?	A preserver of the traditional gender hierarchy.	A moral reader.	An economic reader.
What are the functions of the writing?	Maintenance of the traditional hierarchical gender division.	Public demand for a change in the existing power relations between the genders.	Assurance of the importance of the woman leader's competence for a firm's financial success.
In what ways are these functions promoted?	A woman leader acting as "an iron lady" or "a woman of cunning".	A "redemption" or unofficial networking of women.	A woman leader showing needed competence that results in success.

When it comes to portraying women leadership styles in the media, Sung (2013) investigated the American reality television show 'The Apprentice' and found that when women break their traditional gender stereotypes, they are depicted negatively. At the same time men are depicted in a positive way if they combine feminine traits with their masculine behaviors. Women are expected to present at least some of feminine speech characteristics (e.g. co-operative, facilitative, smooth interaction) to be accepted as leaders and to be viewed positively by others (Sung, 2013). Katila and Meriläinen (1999), however, concluded that women, who tend to adopt a feminine position by being more private, invisible or submissive are regarded as

unprofessional. Overall, historically and socially constructed values tend to prefer and favor masculine traits and de-value feminine traits (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002).

Coltrane and Adams (1997) concluded that women are more likely to be shown with their families, less likely to be shown in professional demanding jobs or leadership positions and more likely to be shown as sex objects. A couple of years later Ganahl et al. (2003) studied prime time commercials and found that many of these claims still apply - females were often cast as younger, supportive and good-looking counterparts to men. Women usually have less dialogue and they are casted mostly to look pretty (ibid). Supporting Coltrane and Adams (1997) and Ganahl et al. (2003), Collins (2011) describes that women are often sexualized, including women in leading positions. Ganahl et al. (2003) stated that older females are the most underrepresented group in the prime time commercials.

Female entrepreneurship is often portrayed with terms like 'passion' and 'personality' rather than 'business skills' (Eikhof et al., 2013). Female entrepreneurs interviewed in British women magazine *Eve* promised self-fulfillment, emotional well-being, easy working hours and liberation from negative work experiences to the female readers, who would like to be entrepreneurs (ibid). The interviews presented entrepreneurship as an easy job, which requires no business skills and just the passion for the product or service (ibid). In addition, as Eikhof et al. (2013) studied 17 career interviews in the magazine, they noticed that all of the businesses were related to products and services that are traditionally associated with women – for example flowers, handbags and cosmetics. These support the female stereotypes as 'homemakers' or even as unprofessionals as they are shown in traditionally feminine roles that many think do not require that much skills (Collins, 2011). However, we do have to note that Eikhof et al.'s (2013) study involved only female magazine articles of female entrepreneurship, so this aspirational representation fits the genre.

Supporting the claim that women are presented as incompetent in the media, Mills et al. (2016) state:

The media all too often makes and disseminates assumptions that (a) women with familial obligations are not competent enough to succeed in leadership

roles; and (b) such multiple roles (family, work/leader roles) might compromise the female leaders' work performance in ways that are not believed to be concern regarding male leaders.

These gender stereotypes are present not only among adults, but among children, who are growing up in our society (Peruta & Power, 2017; Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010). Women and girls in television commercials targeted towards children are underrepresented in leader roles and also overall (Peruta & Powers, 2017). While commercials shown on children's television channel Nickelodeon featured girls in cooperative settings and with feminine toys, boys were portrayed in a variety of roles, most often outdoors and playing competitively (Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010). These stereotypes affect children's perspectives of gender roles – their own and others' - later.

Not only are female leaders presented in a different way than men, but their media coverage is also much smaller. The biggest newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat, had a campaign on the International Women's Day in March 2018 about how women have less coverage on the news especially as experts that are interviewed for articles (Yläjärvi & Ubaud, 2018). On the campaign day, the cover page of Helsingin Sanomat (Helsingin Sanomat, 2018) was blank with just a small column of text which stated:

Women's lot. Our pages would be almost empty if we would leave there only women's voices. At the moment, about one third of the articles we publish involve women. This should change. We are committed to increase the presence of women in our articles. You can follow our development in real time at HS.fi/tasapalsta. Finland is one of the forerunners in equality in the world. The media also has to have many voices. It matters who gets to define the world where you live in.

The campaign was discussed on Pressiklubi (2018), a Finnish talk show funded by Finnish tax payers, which often discusses about media. 'It matters how and in what roles genders are represented in the media', a representative of Helsingin Sanomat, manager Piia Elonen, stated on the show. The newspaper Helsingin Sanomat

received a lot of critic about the campaign being only a marketing tactic to increase their brand value and to follow the 'feminist trend'. One person who saw this campaign as a marketing tactic was Pekka Ervasti, a Finnish male writer and journalist, who stated on the show:

The readers are not so dumb that they would think about what gender does a person represent while being interviewed or portrayed in a news article on any magazine.

Piia Elonen replies to the critic saying:

This campaign is one way to make the world a bit more transparent. It does matter who we present in what roles. For example, if you think about different professions, such as police officers, nurses or bankers, you have a certain picture or person type you think of, which usually has a certain gender. That is what we want to change.

2.3. Effects of the Media Representations

Media representations of women may affect the way women see themselves and their opportunities in their careers. As media images still portray men and women mostly in their traditional gender roles (e.g. Davis, 2003; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004; Peruta & Powers; 2017), the gendered images increase or help to maintain the current stereotypes in real life too. Representations of women in gender-stereotypical roles have been shown to activate gender stereotypes (Yoder et al., 2008).

On the talk show Pressiklubi (2018), most of the participants agreed on the effects of gendered media representations. Mikael Jungner, a former member of the Finnish parliament and the former CEO of the Finnish Broadcasting Company 'YLE' concludes:

Teenagers and kids inhale the values from our society. If they only see their own gender in certain kinds of roles, it will have effects on their self-image and career wishes, of course.

Furthermore, a study by Cadinu et al. (2005) found that women who had been assigned to a stereotype-threat and thus were under negative thoughts, performed worse in a difficult math task. Davies (2005) had also similar results, and found that women who were shown gender-stereotypical commercials preferred a follower role to a leadership role in a leadership task after watching. Women who were shown gender-neutral commercials did not show any preference with the roles (ibid). Hoyt and Simon (2011) investigate this subject even further and suggest that women who are exposed to the media images of very successful women in leadership positions feel worse, since it activates negative stereotypes. They suggest that a more reachable, less elite woman leader with whom women could identify with could be a better role model and reduce the negative stereotypes (ibid). All of the studies found that gender-stereotypes in the media have effects on women's behaviors.

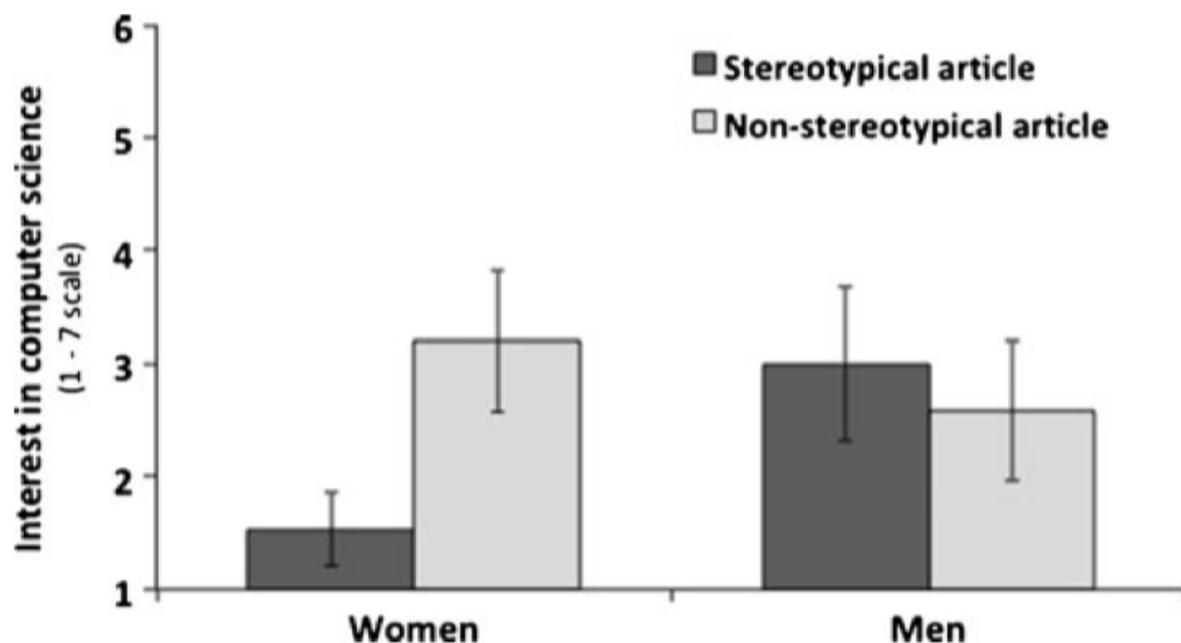
On the other hand, Yoder et al. (2008) found no significant difference in achievement aspirations between women who were shown traditional images on women and women who were shown nontraditional depictions. The paper cites Geis et al. (1984), who found a difference between those factors, and tries to replicate it in today's world. The study concluded that even though women's achievement scripts appear to be almost as similar to men's, "women's aspirations are not fully impervious to sexism in the media" (p. 303).

The descriptive stereotypes presented in the media can lead to workplace discrimination when women experience this 'lack of fit' in traditionally male occupations (Fiske et al., 1991; Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Burgess and Borgida (1999) describe the problem:

When evaluation criteria for male-dominated occupations are based on masculine stereotypes, the use of these gender-stereotypic criteria in hiring and promotion decisions has an adverse impact on women, who are less likely to be viewed as possessing the requisite masculine attributes than men.

Cheryan et al. (2013) investigated whether women's underrepresentation in computer science is due to the common stereotypes of computer scientists, such as their being only male, socially awkward and technology-orientated. They tested whether these stereotypes are present in the minds of college students and found that the stereotypes are still mostly in contrast with female gender role (ibid), which is traditionally associated with people-orientation and being concerned with their appearance (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). When the participants were shown counterstereotypical images of computer scientists, such as images of females with social skills, female participants' interest grew a bit. However, they concluded that the lack of females in computer science is mostly due to their lack of interest. (Cheryan et al., 2013)

Figure 2 'Women's and men's interest in majoring in computer science after reading a newspaper article claiming computer science majors fit or did not fit current stereotypes' (Cheryan et al., 2013: 67)



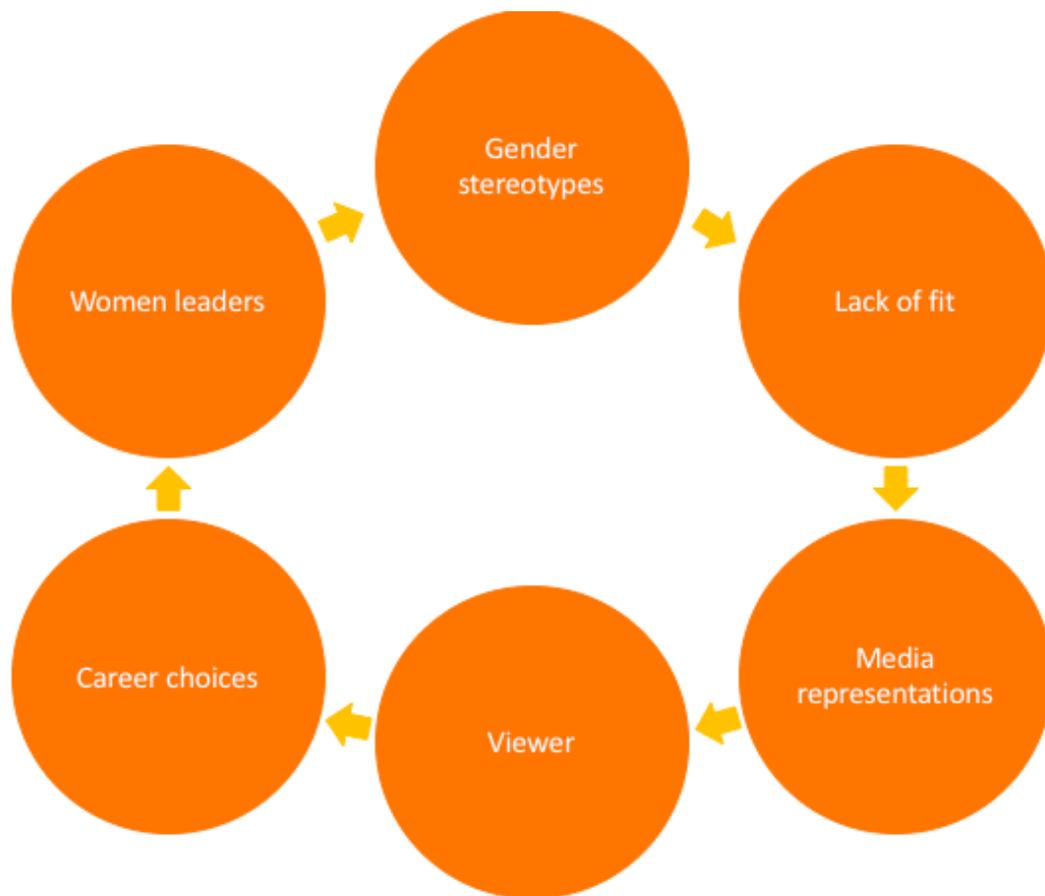
Although the study by Cheryan et al. (2013: 68) concluded that the lack of women in computer science is mostly due to women's lack of interest to the topic, they concluded as follows:

We found that the pervasive ‘computer nerd’ stereotype discourages women from pursuing a major in computer science. However, when this image is downplayed using print media, women express more interest in majoring in computer science. Efforts made by educators to attract more women into computer science may be rendered significantly less potent if the media continue to portray computer scientists in a way that is incompatible with how women see themselves. Increasing the participation of women in computer science may require diversifying the field by drawing attention away from stereotypical representations and towards other more inclusive and varied representations.

If stereotypical media representations have negative effects on women and their career paths, how about the opposite? Simon and Hoyt (2012) investigate how counterstereotypical media representations affect women by showing participants either gender-stereotypical advertisements or gender-counterstereotypical advertisements. The results confirm that these counterstereotypical representations make the viewer endorse more equal gender roles more than stereotypical representations do (ibid). They also suggest that counterstereotypical advertisements can alter gender role beliefs and give a more counterstereotypical idea of the female gender role (ibid).

2.4. Conceptual Framework

As this literature review divides into three themes, they are also present in the conceptual framework: gender representations, media representations and the effects on women’s career paths and choices. In addition to these factors, the framework shows the relationships of lack of fit, viewers and women leaders.

Figure 3 Conceptual Framework

Gender stereotypes can cause a 'lack of fit', which may create problems in the workplace. The assumptions on women's capabilities and requirements of a position can be different. Gender stereotypes and the lack of fit model will then attribute to media representations of women leaders with these stereotypes, expectations and experiences. Media representations then eventually affect the viewer through different forms of media, such as television series, magazines and news.

As the viewer has now been affected by the current media representations and thus stereotypes, the learned expectations will affect her career choices. Will the viewer apply for a leadership position or not can be affected by these representations since they are seen as a norm. The effects on career choices can create the lack of women in leadership positions and affect the way women leaders are perceived – in what positions they usually are and what are they usually like. All of this will eventually attribute back to gender stereotype, as all the factors are connected.

2.5. Conclusion of the Literature Review

Media representations of women derive from gender stereotypes and vice versa. Gender roles presented in the media are still highly traditional, even though they are developing into more modern as the world keeps changing. The media representations affect women's behaviors and aspirations in their careers, and therefore, they might even help closing the gender gap by showing counterstereotypical representations.

In closing, the literature reviewed indicates that women in leadership positions are presented in the media as representatives of their gender and in traditional gender roles and these representations affect women's career paths. The next chapters will therefore consider the following research questions: What are the main differences between the media representations of male and female leaders? How do these media representations link to traditional gender roles and stereotypes? Do these media representations affect the way women see their career opportunities and how they can proceed in their careers? In addition, the thesis will include a comparison between the media representations of women leaders in the United States and in the United Kingdom. To address these questions, the next chapter will present the methodology and findings of the current research. After that, the findings will be analyzed and discussed before conclusion.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Focus Groups

This thesis' purpose is to explore the media representations of women in leadership positions and the effects of these representations. Qualitative methods were considered, since the topics discussed rarely have measurable factors. Qualitative methods give opportunities for the participants to express their own thoughts and reflect the presented material without limitations.

Gender issues are studied and learned together, so the best way to study the effects of media representations in this case was to conduct focus groups, since the groups can be shown the representations and they can be discussed among the participants. In focus groups, the participants could bring out their own opinions and experiences easily. It was decided that the focus groups would involve Aalto University business students, which then made it easy to compare a group of Finnish students to a group of international students. Both of the focus groups had both male and female participants.

The study involved two focus groups of business students in Aalto University. The focus groups had 5-6 participants and both genders were represented. The first focus group involved only Finnish participants, while the second group had several nationalities. The participants' nationalities, ages, genders and identification numbers, which are used later on in this thesis, can be seen from the two tables below.

Figure 4 Participants of the First Focus Group

Participant number	Nationality	Age	Gender
1	Finnish	21	Male
2	Finnish	20	Female
3	Finnish	20	Female
4	Finnish	21	Male
5	Finnish	21	Female
6	Finnish	20	Female

Figure 5 Participants of the Second Focus Group

Participant number	Nationality	Age	Gender
7	Finnish-Zambian	23	Female
8	Vietnamese	19	Female

9	French	22	Male
10	German	21	Male
11	Finnish	20	Female

The questions discussed divided into three parts: warm up questions, questions about the selected episodes of *The Office* and some post-viewing questions. At first, the groups were asked about their favourite leader characters in television and how do they think female leaders are depicted in the media. Then, both of the groups were shown the pilot of *The Office* U.S. version and the second episode of *The Office* UK version. After each episode they were asked how women and male leaders were depicted in the particular episode. In the end, they were asked about the differences between media representations of women in the United States and in the United Kingdom based on these two episodes. They also discussed about the effects of the media representations, their own experiences and the situation in their own culture or country. All the questions are listed in a table below.

Figure 6 Questions of the Focus Groups

Number	Question
1	What are some of your favorite TV/Movie character leaders? Why do you like them?
2	What sort of characteristics and personality traits are typical of female leaders on TV? What about male leaders on TV?
3	What differences are there between depictions of women and men as leaders?
Episode 1	<i>The Office</i> (UK Version) Season 1, Episode 2
4	How would you describe women leaders from this episode?
5	How are their depictions different from male leaders?
Episode 2	<i>The Office</i> (U.S. Version) Season 1, Episode 1
6	How would you describe women leaders from this episode?
7	How are their depictions different from male leaders?
8	Do you think these media representations affect how women see their career opportunities?

9	Do you think you are/have been affected by these media representations?
10	Do you think these media representations of women differ in the United States and in the United Kingdom based on these episodes? How?
11	Do you find these media representations of women leaders similar to your country's media representations? How do you think women are represented in your country's media?

3.2. The Office Episodes

The Office is an award-winning sitcom, which was originally created and released in the United Kingdom between 2001 and 2003 and had two seasons. The UK version of the Office is one of the most successful British comedy exports to date. It tells a story of a company, which has to do some downsizing in its branches. The Office is filmed like it was a document and it is filmed without an audience or laugh track. (BBC.com, 2018)

In the selected episode of the British version of The Office, episode 2, a new female employee comes to work for the company and the male manager gives her a tour around the office. The male manager and the new employee find a pornographic image of the male manager with his face on a body of a naked woman. The male manager pretends to be angry because the image 'offends women' and tells another employee to find out who has done the prank for him. When finding out that it was his good co-worker friend who had done the image, he does not want to do anything about it. Meanwhile the woman CEO visits the office and finds out that the male manager has not done the changes she has asked him to do. The male manager makes fun of the woman CEO by lying to her. (BBC.com, 2018)

The Office was recreated into an American version, which had nine seasons released between 2005 and 2013. The storyline is pretty much similar to the original British version, since it also shares the story of a company, which needs to downsize. The selected episode from the U.S. version was the pilot, which aired in 2005. In the episode, a documentary crew arrives to the office to learn about their management. A

new male employee gets to know the office with the help of the main character – a male manager. The CEO of the company is a woman and she stops by the office to discuss with the male manager about downsizing. She overhears a phone call in which she is referred to as Hillary Clinton and as a sex object, but she does nothing about the issue. The episode also features a female secretary, who has some kind of an office romance, even though she has a boyfriend. The male manager does a prank to the secretary and lies to her that she has to be fired and she becomes upset. As she finds out it was a prank, she calls her boss a jerk. (NBC.com, 2018)

Both of the versions of the series have received Golden Globes and the U.S. version even a few prime time Emmy awards (Van Luling, 2017). However, the U.S. version got at first a lot of criticism for the lack of originality (Timms, 2005). The feedback got better as the new seasons released (ibid), and both of the versions are now seen as one of the greatest comedy shows ever made on television (Van Luling, 2017; Sheffield, 2016).

4. FINDINGS OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

This chapter will introduce the main findings of the two focus groups. To analyse the data gathered from the focus groups, two approaches were available: either discuss the findings of each group separately or together in themes. For this thesis, the latter one was selected, since the aim of the research is to find similarities and differences from the discussions of a Finnish group and an international group.

From the findings, six main themes were chosen for this chapter, since those themes were present in both groups and they were the most surprising and clear findings. The themes are independence and family, need of help, submissive women, plotting the way up, distinction between jobs and jokes, and education and career choices. The themes will be discussed next before the discussion and analysis.

4.1. Independence and Family

“The woman leader is shown as cold and independent”, stated participant number 2 after watching an episode of the British version of *The Office*. The participants from both focus groups agreed that often women leaders are depicted as independent and distant from other employees. As the participants were asked about their favourite leaders, their examples of female leaders were Cersei Lannister from *The Game of Thrones* and Miranda Priestly from *Devil Wears Prada*. “I think it is common that women are depicted as evil and distant characters”, participant 8 said.

The international focus group elaborated on how women leaders presented in movies and television series rarely have partners or children. Participant number 11 commented:

It is like women leaders could not have children at all. They have chosen their career over family and kids, just like Robin from How I Met Your Mother. Overall it seems like it's either children or a career for women.

Women in the international focus group discussed how they see their career and having a family as a trade-off, and that they have to choose which one they will focus on. They thought how it is probably partially because of the media representations, which have taught them what to expect from their careers. Participant number 3 states:

Movies and television series are like our first touch to work life and I believe those have affected how I expect to be treated in an office. Before your first work experience, media is almost the only source you can learn the work culture and norms from.

The international group all agreed that for women children are a downside in the work life, but for men it is seen as an advantage – men can combine both. Participant number 9 wonders:

Maybe women unconsciously think they cannot go too far in their careers because they want to have a family and these media representations show

those two as mutually exclusive. Even though they are not! Many women combine family with successful career.

The female participants agreed that they are kind of taught to think that it is either a family or a career, and even though you would be able to balance them, your career will have consequences.

4.2. Need of Help

After seeing the both of the episodes, participant number 5 from the Finnish focus group stated:

When the new girl came to the office in the British version, she was treated like she would not know anything and would need a lot of assistance and help from the male manager. However, as the new employee was a man in the American version, he was treated like he knew things already and did not need any assistance.

The participants in the international focus group also discussed about similar issues, and stated that usually women in leadership positions are represented with help, while men in similar situations are depicted as being able to do everything themselves. A saying 'behind every woman is a man' came up in the discussion from participant number 9. The woman characters that participants saw in the episodes looked for men's attention in many scenes. 'Women need to be saved', summarizes participant number 7. Participant number 9 concluded:

The media representations seem to portray very traditional values and stereotypes, since women are seen as victims and as 'daughters, wives and mothers'. It seems like women cannot do things on their own and they have to constantly be taken care by a man.

4.3. Submissive Women

In the episode of the American version of *The Office*, a man called his supervisor and assumed her being 'a gentleman', even though she was a woman. 'It makes me feel like women are always assumed to be in a submissive position', was stated by participant number 6 in the Finnish focus group while others nodded. They discussed how the women characters of the show did not resist their bad treatment, while the men caused a show for small things. Participant number 5 stated:

Neither of the episodes had even one scene, where a woman would have stood up for herself, and that really makes me wonder if I will have the same situation in the work life.

When the group got discussing about how women leaders are presented in the news, participant number 2 concluded:

Often news about women leaders focus on being a woman in business world. For example, my good friend was chosen as the new CEO of a start-up company, and the news clip that was made about it was discussing how we should have more women in top positions and how there is still a glass ceiling. Even though it is made kind of in a good spirit, the way it is presented makes me think whether a woman CEO really is the eighth wonder of the world. I feel that we have to reason a lot why women should be in the top and I think in 2018 we should already be past that.

The international group had similar thoughts on the female characters on the show; they thought that they were represented as really quiet and passive, and most of the time as insignificant. Participant number 7 commented:

We saw one scene, where a guy was flirting and the woman was kind of in a lower position, since she was leaning to her table. Even though that was a really small gesture, it made me feel like the woman was very submissive. Later as she became upset about the prank that she was being fired, she first looked for men's attention, like she could not handle things on her own and she needed the company of a man.

Participant number 9 from the international group commented how women rarely have even names in movies and television series. He mentioned the Bechdel test as an example:

I have heard about this Bechdel test, which includes three requirements: the movies has to have at least two women characters, who talk to each other, about something else than a man. I think it is weird that only a few movies pass this test, since there are not so many movies that have many female characters with names!

4.4. Plotting the way up

In the first questions, the groups discussed on how women are represented in the media without seeing the episode. Both groups mentioned Cersei Lannister from The Game of Thrones as an example of a female leader. Participant number 11 from the international focus group explained:

Ladies are often more sly and they are plotting more. They are tricking people and getting the power and authority that way. They usually have alliances to screw people over, such as in The Game of Thrones.

'I agree. Women cannot do it honestly and they have to be lying and cheating or manipulating people in order to get power', participant number 8 commented.

'Women seem to be represented with sexuality and that they need their appearance to persuade people', stated participant number 7. The participants started talking how there is still an image that women have to 'pull their shirt down when talking to their boss.' 'Because it seems that it works! It is frightening how it is still accurate in my opinion, at least in my culture', stated participant number 9.

4.5. Distinction between Job and Jokes

While the participants found the male leaders in *The Office* as clowns, the women leaders were presented as 'spoilsports'. Here are some comments from both of the focus groups:

The male leaders were all about the jokes and were really familiar and careless in their work. The female leaders were more professional and they knew how to differentiate their job from personal relationships and having fun. However, they seemed to be perceived as really tight and strict by the male employees. – Participant number 2

You get the feeling like she [the CEO] is a stuck up woman, who does not get jokes. There were many problematic parts. I think the woman could be seen as a mother character, since she needed to repeat everything she was saying in order to make others listen and understand. – Participant number 11

Women bosses are just entertainment and are just made fun off, so of course it can affect how women see themselves. That can even put women off applying to leader positions, since they unconsciously feel that they would be made fun off. That is what they see in the media, even though it is not conscious, it has effects. – Participant number 10

The international group elaborated how women need to have more role models, which they can relate on or which they would like to be. They stated that since many of the representations are these 'stuck up women', which many women do not want to become, it may affect their will to apply to leadership positions. Participant number 8 said:

These media representations seem to show us women leaders as negative, since they are kind of these spoilsports of the workplace. I don't think women would like to be these kind of leaders, so it would be nice to have more relatable and admirable female leaders.

The group thought that it was interesting, how similar these characteristics that the females of the show were portraying were to the characteristics of a mother.

4.6. Education and Career Choices

As the groups were asked whether they think they have been affected by the media representations, they had to think a moment. Both of the groups started talking about their and their friends' choices in their education paths. Participant number 2 commented:

Majority of the boys I know have been applying for university, while many girls that had before considered university decided to apply for universities of applied sciences. I do not know why though.

Others agreed on that the majority of their female friends have applied to feminine industries after high school, such as nursing and childcare, while no one knew males who would have applied to these same industries. Participants of the Finnish focus group also discussed how many females, who are better at mathematics on average before high school, decide to continue to basic math instead of advanced math in high school. Participant number 3 commented as follows:

All my female friends either did not continue to advanced math or eventually dropped it, since they thought they were not good enough. Meanwhile almost all the boys were in advanced class.

'I have the same. I did not even consider advanced math even though I was very good at it before high school', stated participant number 2.

In the international focus group, participants were focusing on leadership. Participant number 8 commented:

Me and my business student friends [females] have always thought that if we want to be leaders, we have to try harder than boys in order to succeed. Especially in the Asian culture, there is a lot of discrimination and it requires a lot of hard work and sacrifices from women in order to make it to the top, more than men.

The international group agreed that if a woman wants to be a CEO of a company, it requires more than it would if she was a male. They discussed how women are represented in less requiring roles, such as secretaries, and as leaders in feminine industries, such as education, nursing, fashion and consumer products.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

From the focus group discussions, any major differences between genders or nationalities cannot be drawn. Both of the groups discussed similar topics and had similar thoughts come up during the discussions. The female participants seemed to be a bit more aware of the issue, and they seemed to have really thought about the media representations before and even had experiences from their own lives. When it comes to the media representations, the discussions in both groups show how aware this generation is about the issue. However, we do have to note that all of the participants were university students and well educated.

The current media representations seem to still portray quite traditional gender stereotypes and gender roles (e.g. Davis, 2003; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004; Peruta & Powers; 2017). This also applied to the selected episodes: both episodes had a female secretary and almost all other roles were casted as male. However, there was a female CEO in both of the episodes, and they were depicted as independent and submissive according to the participants.

The findings support the literature stating that women are represented either with feminine traits or as cold and distant leaders (e.g. Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoyt & Simon, 2011; Sung, 2013). The participants had before the focus groups noticed many differences between the depictions of male and female leaders and thought that women leaders in the media are usually quite similar with each other, while there are many different male leader types in the media.

The participants agreed that the women leaders in the shows were presented in a negative matter, which is supported by literature (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sung, 2013). As the participants were asked about their favourite leader characters in the media, some of them answered female leaders, but even in that case they did not want to be like them. In other words, they did not seem to have female leaders that they would admire and that they would look up to as they proceed in their careers. The female leaders mentioned are represented as cold and plotting personalities. This supports the study by Hoyt and Simon (2011) which suggested that women do not have many women leaders to admire, since they usually portray or activate negative stereotypes. They also stated that more relatable successful women leaders are needed for women to have better role models to look up to (ibid).

When reading news about women leaders, you notice a certain pattern – the news clips often focus on the person being a woman. The participants of the focus groups discussed how women are seen as representatives of their gender. For example, women are usually titled as ‘woman athletes’ instead of just ‘athletes’ as men are. This finding supports the literature saying that male is seen as a ‘neutral gender’, while women are seen as women (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002; Bligh et al., 2012). Participant number 6 noted that she would rather be called a leader instead of a female leader, since she thought it decreases the value of the title.

The findings indicate that women leaders are often portrayed as independent and as women who chose their career over a family. The female participants agreed how they are taught that it is either a family or a career. They saw that men that have children are portrayed in a positive manner and women with children in a negative matter. These images are still very much supported by the traditional gender stereotypes and gender roles, where men go to work while women stay at home taking care of the children (e.g. Kahn, 1995; Katila & Meriläinen, 1999; Collins, 2011). Mills et al. (2016) also state that women with children are not seen as competent as men with children. This is a concrete example on how women are affected by the stereotypes – they feel that they have to choose between their career and a family and it has effects on their decisions on their career paths.

The literature supports participants' feelings that women are not seen as competent as men. Fiske (1990) stated, women are seen as nice but incompetent and not suitable for certain kind of jobs that are usually held by men. Participants also described how they feel that men are usually more brave and apply for jobs that women with same skills would not. They felt the same way as Davis and Astin (1990) suggest: women often put their success on fate or luck, while men see their success coming from their own achievements.

From the episodes, the participants could not find any major differences between the depictions of female leaders in the United States and in the United Kingdom. However, the groups commented that they would rather place themselves in the U.S. version of *The Office*, since they feel that there women were treated badly only by the boss. In the UK version, they felt that all the males were against the women of the office. The participants discussed that the humor was a bit different in the versions and that the British version was making more fun of women. They stated that in the American version, the humor came more from the male manager itself and it was not as offending to women as the British version was. However, we do have to note that the British version was released four years earlier than the American version.

The effects of these media representations are hard to prove, but discussions by the participants support the literature when it comes to the effects of the media representations. Gendered media representations affect women's will to apply for leadership positions and they have different kind of expectations in the workplace than men do. The participants had experiences and examples of people who they think have been affected by the media in their career and/or education paths. Naturally, their experiences were mostly from education choices, since they have not yet been in the work life that much. It is important to notice that women are affected by these media representations at such a young age that they can have effects on their education choices. Media representations can be considered as partial reasons why certain industries, jobs or positions are held by men.

As seen from the selected episodes of *The Office*, women leaders are often made fun of for several characteristics, which usually link back to stereotypes and gender

roles. The female participants even wondered if that is really the work life that they will experience in the future, and whether they can even be taken as seriously as leaders as men are. When female leaders are made fun of, even in a good spirit, it may unconsciously affect women's will to proceed in their careers to leadership positions, since they do not want to be made fun of.

The gendered media representations are recognized by educated young adults. The findings show that this generation is not just made of savvy consumers, but with people who notice what they are exposed to. Even though the participants stated that these are unconscious things that affect women, their points about women leaders tell that they are aware of how media portrays genders to viewers. Gendered media representations could be something that is generational and that as the younger generations get to decide how media is like, the representations could also change from the traditional stereotypes. The representations have been also very present in discussions on talk shows, news and social media, so the change might be happening right now in the Western countries. Also globalization and technological change, which makes the flow of information between cultures and countries possible, could be factors that have made people more aware of the issues.

As conceptual framework presented in section 2.4 states, gender stereotypes affect the media representations which then affect the viewer. Participants of the focus groups were aware that they are affected by the media representations, which they saw portraying traditional gender roles and stereotypes. As the viewer is exposed to these representations, they can affect career or education choices, as the participants concluded. In a long run, the choices feed back into the stereotypes, since women tend to be in certain kind of roles and tend to behave as they are expected.

6. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude the thesis, this last chapter will summarize the main findings, briefly discuss the implications of this thesis for international business and bring up

suggestions for further research. Finally, the thesis will end with a wrap-up of the thesis process.

6.1. Main Findings

There are five main findings in this thesis. First of all, gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are still present in today's media representations. The present research indicated that women are still presented in traditional gender roles, such as mothers, daughters and wives. Women are portrayed as submissive and in the need of assistance from men and often casted in smaller, not as requiring, roles.

Secondly, women leaders that differ from these traditional women roles are presented in the media negatively as independent and cold persons. Women leaders in television series and movies rarely have a family, since they have chosen their career over a family. Having a family and a successful career is seen as a trade-off for women, and the female participants of the focus groups felt that they are taught to think that way.

Thirdly, women are usually portrayed as representatives of their gender, while men are seen as a 'neutral gender', even though it might be done in good spirit. News often highlight the gender if the leader happens to be a woman and usually interview women about topics such as gender discrimination and lack of women in the industry. Similar topics are not discussed with male leaders.

Fourthly, the lack of proper role models that women would look up to can be one of the factors affecting women's will to become leaders. If all the women leaders that are portrayed in the media are presented either as cold and distant or they are made fun off, women do not have such idols that would encourage them to proceed into higher positions in their careers. As the media gives the first glimpses to workplaces and offices for young people, it is important to give the real picture.

Finally, the young generation is aware of the gender issues in the media representations. The participants of the focus groups had noticed differences

between the media representations of men and women and knew about the possible effects. However, the participants felt that they are still being affected, since the effects happen in one's unconsciousness.

6.2. Implications for International Business

The findings of this thesis can have many implications for international business. As the media representations affect how women feel about leadership positions and women leaders overall, changing them may encourage women to apply in higher positions and therefore increase women's portion of leaders. Also, industries, in which women are a minority, could improve their image on the minds of women to get more women to the industries. It is important to recognise these issues, since they might hold a key to solve large issues such as the gender gap.

The media representations of women leaders have effects from individual level, corporate level all the way to a global level. Individual are affected by these representations as they might have effects on their career, education choices and self-esteem. Individual choices, expectations and experiences affect the bigger picture on a corporate level and on a global level as well as the other way around.

In today's world everything that is published has a global reach. Media does not only have programs for entertainment, but the documents published can be seen as 'representatives' for cultural roles and expectations. As gender issues are performed differently across time periods and cultures, people may look to media texts and documents for insights into different societies and eras. Thus, these portrayals may matter even more than we realize.

6.3. Suggestions for Further Research

Since the negative effects of gender-stereotyped media representations have been proven (e.g. Cadinu et al., 2005; Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Hoyt & Simon, 2011), the positive effects of counterstereotypical images are left to explore. Could there be a

solution for closing the gender gap and filling top positions equally with both genders?

Yoder et al. (2008), Simon and Hoyt (2012) and Cheryan et al. (2013) have already discussed the issue and found that viewing counterstereotypical media representations could help boosting females' leadership aspirations and performance. This might help getting more women in leadership positions and in industries that are traditionally seen as masculine. The positive effects of counterstereotypical media representations should be explored further.

More research could be done on the media coverage of women leaders. Bligh et al. (2012) state that future research could focus on exploring the interactive effects of media coverage and the attitudes against women in leadership positions and for example in political campaigns. Direct comparisons between political candidates could be made. Bligh et al. (2012: 590) comment:

Cable news commentator Glenn Beck described Presidential contender Hillary Clinton as "like the stereotypical – excuse the expression – she's the stereotypical bitch, you know what I mean?" (The Glenn Beck Show, March 15, 2007, M. B. B., 2007). Our results suggest that such a portrayal of a woman politician will enhance perceptions of her as a competent but cold and may result in her being disliked and not trusted. In an increasingly media-driven society in which negative comments concerning both men and women politicians abound, future research and dialogue is necessary to help women politicians counter these messages and avoid becoming just another stereotype.

Most of the current research involves the effects on adults. It would be interesting to see more research done on the effects on children. As the findings indicated, people are affected by the media representations starting from a young age. Education choices and even small decisions like which toys do children prefer could be explored further. In the future, the roles that children place themselves in while they play their games could be explored.

6.4. Thesis Process

To wrap-up, this thesis explored gender issues, which are very current. As the writing process went on, it was interesting to see and read news relating to this topic appear in the media. Media representations of women were the biggest topic of the International Women's Day this year in Finland, so it is rewarding to be able to contribute to such a current topic.

From this thesis I have learned to be more critical when observing the media. Whether it is television shows or news, I am now more aware of the issues and can see how the media portrays people. It was great to see how aware also other young people were about the issue – it seems that the problem is being discussed and we are heading to a new era of media representations.

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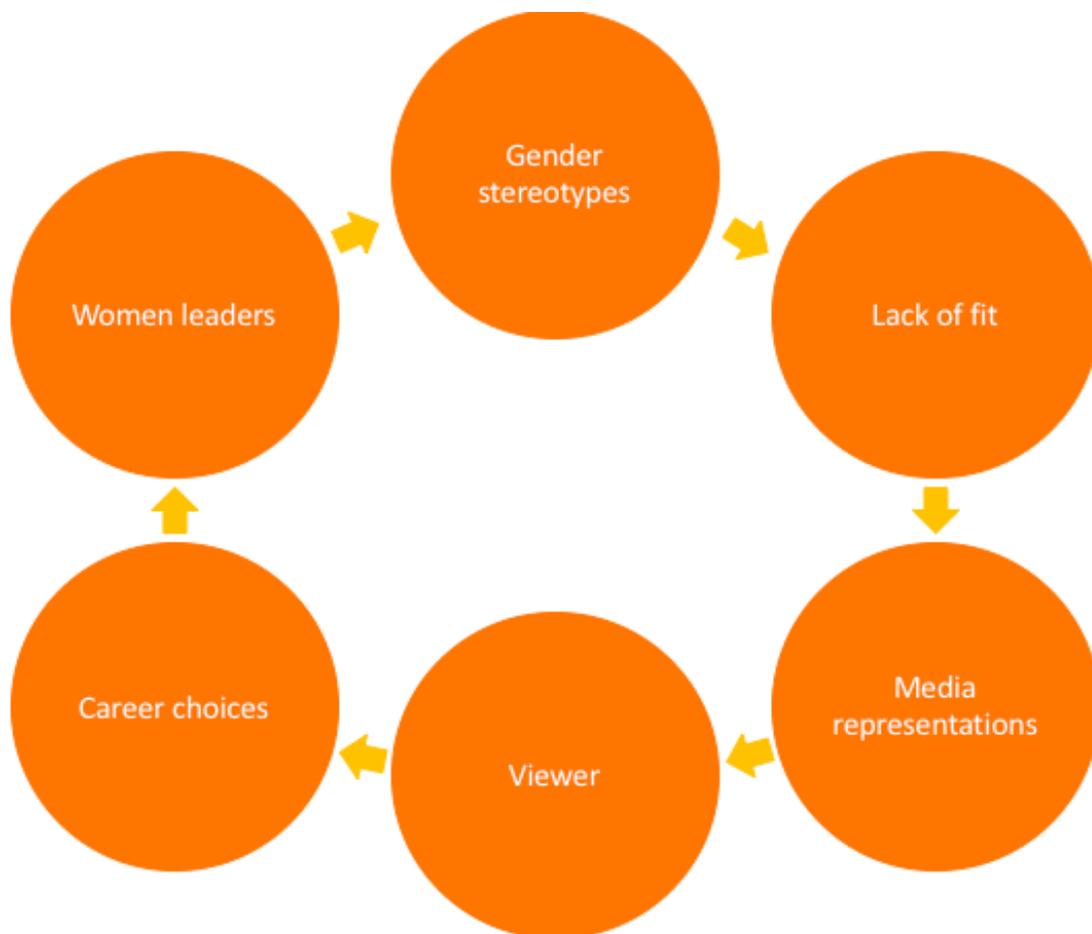
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8. APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Conceptual Framework



Appendix 2: Participants of the First Focus Group

Participant #	Nationality	Age	Gender
1	Finnish	21	Male
2	Finnish	20	Female
3	Finnish	20	Female

4	Finnish	21	Male
5	Finnish	21	Female
6	Finnish	20	Female

Appendix 3: Participants of the Second Focus Group

Participant #	Nationality	Age	Gender
7	Finnish-Zambian	23	Female
8	Vietnamese	19	Female
9	French	22	Male
10	German	21	Male
11	Finnish	20	Female

Appendix 4: Questions for the Focus Groups

Number	Question
1	What are some of your favourite TV/Movie character leaders? Why do you like them?
2	What sort of characteristics and personality traits are typical of female leaders on TV? What about male leaders on TV?
3	What differences are there between depictions of women and men as leaders?
4	How would you describe women leaders from this episode?
5	How are their depictions different from male leaders?
6	How would you describe women leaders from this episode?
7	How are their depictions different from male leaders?
8	Do you think these media representations affect how women see their career opportunities?
9	Do you think you are/have been affected by these media representations?
10	Do you think these media representations of women differ in the U.S. and in the UK based on these episodes? How?
11	Do you find these media representations of women leaders similar to

	your country's media representations? How do you think women are represented in your country's media?
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