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Abstract:

Purpose - Iceland, along with the other Nordic countries, is seen as an international frontrunner in gender equality, and equal sharing of responsibility for paid and unpaid work is part of the official ideology. Nevertheless, the number of women in leadership positions remains low. The aim of this study is to analyse the practices that (re)produce power imbalances between women and men in business leadership, both at the macro and the micro levels. This is done by using two theoretical explanations: gendered organizational practices and the interplay of organizations and family life.

Design/methodology/approach – Mixed methods are applied by analysing fifty-one, semi-structured interviews with female and male business leaders and survey data from CEOs and executives from the 250 largest companies in Iceland.

Findings - Analyses reveal gender differences and asymmetries in work life as well as within the family. Men have longer working hours than women, higher salaries and more job-related traveling. Women carry the dual burden of work and family to a higher degree than do men. By questioning and attempting to resist the organisational culture women risk further disadvantage. The situation of male and female leaders is therefore incomparable. This is a paradox and does not fit with the idea of the Nordic gender equality of a dual breadwinner society.

Originality/Value – It is shown that lack of gender diversity in business leadership is based on gendered organizational practices as well as on power relations within families. These two aspects are mutually reinforcing and the originality of the study is to explore the interplay between them. We conclude that, despite being the country at the forefront of gender equality in the world, neither organizational practices nor family relations recognize the different life experiences of women and men in Iceland. This is expressed in organizational practices and different access to time and support, which may hinder gaining gender equality in top leadership.

Keywords – Gender, CEO, executives, leadership, organizational practices, power relations

Paper type – Research paper

INTRODUCTION

Women are in the minority when it comes to business leadership worldwide (Catalyst, 2017a) and progress in eliminating gender segregation in positions of power is slow (Catalyst, 2017b). However, countries have tried to improve gender equality in business leadership, for instance, by conducting laws on boards of corporations (Doldor and Vinnicombe, 2015; Teigen, 2012; Terjesen *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, these affirmative actions have not lead to more women holding leadership positions, or spillover effect, as was hoped for. Therefore, it is important to know what keeps the gender disparity in leadership positions in place.

According to Hovden *et al.* (2011, p. 408), key factors in understanding the lack of women in business leadership are in the “processes and practices that (re)produce power differences between women and men in the organizations in which they take place.” Aiming to analyse the practices that (re)produce power imbalances between women and men in business leadership the paper reflects this idea both on the macro and the micro levels. Our case example is Iceland, one of the countries that have introduced gender corporate quotas (Amendment to Act on Public Limited Companies, No. 13/2010). The focus is on the organizational practices well as on the everyday life within the family. By focusing on the family life, we broaden Hovden’s (2011) analysis mentioned above. Thus, our theoretical framework is based on two overlapping perspectives: organizational practices and organizational culture (e.g., Acker, 1990, 2006, 2009; Blair-Loy, 2003; Broadbridge 2008, 2010) and the interplay of organizations and family life (e.g., Blair-Loy, 2003; Bryson 2007, 2011, 2013; Eagly *et al.*, 2000). Most importantly, our framework implies a holistic approach attempting to unravel the mutually reinforcing interplay between organisations and family life.

This paper continues the emerging literature on gender and management and contributes to the discussion on the lack of women in leadership positions. The paper is structured as

follows: first an overview of the literature on the relation between work and family is provided, followed by the Icelandic context and the two approaches on gendered power relations. After that the mixed method process is explained, and the findings in which women's lack of economic power is discussed. Finally concluding remarks are given with suggestions for further research.

WORK AND FAMILY

Organizational barriers women face in the workplace and masculine work culture are well documented (Acker, 1990, 2006, 2009; Holton and Dent, 2016; Nagy and Vicsek, 2014; Rafnsdóttir and Júlíusdóttir, 2018; Weyer, 2007). According to Menéndez, Fagan and Ansón (2012) institutions can be seen as gendered rather than gender neutral when job design, career ladders, work practises, recruitment and selection methods, and the organisational culture is invested with assumptions and expectations about gender appropriate roles (p. 4).

Organizational culture consists of several practices, e.g. visibility, long working hours and networking resulting in gender privileges, that can exclude women from powerful job positions (Acker, 2006, Blair-Loy, 2003; Benschop, 2009; Broadbridge, 2010; Holgersson, 2013; Ragins *et al.*, 1998; Singh *et al.*, 2006). It has been noted that the general requirements of work are shaped by the image of white men, with total dedication to work, and who can withdraw themselves from family responsibility for being the bread winner (Acker, 2006). Furthermore, since women tend to have more obligations in the domestic sphere than men, this gendered organization of paid and unpaid work is crucial in sustaining gender inequality in organizations (Acker, 2006; Bryson, 2007, 2011, 2013; Blair-Loy, 2003). This is what Bryson refers to as “time is money logic of the workplace” (Bryson, 2013, p. 120). By overlooking the private activities, e.g. the caring responsibility, the male breadwinner model and the gender division of labour is consistently maintained. Accordingly, the gender

inequality in organizations is also intertwined with the social construction of women and men, masculinities and femininities (Acker, 2006; Bryson, 2007). Therefore, it is important to draw attention to the power relations, not only in organizations, but also in families, when addressing the lack of women in leadership positions.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated that family support is important when it comes to managerial positions (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008; Guillaume and Pochic, 2009; Heikkinen, 2014; Heikkinen *et al.*, 2014). Women have played an important role in their partner's participation in the labour market according to Crompton and Lyonette's (2006) study on work-life balance in Europe. Guillaume and Pochic (2009) have reported that male managers are likelier than female managers to have spouses with part time jobs, working at home or from home. Women in leadership positions, on the other hand, have partners who usually work similar hours or even more than they do; they also tend to be single and childless more often than their male counterparts. Although men today are, in general, doing more housework than in their fathers' generation and women are doing less, the gender differences in domestic work are persistent, and women still perform most of the housework in the Western world (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010; Kan *et al.*, 2011). This is also the trend in the Nordic countries (Leira, 2006). In a recent Finnish study, Heikkinen (2014) examined the importance of female spouses for male managers alongside their careers. The results revealed that traditional gender roles still predominate in Finnish society. The male managers were mainly in the role of the breadwinner, while the managers' wives were in supportive and care-providing roles. Another study of Finnish women in managerial positions showed that contrary to men, women carried a double burden, working hard at work and at home (Heikkinen *et al.*, 2014). A recent Norwegian study on women in high commitment careers demonstrated similar findings. Their resolution to deal with a demanding job and the

responsibility for the home was to outsource some of the domestic duties (Seierstad and Kirton, 2015).

Iceland shares its approach to gender equality with the other Nordic countries. They are known for defamilization, that refers to the extent to which the state facilitates the combining of caring responsibilities with paid employment (Lister, 1997, p.173). Work participation among women and men in Iceland is the highest in Europe (Eurostat, 2014) and among OECD countries: 86.9% for 25–64-year-old women in 2016 (OECD, 2018). They form 47% of the labour force, and work on average 35 hours a week compared to 44 hours for men (Statistics Iceland, 2018). It is, therefore, rare that Icelandic women devote themselves completely to caring and family logistics. The gender regime in Iceland is fair compared to many other countries as there are public day-care facilities for preschool children, a legal right for parents to return to their jobs after childbirth, and nine months, 80% paid parental leave. Fathers and mothers are each given three months, and together, they have up to three months to divide as they wish (Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave no. 95/2000). When the non-transferable right of the parental leave between parents came into force in 2000, the share of fathers taking parental leave increased rapidly and reached over 90 per cent in 2008 (Eydal and Gíslason, 2014). The total number of fathers taking paternal leave, however, declined in the economic crises that hit Iceland badly in 2009, as a flat rate ceiling on payment was introduced (Directorate of Labour, parental leave fund, 2010). This is supposed to result in the decline of traditional gender roles and to be one of the main incentives for women in pursuing their careers, as fathers are encouraged to invest time in their children and exercise their right to care for their children (Hakovirta *et al.*, 2015)

Nevertheless, in Iceland women are outnumbered by men in powerful positions, as government ministers, local government representatives, ambassadors, directors of state enterprises, and CEOs in private companies (Statistics Iceland, 2017). Despite the fact that

Iceland has had gender quotas for corporate boards since 2013 (Amendment to Act on Public Limited Companies, No. 13/2010), only 9.2% of the largest companies, with more than 250 employees, have female CEOs (Statistics Iceland, 2016) and none of the companies on the stock market has a female CEO. Furthermore, Iceland is the first country to implement an act on an Equal Pay Standard (Act, No. 56/2017). Against this background, gender disparities among business leaders in Iceland is paradoxical and begs further investigation. To challenge the gender disparity in business leadership, it is vital to know what factors reproduce the situation. By analysing both quantitative and qualitative data, we aim to explore the practises that (re)produces the power imbalances between men and women in leadership positions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We use two theoretical approaches to analyse our data: gendered organizational practices and the interplay of organizations and family life. These two approaches are interconnected and in our holistic approach they complement each other.

Gendered organizational practices

The first explanation used in our analysis is the masculine embeddedness of organizational practices (Acker, 2006, 2009; Broadbridge, 2008, 2010; Blair-Loy, 2003; Holgersson, 2013; Ragins et.al, 1998; Singh et.al, 2006). The classic work of Joan Acker (1990) on organizational culture showed how the nature of organizations is defined, structured and shaped in terms of masculinity and femininity and thus reproduce gendered differences. Later, Acker (2006) broadened her analysis on what reproduces power relations in organizations, focusing on intersectionality; gender, class and race and the relations of inequality, when pointing out inequality regimes. They are practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organizations. Acker (2006) suggests that “the idea of inequality

regimes, interlinked organizing processes that produce patterns of complex inequalities (p. 459).”

Acker (2006, 2009) addressed several components of inequality regimes when analysing inequalities in work and organizations that produce inequality, they are: Organizing the general requirements of work, class hierarchies, recruitment and hiring, wage setting and supervisory practices, as well as informal interactions while “doing the work.” The social practice of networking influences the recruitment and hiring process (Acker, 2006) which are seen as barriers for women (Ragins, et al., 1998), resulting in men hiring other men and thus cultivating same sex networks, reproducing men in leadership positions (Holgerson, 2013). Broadbridge’s (2010) findings on senior retail managers in the UK, showed that men and women used network differently regarding career advancement. Men were likelier to use their networks strategically while women considered mainly its social support and to battle the male culture. Similarly, the findings of Singh et al. (2006) on corporate networking showed the importance of social support and the variety of career resources networking can have for women.

Furthermore, Broadbridge’s (2008) study reminds us that, in a male dominated environment, women try to live up to the male cultural norms to succeed. That means that executives are expected to put work over family, “upholding men’s life experiences as the norm.” (p.14). These organizational practices relate to the notion of gendered power relations, the second part of the theoretical framework.

The interplay of organizations and family life

The foundation of our study lies in the overlapping relations between the patterns that exist within organisations and families, our second explanation addresses this interplay. Valerie Bryson’s (2007) study on the politics of time reflects upon how modern day working practices

affect the genders differently. Bryson (2007, 2011) points out that the ways in which time is used, valued and understood are central to the maintenance of gender inequalities in public and private life and that they are damaging for both genders. While parental time with children and leisure in general has increased during the last decades, she argues, parents partly achieve this by combining the time they spend with children with other activities, and this applies especially to women. This explains why parents, especially mothers, perceive themselves as being more and more pressed for time, because stress is not simply a matter of total hours of paid and unpaid work, but exacerbated by the intensity of their time use. Thus, women's lack of time in the public sphere is connected to traditional domestic and care responsibilities that are not valued or rewarded. This time squeeze, that especially women experience, can cause decreased autonomy among individuals and diminish their possibilities to become active citizens.

This is important when looking at patterns of power between genders both in relationships and in the labour market (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013). Women's time seems to be "at odds with the dominant time culture of contemporary capitalist society" (Bryson, 2007, p.129). Furthermore, Bryson (2013) argues that the gender difference in time use play the key role in women's disadvantage economically, politically and socially.

Other studies have pointed to the difference in access to time amongst career focused people. Men's time appears to be more respected than women's time (Rafnsdóttir and Júlíusdóttir, 2018). Bryson (2013) also addresses discourse on working hours and masculinity by exploring the idea of shorter working hours as a threat to masculinity. "Many men will be unwilling to see, let alone surrender, the privileges that their economic, social, political and cultural 'normality' bestows" (Bryson, 2013, p. 7).

Eagly *et al.* (2000, p.125) argue that "expectations about women and men necessarily reflect status and power differences to the extent that women and men are positioned in a gender

hierarchy.” This gender hierarchy is the origin of sex differentiated behaviour that are assigned to women and men by obtaining particular skills and resources linked to role performance. Both women and men try to live up to the roles that are modal in their society and behave (and feel) this is expected according to their gender roles (Eagly *et al.*, 2000). For instance, a woman who works long hours or travels for her work might feel guilty as it violates the expectations that the family must come first (Steil, 2000). Nurturing behaviours among women are societally supported because of women’s reproductive role, while for men, independent behaviours have accommodated the role of working outside of the home, especially in occupations where males are overrepresented (Eagly *et al.*, 2000). Mary Blair-Loy’s (2003) study on women in the USA that had achieved senior positions in a male dominated sphere revolved around how women described the challenge of reconciling work devotion with their family responsibility. Blair-Loy claims that the society and culture shapes the companies, the home and the conflicts there within. According to her these cultural conditions and traditional gender roles, still hold women to be the main caregivers, regardless of their position in the labour market and conclude that career women are less suitable candidates for a demanding job, such as being business leaders.

A cross-national study by Wharton and Blair-Loy (2006) also found that work demands have a greater significant impact on the family and personal lives of women than men. They suggest that: “This could be because the mothers have greater responsibility for family care and because they take caregiving obligations more seriously (pp. 430).” However, to a similar effect, it might be argued that women are left without a choice when it comes to family responsibility because of the lack of family support and expected gender roles. Furthermore, a study carried out in Hungary revealed that organizational culture is unable to separate itself from the societal culture. Women managers are still met with a lack of understanding when returning to work with young children at home (Nagy and Wicsek, 2014).

As these two explanations are mainly based on non-Nordic data, it is of interest to observe if they are relevant and meaningful for analysing the Icelandic context.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative, are applied in this study when analysing what (re)produces power imbalances between females and males in leadership positions. The philosophical foundation of this research paradigm lies in pragmatism, suggesting that research designs should be mixed in ways that offer the most useful answers for the research questions and are likely to give complementary results (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The study is situated within a sequential exploratory and explanatory design. The sequential exploratory design suggests that the quantitative data be gathered first, and then, once analysed, the information is used to build a second qualitative study (Creswell, 2013).

Similarly, the explanatory sequential starts with a qualitative study. This study is based on three interconnected, independent datasets collected over a seven-year period. Their purpose was to investigate the lack of women in leadership positions. Thus, Qualitative → Quantitative → Qualitative.

For this study, the use of mixed methods gives a more complete understanding of the research issue than would each approach alone. The quantitative data allows us to identify the “factors that influence the outcome” (Creswell, 2013 p. 20). For example, salaries and responsibility for children, along with long working hours, frequent travelling, networking and high salaries among the people in leadership positions influence the different access to time. The goal of the qualitative data, on the other hand, is to rely on the participants’ views of the situation: How they live and work. That has been negotiated historically and socially and formed through interaction with others according to the social constructivism approach (Creswell, 2013). Our aim is to understand and learn how and when the “experience is embedded in

larger and often hidden, positions, networks, situations, and relationships” (Charmaz, 2007 p. 130 - 131), subsequently, the hierarchies of power become visible.

Quantitative data: Survey

A web-based survey was sent to the executive committees, CEOs and executives directly. CEOs are the highest-ranking persons in an organization as executives ranks below, having an administrative authority in the organization. This gave a total of 1349 individuals (354 women, 995 men), selected from a list of the 250 largest companies in Iceland, according to their revenue. The survey was launched on the 28th of November 2014 and remained open until the 26th of January 2015. The total response rate was 73%, with men accounting for 73% ($n = 366$), and women 27% ($n = 138$) (Rafnsdóttir, Axelsdóttir, Diðriksdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2015). The quantitative survey was part of a larger research project on the lack of women in leadership positions executed in cooperation with the Institute for Social Research in Norway, designed by them and translated into Icelandic. The participants, from the quantitative data, selected for this study are those who have children living at home. The total number of female CEOs are 11 and the male 81. The number of female executives is 82 and male executives 175.

The two concepts of organizational practices and gendered power relations were measured from the six following questions: 1. On average, how many hours do you work in a week, 2. How many days do you spend travelling each year for job related purposes, 3. How many hours does your partner work in a typical week, 4. Income in relation to your partner, 5. How do you share the house work, and 6. How would you estimate your overall responsibility for the care of your children. The first four were answered on a five-item Likert scale and last two with a choice of three statements. The characteristics of the survey participants are summarized based on work and family attributes and can be seen in the following tables. The

Mann-Whitney U Test was used to test for statistically significant differences between female and male CEOs and executives.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the characteristics for this sample: age, education level, years in current position, partner status and number of children. A great gender difference can be seen in the age distribution as women are younger than their male counterparts. Female CEOs have higher levels of education. Male CEOs and male executives have held their current positions for a longer period than their female counterparts, almost all have partners and the majority have 3 or more children.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Descriptive variable	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	CEO	Executive	CEO	Executive
<i>Age bracket</i>				
< 41	20	40.2	9.9	25.1
41-50	70	52.4	45.7	42.3
> 50	10	7.3	44.4	32.6
	(n=10)	(n=82)	(n=81)	(n=175)
<i>Level of education</i>				
Primary	10	15	15.2	15.5
High-school	20	18.8	17.7	16.1
Undergraduate	0	30.0	29.1	29.8
Higher education	70	17.5	25.3	28.6
Other	0	18.8	12.7	10.1
	(n=10)	(n=80)	(n=79)	(n=168)
<i>Years in current position</i>				
< 1	20	23.2	7.3	6.2
1-3	0	28	14.6	25.8
4-6	30	25.6	15.9	21.3
>7	50	23.2	62.2	46.6
	(n=10)	(n=82)	(n=82)	(n=178)
<i>Has a partner</i>				
Yes	100%	91.5	100	98.3
	(n=11)	(n=82)	(n=82)	(n=178)
<i>Number of children living at home</i>				
1	9.1	8.5	1.2	8.4
2	27.3	46.3	24.4	27.5
3 or more	63.6	45.1	74.4	64

Qualitative data: Interviews

The qualitative data consists of fifty-one interviews with male and female business leaders in Iceland, 24 women and 27 men, aged between 40 and 65 years. The criteria for the selection of interviewees was their job position as a CEO or an executive. The CEOs and the executives were promised our commitment to anonymity, and therefore, none of the interviewees can be identified. The analysis that informs this study does not include race and class due to the homogeneity within the group studied.

Table 2 provides characteristics of the interviewees: age bracket, number of children and whether they have a partner.

Table 2 Characteristics of the interviewees

	Women		Men	
	CEO	Executives	CEO	Executives
<i>Age bracket</i>				
<44	5	5	3	2
45 – 55	9	2	12	2
56<	3		8	
	(n = 17)	(n = 7)	(n = 23)	(n = 4)
<i>Number of children</i>				
Cero	1			
One	1	2	1	1
Two	8		10	1
three or more	7	5	12	2
	(n = 17)	(n = 7)	(n = 23)	(n = 4)
<i>Has a partner</i>				
Yes	16	7	23	4
	(n = 16)	(n = 7)	(n = 23)	(n = 4)

Twenty of the fifty-one interviewees were selected from the same survey sent to the 250 biggest companies in Iceland in 2014 according to their turnover. Thirty-one of the interviews were selected randomly from companies independent of their turnover. After selecting possible interviewees, we sent e-mails where we outlined our aims and invited them to participate in the study.

The first part of gathering qualitative data involved twenty-one of the interviews conducted in 2009 with eleven men and ten women. In the second part of gathering qualitative data, thirty CEOs, fourteen women and sixteen men, were interviewed from 2015 - 2016.

A semi-structured, in-depth interview guide was used. The interviews lasted between 30 and 80 minutes and took place in the interviewee's workplace, in our offices or in the participant's home. We focused on the interviewees' everyday life by, asking about their daily routines, their work procedures, working culture, flexibility, leisure time and family life. In thirty interviews, carried out in 2015 and 2016, our informants were also asked questions on networking. They were asked to describe an ordinary day, which gave us a thorough understanding on how their lives interacted with and between family and work. In the processes of collecting the interviews, we relied on the notion of saturation (Robson, 2011), or when we started receiving repetitive responses from the interviewees and no new themes emerged.

All the interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed through gendered lenses by utilizing constructivist grounded theory as introduced by Charmaz (2006). The coding that shaped the analytical frame in which our analyses are built was done by studying the action and processes of our participants, bearing in mind the lack of gender equality in leadership positions. The initial coding of the data gave us theoretical directions on organizational practices and gendered power relations when labelling themes and concepts. We looked for

similarities and dissimilarities, comparisons and patterns that revolved around organizational practices, and the interplay of organisations and family life. We analysed “how” and “why” our interviewees constructed actions and meanings in different situations by focusing on these two overlapping themes. In our analysis, organizational practices revolved around long working hours, travelling, being visible and networking. At the family level our analysis revolved around assumptions and expectations about gender appropriate roles and attitudes, time poverty vs. time availability, spousal support, and household duties.

Yet, we had awareness that the resulting analysis is an interpretation, depending on our view (Charmaz, 2006).

FINDINGS

Aiming to develop an understanding of what (re)produces power imbalance in business leadership in Iceland, we collected data which refers to the organizational practices and gender relations in family life. The findings for these explanations are presented separately. Nevertheless, they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing in real life, and can only be analytically distinguished.

The qualitative and the quantitative data are intertwined to illustrate a holistic interpretation.

Gendered organizational practices

Our findings show that most commonly long working hours, visibility, networking, similarly being flexible to travel shape the organizational practices among people in leadership positions. These practices are work related, they affect one’s career but at the same time they are influenced by other institutions, such as the family, signifying how family responsibility can also affects one’s career.

First, we shed light on the working time among female and male business leaders in Iceland in a typical week.

The working hours for more than half of the participants are greater than fifty hours per week, except for the executive women, as illustrated in Table 3. The difference is statistically significant between the executive women to all other groups ($p < 0.01$), but between other groups there is no statistical difference.

Table 3 How many hours do you work in a typical week?

Hours	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	CEO	Executives	CEO	Executives
0-40	0	9	1	2
41-50	36	58	21	39
51-60	45	23	51	41
61-70	18	10	17	12
70-	0	0	10	6
	(n=11)	(n=81)	(n=82)	(n=179)

When discussing the working time with the interviewees, these long working hours among people in leadership positions were often referred to as the nature of the job itself and the 24/7 work culture. Women, however, questioned the need of these long hours more than men did and it had different meanings between the genders when expressing experiences related to working long hours. Our female interviewees talked more about male working culture as factors excluding women from top leadership positions, while the men were more likely to see this as unavoidable. However, one of our interviewees, Núi, a CEO in his fifties and a father of young children, expressed that changing the working culture would be the best thing that could be done for women in organizations. When describing what would make women's business life better, he said: "You know, not so much e-mails in the evenings and big parties at all times." Thus, he shows concern for women and points out how family friendly policies within the workplace might help women in reaching a higher job position. Interestingly, the

same concern was not pointed towards men, indicating how the working culture of long working hours and networking is less troublesome for men than it is for women. Furthermore, without questioning the gendered world, Nói assumed that his female colleagues had much work to do at home compared to him and his male counterparts.

These practices of social interaction; networking after a regular working day, and working late was actually something that more female interviewees than men had concern for and thus were more critical against. Furthermore, many claimed networking to be inherently gendered. Gunnhildur, a woman executive with three children living at home said, when describing accepted working practices at her previous job:

To become one of them, [...] you were not important unless hanging and eating pizza with the other co-workers.

When Gunnhildur addressed this practice as a bad working culture, the owner of the company decided to start leaving the job at 5 o'clock every day, resulting in changes in working practices regarding long working hours for the employees in the company. At her current workplace, she also had to fight against the same practice. Gunnhildur went on by saying:

But at this workplace, e.g. on Fridays, then it was [sit down] and chat and maybe some wine tasting and something. I sat down the first Friday and thought to myself, no my almighty, this I can't be bothered with. If they have time to sit down half past four, why do they not just go home [...] and I think this is, it's a lot of pressure, very much that you're not one of them, except to be always ready [wherever and whenever].

However, rejecting this kind of practice is not an easy task, as networking is regarded as extremely important for women and men in the business life. In addition, the social practice of networking commonly takes place outside of the regular working hours. The network regularly developed over a long time e.g., through high school, sports clubs, universities or through businesses. What is important is that men, therefore, did not see it as networking when meeting up with colleagues in the business life but more like meeting friends. Different from men, the women in general were more critical towards the culture of networking, especially as male networks were in form of fishing trips and golf tournament are an accepted way of networking, often organized in the countryside. For the women interviewed this was reflecting the time when only men were business leaders.

Furthermore, women also criticised how networking would absorb time away from their families. Kolbrún, a one of the youngest CEOs and a mother of three, expressed how she tried to take part in some of the events she was invited to, such as fly-fishing, mainly because she did not want to be the woman who said no. In addition, she also mentioned golf tournaments which she saw as a male practice and something she did not have much time for, although being aware of the importance of networking. Kolbrún showed difficulties in confronting these organizational practices:

I don't know where I should find the time to play golf, you know, I have three children and [...] but of course, part of the networking, you know [...] the connections are strengthened there [on the golf field] that is for sure.

Many of the female interviewees pointed out that this kind of networking was rather frustrating and difficult to coordinate with other responsibilities in their private life.

These accounts demonstrate very well the gendered power inequality practiced in organizations and reflects a male oriented working culture. The norm is that (white males) CEOs rarely have to take on other responsibilities than their work, and thus can spend their free time in hanging out with their co-workers.

However, several women often networked with other women for personal support, although notifying the importance for women to network with men since the power in general was in the hands of the business men. Tinna, a female CEO, in early fifties, expressed this concern when pointing out that for women networking with other women is very important as a support, but women should also network with powerful men:

It is very important [for women] to build a network with men and women. The women's network is crucial, it is important, but the other one [with men] gives more.

Another organizational practice among people in leadership positions is travelling. Travelling takes time and both male and female interviewees pointed out that travelling abroad for work was tiresome, although Table 4 shows that the travel frequency is higher for men than for women. Male CEOs travel more than male executives, this is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and males travel more than female executives ($p < 0.01$). No statistical difference can be observed for the female CEOs and other groups, since their number is too small.

Table 4. The number of travel days per year for CEOs and executives.

Travel days per year	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	CEO	Executives	CEO	Executives
<10	78	74	27	41
11-20	11	14	32	31
21-30	0	9	19	13
31>	11	4	23	14
	(n=9)	(n=81)	(n=79)	(n=172)

Some of the interviewees preferred using Skype and phone instead of travelling, although that was not always possible. Snorri, a male CEO in his early fifties and a father of three children, expressed negative experiences of constant travel in his previous job. Therefore, Snorri diminished travel to the minimum in his current job.

No, I try to be just in Iceland. I have both been in jobs where I had to travel a lot and in jobs only operated in Iceland. I believe that traveling breaks the concentration for the work [...]. I have been reducing the travelling for myself and for the company. Not to travel more than necessary.

Here he pointed out the negative consequences of too much travelling for the work itself (breaks the concentration), while women more often referred to difficulties for their work-family balance. In addition, when linking together the organizational practices of traveling and networking, women that travelled much for work showed even less interest in networking to be able to spend more time with the family. Men did not address it that way.

The interplay of organizations and family life

One of the reason for the dilemma mentioned above regarding combining work and family is that men are more likely to have partners that work fewer hours than they do, while women are more likely to have partners that work similar hours or more. Table 5 shows that 49% of the CEO's male partners work 40 hours or less. We see the same trend when comparing female and male executives. There is no statistical difference between male CEOs and male executives. However, there is a statistical difference between the males and female executives

($p < 0.01$). Again, here the female CEOs are too few in order to determine any statistical differences between them and the other groups.

Table 5. How many hours does your partner work in a typical week?

Partner working hours	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	CEO	Executive	CEO	Executive
0-30	0	1	16	13
31-40	10	15	33	34
41-50	60	49	29	36
51-60	10	25	18	14
61-	20	8	4	2
	(n=11)	(n=71)	(n=73)	(n=157)

The interviewed men often spoke of their partners’ support in the household, their responsibility of caring and other home duties, allowing them to spend long hours at work. In the household of female leaders, the reality is different. Their battles revolved around equal sharing with the partner in the home, which leaves women with the feeling of time poverty as compared to men. The interviews revealed that the men expressed the necessity of partners working less when having young children, pointing out social roles. The male interviewees did not question the working hours needed for a leadership position, rather the partner was naturally expected to reduce her working hours. Gunnsteinn, a young male CEO and a father of a new-born and a toddler put it this way:

Well, we had one child before, and it is short between [the two children]. She takes a year parental leave, so we're wondering how much work she will do afterwards. It may well be that she will reduce her work...It is very difficult for us both to be working 100%, not to mention a demanding job, with small children. That somehow will not work. So, this is a decision that must be made, what is it that is important?

Through this quote, the caring commitment falls to the mother who was going to reduce her working hours because of family responsibility. A decision that perhaps is not so much of a decision, made by couples where the man has a stronger position in the labour market and a higher salary. Thus, higher salaries in a relationship matters when a decision is made in a household where male partners are more likely to have a lower income, as can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. How does your income compare to that of you partner?

Income compared to that of the partner	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	CEO	Executive	CEO	Executive
Less	9	12	0	2
Same	27	28	5	10
More	64	60	95	88
	(<i>n</i> =11)	(<i>n</i> =75)	(<i>n</i> =81)	(<i>n</i> =175)

Male CEOs hold the greatest pay gap between themselves and their partners, and male executives follow close behind. Their income, as compared to their partner's, shows a gender difference with a male CEO's partner earning significantly less than that of a female CEO's partner ($p < 0.01$). The same holds for male executives ($p < 0.01$).

Another example of the power relations due to salaries is demonstrated when Gunnar, a young male CEO talked of his participation at home by saying:

Well, we have a person [woman] to do all the cleaning and that is my contribution, so technically I do the cleaning, and when I'm at home, you know, I try to buy groceries and sometimes I do the cooking although this mainly falls on the wife.

He, who has the higher salary pays for the cleaning, interprets this as his contribution to the housework. This noticeably reflects the notion of power relations between the public and domestic spheres; the interplay of organisations and family life.

When investigating the gendered division of household duties and the responsibility of caring, a clear gender difference is observed for executives ($p < 0.01$). Female executives do the greater share in their household and male executives benefit from their partner's support (Table 7). However, this is not statistically significant for the CEOs ($p = 0.07$).

Table 7. Sharing of household duties

How do you share the work at home?	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	CEO	Executive	CEO	Executive
I do more	18	22	6	2
Equally sharing	55	76	40	55
Partner does more	27	3	54	43
	($n=11$)	($n=74$)	($n=82$)	($n=174$)

This is in line with our interviews. The male interviewees spoke of household duties quite differently than their female counterparts. For the men who had a wife that worked fewer hours, this division of labour seemed natural. When men were working on their career, their wife took a greater share of home and family responsibility. However, this building of a career would never stop so the wives were usually stuck in the same home situation for years. Böðvar, a young male CEO and a father of three children was aware of this when he expressed the situation:

My wife has often said that now it was her turn. She has said that we are now settled with home and [...] She has been waiting for all my promotions for many, many, years and now she just wants to start thinking about herself.

When asked about a shared responsibility for children, a clear gender difference is also observed (Table 8). Male CEOs and executives spend relatively little time with their children as compared to their female counterparts. Women executives share the greatest responsibility for children ($p < 0.01$).

Table 8. Of the total time devoted to the responsibility and caring for your children, how large is your share?

	Women (%)		Men (%)	
	CEO	Executives	CEO	Executives
0-25%	0	1	32	15
25-39%	33	7	30	42
40-60%	56	54	30	33
61-75%	11	22	6	4
75-100%	0	15	1	6
	(<i>n</i> =9)	(<i>n</i> =81)	(<i>n</i> =82)	(<i>n</i> =177)

Women often justified going against their social roles by pointing out that being away from children, when working long hours, was an opportunity that a person in an egalitarian society should not throw away. Fjóla, a female CEO in her early fifties, justified her long working hours and being away from children the following way:

I sell it to myself and justify it to myself that I owe it to the older generation of women that fought for these rights, and to us who have the opportunity to do it, that we show that it can be done.

Men, on the other hand, did not have the same need as women to justify long hours at work. They had support from the family to stay away from the daily routine jobs in the family and were content in seeing themselves as the main breadwinner of the family. For them, work was

the main priority, whereas family responsibility and duties, without special problems, came second. Helgi a young CEO, remarked that it was more important that the company would do well “in his hands” rather than that he contributed to the housework:

It is just that what is happening here [at work] is of historical importance and it would just be ridiculous not to take care of it. So it would be selfish to have another view on that.

Nevertheless, male and female interviewees pointed out that men today participate much more in the household and in child care than their fathers’ generation did. In other words, the fathering discourse can give rise to complacency, which the men justify by remarking that they do more than previous generations did. In terms of children, the males contributed sometimes in the mornings by driving the children to school or in the late afternoon in the form of quality time. Others skipped the hectic mornings with children altogether and could be at their office around 7 AM and at home around dinner time. However, some of the women mentioned that their children were complaining about them always being at work, something their male counterparts were less likely to hear from their children although, they were likelier to be more away for work.

Mothers who showed commitment to powerful positions regularly had to confront remorse for not being there for their children. Bára, a CEO in her early fifties described:

“You are missing out on parent teaching meetings and moments that you're not always happy to miss out on, you know?”

Accordingly, referring to family matters has a gendered signification.

A woman in the study described as irritating to get questions on the responsibility for children when traveling, while the male co-workers would not. However, among fathers showing commitment to powerful positions, missing out on the children's sporting activities, where other fathers usually showed up, needed to be justified. "Well, it is not like my parents always watched me when I was little," as Unnsteinn, a father of young children, reported, so that was nothing to feel embarrassed about. Different sharing of mundane tasks and family responsibilities seemed to fall smoothly into the wife's hands, so less negotiation would take place. Ketill a male CEO in his early fifties, had this to say about the division of labour in the home:

It just came naturally, I didn't pay the bills, I didn't show up at the children's birthday party and I didn't do the shopping. So it just emerged naturally, it is maybe rather traditional.

This notion of a traditional division of labour in the quantitative and qualitative data gives a strong indication of the social roles shaping women and men, and how time is unequally shared between the genders. In general men in powerful positions have partners that take responsibility for the home and family responsibility, while women in powerful positions usually take the responsibility for family and home.

DISCUSSION

This paper sought to examine the persistent gender disparity among business leaders in Iceland by exploring the interplay of organisations and family life. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data with CEOs and executives, highlighted that organizational practices and gendered power relations in families produce patterns of complex mutually

reinforcing inequalities among Icelandic business leaders. Despite of affirmative action aiming to increase gender equality in the business life (Amendment to Act on Public Limited Companies, No. 13/2010) and the act on promoting gender equality (No. 10/2008), our data shows that organizational practices (Acker, 2006; Blair Loy, 2003; Broadbridge, 2010) in Iceland are similar to other western countries where national welfare policies are not promoting gender equality to the same extent as the Nordic countries (Saxonberg, 2013).

Our line of arguments relates to Acker's framework (Acker, 2006) on inequality regimes when designating complex inequalities that (re)produce barriers for women in organizations. Our study demonstrates that organizational practices such as long working hours, visibility and networking, produce power imbalance between men and women in leadership positions. Networking, especially after regular working hours, even out in the countryside during weekends, was, according to the interviewees less of an issue for men than women. Reaching gender equality in organizations seem to be a difficult task, since the social practice of networking influences career advancement in organizations (Acker, 2006) and partakes in producing homosociality in top leadership (Holgersson, 2014). Our interviewees showed that changes on this traditional organizational practice were possible up to a point. Women were more proactive than their male counterparts in changing this working culture, for instance by suggesting cutting down pizza, beer and wine hours after work. However, both female and male interviewees argued that networking was important for the business and consequently for career advancement.

Furthermore, we argue that the organizational practices influence, and are influenced by gendered power relations within the family. Therefore, the discussion about organizational practices goes hand in hand with theories on gendered access to time (Bryson, 2007, 2011, 2013; Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013) and gender pattern in family support (Heikkinen, 2014; Seierstad and Kirton, 2015; Rafnsdóttir and Júlíusdóttir, 2018). That is, men gain more from

partner's family caring and household support than women, despite of the persistent discourse that Iceland is "the most feminist place in the world" (Johnson, 2011) and "the best country for gender equality" (Sauter *et al.*, 2013).

Our data shows that men work more hours than women, but still work life balance was, according to our interviews, more problematic for women than for men. This manifest both prevailing assumptions and practices of gender appropriate roles. Furthermore, both male CEOs and executives, different from their female counterparts, have partners who work fewer hours than they do. This fact both mirrors and reproduces traditional gender relations, where men are seen as ideal organizational leaders and their partners are not expected to work long hours, to be able to provide the support needed for the spouse's career progression. This narrates Blair-Loy's (2003) notion that the society and culture shape the companies, the home and the conflicts within and between them. It was, however, unexpected to find that traditional gender roles (Eagly, 2000) were so common in the families of the Icelandic business elite in the light of the high labour market participation of women, the discourse on the Nordic welfare system, and men's engagement in fatherhood (Farstad and Stefansen, 2015). It appears that welfare policies have not accomplished to abolish traditional social roles and gender relations among business leaders in Iceland. Like Åmark (2006) pointed out, women friendly Nordic policies do not necessarily change traditional gender roles in the home nor in the labour market.

Despite the policy on defamilization (Lister, 1997), a dual breadwinner model (Leira, 2006), and that both genders are given equal formal opportunities to participate in the labour market, male business leaders still seem to have specific career advantages over their female counterparts. They decide over their own time to greater extent than women, seen by the fact that the length of the working week is longer among the men in our data than their women counterparts. Another sign of this is the notion that women would benefit from less

socializing in the evening, and better work-family policies, pointing out that women had more family responsibility than male leaders. In line with Bryson (2007) men still have specific advantages over the women when deciding their own time. Furthermore, women talk more about a time squeeze and stress. The men identify themselves as breadwinners and do not, according to the interviews, share their duties equally with their partners at home. Women tend to be overloaded with a dual burden and do not have the same opportunities as their male colleagues to let go of the family and household responsibilities. Therefore, women, rather than men, describe themselves as working intensively during traditional working hours to be able to “do it all”. The men spoke of these family responsibilities as hindering women from receiving promotions since women would not be able to fulfil the requirements for long hours and visibility. Nevertheless, during these long working hours, the men interviewed often took time off for the gym and networking. This was rarely the case for the women in the study. Men can devote themselves totally to work and withdraw from family responsibility, this agrees with Acker (2006).

Furthermore, to have power over one’s time (Bryson 2007) is closely related to the gendered power relations in society and within the household in terms of salaries. Our findings show that male CEOs and executives have a higher income in relation to their partners than do their female counterparts. According to the interviews, this empowered the male leaders and liberated them from other mundane tasks required in the home, such as housework. For the female managers, this was not the case. Hence, we see income disparity in both the public and the private sphere; between male and female leaders in comparable jobs in the labour market as well as within their family life reflected in the incomparability of their partners’ working time depending on gender.

By delving deeper into differences in family support for business leaders, it may be argued that this also revolves around masculinity as implied by Bryson (2013), which gives male

business leaders the freedom to work on their career with greater determination and show devotion to their work in terms of long working hours and more frequent travelling. For the males interviewed, work came first and family second. It was even portrayed as selfish to want it any other way. That reflects traditional social roles that still seem to be practiced among career couples, suggesting that both men and women try to live up to their gender roles (Eagly *et al.*, 2000) regardless of social policies that try to abolish them. Furthermore, this is in line with Broadbridge (2008) who noticed that women try to live up to the male norms and the working culture, such as showing commitment to long working hours. By questioning and attempting to resist the organisational culture women risk further disadvantage.

This study shows that the gender disparity in business leadership is reproduced by several factors. These are power relations, both at the macro level of organizations and the micro level of interpersonal relations. Furthermore, the study reveals that these factors, which all reproduce the power imbalance, are closely interconnected and must be looked at as a dynamic whole. The strength of this study is that it is based on comprehensive data from all CEOs and their directly reporting executives in the 250 largest companies in Iceland. Furthermore, the mixed methods give a better understanding of the lack of women in leadership positions. The weakness of the data, however, is that we cannot combine individuals with companies, so we do not know to what degree the companies represented by women and men are similar or different. Likewise, there were only a few female CEOs in our subset in the quantitative data, which can also be a weakness, but this is the reality we are faced with.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FURTHER RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

The impact of this study is both theoretical and practical and the two are intertwined.

Practically it addresses the world-wide public policy debate on gender disparity among

business leaders. It sheds a light on what remains to change, to be able to strengthen the situation of women in business leadership. By building on two sets of theoretical perspectives, namely Acker's (1990, 2006, 2009), Blair-Loy's, (2003) and Broadbridge, (2008, 2011) discussion about organizational practices, and Bryson's (2007, 2011, 2013), Blair-Loy's, (2003) and Eagly et al., (2000) analysis on the interplay of organisations and family life, we shed a light on important mechanisms that perpetuate status quo. By connecting these two perspectives together we show that they are mutually reinforcing, and how both the male dominated working culture and the traditional gender roles within the business leader's families need to be challenged in order for change to take place.

We have argued that to understand women's exclusion from elite positions, also in the cradle of gender equality, it is necessary to explore both organizational and relational issues; the ways gender is reproduced at both macro and micro levels. Women, more often than men, criticise the working culture, which assumes that the company always comes first, and thereby question the necessity of the 24/7 working culture for running a good business, reproduce the aura of women who are not as committed to the business life as men. This is a dilemma, that further studies should address, and which modern companies must work with. As gender inequality within families invokes embarrassment in a country like Iceland, with fairly developed gender regime, this fact becomes quite untouchable and as such difficult to change.

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