Exploring the career experiences of female leaders from the former Soviet Union in private sector organisations in the UK and Russia

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the experiences of two groups of female leaders from the former Soviet Union, one group who now live and build their careers in the UK, and the other in Russia, thus representing two different national contexts. Phenomenological and feminist perspectives influenced this empirical investigation. Female leaders' career paths were studied by means of cross-national comparative research using a qualitative approach. This methodology enabled understanding of the differences and similarities in female leaders' career paths in the UK and Russia. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted in person and on-line with selected female leaders, working in private sector organisations in the UK and in Russia.

The research revealed that a multitude of personal and structural factors influenced female leaders' career paths in both countries, creating barriers to their career development. The attitude of female leaders towards these obstacles uncovered the complexity of interrelated indicators in Russia and the UK. Three key findings emerged from the research. First, despite experiencing persistent gender stereotypes in both the UK and Russia, the essentialist gender equality position prevailed in the participants' views. While gender stereotypes in the UK were perceived as gradually weakening, they still appear stronger compared to the former Soviet Union before and soon after *perestroika*. There were indications however that gender stereotypes in Russia might be strengthening. Second, the participants' experiences indicated that glass ceiling barriers to female leaders' career progression persevere in contemporary organisations in both countries. An additional layer of obstacles to career growth was discovered at the intersection of culture and gender in the UK. Third, the participants in both countries supported liberal gender equality policies. There appeared to be no interest in radical gender equality measures in Russia and these were largely unpopular in the UK among the female leaders. This thesis argues that the interrelated influence of a liberal gender equality perspective and essentialist gender equality beliefs maintains the existing status quo, in effect slowing down gender equality in both, the UK and Russia.

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Chapter introduction

This thesis has been partly inspired by my gendered positionality as a woman who was born and brought up in the former Soviet Union now living and working in the United Kingdom, and partly by my concern with continuing gender inequality in both countries. I grew up around women working professionally, many of whom held positions of leadership. Yet in occasional arguments with my brother during my childhood I often heard from adults: 'you are a girl; you have to pull back'. I thought to myself 'why should I'? Then at some point in my teens I applied and was accepted for training in a young astronauts' club as I was fascinated with the idea of becoming one. I was the only girl among many boys in my group. I wondered why girls were not interested in, what I thought was, such an adventurous pursuit? I still do not have definite answers to these questions, yet I am now convinced that there is a connection between what we hear and observe around us and the choices we make.

I have been immersed in both Russian and UK cultures for more than twenty-five years, and I regard both as an integral part of my heritage. Through an analysis of twenty in-depth interviews with Russian female leaders in both countries, I reveal how national contexts influence their professional experiences. The topic of female leadership is widely discussed in both the UK and Russia, but actual gender equality in leadership is still far from being realised. I explore how changes towards gender equality in both countries re-packaged the gender equality offer yet has still been unable to stop the overwhelming dominance of men in decision-making, particularly in relation to the higher levels of the organisational hierarchy. This work critiques the dynamics of the different forces influencing the existing status quo of gender representation in leadership.

The statistics about gender inequality support the rationale for this investigation. Though the number of companies with female senior managers worldwide is growing, the number of women in top management positions remains low. Russia and the UK demonstrate comparable results in representation of women in senior management. There are now 91% and 93% of businesses with at least one senior

female manager in Russia and the UK respectively (Grant Thornton, 2018:10; 2021). However, the representation of women in management is far from being even especially at the top of organisational hierarchies. Gender proportions on board of directors remain uneven. In the UK on average 36.6% of women are represented on boards of directors and in Russia it stands only at 12.4% (Women on Boards, 2020). The connection between gender and leadership in different national contexts is under-researched. I recognise leadership as a mind-set and a capability of a person to lead, take responsibility and empower others. I was interested to learn how women from a similar socio-cultural milieu experience leadership in two different national contexts and to follow the gender equality trajectory in both countries. Russia and the UK have been selected for the comparisons because there are similarities as well as profound differences between these two countries. Regarding similarities, both countries consist of different and complex entities - the UK comprises Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland. Russia encompasses a multitude of federal subjects, including autonomous regions and republics such as Chuvashia, Tatarstan and others. The capital cities London and Moscow, which are key to this investigation, are both geographically situated on the European continent. The differences between the two countries include the dynamics of their ideologies and political systems and their economic development. I investigate how the differences and similarities of the gender equality values in Russia and the UK affect female leaders' career experiences and seek to explain the female leadership attributes in both countries. My exploration of the extant literature has revealed a gap in knowledge and understanding in this regard. Therefore, this in-depth investigation opens a new level of understanding of the underlying issues affecting the career experiences of female leaders in both countries and endeavours to contribute to the ever-growing voices of women.

This research is influenced by phenomenological and feminist perspectives. I studied the narratives of professional women from the former Soviet Union, who now live and work in the UK and Russia to be able to analyse how gender, culture and leadership interface. Thus, the focus of this research is on women's personal and professional experiences. In this chapter, I first provide the rationale for conducting this investigation, appealing to the statistical evidence of continued gender segregation in both countries, gender inequality in senior management and gender

pay gaps. Then I explain the background of this research, presenting justifications for the selected context, which influences the working environment of female leaders in both countries. The legal gender equality frameworks in Russia and the UK are critically evaluated through the prism of historic developments during the twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium. The research boundaries are then outlined, and the structure chosen for this study is clarified. Afterwards, I present the core concepts and the theoretical overview, which form the basis for this investigation. The research aim and objectives are posed next, and the research design is explained. Empirical and pragmatic implications of this enquiry are subsequently discussed, and the structure of the thesis is delineated.

1.2 Rationale

To provide the rationale for this investigation, I examine the statistical evidence of continued gender inequality in the UK and Russia, which adversely impacts professional women in both countries. I aim to demonstrate the considerable gender segregation at work and the supremacy of men in management, especially in top management positions in both countries.

1.2.1 Gender segregation

There are two recognised types of gender segregation at work, horizontal and vertical. Regarding the horizontal gender segregation, labour force participation between men and women varies in sectors of the economy, which is the basis for sectoral gender segregation (EGGE, 2009:30). There are proportionately more women in what is considered 'female' sectors. According to Devine *et al.* (2021:10), 20% of UK women are clustered in health and social services holding 78% of jobs in these sectors and 12% work in education accounting for 71% of jobs there. In Russia, during industrialisation Soviet women were entering 'male' industries, i.e. metallurgy (Katz, 2002). However, changes occurred throughout the 1990s. Soon after *perestroika* [1] 45% of Russian women congregated in consumer services,

[1] *Perestroika* - re-structuring (transl.), was popularised by Michael Gorbachev initiating Soviet Union reforms after he attained the Communist Party leadership in late 1980s (auth.)

healthcare and education (Ogloblin, 2005) and were squeezed out from banking and finance because these sectors became much better paid than in Soviet times (Klimova and Ross, 2012). Occupational gender segregation represents the inequality in the dispersion of men and women across occupations (EGGE, 2009:30). The International Labour Organisation reports that women are disproportionally represented in lower-paid and less-skilled occupations and men dominate management occupations (ILO, 2016:41). Women occupied 37% of managerial jobs in the UK in 2017 (Eurostat, 2019) and 42% in Russia in 2016 (Goscomstat, 2019). Vertical gender segregation refers to the scope of opportunities for both genders to reach the top of the career ladder in a specific occupation (EGGE, 2009:30). Women are disadvantaged in the progression to senior management. According to the ONS (2017), although a higher proportion of UK women occupied managerial positions (34.8%) than the average in the EU (33.5%), the percentage of female managers in the UK was still below that of the former Soviet republics of Latvia (45%) and Lithuania (41%). In comparison, Grant Thornton (2017) showed that Russia held one of the strongest positions in the world (47%) representing women in senior management. However, the representation of Russian women in senior management is weakening, i.e. in 2018 it was 41%, declining further to 34% by 2019 (Grant Thornton, 2019). Atencio and Pasadas (2015) connect gender segregation to gender role stereotypes, suggesting that shifting direction in gender equality policies might change people's system of beliefs, yet in their view the Russian government is not interested in such changes.

The above evaluation shows that there are similarities in records of sectoral gender segregation in Russia and the UK. However, the gender segregation in Russia appears to have recently deteriorated and changed structure. Women in both countries gather in service sectors and are disproportionally overrepresented in less-skilled and lower-paid occupations. Men dominate managerial occupations in both countries pointing at the existence of vertical segregation, which negatively affects women. In the UK women have made some progress in increasing representation in managerial roles. Until recently, in Russia the position of women in management remained stronger than the position of women in the UK. However, it has weakened since *perestroika* and continues to worsen.

1.2.2 Women in senior management and women on boards

Global representation of women in leadership shows optimistic dynamics, though the improvements are slow. Female representation in senior positions worldwide is growing since 2018, reaching 31% in 2021 (Grant Thornton, 2021). The number of companies with women in senior management worldwide is increasing. In Russia and in the UK, there were 91% and 75% of businesses respectively with at least one female senior manager (Grant Thornton, 2018). By 2021 this figure in the UK reached 93%, indicating how the Covid-19 pandemic heightened the value of management diversity (Grant Thornton, 2021). However, gender balance is still difficult to achieve, particularly in executive positions. A Deloitte report analysed 72,000 active directorships in 44 countries, claiming that women represented 15% of boards of directors worldwide (2017:3). A key debate for improving the proportion of women on boards is around application of quotas. The European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender quota as a

> *Positive measurement instrument aimed at accelerating the achievement of gender-balanced participation and representation by establishing a defined proportion (percentage) or number of places or seats to be filled by, or allocated to women and/or men, generally under certain rules or criteria.*
>
> (EIGE, 2019)

There is a distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' gender quotas. The 'hard quota' is mandatory, and non-complying companies might face penalties (Mateos *et al.*, 2019). Harvard Law School refers to the introduction of targets as non-binding voluntary 'soft law' methods (HLS, 2017). Deloitte (2017) reports that neither the UK nor Russia have legally bounded quotas for representing women on boards. While the 'soft law' measures were introduced in the UK, Russia does not have any mandate in this respect. Deloitte (2017:66) highlights that the issues of diversity on boards do not seem to be apparent in Russia and 'public debate does not appear to address them'. Women on Boards analysis (2020) claim that on average 12.4% of women are represented on boards of directors in Russia, compared to 36.6% in the UK. Kirsch (2018:356) reviewed 310 academic publications on gender quotas,

claiming that contemporary academia underestimates the impact of the board's gender representation on gender equality in organisations.

In the UK the Davies Report (2011:4) provided targets to reach 25% of women on FTSE 100 boards by 2015. Though these targets were achieved with a total average of 26.7% (HLS, 2017), Durbin (2016) emphasised that most female representatives there were non-executive directors. Although Lord Davies' report suggested that the voluntary tactic is effective (Kollew and Hickey, 2015), it allowed corporations to get away with engaging women in board membership nominally, leaving ultimate decisions powered by men. The Financial Times emphasised that female boards' statistics in the UK might not reflect the actual number of women on boards because a non-executive board representative can take two or more appointments within different firms (Cook, 2018). Nevertheless, the Davis Review (2015:7) target of reaching 33% of women on boards of directors in FTSE 350 by 2020 was successfully 'met, and exceeded' (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2021:10).

The above analysis suggests that unlike Russia, the UK has made efforts to visibly address gender inequalities at the highest level of corporate governance introducing voluntary quotas. However, the progress in the UK is slow as well as questionable as the representation of women in management shows moderate increase yet figures of women on boards reveal only nominal improvements in executive positions. Russia shows reasonably healthy figures regarding senior management representation but has demonstrated little interest in addressing issues of women on boards.

1.2.3 The gender pay gap

The gender pay gap is defined by the Office for National Statistics as the 'difference between men's and women's median hourly earning across all jobs', which stood in the UK at 17.9% in 2018, decreasing from 18.2% in the previous year (ONS, 2018:1). However, the difference between full- and part-time employment is not reflected in these statistics, yet almost 40% of women in the UK work part-time (Brynin, 2017:8). Concerning only full-time workforces, the UK gender pay-gap is 8.6% (ONS, 2018:2). The difference between the UK and Russia in full- and part-time employment is dramatic. In the UK 23.5% of all workers work part-time, while in

Russia only 3.5% of the workforce employed part-time (OECD, 2018:31). This significant difference could be due to the legacy of full-time employment of Soviet women prior to the collapse of the USSR (Ashwin and Iusupova, 2018). Comparison of the gender pay-gap in the UK and Russia is difficult because data is not broken down by full- and part-time hours for Russian indicators. However, deteriorating since *perestroika* the gender pay-gap of 24.5% in Russia stands higher than 20.6 in the UK (ILO, 2019:24[2]). Horizontal and vertical gender segregations are the key factors for the gender pay-gap in both countries. Women are overrepresented in poorer paid professions, and there are more men than women working as managers (ILO, 2016:49). As a result, gender pay-gaps in services, where women congregate, are 27% in Russia and 32% in the UK, in managerial occupations it is 28% and 32% respectively (ILO, 2016:50). Thus, the overall gender pay-gap is higher in Russia than in the UK, even though part-time work is much lower there. However, although gender segregation at work detrimentally impacts women's earnings in both countries, the gender pay-gap of women in services and managerial jobs stands higher in the UK than in Russia.

Thus, the rationale for this investigation is substantiated by gender discrimination in three respects, largely disadvantaging women in both, the UK and Russia. First, the statistics demonstrate that horizontal and vertical gender segregation affect careers of women. Women in both countries mainly congregate in service sectors of the economy and they are over-represented in less-skilled occupations, with men dominating managerial positions. Although in the UK women's representation in management shows slow improvements, in Russia the position of women is weakening. Second, profound inequality regarding women's access to leadership positions is evident. Although both countries demonstrate relatively healthy figures regarding senior management representation, the parity of women on boards remains low. While the UK makes nominal efforts to address gender inequalities on the highest level of management by introducing quotas, Russia is reluctant to tackle it. Third, women in both countries experience gender discrepancies in pay with women in the UK being 'penalised' for working part-time. Horizontal and vertical gender segregation adversely affects women's earnings in both countries.

[2] ILO (2019) Appendix V specifies using National Data Sources from 2015 for Russia and 2014 for the UK

1.3 Context

This research investigates the career experiences of female leaders in Russia and the UK and their attitudes towards barriers to their career progression. Further, the research seeks to explore whether these two national contexts present differences in the career experiences of female leaders. In this part I provide a context and overall background information regarding gender equality in the UK and in Russia to enable analysis of the environment in which women develop their careers. The milestones in the respective histories of gender equality, the legal frameworks and government policies affecting the prospects for female leadership are explored. This framework informs the study by establishing the environment in which female leaders work and build their careers, delineating the opportunities and challenges they face in both countries. I would like to say here that there are limited available Russian publications of empirical investigations on the issues addressed in this research. As such, most of the publications cited in this thesis are from a Western context.

The Soviet state nominally ensured involvement of women in the nation's affairs, though the main decision-maker was the Communist party (Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995). Still, it encouraged women's engagement in economic and political life at top levels, achieving 10% of women representation in national government by 1946 (Paxton *et al*., 2021). In comparison, women's representation in the UK Parliament did not surpass 5% until 1980, rising to 10% only in 1997 (Uberoi *et al.,* 2021:7). However, by 2018 the UK had a representation of women in parliament of 32%, whereas the share of Russian women was 16% (World Bank, 2019). Russian women's share fell dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet system while the UK experienced a steady growth during this period.

The revolution of 1917 changed the social composition of Russian society. The newly formed Soviet state declared gender equality in financial, societal and political areas as one of the central issues of their political agenda and aimed for eradicating illiteracy in the 1920s (Fedorova *et al.,* 2016). The 'equal pay for equal work' for all men and women was declared by Soviet legislation (Katz, 2002). The Soviets consolidated the female workforce for accomplishing industrialisation and collectivisation targets. While the plan was to organise both domestic help and

childcare, they only organised the latter through the establishment of government-subsidised kindergartens for working families. However, the programme of helping women with their domestic chores failed (Fedorova *et al.*, 2016), leaving full-time working Soviet women being fully responsible for domestic work. In the 1930s Stalin announced the closure of 'the women question', referring to gender equality being achieved (Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995). This was far from the truth, especially in view of apparent pay-gap and gender segregation at work (Ogloblin, 2005). Although with the arrival of *perestroika* in the late 1980s people in Russia were exposed to different models of domestic life structures, the traditional gender ideology prevailed with only 'a gradual increase in egalitarianism' (Ashwin and Isupova, 2018:451). Fedorova *et al.* (2016) highlight that *perestroika* presented Russian women with access to feminist ideas. However, Metcalfe and Afanassieva (2005) assert that whereas Soviet women were encouraged to progress to science and engineering careers, *perestroika* redirected them towards domestic roles, resulting in financial dependence on men. Skorniakova *et al.* (2020) even allege that the role of a housewife in Russia has recently been glamorised.

In the UK the feminists' activities resulted in significant legislation concerning gender equality during the last century. In 1918 women over 30, and in 1928 all women were granted the right to vote (UK Parliament, 2022). Furthermore, 1950s reforms established that female civil servants and teachers be paid wages equal to men (UK Parliament, 1952:1857); in 1970 The Equal Pay Act extended these conditions to all occupations in the UK (UK Legislation, 1970). However, one of the most significant legislations of the 20th century concerning gender equality in the UK, was the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, prohibiting discrimination against women in the workplace, in training and in education (UK Legislation, 1975). This was replaced by the Equality Act in 2010, accentuating greater responsibilities to ensure equality in organisations and in wider society (UK Legislation, 2010). The Sex Discrimination Code of Practice was implemented in 2007 (UK Legislation, 2007). Additionally, under the Equality Act Regulation (2017), companies with 250 employees and above are required to publicly disclose information about the pay-gap (Equal Pay, 2019). These measures were taken in recognition of the discrimination against women in their earning capacity, resulting from horizontal and vertical segregation, issues related to work-home balance and the under-valuing of women's education (UK Parliament, 2019).

A liberal approach to gender parity has been recognised as prevailing in the UK government's policies and legislation (Webb, 1997), whereas the underpinning philosophy of the Bolshevik's Revolution stems from Marxism (Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995). Jewson and Mason (1986:315) suggest that the radical approach to gender parity has 'derived from ideologies such as Marxism'. The Bolshevik revolution, reinforced by this ideology, aimed to transform the gender equality landscape of Soviet Russia. However, Racioppi and O'Sullivan (1995) argue that despite an ideological commitment to gender equality, these changes favoured Soviet workers, not Soviet women, expanding the labour market to enable mass production, not equality. Fedorova *et al.* (2016) claim that from 2000 onwards there was a decline in the government's interest in gender-related discussions, including women's participation in decision-making; these are now at the periphery of state priorities. Skornikova *et al.* (2020) assert that although by accepting the Action for Women Plan[3], Russia officially committed to the efforts of the international community for women's rights, the implementation is dubious. Many social institutes supporting gender equality in the past, have been abolished. They emphasise that the gender equality rhetoric in Russia has destructive undertones, and that the general public perceives it as a 'radical movement of women against men' (2020:2).

Thus, the UK has taken a gradual and cautious approach to gender equality policies; Russia experienced dramatic changes first brought by the Revolution in 1917 and then by *perestroika* of late 1980s. The Revolution of 1917 brought active involvement of government in gender equality issues. However, these initiatives were mainly in support of industrialisation of the country rather than the liberation of women. Throughout Soviet history women had a double burden of full-time responsibilities in the professional sphere and at home. With the arrival of *perestroika,* the Russian government demonstrated a declining interest in gender equality resolutions, leaving gender-related topics at the fringes of their concern. In comparison, the progress towards gender equality in the UK was slow. Nevertheless, several measures against discrimination of women at work were implemented throughout the second

[3] National Action for Women 2017-22 aims to improve women's involvement in political and social life in Russian Federation (order 8.03.17)

part of the last century. Although in the new millennium the UK government has acknowledged the disadvantaged position of women (UK Parliament, 2019), changes seem to be exceptionally slow. These legacies shape the environment in which female leadership is formed and develops in both the UK and Russia.

1.4 Research boundaries

This research studies female leadership in private sector organisations. Thus, not-for-profit and government organisations, such as education or healthcare establishments (largely represented by women), were not considered for this study. This is because such organisations might present different professional environments for career development as their objectives and structures often differ from commercial settings. Moreover, there is relatively better gender parity in the public rather than private sector (World Bank, 2021). Although there is positive dynamic for women's representation in the parliaments in both countries, in 2020 their shares were 34% in the UK and 16% in Russia (World Bank, 2022). Yet, women's share in CEO positions of FTSE100 and FTSE250 has stagnated since 2016 in the UK (Statista, 2021a) and in Russia there is an exceptionally low share of women CEOs (around 12%) in large and medium firms (Statista, 2021b).

This study explores the experiences of female leaders from the former Soviet Union. Only women from Russian and former Soviet Union heritage who during the data collection period were residing and working in the UK or Russia have been invited to participate in this research. Therefore, regarding the UK participants, women affiliated with the first generation of the third wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union (since the late 1980s) were asked to participate. It was thought that women of Russian or former Soviet Union heritage but of an earlier relocation status might have had cultural values that are far too different, especially as far as the egalitarian perspectives are concerned. I explain how the third wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union has been constituted in Chapter Three.

Furthermore, referring to Russia as a country, the thesis recognises the official status of the Russian Federation, comprising a composite of different cultural and federal entities. These include multiple federal republics, such as Bashkortostan,

Tatarstan and others. Thus, there might be various cultures in both the UK and in Russia. The thesis refers to Russian culture in a general sense as inclusive and encompassing of the overall national culture in a similar way as when referring to the UK culture. Likewise, apart from England, the United Kingdom also includes Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. This study is focused on the largest geographical entities in both countries, England in the UK and Russian Central Federal District in Russian Federation, specifically London and Moscow respectively.

Moreover, the thesis recognises the problematics associated with the interchangeable use of the terms *female* and *woman* (Waldman, 2016). The former is normally seen as a biological category and the latter a socio-cultural construct (see West and Zimmerman, 1987). Contemporary authors highlighted a controversial use of 'female' as a noun, bringing attention to a more accurate lexis (Yakovlev, 2019). The main reason behind this is that the term 'female' by denoting a purely biological status is often charged with a derogative power, diminishing and restricting the meaning of 'woman' (Norris, 2019). Recognising equal social positions of women and men beyond their biological functions, the thesis uses *female* as an adjective when referring to professional standings of women, such as 'female leaders' or 'female engineers', etc. In some instances, substantive 'female' is used in inverted commas to accentuate the overtone of a critique. In other cases, the constructs *women* or *woman* are used as nouns in contrast with *men* or *man*.

The thesis also distinguishes between terminologies of leaders and managers. Managers are associated with a particular job role or position within the organisation. Leaders are recognised beyond titles and appreciated for their societal position, especially regarding accountabilities for people they lead. The definition of leadership adopted for this study is discussed further in this chapter.

Finally, the phenomenological nature of this investigation entails a collection of personal and professional experiences via the stories told by the participants. When the female leaders speak, their voices are presented through quotations. However, I take responsibility for the interpretations offered by this study. I explain the details of how the stories are collected and analysed in Chapter Four.

1.5 Research framework

The experiences of female leaders in this research were studied by examining their career paths. The Systems Theory Framework (STF) proposed by Patton and McMahon (2014) forms a fundamental structure for the thesis. This framework was chosen because it accounts for the intricacies of modern career progress, integrating a systems' thinking approach to enable reflections on how careers evolve (McMahon and Patton, 2018). STF contemplates that a plethora of interrelated factors on three levels influences the career course of an individual as presented in Figure 1. The personal level of influences, including gender and personal aspirations of individuals, is at the core of the overall stimuli. The next level shows structural forces on a social level, including influences in domestic and organisational settings. Finally, the level of wider socio-environmental forces integrates the gravity of the national context, including historic developments, political changes, and labour market participation (Patton and McMahon, 2014). Consequently, the national context impacts organisational practices, predetermining female leaders' personal circumstances. Hence, female leaders' career paths in both Russia and the UK are studied in view of these levels of impetuses.

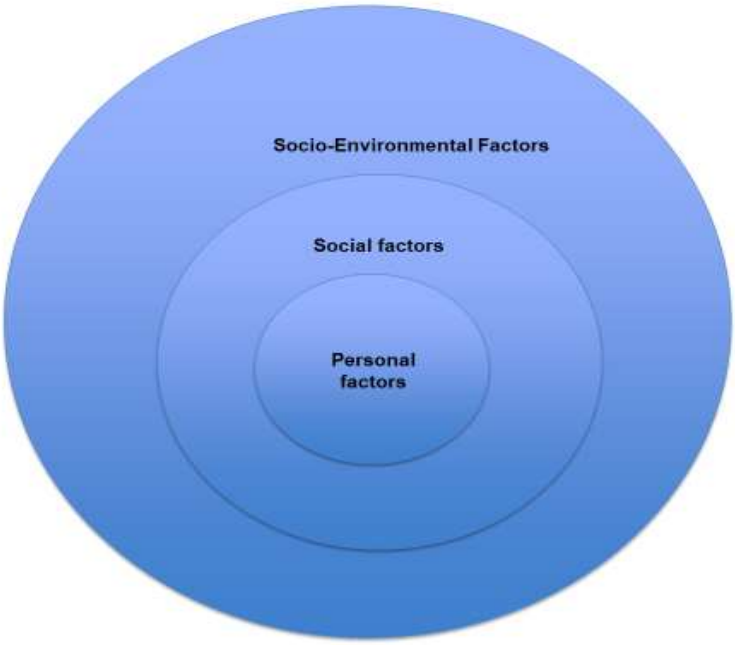

Figure 1: Levels of career progression influences (Adopted from McMahon and Patton, 2018)

The significance of the Systems Theory Framework for this research is that on the one hand, it places an individual in the very centre, recognising the potential of each person for forming their own sense of a career. At the same time, it recognises the importance of the context in the decision-making process for this person's career development. The factors outlined above, influence the life experiences of female leaders, and shape the trajectory of their progression in both Russia and the UK. This research critically analyses the experiences of female leaders along their career paths in both countries to elucidate the differences and similarities. STF enables this study to appreciate the centrality of a woman as an individual, faced with interrelated multifaceted external influences along her career path.

1.6 Theoretical overview

Female leadership is a complex phenomenon that touches on themes of feminism, gender, culture, leadership, and many others. Thus, the career development of female leaders is viewed through the light of the main theories and concepts derived from feminist studies as well as social sciences regarding leadership and culture.

The early researchers on career development, starting from trait and factor theory (Parsons, 1909), recognised career development as a match between personal characteristics of an individual and job prerequisites. Nevertheless, the literature distinguishes the complexity of an individual acting upon the changing nature of the modern environment (Ke-Jia *et al.*, 2011). Nowadays people swap jobs, companies, and economic sectors (Silver and Jansen, 2017). There are still no adequate considerations given to careers of women, especially in view of the continuous misalliance between their domestic and organisational demands (Rath *et al.,* 2019).

Feminist studies are a source of inspiration and guidance for this research. Feminist theories were developed in response to social problems arising at various times in history. Early liberal feminists addressed the basic rights of women to vote and to be educated; the radical feminists fought for eliminating the system of overall male domination, including access to well-paid jobs and professions (Epure, 2014). The model of equality established by Jewson and Mason (1986) explains that if liberal instruments for achieving equality are driven by equal procedures for all, the radical

tactics focus on attaining equal results. However, it is still difficult for people to distinguish between the two stances (Conley and Page, 2017). Lately, postmodern feminists focus on race, ethnicity, and other implications for women, believing that the traditional femininity and masculinity concepts are fluid (Nussbaum, 2001).

Furthermore, gender essentialists view gender simply as an essential characteristic fixed by nature and explain social disparities between men and women by biological differences. They claim that male and female hormones are responsible for the behaviour of women and men in all areas of life (Goldberg, 2008) and traditional gender characteristics of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' complement each other in social settings. Thus, by expecting gender disparities at work, effective leaders might turn 'masculinity' and 'femininity' into opportunities (Kurger, 2008). Recognising gender as a social construct, this thesis strongly opposes the essentialist outlook.

West and Zimmerman (1987) assert that people learn about their gender in early years from existing 'male' or 'female' behaviour. Thus, the gender disparities in the behaviour of women and men are deep-rooted in gender roles set by the society, controlling the performance of an individual in adulthood and influencing people's attitude to work (Eagly, 1987). The stereotypes about women being more 'communal' than men, and men being more 'self-directed' than women persist in the twenty-first century (Eagly *et al.,* 2020). Women are expected to prioritise home, while men commit to work. The domestic division of labour is linked to the concept of work-home balance, a ratio between personal and professional activities of an individual (Wada *et al.,* 2010). A greater number of men rather than women in leadership is linked to a higher home accountability of women and to mothers' extended time-out from work (Christofides *et al.*, 2013). However, greater access of women to leadership positions might alter the gender division in domestic labour as the bargaining power of women grows with the rise in their salaries (McGinn and Oh, 2017). This research endeavoured to investigate how female leaders perceive the issues of work-home balance and how they tackle it.

Acker (1990; 2009) introduced a theory of gendered organisations, addressing the traditional organisational design. The fundamental problem lies in organisational structures, which are reinforced by gender stereotypes, creating preferable

conditions for men and disadvantaging women. Acker argues that an abstract job is designed for a male worker and the organisational hierarchies disadvantage women because management is regarded as a male domain (Acker, 2009). These theories help the understanding of current organisational practices affecting female leaders' career paths in Russia and the UK. This study exposes how established policies and procedures of those organisations where female leaders work, affect their chances for career accomplishment.

Women in gendered organisations face career progression obstacles, especially in environments dominated by men (Goodman *et al.,* 2003). The glass ceiling metaphor (Hymowitz and Schelhardt, 1986) among others symbolises the hidden barriers that female leaders face in professional settings for succeeding to the highest leadership positions. For example, women must demonstrate a higher level of competences than men to attain leadership positions (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). Their male managers often fail to recognise their professional skills (Scholten and Witmer, 2017). This research reveals how the glass ceiling and other categories of barriers to female leaders' career progression shape professional experiences of female leaders in both countries.

Finally, the literature on cultural and national aspects conceptualises the dimensions of wider socio-environmental impacts on the female leaders' career progression. The thesis accepts definitions of culture and leadership provided by House *et al.* (2004) in their study of Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE). Leadership is recognised as **'**the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members' (House *et al.,* 2004:15)**.** Culture is seen as a complex amalgam of aspects such as 'commonly experienced language, ideological belief systems, ethnic heritage and history' (House *et al.*, 2004:16). Culture affects professional qualities of people, including leadership. Cultural variations and attitudes towards female leaders are explained through cultural differences. Specific attention is given to the cultural dimension of gender egalitarianism, which is connected to the strength of gender stereotypes and influence people's perceptions (Lyness and Judisch, 2014). The thesis recognises that the experiences of women from the former USSR in the UK and in Russia might

differ. The issues of the Russian diaspora (Isurin, 2011) are considered to better appreciate the cultural complexities lived by women. The literature on intersection (Crenshaw, 1989) assists the analysis of gender and culture, affecting choices of women from the former Soviet Union working in the UK. The model of stereotyping through associated and intersectional categories (MOSAIC) by Hall *et al.* (2019) is applied to analyse the stereotypes created by the intersection of gender and culture to indicate possible variations. Figure 2 shows how key theoretical framings fit within the Systems Theory Framework.

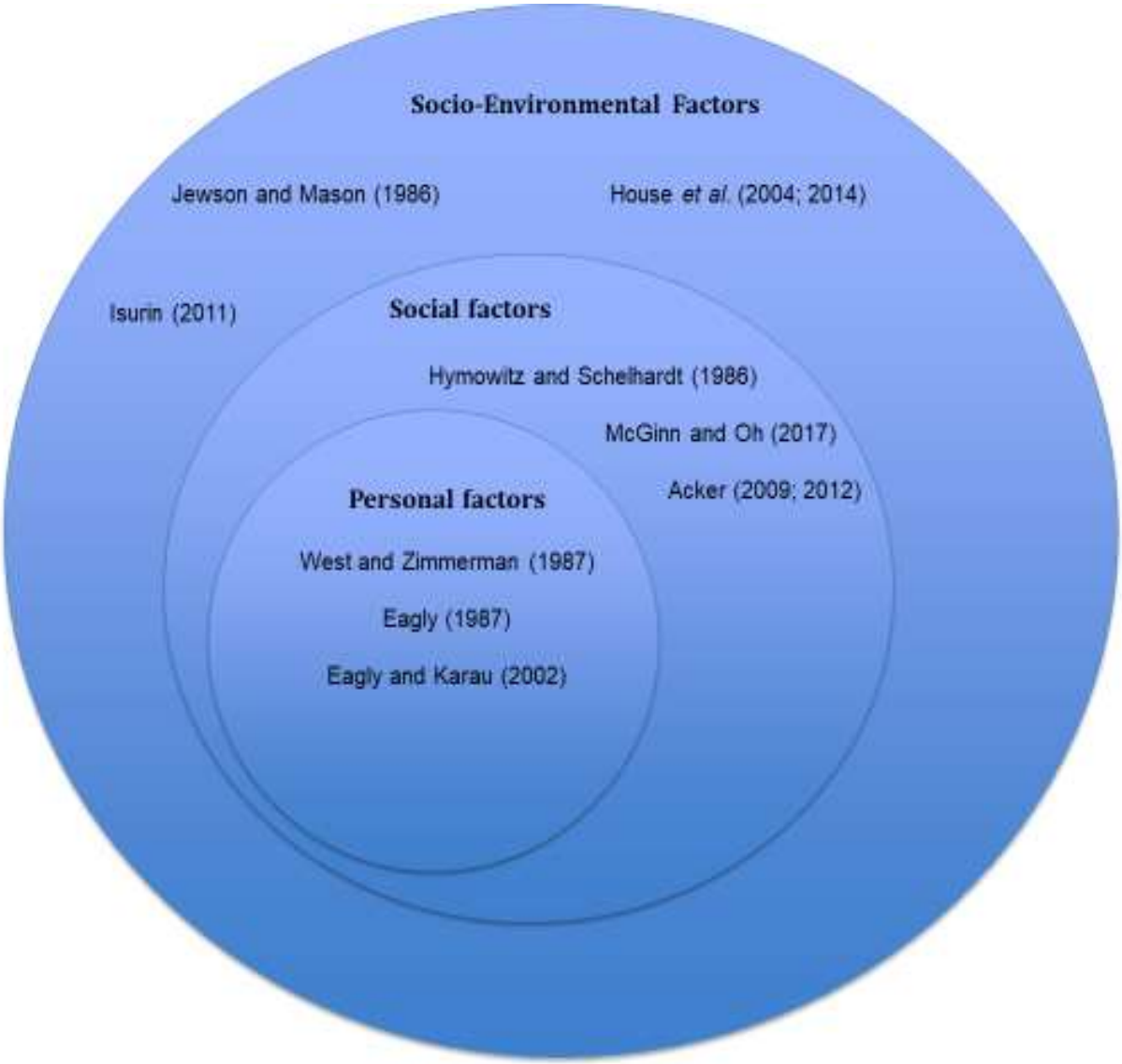

Fig 2: Systems theory framework and key theoretical framings

Thus, the main concepts and issues regarding feminist values, leadership and culture guide this investigation towards evaluation of the experiences of women with a former Soviet background, who now reside in Russia and the UK. This research proposes a holistic in-depth investigation of female leaders' experiences by looking at the life stories and career trajectories of those women who have managed to achieve professional success. The conceptual diagram (Fig. 3) shows how interrelated key factors within the Systems Theory Framework impact female leaders career experiences.

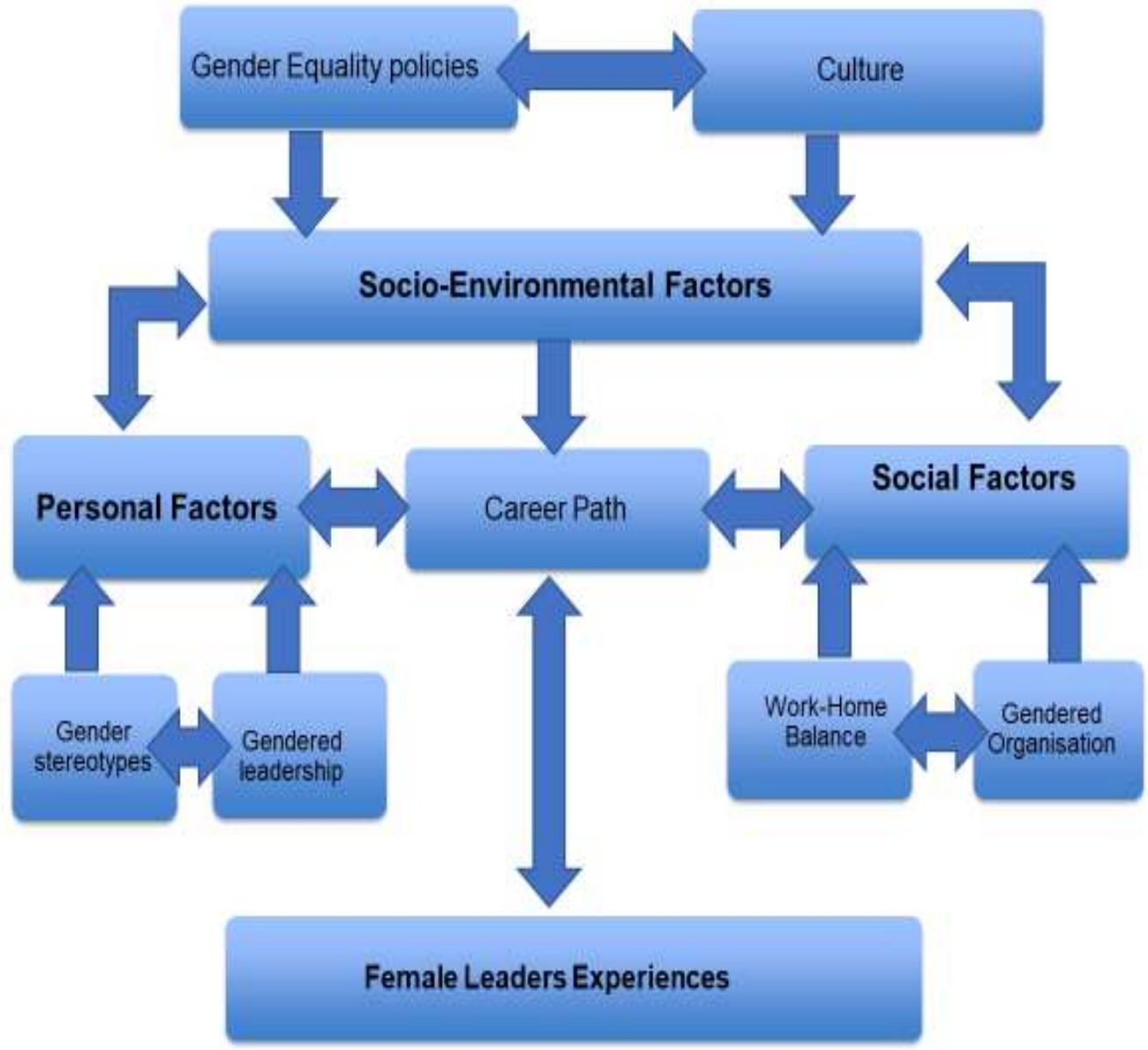

Fig. 3 Conceptual diagram

1.7 Research Aim, Questions and Objectives

The thesis aims to:

Critically explore the factors influencing the career experiences of female leaders with a former Soviet Union background working in private sector organisations in Russia and the UK.

The thesis seeks to address two main Research Questions:

What are the career experiences of female leaders from the former Soviet Union working in private sector organisations in Russia and the UK?

How can any contrasts in the career experiences of the female leaders from the former Soviet Union, now working in the UK and Russia, be explained?

The Research Objectives are therefore to:

Critically evaluate the career paths of female leaders from the former Soviet Union working in the business environment in the UK and Russia and explore the factors that influence their career progression in both countries.

Examine the attitudes of female leaders from the former Soviet Union in Russian and UK organisations towards barriers to their career progression.

1.8 Research design

This research is a comparative study designed to explore the differences and similarities of female leaders' experiences along their career paths in Russia and the UK. The comparisons aim to be exploratory in nature and the study focuses on both countries. Qualitative methods are used in this phenomenological study, utilising twenty in-depth interviews for better understanding of the female leaders' experiences and possible obstacles to their professional success.

The phenomenological approach enables an exploration of the female leaders' lived experiences and how they make sense of these experiences. Earlier feminist researchers were criticised for comparisons of men and women, especially regarding women's struggles compared to men's (Gordon, 1975) and for implying that fairness could be achieved if women act as men (Nussbaum, 2001). In addition, there was a criticism of the comparative studies' tradition for using positivistic approaches aimed at determining causations and testing theories (Rönnblom, 2005). This phenomenological study aims at investigating female leaders' career experiences in two different national contexts. Such an approach enables in-depth knowledge of the intricacies of female leaders' experiences along their career path in the UK and Russia. So, my approach in this thesis is unconventional as I examine the career experiences of women who are comparatively equal in attained professional success and recognition, and are from similar cultural backgrounds, but who are exposed to two different national environments.

1.9 Chapter conclusion

Influenced by phenomenology, this research provides a new approach in revisiting the subject of gender inequalities. Focusing on the career experiences of women brought up in the former Soviet Union who now live and build their careers in the UK and Russia, this research analyses the factors that influence these experiences and the women's attitude towards their career development. The women's career experiences are analysed following the Systems Theory Framework, which demonstrates the centrality of women as individuals though with considerations of the influence of structural societal forces. Feminist theories underpin the academic foundation for this research. The literature also examines cultural perspectives on gender issues. The theme of female leadership is discussed with explicit considerations to the problems that female leaders experience along their career path. The thesis moves away from the outdated comparisons of men versus women in the feminist academic tradition and offers instead a method of evaluating career experiences of women from a similar cultural background exposed to different national contexts. The thesis considers the unbalanced attention to a quantitative approach in recent comparative scholarship and takes a qualitative course. The thesis is structured in the order outlined below.

In the current Chapter One I have introduced the main considerations for this study, provided statistical justifications for the rationale of this investigation, and evaluated the background for the context of this study. I have also presented the conceptual framework that underpins this investigation. The subsequent two chapters provide the theoretical framings for this research, reviewing the literature related to the research objectives. Specifically, Chapter Two examines the academic deliberations on personal and social factors, including how careers are influenced by gender, personal beliefs and structural factors. This is followed by Chapter Three, which illustrates the current debate around wider socio-environmental influences on career progression. In this chapter feminist theories and models of equality are examined, considerations to cultural issues are given with particular interest to the intersectional aspect of culture and gender. Then Chapter Four explicates the fundamental thoughts around research methodology and methods, elucidating on philosophic views and practical considerations for the chosen research methods. This chapter explains how I collected, analysed and evaluated the narratives. Thoughts on the integrity and rigour of this research constitute a noteworthy part of this chapter.

In the successive three chapters I present the discussions on the findings of this study, organising these into different levels according to the overarching Systems Theory Framework (Figure 1). In these three chapters I present the most significant storylines supported by the quotations, analysis, and interpretations. Chapter Five begins these discussions, examining the personal level of influences for the direction of women's careers in the UK and Russia. Then, in Chapter Six I investigate the structural powers of the organisational and the domestic levels, which influence the career experiences of women in the two countries. Finally, Chapter Seven analyses how the career attainments of women are shaped by the gravity of national discourse and gender equality rhetoric in both the UK and Russia. To conclude the thesis, Chapter Eight brings together a succinct culmination of the main arguments of this investigation. Structured around the overarching research objectives, this chapter also acknowledges the limitations of this exploration and outlines the directions for future research.

Chapter Two Theoretical framings I: Personal and socio-structural factors influencing women's careers

2.1 Chapter introduction

The next two chapters examine how the literature conceptualises and explains the barriers to female leaders' career development to comprehend the slow progress in achieving equal representation in leadership. Thus, in this chapter the plethora of possible influences for the female leaders' career path in professional fields, is evaluated focusing on personal and structural factors. The conceptual structure of this study is built around the Systems Theory Framework (STF) by Patton and McMahon (2014). This framework contemplates that the career path is influenced by a combination of interrelated factors within three levels. These include personal attributes, interface with social groups and wider environmental-societal factors, including historical and political trends.

This chapter considers the personal and social level of influences (McMahon and Patton, 2018), such as the personal traits of female leaders, especially those related to forming personal beliefs and preferences. Firstly, the literature on the career path is considered. Gender is recognised as being a social construction (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Specific attention is given to the issues of gender stereotypes, how they influence aspects of the lives of women and the role they play in forming barriers to female professional success. The literature reflects on societal role theory (Eagly, 1987) in forming stereotypical beliefs. Preference theory associated with the work of Hakim (2000) is critiqued on the basis that the prevailing domestic division of labour defines women's choices, while gender role stereotypes play an imperative part in creating gender inequalities. Moreover, role congruity theory by Eagly and Karau (2002) expounds how prejudices against female leaders are formed.

Then, the literature concerning domestic division of labour outlines and evaluates the difficulties presented for women to attain professional recognition. Furthermore, the theory of gendered organisations by Acker (1990; 2009) elucidates how inequalities are produced through daily organisational activities. The concept of gendered organisations explains challenges that women face in the work environment as

traditional organisations are designed for men (Acker, 2009). Subsequently, the main barriers to female leaders' professional lives are comprehended through metaphors such as glass ceiling (Hymowitz and Schelhardt, 1986), glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam, 2007) and labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007). The chapter closes by drawing conclusions around personal and socio-structural issues addressed in this section.

2.2 Career path

The career path is seen as a pattern of professional progression in the history of an individual's employment, which illustrates 'the succession of occupational jobs' (Joseph *et al.,* 2012:429). Ginzberg *et al.* (1951) studied the professional choices of men in the United States and introduced the career development concept as a journey happening throughout a lifetime. This concept captures 'the dynamic and changing nature of career' (Lent and Brown, 2013:9). The conventional career path occurs in an organisation, entailing logical steps along advancement in payment and authority (Super,1957). Early studies of the career path include the trait and factor theory (Parsons, 1909), suggesting that the occupational choice is essentially a match between a job and an individual. As such, 'traits' refer to the personal qualities of an individual, 'factor' refers to the requirements for effective job attainment and the theory denotes 'the assessment of the person and the job' (Sharf, 2016:25). Traditionally the foremost important choice for the professional career was around determining the 'right job' of an individual 'for life' (Sarchielli, 2017:138). The trait and factor regard the career selection process as a cognitive practice (Zunker, 2016).

There are several limitations to the trait and factor career development theory. It implies that 'there is a single career goal for all' (Zunker, 2016:23), as well as inadequate consideration being given to the context and changes over time, whereas traits related to people's beliefs and perceptions are not static. Besides, it is questionable whether all people apply logic and make rational career choices in the same way. For instance, Kidd (2008) advocates that emotions in career development cannot be underestimated. Blustain (2013:5) criticised this theory for inattentiveness to the 'impact of external barriers', yet Brimrose and Hearne (2012:343) highlight the value of career aspirations in resilience to barriers. The significant limitation of the early career development attributed to the lack of consideration to the understanding

of women's experiences. Betz (2002) asserts that the basic presumption about career progress, where job and career are seen as central to people's existence, does not depict the reality in which many women live. She questions whether it is reasonable to pair individual qualities and the type of occupation as well as whether the vertical career advancement towards higher accountabilities is at all logical. In reality, the career of women compared to men is easily interrupted by domestic obligations (Betz, 2002).

Further evaluation of the trait and factor theory reveals that it regards the career choice as an instant event, whereas contemporary life experiences present a more complex outlook. Arthur (1994) introduced a concept of a boundary-less career, emphasising a possibility of career movements between different organisations. Thus, instead of moving along a promotional hierarchy within one company, people often change companies for career progression. Moreover, Silver and Jansen (2017) reveal that modern leaders switch between organizations and occupations, moving between private, public and voluntary sectors. Their interviewees exposed that such cross-sector experience enabled quicker career advancement and brought higher personal satisfaction to individuals. These researchers argue that such multi-sector experience benefits both the individual leaders themselves and the organisations where they work. Recognising the transformative nature of career context, Hall (2002) introduced the concept of protean career with focus not on organisations, but on individuals, who navigate the course of their careers. The career is seen as a process of life-long development, which is self-directed and relational. Examining both, boundaryless and protean careers, Greenhaus *et al.* (2008:283) see them as unconventional and superseding the 'traditional organisational career'.

Savickas (2005) proposed career construction theory from the assertion that people respond to the construction of the reality, leading to a person building a career from modelling life practises. However, the assumption here is that people do not have the ability to construct the reality. Then, Ke-Jia *et al.* (2010) introduced a theory of career action, accepting the importance of an individual's daily practices and planned goal-oriented action consequential of external environment. Nevertheless, Sarchielli (2017:138) believes that since the traditional linear career attitude right 'job for life' does not work in the current environment, the career path development often

transforms into successions of obsolete work experiences. So, practitioners in career coaching, such as Mathews' question whether the use of theory for career planning is relevant in the contemporary world. Addressing the intricacies around the nature of individuals involved in this process and the environment in which people build their careers in modern times, they support the view of 'career adaptability' (2017:334). Accordingly, the focus of career development has moved from choosing the 'right job' towards encouraging individuals to act in changing environments, with specific considerations to the individual (Amudson *et al.*, 2002). This is usually determined by the individuals' aspirations and ambitions (Briscoe and Hall, 2006).

Further evaluation of the theoretical views in respect to the career development reveals that it regards career choice as homogeneous experiences accessible by all. The key criticism of the career conceptions is that it is mainly built around a Western middle-class premise (Watson, 2008), primarily for application by males (McMahon *et al.*, 2014). Zytovsky (1969:662) called for recognition of individual women, emphasising that 'progress in a career for women …is apt to be handicapped, compared to men by the fact that it suffers interruption with the birth of each child'. This argument made fifty years ago is still valid. The research in different national and organisational contexts indicates that even if women change organisations, industries and occupations within their career span, it is likely to be primarily for their family related reasons, not for their career advancement (Blair-Loy, 1999; Huang and Sverke, 2007; Wichert, 2011). Huang and Sverke (2007) studied career spans of women in Sweden and determine that women either adapt to the traditional hierarchical career mobility in their organisation or move to another organisation purely for domestic motives. Evaluating careers of more than 50 executive women in the finance sector, Blair-Loy (1999) found variations in how women progress in their career. In large firms they move up the hierarchical career ladder, whereas in small and medium organisations they move between industries and occupations. Still, as women advance towards the highest level in the organisational hierarchy, their careers become more regimented, they find it impossible to work part-time or to have a career break. If they do, they feel their career progression has little chance to recuperate (Blair-Loy,1999). It is difficult for women to manage numerous responsibilities in building successful careers. Analysing publications about male and female career advancements, Eagly and Carli (2007) claim that gender disparity is

equally strong at each phase of the female leaders' career. Wichert (2011) advocates that female leaders feel being able to commit themselves solely to their work only when they approach the retirement age.

Patton and McMahon (2014), offer a systems theory framework (STF), which accounts for the complexities of career journeys and for the diversity of the contemporary society. STF recognises that careers in the new millennium seem to be elastic and enable multi-career trajectories. The emphasis is on the working environment of the 21st century, when people are making career choices many times throughout their lifespan. The essence of this model is around the 'wholeness and interrelationship of parts within a whole' (Patton and McMahon, 2014:24) with consideration to the context around the decision-making process. This framework also appreciates the input from earlier theories of career development, accepting that in interconnected systems the influences might change over a period of time and circumstances. Consequently, on a personal level the framework acknowledges gender, personality, people's interests and viewpoints. The social context embraces family, education establishments as well as a workplace of an individual. Socio-environmental factors account for historic developments, political changes and labour market participation (Patton and McMahon, 2014).

McMahon and Patton (2018) emphasise that they do not regard STF as a new model, but rather as an integrative meta-theoretical framework. The important consideration for the current study is that STF allows a broader multi-disciplinary attitude. This research contemplates contribution from different perspectives, including gender theories and cultural studies. The systems theory framework forms an overarching structure for this investigation for it appreciates preceding career theories and places an individual, who is building a career, at the very centre (McMahon and Patton, 2018). This framework enables this research to appreciate the centrality of a woman as an individual yet recognising the plethora of external interrelated influences that women face along their career path.

Thus, the factors influencing career development of female leaders and the possible barriers to their career progression are studied on three levels suggested by the STF. The discussion starts from analysis of personal influences, including gender

characteristics, personal beliefs and personal preferences. Furthermore, the structural issues regarding work-home balance are considered, followed by discussion around structures of modern organisations and leadership.

2.3 Personal factors

The thesis evaluates how self-fulfilment and social roles might be related to gender. Therefore, issues of gender and gender characteristics, which affect female leaders' career paths are examined next.

2.3.1 Gender and gender characteristics

The iconic work 'Doing gender' by West and Zimmerman (1987) conceptualised gender as a social construction. These authors demonstrate how people learn about appropriate gender behaviour very early in their lives. Then throughout their lifespan individuals largely reproduce existing 'male' or 'female' performance patterns. Certain characteristics are ascribed according to gender and then define social roles (Kelly *et al.,* 1993). In particular, women are associated with 'feminine' and 'communal' qualities of 'passive' and 'soft-spoken', whereas men are labelled by characteristics of 'masculinity' referring to their 'agency' being 'aggressive' and 'dominant'. Those men and women who are not compliant to these standards are met with social disapproval (Kelly *et al.*, 1993:23) and 'individuals may be called to account' with condemnation from society (West and Zimmerman, 1987:146). These characteristics became descriptors of masculinity and femininity (Pryzgoda and Chrisler, 2000). The recent US general polls meta-analysis by Eagly *et al.* (2020) demonstrates that compared to men, women are still regarded as more 'communal' and compared to women, men are seen as more 'agent'.

However, there is a view that gender is simply an essential characteristic fixed by nature rather than an outcome of replicated behaviour established from early childhood. Gender essentialists claim that the two genders profoundly differ because of biological differences, justifying ongoing societal disparities among women and men. For instance, Goldberg (2008) argues that male and female hormones are responsible for gender variances in how men and women behave in all spheres of

life. The second essentialist point of view maintains that the combination of opposing gender characteristics enhances each other, resulting in mutual understanding and happiness at home and at work. As such, Kurger (2008) advocates that if leaders in educational establishments accept gender disparities, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' might be turned into opportunities for more effective management. Nonetheless, Crompton and Lyonette (2005) have undertaken an extensive quantitative cross-national study and claim that gender is neither 'natural' nor underwrites the harmony between the two sexes in social spheres. Likewise, there is a strong opposition to the essentialist outlook in the wider academic community. West and Zimmerman assert that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' traits to be redeployed from 'natural essential properties of individuals' to 'social properties of a system of relationships' (2009:114).

The next part of this chapter endeavours to comprehend how people's personal beliefs are formed. This study recognises that gender stereotypes present one of the major obstacles for women's progression to management positions. Gender role theory (Eagly, 1987) is fundamental for understanding the reasons behind persistence of discriminatory practices against women at work and at home. This research examines how social descriptions of gender role stereotypes influence the perceptions of choices for female leaders.

2.3.2 Personal beliefs and societal gender role stereotypes

Stereotypes are defined as a construction of individual views and attitudes towards particular categories of people. They are attributed to 'a cognitive activity, related to thinking, learning and remembering distinctions among groups of people' (Powel, 2018:7). Eagly (1987) examined how societal pressures influence an individual and explains that societal gender roles predetermine the behaviour of men and women. Her meta-analysis demonstrates that societal gender roles promulgate variance in the behaviour of people. By integrating statistical analysis and theorising, she developed societal role theory, proposing that gender disparities are an outcome of societal gender roles, which control the performance of an individual in adulthood. Eagly (1987:9) argues that although gender roles may be connected to 'childhood socialisation pressures or biological predispositions', the effect of societal gender

roles has significantly greater impact on behaviour of men and women than their 'prior socialization or biology'. The important consideration for this research is that societal gender roles of adults determine their gender differences, generating stereotypical behaviour and influencing people's attitude to work. Eagly (1987) maintains that women and men tend to hold jobs in accordance to societal stereotypical beliefs. Eagly *et al.* (2020) demonstrate that the stereotypical beliefs have not diminished but strengthened in the last 73 years. People still see women as having more 'female' traits related to 'communal' qualities than men; and men having more 'masculine' attitudes than women, connected to 'self-assurance'.

Developed towards the end of the last century, the social role theory (Eagly, 1987) has several limitations. Ridgeway (1997) points out that the theory lacks specifics and details, upholding that generally the behaviour of women is more communal than self-assured, underestimating the importance of context. Variations in stereotypes are conceivable depending on the cognitive background of an individual and the social settings. Furthermore, in a work environment other social role may interfere with gender roles, such as in interactions between a manager and a subordinate (Ridgeway, 1997). Correspondingly, the personal values and dispositions of each individual involved in a communication might affect an outcome of the interaction. For instance, vigilance and awareness might alter typical gender behaviour (Sczensny and Kuhnen, 2004). In addition, the cultural distinctions are also important. For example, Guimond (2008) emphasised the cultural variations in gender role disparities between North Americans, Europeans, Asians and Africans. Moreover, changes over time might occur affecting gender stereotypes. Ebert *et al.* (2014) report about the transformation of gender roles in Germany. Also, in light of current academic developments, the theory does not consider the issues of the intersection between gender, race, ethnicity and other factors. Besides, Rucker *et al.* (2018) believe that in addition to gender subordination, the acuity of perceived benefits may affect the behaviour of individuals.

Nevertheless, gender scholars mostly agree that there is a correlation between gender roles and occupational stereotypes, influencing people's views that specific jobs are more appropriate for men or women. People tend to prefer occupations compatible to their gender (Gadassi and Gati, 2009). For example, ICT occupations

are seen as ‘masculine’ by both, young men and women (Ginerva and Nota, 2017). Heilman (2012) asserts that stereotypes about characteristics and roles assigned to men and women encourage gender bias at work. The appropriate appearance of men and women at work might be a contributing factor. Sotak *et al.* (2021) applied gender role theory to examine the influence of context on gender. They find that irrespective to the type of business, the appropriate appearance is an important consideration for perceptions. Cundiff and Vescio (2016) presented a view that those who approve gender stereotypes would recognise neither gender inequalities nor prejudice compared to those who do not approve stereotypes. Therefore, gender stereotyping dismisses the very thought of unfairness. The issues related to gender role stereotypes are important for this study because the stereotype ‘think manager – think man’ prevails in society (Schein, 1973; 2007) as societal expectations of leaders to be tough and firm fit with the success attributed to performance by men, not by women.

> *Underlying the resistance, the foot dragging and the excuses, is a deeply held belief that managerial positions are “for men only,” or “only men are really qualified” to do these jobs. Neither changes in women’s work force participation nor cultural differences seem to affect the view of women as less likely to possess qualities necessary for managerial success*
>
> (Schein, 2007:12)

Stereotypes endorse certain ‘standards for behaviour’ that provoke condemnation and ‘social penalties’ once successful women directly or indirectly contravene these standards. Stereotypical gender role attributes shape leadership and build barriers to the career path of women (Smith *et al.*, 2013:383). Furthermore, Koenig *et al.* (2011) advocate that stereotypes strengthen the typical outlook that leadership qualities are conventionally attributed to men. Their meta-analysis confirms that ‘stereotypes of leaders are decidedly masculine’, generally people view leaders as ‘similar to men but not very similar to women’ (2011:634). The lack of ‘agency’ might be one of the reasons why women still do not succeed in getting to the top of corporate leadership (Eagly *et al.,* 2020). Fisk and Ridgeway (2018) claim that gender largely defines social relations operating as a vital source of reference for constructing sense of others. These are learnt and rewritten in new activities; this cycle will persist under the existing state of affairs.

Eagly and Karau introduced the theory of role congruity (2002) regarding gender role stereotypes affecting female leaders. They detailed how bias against female leaders is created. If an average person imagines a female leader, their understanding of what a leader should be, merges with what a woman should be. The leadership role is inconsistent with the stereotypical belief on women's role in a society. However, if people imagine a male leader, both roles of a leader and a man are consistent in their understanding (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Such biases have implications for female leaders because when they fulfil the expectation of a 'typical woman' ('caring' and 'nurturing'), they are judged as not meeting the expectations of a real leader. Conversely, if female leaders act to fit society's expectations of a leader ('firm' and 'assertive'), they are seen as less of a woman. Thus, it is difficult for a female leader to be seen as successful because if they act with agency in a decisive manner, they are viewed as inappropriately aggressive (Eagly *et al.,* 1992). Yet, when women behave less strong and assertive, they are perceived as soft and incompetent. These prejudices reinforce the public attitude that women are less capable then men in leadership positions. Consequently, it is more difficult for women compared to men to access leadership posts for accomplishing their leadership potential (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Therefore, female leaders are expected to combine qualities of co-operation with leadership qualities of 'assertiveness' to develop their career (Eagly and Carly, 2007). Qualitative research by Schock *et al.* (2019) studied perceived leadership characteristics in an all-women environment in Germany. They assert that by combining 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes of leadership qualities, women have a better chance to secure promotions and progress in careers. This is because by presenting visible agentic qualities they are seen as successful. However, Zheng *et al.* (2018:586) found that societal demands on female leaders to be seen as simultaneously 'feminine' and 'masculine' generates tensions. These scholars affirm that contingent on women's mental outlook and context, these 'latent tensions seep into women's experiences.' Moreover, Kark *et al*. (2012) using self-reported questionnaires from Israeli male and female bank managers, found that female leaders practise a combination of 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities to avoid discrimination. Nevertheless, it seems that it is not only women who experience

difficulties from societal stereotypes. Gartzia and Baniandrés (2019) combined experimental studies and field surveys, demonstrating that both female and male managers, who infringed 'appropriate' gender behaviour, were disapproved by their followers. Their results indicate that the theory of role congruity by Eagly and Karau (2002) might be less applicable on female leaders over time. Indeed, not all female managers apply tactics of blending stereotypically 'masculine' and 'feminine' attitudes. A literature review by Guadagno and Cialdini (2007) draws on gender role stereotypes applied to impression management. They claim that both men and women deploy self-presentation methods congruent with their gender role expectations. However, these authors could not verify that successful women use hybrid methods of combining 'male' and 'female' behaviour. In addition, changes over time and between cultures affect gender stereotypes. Ebert *et al.* (2014) inform that due to the changing role of women in Germany, competency at the workplace is no longer perceived as an exclusively male trait.

A controversial view among academics is presented by Hakim that women hold back in their career by their own free choice because it fits with their lifestyle. Her preference theory (2000) asserts that women's labour market participation is defined by individual choice. She categorised all women into three types, home-centred prioritising family and children, work-centred prioritising employment and public life and adaptive, who 'combine work and family' (Hakim, 2000:6). Preference theory and Hakim's view on domestic division of labour has been strongly critiqued by feminist scholars. The main criticism of Hakim's (2000) view is around essentialist gender assertions, implying that fixed biological disparities in women and men being a main driver for individual behaviour (Bohan, 1993). However, Fagan (2001) highlights that the lifecycle of both men and women has a role to play in career choices. Both women and men might be less committed to their career if there are young children in the family, therefore women's careers will be ruled by the situations rather than by free choice. Hakim (2000) appears to identify biological factors being a driver; her argument lacks elucidation around social accountabilities for the division of labour. The preference theory is criticised for overlooking the social organisation of gender inequalities. Crompton and Lyonette (2005) studied individual national datasets from six Western countries, reporting that women are happier at home when they do not follow the conventional division in domestic labour. Also, there is

much lower work-home conflict among women with open-minded unconventional attitudes. These findings suggest that women who do not abide by societal gender role stereotypes are happier across both spheres of their lives, family and work. Crompton and Lyonette (2005) advocate that reconsidering current gender domestic division of labour will enable improvements for individuals' life at home and at work.

Corby and Stanworth (2009) draw on bounded rationality theory in their research, interviewing 80 women in full and part-time employment from different organisations in England. Bounded rationality (Simon, 1972) recognises personal and situational constraints in decision-making. The behaviour and decisions of an individual are bounded by 'limits imposed by given conditions and constraints' (Simon, 1972:161) within their environment. Corby and Stanworth explain, regardless of education most women rather 'fall into' jobs in presented circumstances (2009). They use the term 'satisficing' to demonstrate how women's 'choice' is predetermined by conditions and bounded by what seems to be rational in a given situation. As a result, women go for jobs, which are 'good enough' for them at the time, such as 'choosing' to work part-time or work in a location close to their child's school rather than follow their aspirations (Corby and Stanworth, 2009). Thus, women's' choices although seeming to be rational, in reality are bounded by domestic division of labour and interrelated to gender role stereotypes. Consequently, women's orientation to work are not fixed, but conditioned. Therefore, the preference theory (Hakim, 2000) simplifies women's life course, as it does not consider covert societal influences.

This thesis recognises gender as a social construct, profoundly predisposed to gender societal arrangements that could be challenged. Likewise, this research recognises leadership being gendered because it is powered by a perceived 'masculine' model of leadership. These stereotypes disadvantage women in successfully performing leadership roles. Female leaders expected to practice agentic 'masculine' attributes. Thus, this research aims to explore whether career trajectories of female leaders are influenced by stereotypical societal gender role expectations and how this might impact on their leadership performance. Therefore, it is important to reflect on how the current societal and organisational settings affect career choices and experiences of women.

2.4 Structural social factors

2.4.1 Domestic division of labour

Scholars call for a reconsideration of the place of women in society. Kark and Eagly (2010) show how the domestic division of labour shapes women's career progression. They argue that one of the reasons for underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is attributed to their higher number of home accountabilities compared to men. This restricts their occupation beyond domestic calling, therefore 'for most women, the path to workplace advancement involves negotiating trade-offs between family and employment' (Kark and Eagly, 2010: 445).

West and Zimmerman (1987:143) recognised that the traditional settings of work and home responsibilities between men and women represent an established gender division of labour, when two parties negotiate 'allocation of who is doing what'. There are examples from around the world of women sacrificing their career in order to fit their life around domestic obligations. For example, Gullaume and Pochic (2009) interviewed managers in a French utility company to understand problems associated with women's career paths. They concluded that women are not as ready as men to be transferred to different geographical areas for their career progression. Yet, they are ready to sacrifice their career and relocate for their partners' career progress. Such choice compromises their long-term work perspectives. Furthermore, Niederle and Vesterlund (2007) analysed data from all private organizations in Denmark for the period between 1997 and 2007 and assert that one of the main reasons for insignificant numbers of women in top leadership positions is that women are not prepared to dedicate as much time to work as men when their children arrive. They expect that leadership at work would involve high level of dedication, extensive working hours and accountability, leaving them no chance to balance it with domestic tasks. The qualitative study by Rath *et al*. (2019) revealed that women in India contribute to many roles in the three different spheres, including society, organisation and home. They found that the main disadvantage for women lays in marital and maternity obligations backed by traditional family norms to be seen as a model of motherhood and maintaining a household.

However, earlier studies claimed that female leaders display different attitudes towards prioritising their family and work. For example, contrary to the general perception of societal roles, Powell *et al.* (1984) assert that female leaders unlike male leaders, regard self-accomplishment aims of higher significance than aims of social character. They compared values of matched samples of male and female managers of the American Management Association and found that women managers put considerably more effort into their careers than into their family life as opposed to men. These authors argue that women who advanced to management positions have a more 'masculine' attitude to work and career than the average male managers. McGinn and Oh (2017) claim that women are inclined to dedicate less time to household duties as they earn more. These authors allege that the bargaining power of women grows as their salaries grow. Therefore, greater access of women to leadership positions might alter the gender division of domestic labour.

Furthermore, the processes in domestic and professional spheres relate to gender inequality at work (Ridgeway, 1997). Christofides *et al.* (2013) suggest that extended time-out of mothers from work may not only negatively impact their career opportunities, but also sets them back in terms of earnings upon returning to work. However, Smith *et al.* (2013) show that when men go on paternal breaks, the likelihood of them missing out on career advancements is even higher than for women in the same circumstances. Those households where both spouses equally progress in their careers, break conventional stereotypes on domestic arrangements (Smith *et al*., 2013). It is important to understand the complexity of gender processes, which operate on different levels. Concerns related to gender domestic division of labour are closely linked to gender role stereotypes (Eagly, 1987). The work and home arrangements rely on the societal roles of men and women at the workplace and outside of it. There are social expectations of priorities prescribed to both genders in terms of time and dedication to work and home. Women are usually expected to prioritise home, while men prioritise work (Eagly, 1987). Gender stereotypes influence personal decisions. The domestic division of labour informs organisational settings. Acker (1990) advocates that organisations help reproduce stereotypes regarding gender division at home and work, disadvantaging women.

2.4.2 Organisational factors and the theory of gendered organisations

The social role theory implies that gender variations in societal behaviour would diminish in organisational settings since professional roles would manifest themselves more noticeably (Eagly, 1987). However, gender role stereotypes constitute serious equality challenges for female leaders in a workplace as leadership is stereotyped with

> *the image of the strong, technically competent, authoritative leader, who is sexually potent and attractive, has a family and has his emotions under control*
>
> (Acker, 1990:153)

Alvesson and Billing (2009) examined female leaders' work practices, claiming that all women experience hurdles in their careers. Acker (1990; 2009) asserts that the core tribulations are connected to organisational structures for their unchallenged practices of what is accepted as 'normal'. She advocates that gender must be considered in the design of organisational processes.

Acker (1990) argues that the assumption about organisations being gender neutral is problematic because gender is an essential component of organisational processes. Gender affects organisational logic especially regarding the set of expectations and practices concerning job evaluation and hierarchy. By rating the input of proficiency and capabilities of the workforce, job evaluation seems to be rational, thus easily accepted by all. In reality, organisational processes are detached from the individual workers because an important part of their lives outside of organisations is not considered. Regarding hierarchy, members of the organisation take the ranking for granted with the presupposition that lower-level jobs are less difficult. Yet the office secretary might be managing several different tasks, at the same time dealing with the erratic personalities of her supervisors. Furthermore, Acker argues that despite apparent organisational logic, the concept of 'a job' is subliminally gendered as it reflects the 'gender-based division of labour and the separation between the public and private spheres.' Hierarchy is gendered as it follows organisational logic, assuming that higher positions should be assigned for workers who are more 'committed'. This reproduces structures and job values intended for 'a genderless

worker', who transpires to be a man in social reality (1990:149). An abstract 'universal worker' does not have pregnancy, ability to give birth, breast-feed or emotions as these traits would intervene with organisational processes. Women's work is seen allied to home life with little chance to fully commit to an abstract job. Therefore, contrary to general belief that organisations are gender neutral, they are gendered. Lazear and Rosen (1990) agree that due to the pre-conception about women being more likely to abandon their profession prioritising home over work, they are less likely to be considered for promotion then men.

Moreover, Acker (2009) explains how gendered organisations are related to gender stereotypes. She argues that the inequalities between advantaged and disadvantaged members in organisations are formed on several levels through the stereotype of an 'unencumbered worker'. Such a worker is utterly devoted to the job, i.e. on-time arrival, absolute attention to work from early morning to late evening when required. Yet, someone else must attend the responsibilities of that worker outside of work. Thus, the 'unencumbered worker' happened to be a man (Acker, 2009: 206). Besides, job hierarchy corresponds to wages and power, disadvantaging women from the beginning of their working life. Starting positions such as office jobs offered for women are congregated at the lower paid category with limited opportunities to climb up the career ladder. Top-level positions are influenced by stereotypical images of female managers being less competent than men. Acker (2009:11) asserts that lack of cognizance of inequalities might be deliberate or unintended. Often employees insist on maintaining the ongoing pattern. Organisations reward 'heroic' male efforts, failing to notice that daily upkeeping is habitually made by female workers (Acker, 2009). In addition, the policies addressing work-life balance are mainly designed for mothers, offering just a short-term break from established male models of work. Acker believes that family-friendly policies might strengthen gender inequality as they are underpinned by a male organisational model (2009). Therefore, she suggested updating organisational theories to reflect the realities of being a woman and worker's lives outside of the organisation.

In her more recent work, Acker (2012) reflects on gendering organisations, further conceptualising gendered organisations' substructure, subtext, organisational logic and addresses the complexities of intersectionality. Although some improvements

took place in organisations since her earlier publications, ‘inequality regimes’ still persevere. Regarding substructures, inequalities are embedded in organisational process, including job design, decision-making, and organisational culture influenced by gender stereotypes. Substructures explicitly or implicitly underpin gendered organisational subtext, i.e. job evaluation and organisational logic. Though different logics appear as alternatives to traditional bureaucracies and hierarchies, such as in team-centred organisations, inequalities persist. Gendered logic encompasses beliefs about employees’ priorities around jobs and peoples’ lives as fundamentally split between work and home. Furthermore, gender evaluations are inadequate without considerations to other processes contributing to inequality. Therefore, Acker (2012) advocates considering intersections with race, class and other demographic components, addressing how stereotyping about people from minority backgrounds affects communications at work.

The pioneering work by Acker (1990, 2009, 2012) has limitations. Britton (2000) regards Acker’s theory of gendered organisations (1990) empirically and epistemologically weak. She believes further clarifications required on the meaning of organisations being ‘gendered’. Hart (2016:22) questions this terminology further, criticising gendered organisations for focusing solely on women without addressing strains of the ‘experience of being the ideal worker’, including individuals without family commitments. Therefore, Hart (2016) maintains that defining organisations as ‘gendered’ is problematic as in her view, Acker’s theory implies organisational masculinity. Thus, she proposes that the terminology of ‘masculine organisations’ might better resemble the ideas propounded by Acker. Still, the question remains, if ‘masculine organisations’ replace ‘feminine organisations’, will gendered inequality disappear? Besides, the theory of gendered organisations does not offer a vision on how to change organisations. Also, the theory does not consider different national contexts. Consequently, further development is required to advance the theory.

However, the academic community highly regards the theory of gendered organisations as a valuable source for analysis. Nkomo and Rodrigues (2019) reflect on the legacy of Joan Acker’s work, emphasising that her ideas were instrumental in influencing management and organisational studies. Scholars from various fields around the world indicate that Acker’s arguments regarding structures and logic of

traditional organisational are still valid. For instance, Atena and Tiron-Tudor (2020) studied gendered structures in Romanian accountancy firms, advocating that women still experience the same gender issues as thirty years ago and they call for updating human resource policies. Rath *et al.* (2019) studied career progressions of Indian women and assert that general help for domestic duties as provision of crèches and care homes might assist in keeping jobs, yet it does not induce prospects of women's career advancement. They plea to 'defeminise household responsibilities' (2019: 30). Furthermore, Showunmi *et al.* (2016) analysed leadership experiences of British women regarding intersection of gender and ethnicity among other categories. They suggest that there are differences of how white British women and women of minority cultures view leadership.

In essence, Acker (1990) demonstrates how organisations create discrimination because the design of traditional organisations is gendered. Gender stereotypes support the outdated organisational arrangements, creating preferable conditions for men, effectively disadvantaging women (Acker, 2009). The theory of gendered organisation by Acker (1990, 2009, 2012) contributes to the design of the research tools in order to understand current organisational practices affecting female leaders career paths in Russia and the UK. This research depicts how established policies and procedures of those organisations where female leaders work might limit their chances for career accomplishment.

2.5 Career barriers

The theories and concepts discussed above find manifestation in dissatisfactory experiences for women because of the commonly accepted discriminatory practices. These practices produce obstacles for women's career progression, especially within male dominated environments (Goodman *et al.,* 2003; Mate *et al.,* 2019). A number of metaphors articulate the difficulties that female leaders experience in their professional life, namely the glass ceiling and its' derivatives, the glass cliff and the labyrinth. These metaphors denote obstacles, which reflect on inequalities between men and women.

Hymowitz and Schelhardt (1986) introduced the glass ceiling metaphor, which indicates a hidden barrier obstructing woman from reaching the highest levels in corporate hierarchy. Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) analysed the characteristics of female directors in the FTSE 100 companies and found that female board members have to demonstrate a higher level of skills and experiences than male board members in order to get to the top positions. Their study reveals that 36% of female directors against 21% of male directors held a PhD degree, indicating that women have to put more effort than men for attaining similar positions. Still, women are often not taken seriously in work situations. When Durbin (2016) asked her female manager interviewees about their career difficulties, most of them identified gender-related challenges. These include disrespect of male executives towards them, diminishing their professional value in the eyes of their male colleagues. Scholten and Witmer (2017) report male managers fail to recognise the professional skills of female colleagues, treating them as personal assistants and disregarding their opinions during professional meetings.

The glass ceiling effect is linked to the phenomenon of social exclusion. Claringbould and Knoppes (2007) explain that exclusion practices formed and driven by power relations among different units in the group, which might be defined by age, gender, ethnicity or race. Usually there is a dominant and a subordinate group, with dominant group having established access to certain resources. Scholten and Witmer (2017) assert that positions of power are usually open for the male elite. Scholars emphasise that women are often excluded from company politics, yet men seldom realise that their gender works to their advantage in the professional sphere. For example, male board members do not see that they ostracise female board members from discussions about their hobbies (Claringbould and Knoppes, 2007). Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) highlight that women are customarily barred from so-called ‘old boy’s networks’, which underpin informal business practices at executive level, encompassing men of similar age, background and education.

Akpinar-Sposito (2013) emphasise that the glass ceiling reflects on the lower bargaining power of women in the corporate environment, discriminating against them in professional settings. Bjerk (2008) believes that discrimination against

female leaders takes place because it is mainly men who determine the terms of promotion, which is why female managers are more likely to be disadvantaged. However, it seems that the glass ceiling is much more complex and not easy to understand. For example, Smith *et al.* (2013) analysed the gender gap in advancements of directors to positions of vice-presidents and from vice-presidents to CEOs in Denmark. Using wide-ranging statistics, they determined that although gender gaps are persistent across different company types, the glass ceiling effect did not disappear in those companies, which were run by female executives. At times there would be even fewer female leadership appointments in corporations directed by women (Smith *et al.,* 2013). Thus, women's access to executive positions does not guarantee that barriers for other female professionals disappear.

Furthermore, there are indications that interesting professional assignments, which open promotional opportunities, often bypass women (King *et al.,* 2012). Ryan and Haslam (2007) stretch the glass ceiling phenomenon further by introducing the metaphor of the glass cliff. They propose that female leaders are presented with leadership opportunities in times of crisis or difficulties in their organisation. These researchers studied performance indicators of companies, where women were selected for senior positions and found that these companies had already experienced performance problems before the female leadership nomination. Analysing their experiments and company data in different UK organisational settings, they determined that glass cliff phenomenon is not bound to a particular context, highlighting that further research is required into whether there are national variations. However, Bechtoldt *et al.* (2019) examined statistical financial performance of 233 listed companies in the UK and Germany using a variety of procedures for occurrences of the glass cliff effect. Contrary to Haslam and Ryan (2008) they did not find evidence that the glass cliff exists. This difference in results might be attributed to the glass cliff being defined in terms other than financial figures. One of the limitations of quantitative analysis by Bechtoldt *et al*. (2019) is that they did not explore the motives behind female appointments. Ryan and Haslam (2007) encouraged researchers to follow the subsequent career trajectory of those women, who were presented with glass cliff situations to study the aftermath.

Nonetheless, Eagly and Carli (2007) critiqued the widely used terminology of glass ceiling. They believe that this metaphor implies that there is a total stop point for women at the top of the organisational hierarchy. They maintain that the glass ceiling does not encompass the complexity of women's' career path towards that stop-point and it does not reflect on the tactics that women accrue to conquer the obstacles to their career progression. These scholars offer a terminology of labyrinth to signify the multitude of barriers, which women encounter on their pathway towards leadership posts. Carli and Eagly (2016) emphasise that while recognising the challenges of female leaders, the labyrinth symbolises women's career journeys, where progress to top positions is difficult, yet achievable. There are various routes towards leadership, some go to a dead-end. Women learn to steer around the labyrinth of obstacles, navigating their careers. At some point some arrive at the glass ceiling (Carli and Eagly, 2016). Reis and Grady explored the labyrinth of career obstacles among university presidents. They believe that labyrinth 'offers a concrete understanding of social phenomenon and provides an image of how women can and do reach leadership positions' (2018:108). Compared to the glass ceiling, which was introduced towards the end of the twentieth century, the optimistic view of the labyrinth metaphor corresponds to the changing environment in the new millennium.

Additionally, women encounter difficulties in the workplace related to promotions occurring for reasons other than professional merits (Durbin, 2016). Regarding promotional prospects, women of minority cultures experience additional discrimination barriers (Koch *et al.,* 2015). For example, a recent study from the USA determined that entry to middle and senior management positions is more problematic for black women than white women (Block *et al.,* 2021). Furthermore, there are variations in how women in different cultures experience difficulties in their progression to managerial posts. The qualitative study by Mate *et al.* (2019) compared experiences of female academics in Australia and Vietnam. They reveal that women in Vietnam experience overt discrimination practices compared to Australian women, who experience discrimination of a covert nature.

Chin *et al.* (2007) are of a view that barriers to female leaders' career progression prevail because managerial positions are seen as dependent upon 'corporate masculinity'. Acker (2009) explained that although promotional decisions depend on

selection criteria, decision-makers are still swayed by their own dogmas, including gender stereotypes. She elucidates that at the point of recruitment and promotion employers use ‘gendered images’ of suitable employees, implying that women are suitable for particular work. Thus, male domination in the professional environment is recognised as one of the main problems female leaders face throughout their career (Stead and Elliot, 2009). Though, contrary to widespread opinion about the enduring difficulties of female leaders’, the study from USA by Leslie *et al.* (2017) indicates changes. Their field study and experimental research claims that pressure on corporations to comply with diversity objectives raises demand for female leaders on a higher level in organisations. This is especially true for male-dominated settings as it creates a ‘high potential female premium’ from ‘high potential women’ (Leslie *et al.,* 2017:404). These women are seen as of a higher value because in addition to their professional merits, they enable attainment of the diversity targets unlike ‘high potential men’ (2017:404). Therefore, corporations may be prepared to hire and pay them more than men. These results reveal that impetus on corporations for gender equality might present opportunities for talented female leaders. Though, it is unclear whether these results are bound to the US firms or there are tendencies elsewhere for this occurrence.

2.6 Chapter conclusion

The literature reveals that the career path of female leaders is impacted by a plethora of interrelated influences, including personal and structural factors (Patton and McMahon, 2014). This research recognises gender as being socially constructed and that people learn early in their life about the appropriate ‘communal’ qualities of ‘femininity’ and ‘agentic’ characteristics of ‘masculinity’ (West and Zimmerman, 1987). On a personal level women’s ‘choices’ of professional occupation are influenced by stereotypes formed in a society through beliefs and societal expectations (Eagly 1987). It seems that women have a choice in prioritising between work and home duties (Hakim, 2000), but in reality, their ‘choices’ are constrained by the domestic division of labour and gender role stereotypes (Corby and Stanworth, 2009). Due to the persistence of traditional social stereotypes around domestic responsibilities, many women experience work-home imbalance.

This research views organisations as being gendered (Acker, 2009). Women face challenges as the structures of traditional organisations are affected by gender role stereotypes reinforcing the 'masculine' model, discriminating against women (Acker, 1990; 2009). Female leaders are expected to fit with the 'male model' of leadership (Acker, 2009) to pursue careers in gendered organisations designed for men (Acker, 1990). Societal stereotypes form expectations and predetermine societal 'norms', creating prejudice against female leaders because leadership is labelled as 'male' (Koenig *et al.,* 2011). Women face obstacles, which are often linked to prejudice against female leaders because female leadership is perceived as 'incongruent' with their societal role (Eagly and Karau, 2002). The expectations of gendered organisations force women to apply 'agency' as a sign of 'masculinity' *(*Leicht *et al*., 2014) and 'toughen up' their leadership style (Schock *et al*., 2019).

These influences create hidden obstacles in women's career paths towards the top of the corporate hierarchy. Metaphors such as glass ceiling (Hymowitz and Schelhardt, 1986) and labyrinth (Eagy and Carly, 2007) convey the difficulties faced by female leaders in their careers, including when leading their subordinates in a different way from men. With a lack of opportunities for career progression, women occasionally see prospects for advancement to senior roles in crisis situations, captured by the glass cliff metaphor (Ryan and Haslam, 2007).

The literature demonstrates that the career paths of female leaders are influenced by personal and structural factors, which have a detrimental effect on their opportunities for progression. However, the existing literature does not differentiate between national variations in gendered organisations. Thus, the thesis which recognises that leadership is gendered, explores how the barriers to female leaders' career progression manifests in the two different national contexts of Russia and the UK.

Chapter Three Theoretical framings II: Socio-environmental factors influencing women's careers

3.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter is the second of two, examining the theoretical concepts to enable understanding of the reasons behind slow progress of women in achieving equal representation in leadership with men. In this chapter the impacts of broader socio-environmental factors are explored and their possible influences for the female leaders' career progression are evaluated. This review examines the contemporary body of knowledge around feminist studies and the role of cultural factors in women's career progression. The chapter overviews the main feminist theories developed over time and how they have influenced research traditions in these fields, reflecting on the different needs of contemporary societies. These discussions help to expose the roots of the barriers to female leaders' career success.

Furthermore, core theories of culture relevant to this investigation are examined and cultural variations in leadership as well as attitudes towards female leaders explained. Specific attention is given to cultural dimensions of in-group collectivism and gender egalitarianism (House *et al.*, 2004). The chapter also provides a discussion around the existing focus on quantitative approaches in scholarship and to the overpowering number of studies from Western research.

Finally, the evaluation of the issues regarding the Russian diaspora (Isurin, 2011) assists the understanding of the cultural complexities that women from the former Soviet Union might experience in the UK. The intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) approach enables analysis of how gender and culture intersect. The model of stereotyping through associated and intersectional categories (Hall *et al*., 2019) is applied to the analysis of the stereotypes created by intersection between gender and culture. Conclusions are then drawn based on the reviewed literature.

3.2 Feminist studies and models of equality

Feminism is seen as ‘a social movement whose basic goal is equality between women and men’ (Lorber, 2010:1). The history of feminism goes back more than 200 years, raising concerns regarding issues of suffrage, equal access and global equality. Several well-recognised directions in feminist theories have been developed in the twenty-first century, including liberal, Marxist-socialist, radical, and postmodern. These directions are often affiliated with ‘waves’ in the history of feminism.

From the end of the nineteenth century throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, ideas of the first wave feminists addressed issues of access to education and voting rights for women (Rampton, 2015). Their ideas resonate with liberal feminists, who believed that reforms could be attained by logic and reasoning to bring a solution to gender inequality and societal preconceptions. Judith Lorber developed a conceptual framework comprising of three categories, in which she grouped the main feminist perspectives – gender reform feminisms, gender resistance feminisms and gender revolution feminisms. She located liberal feminists in the ‘gender reform’ stream of the feminist movement; they stood for reforms, believing that women and men ‘are not all that different’, so ‘should not be treated differently under the law’ (1997:9). Kark (2004) among other scholars accepted this terminology in her analysis of feminist typologies. Marxist-socialist feminists are in the same ‘gender reform’ category in Lorber’s (1997) framework, these feminists fought for access to economic resources equal with men to be able to survive. They recognised capitalism as a foundation for the oppression of women (Reed, 1970). Thus, these feminists brought attention to problems of women in a class-based society, dealing with unemployment and criticising the family as a source of women’s exploitation (Lorber, 1997).

Moreover, from the 1960s a new wave of radical feminist studies addressed problems of the male dominance and their role in the repression of women (Firestone, 1968, 1970; Delphy, 1995). They believed that the outcome of male control over the access to certain professions resulted in women’s lower paid jobs, therefore this system had to be destroyed. These ideas were taken by the second

wave of feminists, who from the second part of the twentieth century fought for empowering women in taking control of their own destiny. Recognising lived experiences of women, they distinguished between sex and gender, addressing reproductive rights (Rampton, 2015). Lorber (1997) regarded these feminists as in the category of 'gender resistance', and they were characterised by creating women-only communities to support each other. Kark (2004) adopted Lorber's 'gender resistance' terminology for radical feminists opposed to a gender reform approach, accentuating gender differences and recognising different experiences of women compared to men. However, these activists were criticised for treating men as enemies (Coward, 1999) and for their gender essentialist position, exemplifying women's sensitivity and nurturing nature (Lorber, 1997).

Third wave feminists from the end of the twentieth century aimed at emancipation of people generally rather than being gender focused, often being regarded 'less overarching in its political aims' than feminists of a previous wave (Blevins, 2018:99). These feminists 'who grew up with feminism' and witnessed some gender equality improvements in society, refuse the idea of viewing women as being subjugated to men (Lorber, 2010:4). They broke away from homogenous collective values, celebrating diversity, ethnicity and sexual orientation with emphasis on inclusion (Rampton, 2015). The concepts of postmodern feminists addressed the universal interests of women worldwide. Early postmodern feminists (Derrida, 1978; Butler, 1990) emphasised problems of women arising from racial and gender discrimination as well as issues of minority cultures. Their quest to re-focus attention to the emotional level aimed to learn about the experiences of contemporary women. They believed that the long-established views of femininity and masculinity can be adjusted (Nussbaum, 2000). These feminists set new criteria for standards to make choices about career, parenthood and lifestyles (Adler, 1993), exploring expressions for women's identity formation, often acting together with other minority groups. For example, Gedro and Mizzi (2014) and Marinucci (2016) tried to bring under one roof the views of feminist theories and queer theories, concerning sexual minorities. They believed both movements were marginalised because of 'hetero-masculinity', and there was a better chance for changing social practices towards 'non-normative thinking', offering a new form of 'social reality' (Gedro and Mizzi, 2014: 452). Moreover, multi-ethnic feminists (Lorber, 1997; 2010) addressed issues of different

social classes, ethnicities and religious groups; they embraced groups which went beyond gender, thus including men. Lorber referred to these feminists as ‘gender revolution’ feminists for they criticised ‘the dominant social order’ and deconstructed ‘the interlocking structures’ of power and privilege’ that justified and normalised ‘inequality and subordinating practices’ (1997:25). Kark coined the terminology ‘gender rebellion’ for feminists of this wave, signifying their intentions to destabilise gender norms beyond limits (2004:170).

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the rise of the fourth wave of feminists. Internet platforms helped these activists to join into online groups (Rampton, 2015). With help from social media and discussion boards these activists detached themselves from third wave activists, creating conscious-raising clusters (Blevins, 2018). Qualitative research findings on internet circles by Rodak (2020) reveal a new trend of camaraderie among women in Poland. These informal online networks create spaces where people can support each other, addressing experiences of injustice, welcoming men and women in sisterhood discourse (Rodak, 2020). Fourth wave feminists take intersectionality discussions to a wider online audience via hashtags and tweets epitomising solidarity in combat for bigotry, racism and other discriminations (Zimmerman, 2017). However, these groups often provoke harassment and they are criticised for idealising online spaces, when some minorities still cannot afford internet access (Blevins, 2018).

The deliberations about waves of feminism are criticised for reducing the equality debate by simply following historic events (Halberstam, 2012). Concerned about lack of depth in ‘wave narratives’, Chamberlain (2016:460) suggests viewing each wave as an ‘affective temporality’. Furthermore, Nicholson (2010:1) questions the value of the waves’ metaphor contending that it has outlived its’ purpose for being used ‘by those who want to detach themselves from other feminists’, while feminism includes all gender perspectives. She maintains, both liberal and radical feminists were effective throughout 1960-80 (2010:3). Following the evolution of feminists’ thoughts, Lorber (2010) argued that gender inequality is deep-rooted in societal institutions, including family, work, religion, economy and others. In effect, she saw gender as an institution, which accredits patterns of expected behaviour for people, directing their daily lives and societal practices (1994). Anderson (2016) emphasised that different

waves of feminism bring different political agendas. Besides, Kark (2004) demonstrates the implications for female leadership from different feminist directions. She highlights that 'reform feminists' presume that women being equal to men can easily adapt to traditional organisational structures with little disturbance for existing arrangements. Those accepting radical ideas, recognise the systematic challenges of women resulting from privileged positions of men. Yet, she maintains that their 'female advantage approach' might just 'reinforce an even more sophisticated form of sex imbalances.' Finally, although 'gender rebellion' feminists recognise systemic challenges, they still lack clarity in application of their ideas (Kark, 2004:170). Ultimately though, feminists aim to attain 'a society without economic inequalities, racial distinctions or sexual exploitation, since they are all implicated in the social production of gender inequality' (Lorber, 1994:293).

Jewson and Mason (1986) developed liberal and radical models of equality, addressing the disparities between liberal and radical stands. They observed that although the two approaches differ in theory, the distinction in a practical sense is less clear. In essence, the liberal tactics are driven by process, whereas the radical ones are driven by results. However, Cockburn (1991:28) noted that 'feminists are a little bit of each'. Jewson and Mason (1986) propose that the liberal view on equal opportunities focuses upon fair procedures by supporting 'positive action' in decision-making, i.e. fostering open contest between employees. The radical methods ensure fair rewards allocation regardless of the procedures. This includes encouraging deliberation in decision-making and fostering 'positive discrimination', i.e. enforcing quotas in favour of underrepresented groups of people. However, Jewson and Mason's case studies show that although the theoretical contexts of the two approaches differ, policy makers are consistent in their practical implementation of gender equality, mixing-up philosophically different approaches (1986:322). This conceptual framework was recently re-examined by Conley and Page (2017) regarding gender equality in view of the recent changes in the UK concerning the application of the Gender Equality Duty (GED) presented in 2007. Their qualitative case studies demonstrate that though the GED was instrumental in raising understanding of gender equality issues, as in Jewson and Mason (1986), local authorities did not differentiate between the two approaches. They argue that decision-makers simultaneously employ both approaches without recognising the

value in their contrasting theoretical agendas. Thus, three decades, which separate the two publications, witnessed limited change in local authorities' attitude towards gender equality.

However, this problem is not exclusive to the UK. In Sweden, where there has been a long-standing attention to gender policies since the1970s, core principles of equality are still undifferentiated. The case studies by Scholten and Witmer (2017:56) reveal that human resource specialists from the food industry do not distinguish between 'gender equity and gender equality'. Their interviewees referred to gender equality merely in arithmetical terms, reporting procedures ensuring statistical parameters, i.e. identical pay for men and women, etc. However, they struggled to convey whether their female and male employees could equally access leadership positions. Scholten and Witmer (2017) advocate the importance of enabling practitioners to distinguish critical perspectives of gender equality for endorsing thoughtful implementation. Therefore, it appears that despite the efforts towards gender equality, authorities still fail to recognise a wide range of problems that women face in entering positions of leadership.

Furthermore, there is no consensus among feminists whether the best way to achieve gender equality is via a radical approach of accentuating gender differences or a liberal approach of downplaying them. The quantitative study by Martin and Philip (2017) examined the effect of 'gender-blindness' on the self-assurance of women at work. The 'gender-blindness' tactic understates gender disparities, emphasising the resemblance between men and women. These researchers believe that gender-blindness endorses women's self-assurance, particularly in male dominated settings. Martin and Philip (2017) argue that gender-blindness is more effective then gender consciousness for women's self-confidence because they start behaving as equals to men, dismissing traditional beliefs. However, De Vries and Van den Brink (2016) explored how organisations can respond to radical feminist strategies. Contrary to Martin and Philip (2017), these researchers endorse the view that it is by following the radical approach of highlighting gender differences, that women start developing confidence. Tools such as upholding 'women only' programmes, thoughtfully collaborating on the highest level of leadership, enable organisational change towards delivering equal opportunities. Ortenblad *et al.* (2017)

are concerned that the absence of a unified position in feminist theory on policy actions results in difficulties with interpretations and implementations. Their case study analysis demonstrates how different nations applied the UN Convention on Eliminating of all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW). They assert that while feminist theories critique current legislations, they do not offer clarity for juridical changes. Therefore, different nations understand gender equality differently. A comparison of a political and jurisdictive context of Scandinavian countries, reveal that Sweden and Norway offer a wider spectrum of measures in academia than Denmark does (Nielsen, 2017). Thus, although liberal policies remove bigoted practices, the important considerations remain around the transformation of the social system. If legal systems reflect experiences of men, women will be disadvantaged. In addition, liberal discourse does not reflect on inequalities amongst women. So, legislation cannot be detached from ethical and political agendas of social reality. Ortenblad *et al.* (2017) advocate that gender equality ideology requires local deliberations around implementation.

With the arrival of postmodern feminism, the contemporary feminist discussions have changed direction from the liberal quest for equality towards the new direction of diversity. This change has not been taken lightly. One of the arguments supporting diversity relates to commercial rationale. The labour force diversity offers a greater competitive advantage to organisations for considering the needs of the growing diversity of customers (Noon, 2007). Benschop and Verloo (2006) proposed that feminist researchers work together with equality implementors to avoid conflict between the interests of postmodern and liberal feminists. Conley and Page (2017) recommend a direction for gender equality suitable to gratify commercial interests as well as aiming for diversity. They note that the sensitive and frequently ambiguous nature of the gender equality projects relies on people, relations between them and politicisation. Kirton and Greene (2016) are amongst the critics of diversity. They note that most of the academic work on diversity originates from the United States, where issues of race have been the focus of research agendas for a long time. So, the findings of American scholars in other countries require to address differences in economic, social, political, legal and historical aspects. They dispute that diversity brings equality and advocate keeping focus on discrimination, building diversity policies upon existing equality policy frames instead of interchanging them (Kirton

and Greene, 2016). Thus, postmodernist views are not homogeneous; there is no one single resolution to end discrimination of women.

3.3 Culture considerations

This part of the thesis discusses how existing literature conceptualises national cultural differences, which helped to identify cultural factors in the career paths of female leaders in Russia and the UK, underpinning this research. Accordingly, it draws*, inter alia,* on House *et al.* (2004), who suggested that national cultural differences could influence a leader's behaviour. This discussion supports understanding of how cultural determinants might impact the career paths of female leaders.

Hofstede (1980) was among the first researchers establishing that national culture explains the diversity in employees' attitudes and behaviours. Many scholarly articles were influenced by this pioneering work, forming the basis for extensive discussions around national differences. The strength of Hofstede's cultural dimensions is widely recognised in social sciences, and by the 1990s the dimensions method 'became the dominant approach in cross-cultural analysis' (Hofstede, 2016:173). However, this work has several weaknesses. First, it was widely criticised for inadequate measurements, especially regarding femininity and masculinity as a 'lack of masculinity was considered feminine' (Shi and Wang, 2011:96). Besides, apart from his data being now considered as dated, it was collected in various geographical locations from a single multinational organisation. Thus, it was difficult to determine whether the organisational or national culture influenced the respondents' responses (Fernandez *et al.,* 1997). More importantly though, leader's behaviour was not in focus of Hofstede's study, thus its' value is limited for this investigation. Therefore, it will not form the core theoretical framework for this discussion on cultural considerations, influencing female leaders' careers. Other researchers examined cultural characteristics to understand their effect on individuals. For example, Schwartz (1994,1999) developed the theory of cultural value dimensions establishing their effect on the attitude and behaviour of individuals within different cultural regions of the world. Schwartz (1999) among other researchers, such as Huntington (1993) and Inglehart (1997), recognised several idiosyncratic regions in the world

concerning culture. Schwartz (1999) assumed that culture is a complex amalgam of societal beliefs, norms, symbols, and meanings, collecting data on schoolteachers and college students from different cultural groups. Yet again, though this work is appreciated for presenting the picture of cultural distinctiveness, it does not reflect how leaders are affected by culture.

The Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) project is an extensive work, which analysed leadership worldwide. GLOBE researchers evaluated social beliefs, customs and attitudes of leaders in different countries (House *et al*., 2004). There are two GLOBE studies presented to date, i.e. by House *et al*. (2004) and House *et al*. (2014). The current research mainly refers to the first GLOBE study rather than to the recent one because England as part of the UK was included only in their first investigation. Therefore, to enable fair comparison of cultural similarities and differences between Russia and the UK, the definitions and findings of House *et al*. (2004) are considered. The GLOBE project involved the collaboration of 170 researchers throughout the world, collecting data on cultural dimensions from 62 countries, engaging about 17,000 middle managers. They viewed societal culture as a combination of different factors, including shared 'language, ideological belief systems … ethnic heritage and history" (House *et al.*, 2004:16). The organisational culture in this research is described as the generally practiced 'nomenclature within the organisation, shared organisational values and organisational history' (House *et al.*, 2004:17). Their main attainment is that they established the relationship between organisational and national culture. Thus, GLOBE describes culture as

> *The shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations*
>
> (House *et al.,* 2004:15)

Elaborating on the findings of previous researchers, including Hofstede (1980) and Schwartz (1994), the GLOBE researchers determined their own cultural characteristics to reflect on views and attitudes in different societies. The spectrum of cultural traits and their measurements for Russia and England are presented in

Appendix 1. In-group and institutional collectivism as well as gender egalitarianism are of particular interest because collectivism dimensions reflect on differences between the UK and Russia, whereas gender egalitarianism reflects on their similarities. GLOBE regards in-group collectivism as a measure of the reward for loyalty in family or organisation, institutional collectivism measures rewards for collective distribution of resources within an organisation. Gender egalitarianism is a measure of the degree to which a society encourages gender equality (House et al., 2004). Russia shows a higher index of in-group collectivism. GLOBE (2016) interprets that Russians are more committed to groups and inner circles compared to the English. Regarding institutional collectivism, Russians seem to be more dependent and loyal to their organisations, whereas the English are more independent and less reliant on their organisations. Concerning gender egalitarianism, although both Russia and England show results higher than GLOBE's average, the Russian score stands higher. This reflects a greater share of women in power in Russia compared to England and more homogenous educational achievements of men and women in Russia than in England. England also has a higher gender division at work than Russia has (GLOBE, 2016). Moreover, GLOBE researchers analysed the correlation between cultural dimensions and culturally endorsed leadership dimensions at both the organisational and societal levels (Dorfman *et al.,* 2012). Relatively high gender egalitarianism in both Russia and the UK strongly correlates with participative and charismatic leadership. Grove (2005) regards the gender egalitarianism dimension as one of the best indicators in forecasting an effective leader. This means that the more the organisation or the society support gender equality, the higher the importance of participative and charismatic leaders there. The crucial finding of the GLOBE study is that national culture affects leadership through social beliefs and expectations. GLOBE researchers concluded that leaders who subscribe to stereotypes and lead as society expects them to, are more successful. These findings relate to the thesis' pervious discussion on how social gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987) influence behaviour of individuals in traditional societies by creating societal expectations, disapproving attitudes outside of the norm. This creates pressure on leaders to comply with societal expectations to be successful. However,

> *When individuals think about effective leader behaviours, they are more influenced by the value they place on the desired future than their perception of current realities. Our results therefore suggest that leaders are seen as society's instruments for change. They are seen as the embodiment of the ideal state of affairs.*
>
> (House *et al.*, 2004: 275).

Although this thesis recognises the importance of the GLOBE study in assessing leadership in different cultures, their main limitation is around gender blindness. Besides, there is a call for further studies focusing on organisational aspects within the national and cultural contexts (Earley, 2006). The thesis examines further how cultural characteristics of collectivism and gender egalitarianism are viewed by other researchers. Studies highlight that the UK culture resembles Western values (Schwartz, 1999) and Russian culture is seen as encompassing both Eastern and Western values (Letisaari and Musajoki, 2017). The cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism seem to be consistently contrasting between the UK and Russia throughout studies by Hofstede (1984) and Schwartz (1999). Triandis (2001) believes that individualism and collectivism enable a better comprehension of the differences in people's behaviour in cross-national studies than any other characteristic:

> *No construct has had greater impact on contemporary cross-cultural psychology than individualism and collectivism … to understand, explain and predict cultural similarities and differences across a variety of human behaviour*
>
> (Triandis, 2001:35)

There is disagreement on the precise makings of these cultural attributes, i.e. Hofstede (1984) saw them as contradictory, whereas Schwartz (1999) and House *et al.* (2004, 2014) as able to coexist. Triandis (2001) views these characteristics as multi-dimensional constructions rather than opposing. Generally Western cultures are viewed as individualistic, and Eastern cultures, including Russia, are seen as collectivistic. Regarding cross-cultural differences in gender egalitarianism, Emrich *et al.* (2005:347) reported that in cultures with low gender egalitarianism, there is 'traditional gender division', where men are seen as wage-earners, and women are seen as taking responsibility for domestic households. In high gender egalitarian cultures, the responsibilities of women and men are spread more equally at home

and at work. McDaniel (2008) also highlights that there is less difference in social roles and expectation of priorities by gender in more egalitarian cultures. Thus, the national culture itself can shape gender roles.

Some social and professional activities are considered more 'masculine' than 'feminine' in different cultures because of different expectations of people in these cultures. Fisher *et al.* (2013) suggest that 'masculinity' is higher in those countries where there are expectations of men to prioritise financial success and women to safeguard quality of life. However, Martin and Nakayama (2008) believe that with the change of culture, gender roles change as well. Besides, Lyness and Judiesch (2014) highlight that gender egalitarianism on the one hand, is a dimension of culture linked to gender roles. On the other hand, it also could be seen as a regulator of cross-national differences. The question arises about the mechanism behind how national cultural gender roles might be adjusted regarding gender equality. Alvesson and Billing (2009) suggest that the knowledge on gender is dynamic, and it is contingent on cultural experiences and time, cultural practices contribute to the development of gender and cultural customs. They argue that it is not genes that determine 'unpaid homework in various occupations and hierarchical levels in organisations' (Alvesson and Billing, 2009:9). These authors maintain that the time that male and female leaders spend at work and the index of vertical gender segregation in their workforce linked to the subordination of gender roles. Chin *et al.* (2007) propose that, one way to move forward in gender discussions is by attempting to change cultural stereotypes by promoting integration and the acceptance of new values. In other words, creating an environment, to which both men and women would be attracted and would demand certain occupations.

Researchers (Greenhouse and Allen, 2011; Wada *et al.*, 2010; Lyness and Judisch, 2014) advocate that national gender egalitarianism is related to how the work-home balances of women and men differs. Low egalitarian countries are associated with greater work-family tension by women due to incompatibility of their work and domestic responsibilities. Men have less difficulty because there is no pressure for them to combine domestic and work responsibilities. Eagly and Wood (2012) considered variations in gender beliefs by different groups of people in society. It is thought that the societal practices would form members' expectations and determine

gender role stereotypes. Therefore, women and men in such societies tend to alter behaviour to fit these expectations. Lyness and Judisch (2014) explained how social gender egalitarianism might affect people's views. They studied the work-home balance of both, women and men applying the gender roles theory in different clusters of society by Eagly and Wood (2012). Their self-reported studies in 36 countries reveal that the consequences of national gender egalitarianism influence the attitude of men and women towards attaining work-home balance. They claim that in low egalitarian cultures men's engagement with work is in harmony with the societal expectations, indicating a higher work-home balance. Nevertheless, high work engagement by women is not harmonious with societal views, it is difficult for them to achieve a good work-home balance (Lyness and Judisch, 2014).

Issues in relation to the diaspora culture are also important for the analysis of cultural issues that women from the former Soviet Union who now live and work in the UK might experience.

3.4 Diaspora culture

The United Nations asserts that 3.3% of the population in the world resided outside of their country of birth in 2015 (latest available records). Although the reasons for migration differ for each individual, the majority of immigrants pursue prospects to improve their circumstances (UNFPA, 2020). Most of the migrants settle in the new homes of their hosting nation, find employment and bring up their children. Trying to keep their innate values, they build up groups replicating the environment of their homegrown country, forming diasporas (Esman, 2009). Created by Ancient Greeks, this term translates as dispersion, offering a conceptual model for group construction (Ohliger and Munz, 2004). The diasporas are regarded as a

> *Transnational migrant community that maintains material or sentimental attachment to its country of origin… while adopting the limitations and opportunities of its' country of settlement*
>
> (Esman, 2009:14)

The thesis examines cultural issues regarding the Russian diasporas formed as a result of immigration in the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the downfall of the Soviet Union. This stream of immigration considered as the third wave of Soviet/Russian immigration, brought the largest flow of people to the West since the Russian Revolution of 1917. This immigration resulted in the establishment of strong Russian diasporas around the world (Isurin, 2011). For thirty years since the collapse of the USSR historians have tried to find explanations for the troubles of the Soviet realm (Eliaeson, 2016). In an attempt to comprehend dramatic changes in Russian culture brought by *perestroika*, scholars appeal to the concepts of individual and collective rationality (Genov, 2016). Russian culture is portrayed as accepting both Eastern and Western values (Letisaari and Mustajoki, 2017), resembling Western cultures on egalitarian parameters (House *et al*., 2014) and Eastern cultures on collectivistic measures (Hofsteade, 1984; Schwartz, 1990). Being brought up in a collectivistic culture with a strong dependence on in-group standards, migrants from the former Soviet Union meet individualistic culture in Western countries, where people are generally more independent and self-reliant (Isurin, 2011). This poses extra difficulties for individuals in the Russian diaspora as diaspora culture encompasses an extra layer to the aspects of mainstream Russian culture. Esman (2009:9) considers that diasporas work in a three-dimensional interaction, firstly involving the émigré's motherland state and left behind friends and family. Secondly it comprises the new homeland state, the establishments there and the new general atmosphere. Thirdly, it incorporates the diaspora, connecting them to both, the motherland and the new homeland. Isurin (2011) examined the acculturation process of Russian immigrants in the US, German and Israeli diasporas via qualitative and quantitative methods. She advocates that the Russian immigrant's self-focused individualistic constructions could be stimulated by contact with the individualistic cultures. Therefore, it is believed that Russian diasporas' culture in the UK is different from both British mainstream culture and the Russian mainstream culture.

Scholars argue that culture is primarily dependent on history and context rather than on place (Platt, 2019). Culture is expressed by 'behaviours of individuals, one of which is language' (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015:15). More than 300,000 Russian speakers came to reside and work in the UK at the junction of the centuries, availing themselves of placid migration policies of the Labour leadership (Byford, 2012). The

Russian diasporas abroad are very active in keeping their culture alive, establishing 'Russian World' programs (Platt, 2019:7). Moreover, there are a number of weekend Russian-speaking schools, poetry classes, theatre groups formed in different locations in the UK (Pushkin House, 2021). The efforts of Russian diasporas have been recognised by the Russian government. High-profile projects such as annual festivals 'Russian Winter' in the centre of London were developed with Russian and British cooperation (Eventica, 2020). Besides, 72 Russian centres for culture and science were formed around the world (Rossotrudnichestvo, 2020), bringing platforms for concerts, public readings and exhibitions for Russian diaspora artists, poets and musicians. However, with the example of the 'Compatriots living abroad' project in the UK, Byford (2012) argues that this is yet another way for the Russian State propaganda to reach an audience beyond the boundaries of the Russian Federation. Hence, political issues might be a delicate subject for Russian communities abroad. Isurin (2011) emphasised the complexities of the Russian diaspora culture; it is very difficult for Russians abroad to distinguish between issues of politics and culture. The migrants she interviewed often asked: 'What culture and society do you want me to compare it with: Soviet or Russian?' (2011:168). Brought up in Soviet communism era, most of the migrants of the third wave find it exceptionally difficult separating culture and politics.

Jenkins (2004:17) argues that each individual is subject to the social construction of identity, resulting first of all from an 'individual order', addressing the question of 'what is going on' in the head of an individual. Next, the 'interactive order' addresses the question of 'what is going on between people' and 'institutional order' considers 'how we do things around here'. The affiliation with a collective entity, such as ethnicity or gender, will affect how individuals see themselves as well as affecting how other people see them (Kirton and Greene, 2016). Social Identity is one of the most challenging topics around diaspora culture, denoting

> *specific sets of characteristics, expressed in particular ways, to which both individuals and groups may subscribe in order to emphasise who they are and to distinguish themselves from others*
>
> (Story and Walker 2016:138)

Social identity is closely connected to a basic human need for belonging, which is manifested in inclusion in societal groups and results in enhanced self-esteem (Leary and Baumeister, 2000). Much of the research on identities is focused on perceptions of inclusion among minorities of the population (Plaut *et al.,* 2011). In relation to Russian immigration, the sense of belonging might be problematic, especially for those who live between two homes (Isurin, 2011) and often find themselves feeling alien to the host country (Harrison *et al.,* 2018). Though, Russian immigrants indicated that they often find themselves 'feeling like outsiders on their trips to Russia' and 'this topic brings some Russian immigrants to tears' (Isurin, 2011:168). However, the dual-national identities of immigrants might leave immigrants susceptible to accusations by local nationals of lacking allegiance to the host country. Although diasporas actively contribute to the economic systems of host countries, their existence often creates ethnic clashes with the natives, who believe their employment opportunities and local culture is endangered (Esman, 2009). Even when the conflict does not manifest itself in an open clash, the exclusion practices in Western societies could be apparent through a lack of support for multicultural policies (Plaut *et al*., 2011). Verkuyten (2005) asserts that the dominant cultural groups might see multi-culturalism as a source of threat. In the work environment this could be manifested in an approval or preference for colour-blind policies or exclusion practices (Plaut *et al*., 2011). Isurin (2011:129) believes that the social identity of Russians abroad is constructed from their affiliations with a specific 'social or ethnic group', while distancing themselves from the groups of 'others'. Ethnicity is seen as

> *the enduring relationship between more or less bonded groups or social categories that perceive themselves as being culturally different*
>
> (Eriksen, 2012)

In relation to the Russian ethnic minority, Platt (2019) asserts that the progression of Russian immigration throughout the World poses new problematic and unanswered questions related to the complexity of multi-faceted Russian culture. Discussions on ethnicity recognise similarities that ethnic minorities face, emphasising the importance of cultural heritage and traditions. Ethnic identities are grounded in common background and cultural values, recognised by the ethnic community and outsiders (Eriksen, 2012). These could incorporate 'cultural capital', including the

beliefs system, drive and determination, level of education, professional experiences and social capital, i.e. networking opportunities, the level of integration and economic situation (Morawska, 2016:341). Esman emphasises that diasporas are not an abstract group of people moved through the international boundaries. They are viewed as ‘real social structures’ undergoing multifaceted processes of transformation and recognition (2009: 9). The discussion of diaspora culture concerns the change that migrants go through in the process of acculturation in the host country. Apart from learning a new language, acculturation involves adapting to a new culture (Isurin, 2011). The socio-economic integration process of an immigrant develops along the mainstream or ethnic trajectory (Muller, 2016). In a first scenario it could go up or down the established socio-economic hierarchy in the host society, i.e. towards the middle- and upper- classes or towards the lower classes (Portes and Zhou, 1993). In a second scenario, the assimilation occurs along the ethnic minority groups, progressing towards the middle- or lower-classes direction. The immigrants accumulate new-fangled mind-sets, rituals and traditions through the integration process (Morawska, 2016). In diaspora people try to preserve tangible and symbolic attributes of their homeland culture (Grossman, 2019) through communications with relatives and personal contacts in both, diaspora and homeland (Van Hear and Cohen, 2017).

Although the issues of diaspora identities are very eminent for the academia, Morawska (2016) highlights that there is a big gap in systematic knowledge on this subject. Isurin (2011) also emphasises that the themes related to Russian immigration have attracted the attention of researchers following the collapse of the USSR. However, subsequent academic research has been inadequate as most publications look into the third wave of the Russian immigration in a homogeneous way without recognising hidden undercurrents. Esman (2009:9) believes diasporas have to be viewed as an intricate and distinct community, often compelled by a plethora of ‘internal factors’ pulling in various ways. Thus, the diaspora is not homogenous as people there might be attached to two or more homelands and be part of two or more diasporas (Grossman, 2019). In addition, diasporic relations with the homeland might be complex, for example due to disagreement with the official politics of homeland authority. Equally, homeland authorities might be antagonistic towards emigrants (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2017). Most of the third wave

émigrés were highly skilled professionals, who were deprived of opportunities and were professionally unrecognised by the Soviet State. Their exodus from the USSR produced a strong intellectual leakage as 96% of these migrants consisted of highly regarded academics, scientists and other key professionals (Heleniak, 2012). This stratum of Soviet society represented a class of *intelligentsia,* denoting people from a refined, well read and high-culture background. This type of émigré might well have had an easier cultural transition from the collectivistic to the individualistic culture as professionals and upper layers of the society display more individualistic behaviour in all cultures (Triandis, 2001). Yet, Isurin (2011: 89) believes that once in a diaspora, they may find a lack of 'the same level of appreciation in host countries.'

Furthermore, Werbner (2013) asserts that diasporas are often segmented and multi-layered. Heleniak (2012) highlights that prior to *perestroika*, extensive and strong Russian diasporas already existed and were deeply rooted in all former Soviet Republics. At the point of disintegration of the USSR, 25 million Russian people were stranded in the newly independent states, stripped of their protected and pre-eminent Soviet status, they were strongly unwanted by local populations (Hagendoorn *et al*., 2013). Therefore, many Russians from former Soviet republics fled back to Russia or to the West (Heleniak, 2012). Thus, among the émigrés of the third wave of immigration were Russians from the former republics of the USSR who never lived in Russia. This is important to consider as this factor might add an additional layer to the participants' identity construction. Moreover, Isurin (2011) believes that it is also imperative to consider that the third wave of Russian immigration and therefore more recently formed Russian diasporas abroad comprise a large number of Russian Jews departing from the USSR. The Soviet system largely disadvantaged Jewish communities; Judaism has been recorded as a distinct 'nationality' in Soviet passports. Even though Jews denoted a highly professionally accomplished cluster of Soviet society, they often were deprived of equal opportunities compared to ethnic Russians in selecting universities or professional occupations. Once in a diaspora abroad, Russian Jewish émigrés may relate to the same culture, history and speak the same language, yet the generalisation as 'Russians' might be a sensitive issue and their Russian self-identification might become problematic (Isurin, 2011). Thus, while the application of the language-based model of minority ethnic groups in the UK in support of multiculturalism and

diasporas (Byford, 2012), seems to be rational, it is nevertheless challenging when the whole Russian diaspora in the UK is regarded as a uniform minority ethnic group.

Therefore, immigrants might have difficulties in identifying themselves as belonging to a specific culture and instead seeing themselves as cosmopolites. Miller (2016:382) noticed that cosmopolitism is seen as an inter-disciplinary formula for 'citizens of the world' to oppose the single minded 'local particularistic' remedy to nationalism, offering to deliver a suitable framework for evaluating the consequence of globalisation for fairness and equality. In addition, identity in the contemporary world is not static but fluid and interchangeable. Cohen (2013) highlighted that the nature of identity flexibility emphasises a fresh authentic start in a new location. Regarding diaspora, cosmopolitanism identity refers to cultural distinction, a readiness to accept others and overall cultural competency (Vertovec, 2013). However, people's self-perception and how they are seen by others changes through the transformation of identity during the acculturation process (Isurin, 2011).

The main limitation of the studies discussed above concerning Russian diasporas' culture and cultural identity is that this body of knowledge lacks perspectives on women, which the current research aims to resolve. Russian diasporas abroad could be facing complex issues related to gender. According to UNFPA (2020) women constitute nearly 50% of all immigrants. Al-Ali (2013) asserts that diaspora discussions often ignore gender issues or demonstrate a profound gender-blindness. Yet, women could experience the cultural issues caused by immigration in a different way than men. Moreover, apart from the mere understanding about what it is like to be a woman, gender also has an effect on the balance of power and resource allocation. Scholars urge for attention to sensitive discussions of issues concerning gender (Patil, 2013). Oyet *et al*. (2020) also highlighted the underlining influence of perception in the intersectional context of gender and other categories. They emphasise that perceived differences might be manifested in incivility, especially for women, and this often serves as a catalyst for women from minority communities to resign from work. This research considers that there might be indications for Russian female professionals as representatives of the minority cultures in the UK to experience discrimination practices from their mainstream British colleagues. In regard to the power structure at the intersection between gender and culture, it is

important to consider that Russian women in the UK might be perceived as 'others' by both British men and British women. This research studies the experiences of women from the former Soviet Union in the UK by indicating whether issues of identity and belonging influence their career progression. The thesis looks into how gender and diaspora culture intersect across national boundaries and trace possible differences in cross-border connotations of gender issues.

3.5 Intersection of culture and gender

The concept of gender intersectionality was popularised by Crenshaw (1989), who sought to address the limitations of feminist theories, which examined women's struggles and identity patterns in a homogeneous way. Existing feminist theories focused on relatively privileged white women and largely ignored black women's experiences. This concept has risen as a plea by black women for recognition of the unique ostracism and injustice where gender intersects with race (Carastathis, 2016). The critical approach of intersectionality has since then laid a foundation to the analysis of social complexities (Cho *et al.,* 2019). The intersectionality concept has recently been widely adopted by feminist scholars addressing issues of diversity and analysing the overlapping systems of oppression in the contemporary world (Hancock, 2016).

Patil (2013) asserts that the academic community should be more thoughtful in its use of intersectionality. This is because it is often used as a replacement for discussions around the system of oppression addressed by gender studies and is seen as a universal move from patriarchy towards intersectionality. Cho *et al.* (2019) however, believe that intersectionality goes beyond studying issues of power dynamics and inequality as it is connected to interrelated concerns about equally important issues of identity. Furthermore, one of the crucial considerations of the intersectionality framework is a simultaneous nature of the analysis of the intersection components, which often makes it impossible to recognise which one acts stronger than the other (Mahler *et al.,* 2015). Patil (2013) advocates the view that further sensitivity required in the application of the Western-imposed idea such as patriarchy to discussions in different countries, especially for issues concerning gender identity outside of the Western culture. Therefore, the one-dimensional view

of fixed gender relations requires reconsideration of how gender inequality moves throughout times and spaces. Collins and Bilge (2016) look into issues of the intersectional complexity recognising three main domains of power. First, within the interpersonal domain of societal exchanges between people. Then, the disciplinary domain that establishes societal rules, presenting individuals of the right sex, gender and other characteristics with opportunities, and those possessing wrong characteristics with drawbacks. Finally, the structural domain shapes power relations within the organisational structures in similar ways.

Acker (2012) asserts that work communications are affected by gender stereotyping, ethnicity and other demographical characteristics. The organisational studies that do not consider intersectionality, imply all women endure homogeneous experiences regardless of their background or ethnicity. Intersectionality allows comparisons of people who have some characteristics in common and diverge in others, with deviating results (Hall *at al.,* 2019). The stereotypes produced by the intersection of gender and culture are distinct from the mere sum of the two stereotypical factors. The representation of women from ethnic minority differs from the representation of their male counterparts, and encompasses unique features (Ghavami and Peplau, 2013). However, male stereotypes of the ethnic minority community might underwrite the perception of the whole ethnic group (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2011).

Hall *et al*. (2019) offered a framework explaining how stereotypes with different demographic characteristics created in a society, might influence work opportunities. Their Model of Stereotyping through Associated and Intersectional Categories (MOSAIC) helps understanding how stereotypes form expectations of people impact on the behaviour of employees in work situations. They presented intersectionality scholars with different demographic categories. Associated demographic category ‘bears an implicit cognitive link to another demographic category, typically the intersectional category’. Intersectional demographic category ‘crosscuts the foundational category’ and the foundational category reflects the characteristic ‘that two hypothetical individuals have in common’ (2019:651). Within intersectional perceptions these categories integrate forming the strengthened or weakened stereotypes. This could result in societal expectations creating prejudice against an individual. The model is valuable as it permits micro-level analysis about how a

specific amalgam of personal characteristics produces specific stereotypes (Hall *et al*., 2019). An application of this model suggests that ethnicity and gender might be intricately connected.

Comparing a woman from the former Soviet Union working and building a career in Russia and in the UK, both are fundamentally categorised as women. However, the woman living in the UK has an ancillary characteristic, as she represents the UK ethnic minority culture, whereas the woman living in Russia is not attributed this characteristic. Therefore, the intersectional demographic category of Russian culture intersects with the fundamental category of woman. Thus, the intersectional categories encompass the perception of the Russian mainstream culture (in Russia) and Russian ethnic minority culture (in the UK). Moreover, Russian culture in general is associated with being a woman (Hubbs, 1983; 1993), which represents an associated demographic category, influencing the outcome of the integrated stereotyping outcome. Therefore, the integrative stereotype of the woman associated with Russian culture will be amplified as a woman ('femininity') in the eyes of the general UK public by merging the categories of woman and Russian (feminine). This image is consistent with how Russian women are portrayed in the West, i.e. emphasising physical features and generally beautified images (Tolstikova and Molander, 2012). Similarly, the general expectation in the UK is that Russian women, arguably, would rather spend a big sum of money than earn big sums of money (Financial Times, 2016). Considering that leadership is traditionally attributed to men (Koenig *et al.,* 2011), women from the former Soviet Union building careers in the UK might experience additional barriers in attaining leadership positions compared to those women building careers in Russia. This is because leadership is perceived as obliging masculinity, yet women from the former Soviet Union in the UK might be perceived as 'too feminine' by their association with Russian culture.

The current research studies how gender and culture intersect across national boundaries, tracing possible differences in cross-border connotations of power dynamics. Women from the former Soviet Union constitute an ethnic minority group in the UK are associated with Russian culture. Thus, a manifold of undercurrents might add to the specific processes at the crossroads where gender meets culture.

3.6 Chapter conclusion

The reviewed literature demonstrates that feminists' views and cultural studies contribute to the understanding of the influences in female leaders' career paths on a wider socio-environmental level (Patton and McMahon, 2014). The thesis recognises that ideas of liberal, radical, and postmodern feminists contributed to establishing different schools of thought in approaching gender equality. There is no consensus among feminist researchers in how to attain equality. The thesis considers Jewson and Mason's model of equality (1986) for analysing the tactics of achieving gender parity, such as liberal direction of safeguarding equal procedures for all, or a radical course, driven by the ultimate results. These views assisted evaluations of a wider equality directions in the UK and Russia, which influence female leaders' career development in these countries.

Moreover, national cultural factors impact the career progression of female leaders. The thesis draws on the GLOBE study among others, accepting their definitions and concepts regarding cultural dimensions (House *et al*., 2004). The strengths of societal gender roles in Russia and the UK (Eagly and Wood, 2012) are susceptible to cultural variations. Furthermore, the issues of diaspora abroad might affect the choices of women from the former Soviet Union working in the UK because they represent an ethic minority group (Byford, 2012). Therefore, their experiences might differ from the experiences of women in Russia.

Finally, this research recognises the issues of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) being important for analysis of female leaders' experiences. The intersection of gender and culture is considered for the evaluation of possible differences in experiences of female leaders from the former Soviet Union working in the UK and Russia. The literature conceptualising diaspora discussions is largely gender blind, especially missing on discussions of professional women abroad. This research will address this gap by applying an intersectionality approach for analysing the career experiences of female leaders from the former Soviet Union in the UK. The Model of Stereotyping through Associated and Intersectional Categories (MOSAIC) by Hall *et al*. (2019) suggests that the female leaders in the UK associated with Russian culture have accentuated career barriers in accessing leadership positions. Thus, the

analysis of female leaders' career experiences in the UK and Russia critically evaluates cross-national differences in these countries.

Chapter Four Methodology and methods

4.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology underpinning the thesis as well as the techniques of the data collection and the analysis. I start with an overview of the research paradigm, encompassing the ontological and epistemological issues, informing the choice of methodology. The underlying foundation of ontology, epistemology and methodology determine the current research process, which constitutes the research paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). I was guided by ontology and epistemology, which established a research framework. I critically evaluate the reasons for my decisions in this chapter. Phenomenological and feminist perspectives (Maruska, 2017) have influenced this research, aiming at exploring female leaders' experiences and perceptions of their professional careers.

The chapter then sets out the methodological choices for research design defining 'methods and techniques' (Kumar, 2014:7). Female career paths are studied by means of cross-national comparative research (Romani *et al.,* 2018), using qualitative methodologies (Silverman, 2017). A phenomenological approach (Crowell, 2013) is believed to enable the collection of female leaders' career experiences. The sampling tactics and data collection methods explain how the research has been conducted. Purposive sampling (Maxwell, 1997) enabled the selection of the participants for this study. Women from the former Soviet Union now professionally occupied in the UK and Russian private sector organisations were invited to participate. Twenty women in total contributed to this study with equal representation from each country. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted face-to-face and online obtaining an in-depth understanding of the female leaders' experiences.

Thereafter, I discuss ethical considerations and address issues regarding research trustworthiness. The ethical code of conduct (Bell and Bryman, 2007) guides the integrity of this study and along with my own reflexivity, underpinning the rigour of this empirical investigation (Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011).

Subsequently, I explain the mechanisms for data analysis - thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was adapted for this study. The analysis is performed on two data sets representing each country. The evaluations of experiences allowed detailed interpretations (Silverman, 2017) and permitted elucidations on female leaders' career experiences in different national contexts. As a phenomenological qualitative study, this thesis seeks to unpack the women's lived experiences of their careers and as such it does not aim to generalise beyond the research participants and their personal and professional contexts (Pringle *et al.*, 2011). Finally, I review the key points and insights in the chapter conclusion.

4.2 Research paradigm

Research paradigm reflects the researchers' system of beliefs about what is principal and genuine regarding 'a worldview, general perspective, and a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world' (Patton, 1980:37). Thus, research paradigm refers to postulations of 'basic assumptions, key issues, models of the research quality and methods for seeking answers' (Neuman, 2011:94). Kuhn highlighted that

> *paradigms may be prior to, more binding, and more complete than any set of rules for research that could be unequivocally abstracted from them*
>
> (Kuhn, 1970:46).

The purpose of paradigm is to determine the direction of research, clarifying the views of the choice of ontology, epistemology and methods of research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Romani *et al.*, 2018). Broadly speaking, two major paradigm archetypes are established, quantitative and qualitative (Antwi and Kazim, 2015). Quantitative paradigm is also known as positivism and aims to find regularities and consistent patterns amongst objects (Romani *et al.,* 2018). Qualitative paradigm, which is also recognised as interpretivism, opposes the positivist attitude, and aims to expose common implications (Romani *et al.,* 2018). Social science researchers from these opposing perspectives see the reality of people's behaviour in different ways. The ultimate steps and the direction of a study is contingent on which course is taken (Killam, 2013). Quantitative/Positivist researchers use a 'narrow-angle lens' for conducting their investigation as the emphasis of their work is on a limited aspect

of the enquiry. However, qualitative/interpretivist researchers use a 'wide and deep angle lens' to explore the variety of layers manifested in human behaviours as they occur in their natural settings (Antwi and Kazim, 2015:221).

This research is interested in female career experiences. The early studies on career development reflect on the spirit of industrialisation. A positivist outlook mainly centred on the individual, who functions unconnectedly from the environment (Patton and McMahon, 2014). In the new millennium the worldview around careers perceived an individual as part of the context and the environment, consistent with interpretive views (Patton and McMahon, 2014). Although the System Theory Framework adopted by this study allows positivism as well as interpretivism (Mc Mahon and Patton, 2018), this conceptual theory is substantially predisposed to interpretivist views (McMahon *et al*., 2014). This research follows the interpretive route, aiming to explore influences on women's career paths and examine barriers to their career progression. I believe female leaders have distinctive experiences throughout the course of their career and the interpretive course rather than the positivist direction is more suitable for addressing the overriding research aim of exploring a wide spectrum of such experiences. Thus, this research accepted the interpretivist view of the world assuming that people's behaviour is flexible and depends on circumstances, unlike positivist research, which appreciates the reality as calculable and accountable (Killam, 2013).

The research also aims to consider the cultural aspects of female leaders' career experiences. Yeganeh and Su (2006) claim that cultures viewed through the positivist paradigm, are seen as detached and steady, comprising measurable and controlled characteristics. Earlier studies in cultural dimensions by Hofstede (1980) and Schwartz (1994) represented this position. However, interpretivists see cultures as common social practices of people within a cultural cluster, who still might be varied in their views and attitudes (d'Iribarne, 2009). This research considers peoples' values and opinions as of crucial importance. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm fits the direction of this inquiry, aiming to demonstrate culturally explicit and emic perceptions (Chanlat, 2013) related to career, leadership, and gender.

Moreover, the earlier positivist cultural research, epitomised by Hofstede (1980), was

dominated by investigations of the inter-cultural scale, lacking enquiries concerning the individual levels of examination. This research aims to investigate the personal views of women. The interpretivist approach enables exploring women's' experiences at work, relating them to possible cultural meanings (Romani *et al*., 2018). Besides, the interpretive study is recognised as particularly effective in enquiries, concerning the representatives of marginalised societal groups (Pierre, 2013). Women from former Soviet Union in the UK might develop a specific cultural identity at work, which is different from the mainstream group. The interpretive research paradigm facilitates better knowledge of female leadership complexities. This research aims to unearth the depth of experiences rather than focus on a narrow area of this social phenomenon.

4.2.1 Ontology

Researchers refer to ontology as the core of the 'nature of reality' (Neuman, 2011:92) because it helps understanding of the world. Ontology is seen as a belief in how researchers see the world regarding the essential 'rules and structures' (Davis and Hughes, 2014:25). There are two central traditions within the ontological choices. The first is rationalism, also known as the scientific approach, which recognises a single reality bound by physical foundations. The second tradition is relativism, which determines that there is a manifold of realities assembled by different people. Gray (2018:21) refers to these ontological views as 'being' and 'becoming', both originated in Ancient Greece, where the former tradition regards the reality as stable and static, the latter asserts reality as moving and fluid.

The researchers adopting different ontological viewpoints see the subject of their research differently. Rationalist thinkers merely employ logic (Jackson, 2015). Starting from the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato, they support the idea of 'prior truths' building explanations on reasoning, simplifying their assessments by accepting that the reality is free from 'humans and their interpretation of it' (Neuman, 2011:92). One of the main criticisms of rationalism is that if the content of the prior belief is false, the rationally valid conclusions could be empirically deceptive (Jackson, 2015:10). To the contrary relativist thinkers, from as early as Aristotle, reflect upon the world around them in order to know it better. They trust people's

feelings, claiming that ‘the only knowledge that human beings accrue is from sensory experiences’ (Bernard 2013:8).

Denzin and Lincoln (2017) consider wider metamorphosis in ontology of social sciences. They believe that the ontological outlook of rationalism around the reality of the social world is contingent upon pure logic; relativism believers see that it is impossible to understand social reality while ignoring people’s perceptions. Both rationalism and relativism are instrumental for the understanding of social reality, whilst maintaining their different perspectives. Earlier research in career development took the rational approach, seeing reality as detached from human elucidations (Patton and McMahon, 2014). Lately researchers inclined to consider the complexity of the modern world, acknowledge that

> *We are relational. We have material experiences… It is a productive consequence of our existence that the rational systems that drive our meaning-making can never fully make sense of the totality of our relational lives; attempts at meaning-making inevitably fall short*
>
> (Kuntz, 2016:21)

This research is underpinned by relativist ontology, which is more congruent with the interpretivist paradigm, and which follows the pledge ‘to respect the evidence of the research and to locate your interpretation of it within the world of which it is a part’ (Davies and Hughes, 2014:240). Likewise, this research does not see reality without human interpretations. Thus, relativism is recognised as a main ontological tradition, which is believed to be appropriate for this study because the nature of the female leadership phenomenon is seen as changing and evolving rather than fixed and firm. Also, feminist ideas about the nature of social reality have been considered by this investigation for critical evaluation of the concepts of gender, leadership and culture.

Two main directions have been recognised within feminist viewpoints, gender essentialism and the social construction of gender. Following the essentialist ideas, which correspond to the ancient Greek model of ‘being’, Witt (2011) argues that though gender roles are uneven through times and cultures, gender remains the core-classifying element in the life of individuals. Thus, ‘gender essentialism’ conveys ‘centrality of gender in our lived experiences’ (Witt, 2011:15). She

introduced a notion of ‘uni-essentialism’, illustrating that a woman inhabits a firm place in a society (being a mother), complying with certain societal norms (caring for children). While subjugating instantly to a variety of social calls, gender is indispensable to all individuals, those in her view, with moral, duties and dependence. However, not all women conform to such an outlook, ‘most women, and not just feminists’ differ in their view of reality (Stanley and Wise, 2002:135). The essentialist position is criticised for being simplistic and naïve because it defines gender in an uncritical way presuming all women have similar experiences and all people live their life detached from societal processes (Harding, 1990). Contrary to the essentialists’ static view of reality, this research adopts the feminist idea that gender is socially constructed, which is believed to be more consistent with the ancient Greek model of the reality of ‘becoming’. So, reality is believed to be variant and abstruse (Maruska, 2017). Contemporary feminists recognise how socially constructed gender differences impact on daily experiences of individuals. They moved the focus from dealing with ‘the difference as a matter of substance or essence’ towards ‘analysing gender relationships under… social inequality’ *(*Gildemeister, 2004:123). In an ontological sense constructivism recognises that the

> *social phenomena making up our social world are only real in the sense that there are constructed ideas which are continually being reviewed and reworked by those involved in them through social interaction and reflection.*
>
> Matthews and Ross (2010: 475)

Contrary to the essentialists’ view of seeing gender as fixed and unchangeable, the constructivists’ outlook of reality accepts change and transformation (Stanley and Wise, 2002). Feminist constructivists conceptualise a woman as ‘becoming’ (developing, changing) rather than ‘being’ (stable, static), where

> *her body is rather seen in terms of embodiment, a cultural process by which the physical body becomes a site of culturally ascribed and disputed meanings, experiences, feelings…*
>
> Stanley and Wise (2002:146)

This research recognises that female leaders have experiences throughout their life, which impact their career paths. Feminist social research emphasises the

importance of idiosyncratic ‘experiences of women’ (Neuman 2011:116), and such an outlook fits well with the ontological direction of relativism of this investigation.

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to a theoretical approach associated with ‘how you know what you know’ (Davies and Hughes, 2014:239). Researchers pledging to different epistemological views consider different evidence as the basis for their knowledge (Gray, 2018). Therefore, epistemology helps to make decisions on how social phenomena is learned and evidences are gathered (Bernard, 2013). Epistemology relates to the formation of knowledge (Neuman, 2011:93) and is seen as a ‘theory of knowledge’ (Bryman, 2016: 690). The literature largely distinguishes between the two epistemological stances, objectivism and subjectivism (Lincoln *et al*., 2011). The epistemological direction for this study originates from subjectivism, appreciating the subjective experiences of female leaders. The reasons behind this choice will be examined below.

The objectivist researchers, who accept ontological views of a single reality, believe that any phenomenon in such reality can be understood through detachment and objectivity (Davies and Fisher, 2018). Their epistemological tradition encourages the use of techniques established by scientists, who believe in precise measurements for determining causal laws. Objectivists learn about reality via tangible elements, which can be touched and seen (Gray, 2018). Followers of these philosophies think that study must be value-free to be objective (Bryman, 2016). This view undermines the role of human involvement in the research process, emphasising the importance of ‘structural forces’, which are changeable (Neuman, 2011:99). However, Tsouhas and Knudsen (2003) argue that to determine figures and facts separately from individuals, the process of acquiring knowledge still cannot be value-free as it is confined to the complexities of the social environments.

Patton and McMahon (2014) claim that for far too long the studies about career development followed logical positivist views, accentuating objectivity rather than subjectivity, regarding facts above feelings. Recently scholars have reflected on the intricacies of people’s experiences. Contemporary researchers recognise methods of

acquiring knowledge beyond the ‘extracted way of knowing’ as ‘our embodied and emplaced experiences’ integrate with the physical realm in constructing the meaning (Kuntz, 2016:21). For research on career progression, McMahon and Patton (2018) suggest considering whether the career path construction is to be regarded as a social undertaking or a purely cognitive one. Contrary to the objectivist position, which disregards people’s judgements and undervalues brainpower for being imperfect and inconsistent, this research recognises human interactions as an important part of the study, adopting the subjectivist epistemological views. The subjectivist epistemology is chosen for this research because it seems to be consistent with relativists’ view of reality, varying from one individual to another (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and implying that knowledge is acquired through experiences (Jackson, 2015).

However, the multiple realities of the relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology are criticised, especially in regard to the theories about the origin of knowledge. The concern is whether it is at all possible to gain a sound understanding of social reality if the subjective reality is so reciprocally constructive and perplexed, thus no reliable knowledge could be confidently claimed to be admissible (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Unlike objectivist enquiry, which studies objects, or regards people as if they are objects (Mies, 1983), this research explores experiences and perceptions of women with a focus upon subjectivity rather than objectivity. Therefore, knowledge is learned throughout the course of people’s life, it is relative as people learn only from what they are exposed to (David and Hughes, 2014). I examine the depth of social interactions of women in their professional lives to accrue understanding through learning about the events they have witnessed. This approach provides opportunities to build comprehension via interpretation of meaningful authentic evidence. The concepts developed by the social science within the STF model (Patton and McMahon, 2017) adopted by this study, are consistent with subjectivity, comprising relations of individuals and emphasising the importance of context.

Furthermore, feminist perspectives are criticised for being charged with intensity. Neuman (2011:116) proclaims that feminists posit a significant degree of researcher’s integration, as well as ‘personal feelings and experiences into the research process’. Gorelick (1991) inspires feminist researchers to ardently promote

societal change. Therefore, feminist research has been categorised as 'action research… to create awareness of women's issues…to foster action, promoting equality between sexes' (Kumar, 2014:160). Yet the main criticism of feminist perspectives is around using stereotypical views. For example, Gildemeister (2004) advocates that only a woman can understand another woman. Feminist epistemologists often attempt to privilege female researchers saying that 'gender of the inquirer influences the character of knowledge' because information 'travels by the subjectivity of the researcher herself' (Anderson, 1995:62).

Although I do not aim explicitly for action in this investigation, I have an empathetic understanding of female experiences and share affinity and benevolence to the progression of women. Appreciating feminist ideas of equality, I conducted research in a sensitive manner (Lugone and Spelman, 1983). I profoundly understand that women might be sharing complex and delicate information related to their personal and professional experiences. Feminist research often goes beyond the frontiers of specific academic subjects and it is adaptable to a choice of different methodologies (Gray, 2018). I consider feminist epistemological ideas for this research, having sincere compassion towards feminist thinking, sharing feminists' interests in transformation of knowledge on an individual and social levels. Thus, being influenced by feminist views, this research accrued knowledge through subjectivist and feminist perspectives. This epistemological base allows bringing experiences and views of women into the centre of this investigation.

4.2.3 Methodology

Methodology, as a theoretical attitude, addresses the strategies for this investigation and refers to the research process (Killam, 2013). Researchers in interpretive studies are seen as *bricoleurs* because they often manoeuvre between different assignments within their research project. The interpretive *bricoleur* signifies a multifaceted kaleidoscope of interrelated strands, reflecting on methodological choices. Some scholars see methodological principles as restraining because it confines the researcher to a specific ritual (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Others underline the overriding importance of understanding the reasons behind adopting 'certain methodological stances and employ particular methods' (Kuhn, 2008:181).

Following is an explanation of the research design and approach, the research positioning and the justifications for selected data collection instruments and data analysis methods.

4.2.3.1 Research design

The research design stems from the epistemological approach (Gray, 2018), holding the principal structure for data collection and analysis. This research concerns the perplexity of social relations unlike quantitative design, which focuses on relationships between factors, defining narrow research questions for answering research hypotheses (Creswell, 2014:111). The intricacies of female leaders' career path are explored through evaluations of the activities and daily interactions (Silverman, 2017) of women working professionally.

The focus of this research under the direction of subjective, feminist epistemology is on exploring individual women's experiences. Previous research on this subject overlooked how experiences of women and their explications affect the direction of career progression (Ahn *et al.,* 2017). Qualitative research is the universe of living experiences where personal views and events overlap with cultural values (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). I stayed closely connected to the process of the research and the research participants (Schreirer, 2018). In addition, the qualitative research process of generating knowledge is regarded as being profoundly thoughtful. I aimed for attentive communications with the participants to learn about their experiences (Davies and Fisher, 2018).

I was aware that using qualitative methodology, I would not be in the position to apply the results of this study to a wider populace (Flick, 2018) as it is based upon a purposive sample. The nature of qualitative methodology does not allow transferability (Deavis and Fisher, 2018). Thus, this qualitative research design adopted an open-minded and adaptable attitude, aiming to present findings in an evocative rather than diagnostic manner. Data was produced by listening, recording, and analysing female leaders' experiences and perceptions without generalisation. Maxwell (2013:3) regards qualitative research design as a 'do-it-yourself' route, compared to quantitative research as an 'off-the-shelf' practice. One of the essential

characteristics of qualitative design is that it is ‘emergent’, i.e. the concepts about the design might be altered as the research progresses. Encompassing ‘interconnection and interaction among different design components’ (Kumar, 2014: 132), I tried to allow a degree of flexibility for research to evolve, interpreting situations by looking into women’s judgments, visions and attitudes.

4.2.3.2 Phenomenology

There are several approaches recognised in qualitative methodologies, including ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenology (Gray, 2018) leading towards specific research tactics (Deavis and Fisher, 2018). The choice for this investigation was mainly between the prospects of grounded theory and phenomenology because these types of qualitative enquiry are often associated with research influenced by feminist philosophies (Maruska, 2017).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed the principles of grounded theory emphasising the centrality of the emergence of theory from primary data. This approach pursues the construction of complexity by incorporating the context, opposing quantitative tactics that aim for simplicity, breaking down constructs to variables (Flick, 2018). Many grounded theory supporters promote the unconventional strategy of starting research without prior involvement with subject literature and predisposition to any conceptual framework. Instead, they consult the literature at later phases, arguing that concepts emerging from the data enable contextualising results at a later stage (Bryman, 2016:380). This reflexive approach helps to reveal the ways in which the literature may have influenced and moulded the understanding of the field (Dunne, 2011). The current research, however, considers the literature review as one of the important elements for this investigation as it assists learning from previous studies. Postponing engagement with the literature carries a risk of exploring something that has been previously revealed. Unlike grounded theory, which aims to develop models (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), this research aspires to explore the phenomenon of female leadership to deliver interpretations of their experiences, considering ‘those who are being studied in a phenomenological sense’ (Johnson and Duberly, 2013:132). Therefore, a phenomenological approach is chosen for this

investigation, focusing on the phenomenon of female leadership and drawing upon existing theories.

Phenomenology is based on ideas of Husserl and Heidegger with attention to implications of social practices, defined as a perspective of researching unique social experiences (Giorgi, 2012), which are conditioned by the environment (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015). Phenomenology uses rather amorphous means of collecting data, accentuating an inductive way of gathering large volumes of it (Gray, 2018:167). Within the epistemological approaches of data analysis, the inductive or 'bottom up' approach is driven by data, whereas the deductive 'top down' approach is motivated by theoretical interest (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Contrary to positivist research associated with the deductive practices of testing models and concepts, this investigation aimed at building detailed interpretations using inductive practices consistent with interpretivist perspectives. The aim was to achieve comprehension of the phenomenon from the participant's perspective, creating thick descriptions of their lived experiences resulting from personal and cultural situations as well as from their own individual traits (Tsouhas and Knudsen, 2003). This study investigates how female leaders' performance is formed by the affiliation with their environment. It comprises places where they work, their career phases as well as social interactions throughout their professional life (Giorgi, 2012).

There are two main approaches recognised in phenomenology, transcendental (also known as descriptive), founded by Edmund Husserl and hermeneutic (also known as interpretative), introduced by Martin Heidegger. I have used hermeneutic phenomenology in this research, which is often referred to as existential for Heidegger (1996:11) believed that '*fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can originate, must be sought in the *existential analysis of Da-sein*' (existence, being, being in the world).

Using hermeneutic phenomenology, I appreciated that experiences, which the female leaders live through, are inseparable from their world, as well as they are bounded by time and their past history. Researchers who subscribe to transcendental phenomenology aim for general descriptions of the research phenomenon. However, by following the path of hermeneutic phenomenology, I

pursued a deeper level of understanding of experiences (Neubauer *et al*., 2019). Whereas transcendental phenomenologists, aspired for objectivity and emotional detachment from the process, and aimed to portray the fundamental constructions of experiences, I went along the explorative path to learn how female leaders' experiences transpire (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). Thus, the female leaders' reality and their relation to the world around them was an important consideration as 'taking up of relations to the world is possible only because, as *being-in-the-world*, *Da-sein* is as it is' (Heidegger, 1996: 54). Thus, as a hermeneutic phenomenologist, within the interpretations of female leaders' experiences, I was revealing the complexities of their environment, rather than providing mere descriptions of the phenomenon (Sloan and Bowe, 2014). Unfolding women's backgrounds during the interpretation process, I tried to comprehend their world. I considered language being a very important instrument, I viewed interview language as a source of data. By analysing their narratives, I searched for meanings of the participants' stories within the context of the unique world of their experiences (Neubauer *et al*., 2019). Thus, I saw my own contribution within this investigation playing a vital part. By listening to the stories shared by the participants, analysing and interpreting their experiences, I was moving along my own subjective path. Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology helped to unpack women's experiences in a delicate, sensitive and thoughtful way.

Thus, phenomenologists aim to obtain a profound inclusive picture by gaining access to daily experiences of people to comprehend the phenomena (Hay, 2016). With focus on the phenomenon of female leadership, I aspired to expose various lived experiences of female professionals presenting their reality and interpreting their views. I sought to understand how these women made sense of their career experiences. This research is also designed as a cross-national comparative study. I explore the social phenomenon of female leadership in application to professional women from the former Soviet environment in two countries, Russia and the UK.

4.2.3.3 Cross-national comparative research

Cross-national comparative research has roots in Ancient Greece, (Hantrais, 1995). It uncovers differences and similarities between two or more countries using various research methods and approaches. I look into differences and similarities in the

career paths of women from the former Soviet Union now working in Russia and the UK. Romani *et al*. (2018) highlight that there was a lack of studies related to the individual levels of analysis in cross-national research, as traditionally quantitative studies seem to prevail in these types of enquiry. This comparative investigation designed on a *micro-,* rather than *macro*- level via qualitative research methods.

Matthews and Ross (2010) suggest designing qualitative comparative research through investigation of the phenomena in two countries on the set of the same criteria. Female leadership in two national settings is compared using identical research mechanisms to gain additional comprehension of the phenomenon. This enabled insightful knowledge of how different societal values and beliefs influence female leaders career paths. Bryman (2016:65) asserts that it is important to avoid treating cross-national research as solely concerned with comparisons between nations. Cross-national comparison research studies 'social phenomena across countries, developing explanations on similarities and differences' and 'the effects of national and sub-national contexts on behaviours and attitudes of individuals' (Andress *et al.*, 2019:2). Hantrais (1995) emphasised a close link between comparative and non-comparative qualitative studies, with indistinguishable purposes of enlightening the societal phenomenon.

There was a recent rise in qualitative studies interested in examining how cultural minorities construct a distinctive cultural identity at work reacting to the professional identity of the majority (Pierre, 2013). Furthermore, Chanlat (2013) drew attention to conflicts stemming from xenophobic attitudes towards subgroups of society from the representatives of the prevalent cultures. Primecz *et al.* (2016) expound a conflict about migrants and native personnel, demonstrating how their cultural disparities produces an extra layer to the existing frictions at work. There has also been an increase in enquiries concerning intersectionality (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015).

The qualitative cross-country comparative research design has an advantage over the qualitative single country research as it allows comprehension via comparing the phenomena in different contexts. This is because different environments allow development of the same phenomena in a distinctive way (Williman, 2011). In addition, this comparative investigation might lead to supplementary clarifications by

contemplating national similarities and differences, because it exposes diverse social viewpoints, endorsing additional angles (Hantrais, 1995). This enables better comprehension of the phenomenon as it permits learning 'through different eyes' (Matthews and Ross, 2010:131). I encompass the national norms and customs through attention to the distinctions and commonalities (Hantrais, 1999) in the two contexts. This approach is seen as all-inclusive, informative and evocative (Ragin, 1989:16). The main challenge was to produce a sound structure. I was confronted with the task of modelling differences and similarities of multiple experiences. The circumstances in which women live and work feature models and theories identified and discussed throughout the literature review. The research findings enable better understanding of the environment in which female leaders build their careers.

I remained vigilant ensuring that possible inconsistencies were not overlooked during the data collection (Hantrias, 1995). The study results are scrutinised in connection to a broader social setting during the interpreting stage. Language and social affinity are crucial for cross-national studies because linguistic expressions transmit both the way of communication as well as conceptual social structures (Elder, 1976). There are nuances in the culture specific and emic connotations of assumed worldwide-accepted conceptions (Romani *et al*., 2018). This potentially presents limitations because the meaning of terms and concepts might be lost in translation. Attention was given to the use of concepts central for this study such as gender, leadership, feminism and societal expectations. Having the experience of living in both the UK and Russia for more than twenty-five years, I am familiar with social aspects in these countries. In addition, the most important concepts have been discussed with professional translators and linguists, organised via personal contacts. Furthermore, practicing reflexivity helped to attain a profound comprehension of the phenomenon (McHugh, 2014). These measures helped to ensure mutual understanding between the participants and the researcher.

4.3 Research methods

The research methods were largely determined by the research questions and gaps in previous investigations. The earlier qualitative research around career experiences has been generally undertaken within academic settings. In addition,

there are studies researching employees, whose career motivations are linked to their immediate situation, not concerning their career path history and its different phases (Ahn *et al.,* 2017). Besides, career path studies prevail in research conducted in the USA. In the UK the studies concerning female leadership mainly examine issues related to leadership style and work-home balance of female leaders. Durbin (2016), however, presented a comparison of female leaders' attitudes in the UK public and private sector organisations. Still, overall, there is a lack of research about how career paths of women could be affected by their predisposition to a specific culture in a different national context as well as at the intersection of culture and gender.

Research methods are recognised as techniques chosen for designing research instruments (Williman, 2011). In this work, the study population represents women form the former Soviet Union, working professionally in the business environment in the UK and Russia. The barriers of discrimination that they face throughout their career present a problem resulting in female leader's underrepresentation in positions of leadership. The research aimed to study the experiences of these women throughout the process of their career growth. Therefore, the phenomenon of female leadership is researched through the collection of data about the experiences of female professionals along their career path with regards to the opportunities of attaining leadership positions (Kumar*,* 2014:65).

4.3.1 Sample strategies

Sample selection is one of the important steps of the research because it influences the research quality (Boeije, 2010). The sampling design fundamentally depends on the research approaches (Creswell, 2009). Following qualitative research tradition, this research used small samples to enable gathering meaningful data for depicting personal experiences (Schreier, 2018). A phenomenological approach helped to illustrate the quintessence of these experiences and their features.

The research proceeded with a purposive sample strategy, where participants were selected purposively based on the research objectives (Maxwell, 1997). The conditions for the sample selection were around the origin, gender, professional

duties of the potential participants, and the type of organisation where they work. Women from the former Soviet Union now residing in Russia and the UK, working professionally in private sector organisations, have been selected purposely for this investigation. This sample enabled collecting data rich in context to achieve the comprehension of the phenomenon (Gray, 2018). Attaining a better level of depiction by increasing sample size improves quality of data (Morse, 2016), which is difficult to achieve in a qualitative study (Schreier, 2018). Data quality was enhanced via a greater 'homogeneity of elements within the sample' (Gray, 2018:211) by choosing information-rich respondents of a similar background, who work in similar types of organisations within comparable roles.

I organised data collection through personal and professional networks in both countries. These connections presented an opportunity for targeting, selecting potential participants and securing meetings in both countries. In total twenty women with leadership attributes from a former Soviet Union background, ten from Russia and ten from the UK, professionally working in private sector organisations were selected for this study (for leadership definition see Chapter One, pp. 8, 18, 22). These measures were considered sufficient for exploring the research objectives. It was thought that if during the analysis stage the saturation point, when new themes stop emerging (Weller *et al.,* 2018) was not met, more participants could be recruited. Women from public and non-profit sector organisations were not considered for this study because the dynamics of career progression in those sectors are different from the private sector organisations (Durbin, 2016). Besides, the career progression of women in the private sector seems to be particularly problematic (World Bank, 2021). Also, for better cross-national comparison, a matched sample was used (Cao, 2007), where women working professionally in the UK private sector were matched with women working professionally in the private sector in Russia.

Furthermore, I considered that currently careers follow flexible patterns as leaders are not bound to a particular industry, moving within and between industries (Joseph *et al*. 2012). Therefore, the participants were recruited from an assortment of industries to depict different professional environments. The convenience factor also played a role as I engaged personal and professional connections mainly in Moscow

and London. Convenience sampling tactics are regarded as appropriate for phenomenological study (Schreier, 2018). Moreover, snowballing sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) was employed to find participants for this investigation. For example, friends and colleagues were willing to arrange contacts with the potential participants who fit with the selection criteria. Then the participants themselves were keen to involve their contacts, so all introductions were arranged through well-established networks. Thirty candidates were considered for this study, twenty-five of them were approached and twenty agreed to participate, of which ten interviews in Russia and ten in the UK were conducted. I considered a surplus of candidates in case data was not saturated. Participants were first contacted via telephone to identify their interest, followed by emails entailing information delineating the details of their participation (Appendix 2). This research is built strictly upon an informed consent basis (Crow *et al*., 2006) to open the opportunity for the participants to refuse participation without requiring explanations. Consent was obtained from each participant prior to commencing the interview (Appendix 3).

Cross-national comparison researchers are cautioned about administrative and financial difficulties, especially regarding travel itineraries. This type of research involved considerably higher amounts of time and money than studies conducted in a single state (Hantrais, 1995). Also, cross-country research uses extra resources for translating materials, arranging trips and travel documents, accommodation and living expenses in a foreign country. Difficulties of this nature were overcome by careful planning and taking advantage of personal connections. As I have dual citizenship, there was no need to obtain visas when travelling to Russia. I am familiar with both countries (Russia and the UK) and fluent in both languages, which is valuable for fieldwork, considerably reducing the costs of the project. Trying to keep costs under control, I prudently arranged travels outside of expensive periods, avoiding school holidays; my friends and family assisted with accommodation in Russia during the data collection. Also, I carried out the translations for this study. Translations involve more than knowledge of the language, it requires deeper understanding of the lexis' layers to appreciate the meanings, which might be lost in cultural discrepancies (Fomina, 2019). This is particularly true for qualitative studies where data constitutes words, perceptions and views, which researchers expose. Translation acts as interpretation, where the participants' meanings are crucial as

language is used for both extracting meanings and constructing meanings, so readers grasp the original sense of the data (Van Nes *et al.*, 2010).

4.3.2 Data collection methods

The data in this research was collected via interviews. Although this method is effective for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, interviews have been regarded as one of the main data collection instruments by qualitative phenomenological researchers (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015). The depth of the phenomena and concepts can be unveiled through interviews as concepts are 'part of the landscape in qualitative research' (Bryman, 2016:382). The interview has been defined as

> *a verbal interchange often face-to-face, though the telephone may be used, in which the interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs or opinions from another person*
>
> Burns (1997:329)

Interviews present a possibility of collecting in-depth information, as well as the opportunity for follow-up questions, enabling clarifications and explanations to avoid confusions (Longhurst, 2016). However, the main drawback of such a data collection instrument is that interviews are intensely time-consuming (Neuman, 2011). Also, the quality of data depends on quality of communication between interviewer and interviewee (Kumar, 2014). I tried to improve my communication skills by reflecting on each interview session (Mayers, 2015), learning from weak points and building on the strengths of the preceding interview experiences. Moreover, research diaries kept account of feelings and thoughts behind each encounter with the participants (Gray, 2018) for profound reflections.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with each participant in each country. Cooper and Schindler (2008) describe individual interviews as a one-to-one communication between an interviewer and a participant. This is the method where 'one person, the interviewer attempts to elicit information from another person' by questioning (Longhurst, 2016:143). The semi-structured technique enabled achieving balance between safeguarding data comparability and allowing the depth

of discussion (Creswell, 2014). This data collection method allowed scope for exploring the intensity of the phenomenon for addressing the research objectives.

Most of the interviews (thirteen) were carried out in person usually at the participant's workplace. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, six interviews were conducted online and one by telephone. The quality of on-line conversations depends on technology. This was an important issue for interviewing busy individuals working on tight schedules. Careful planning was a crucial factor helping to overcome this challenge. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, and often exceeded this time. Prior to the beginning of the interview, I asked the participants whether they had had the chance to read the Information letter (Appendix 2). Upon receiving a positive response, each participant was asked to sign the Consent form (Appendix 3). For interviews conducted online and by telephone, consent has been obtained via email. If the participant had indicated that they had not read the introductory letter, a copy of this document would be offered to them preceding the commencement of the interview. At the start of the interview, I reiterated to the participants their rights of terminating the interview at any time without obligation or explanation. With the participant's approval all interview data has been audio-recorded (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009); a copy of audio files for each interview is stored electronically. The interviews were guided by the schedule, designed to allow participants to talk about their background, starting point of their career, milestones of their career path and career progression challenges (Appendix 4). Interview questions were guided by the theoretical framework. For example, the question about gender equality policies in the organisation was influenced by Jewson and Mason's (1986) theory on liberal and radical approaches to equality. Similarly, asking women to think about situations where they might have felt were being treated differently from their colleagues provided opportunity to elaborate on possible glass ceiling effects (Hymowitz and Schelhardt, 1986). This also often opened discussions about intersectionality of gender and culture (Hall *et al*., 2019). During the interview participants were encouraged to convey their experiences by means of open-ended questions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Overall, 25 questions initially were intended and thirteen were confirmed after feedback received from the pilot interview. There are two main parts in the interview guide, i.e. concerning the participant's career path and their overall professional experiences. Interview questions were designed to encourage

the use of examples and explanations, expressing unique circumstances. This was designed with a view to capture personal idiosyncratic experiences of career progression and influences on the career path. This later enabled recognising main themes covered by each personal story. The interview concluded by asking participants to provide additional information, which they felt might be important, but was not included in the interview agenda. I then thanked the participants for their time and contribution to this research. The profile of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Russia

Code	Name	Age	Industry Background	Expertise
RU01	Darya	35 - 44	Distributions	Human Resources
RU02	Eugenia	35 - 44	Telecommunications	Human Resources
RU03	Zhanna	35 - 44	Tourism and Hospitality	Marketing and Sales
RU04	Victoria	35 - 44	High Technologies	Human Resources
RU05	Nadezhda	45 - 54	Electronics	Marketing/directorship
RU06	Clara	45 - 54	Science and Innovation	Management
RU07	Evelyn	45 - 54	Financial Services	SME Manager/owner
RU08	Tamara	55 - 64	Tourism and Hospitality	Tour Operator
RU09	Ksenia	35 – 44	Information Technology	Administration
RU10	Galina	35 – 44	Information Technology	Human Resources

UK

Code	Name	Age	Industry Background	Area of Expertise
UK01	Valeria	45 - 54	Insurance	Broking
UK02	Emma	45 - 54	Legal Services	Lawyer
UK03	Veronica	45 - 54	Information Technology	Engineering/Management
UK04	Inga	45 - 54	Information Technology	Engineering/Management
UK05	Nella	45 - 54	Telecommunications	Engineering/Management
UK06	Inna	35 - 44	Information Technology	Marketing and Sales
UK07	Lidia	35 - 44	Legal Services	Lawyer
UK08	Bella	45 - 54	Financial Services	Marketing
UK09	Claudia	55 - 64	Visitor Economy	SME directorship
UK10	Regina	45 -54	Insurance	Broking

Table 1: The participants' profile

4.3.3 Pilot study

Bryman and Bell (2011) suggest that the pilot should have a set of respondents who are compatible with the populace of the main enquiry. A pilot interview was

conducted in April 2018 to be able to assess the study design instruments. As defined by Wilson (2014), a pilot study is a minor investigation that is conducted preceding the major enquiry to be able to increase research thoroughness. Cooper and Schnider (2008) described it as a data collection trial for identifying shortcomings in project design, which could lead to alternatives of data collection. Blaxter *et al. (*2010) suggest conducting informal piloting, which is an early pioneer test for the feasibility of the main research to enable necessary modifications. The pilot study in this research was conducted with a proxy interview (Bryman and Bell, 2011) to enable clarification of the study design mechanisms.

The contact for the pilot interview was obtained through my personal network in the UK, it offered the opportunity to reveal weaknesses in the interview schedule and to modify interview questions. For example, the earlier version of the interview schedule included far too many questions, which made the interview long and unmanageable. Therefore, after the pilot study, repetitive questions were removed. As such, it was discovered that asking female leaders a question 'Could you please tell me the story of your first leadership appointment and how did it develop from there' was already covered by the preceding question of: 'Could you please tell me about your work history from leaving full-time education until your current position'.

Also, in the initial version of the interview schedule the participants were asked to draw a timeline graphic of their career progression. Although the timeline graphic would be a valuable tool for analysis, it proved to be impractical as it took far too much time from the interview, and effectively, from a busy schedule of a female professional. Thus, I decided to take the timeline idea out of the interview schedule and depict career milestones from the interview because this information would be provided via the direct question about the career trajectory of the participant. Overall, the pilot study was a valuable contribution. First, it provided answers to research questions. Secondly, I feel that it refined the value of the questions for the final interview guide and improved the quality of the experience for both, the participant and me as an interviewer for the main study.

4.3.4 Interview experience - personal reflection

I conducted twenty interviews in total between September 2018 and December 2020. During the interview all participants were relaxed, engaged and enthusiastic about the topic, eager to express their opinion and share experiences. Each interview was planned for one hour. However, it often went beyond the scheduled time because the participants were willing to continue the conversation. Being aware of the busy diaries of professionals, at the time of approaching the one-hour boundary, I would bring the participants' attention to the time, indicating that I would be glad to continue the discussion if they were happy about it. Most participants were happy to continue, which usually would endorse the evocative conversations and allow further depth. Often, at the end of the interview once the recorder was switched off, the participants were keen to speak with added frankness and openness. This provided further insights to comprehend the topic of discussion. However, these off-the-record conversations did not offer direct quotations to manifest the point of view. Still, these genuine contributions helped further expose the nature of the female leadership phenomenon.

All interviews in Russia and all but four administered in the UK were conducted in Russian. Initially I planned to conduct all UK interviews in English to ease the process of analysing data. However, I noticed that participants were not as relaxed and elaborative talking in English as when speaking in Russian. Therefore, before commencing the interview, I started asking the participants which language they would prefer speaking in during our conversation. Most of the participants preferred conversing in Russian. Apart from added openness and sincerity, speaking Russian helped to create a special bond between us, further contributing to a relaxed atmosphere. As one of the participants noted after choosing to speak in Russian: *"A native tongue is a mother tongue!"*

I am confident that the questions asked during the interview were well received and well understood. Although I prepared the interview questions in advance, I was very happy when the participants would start speaking spontaneously. I believe this enhanced the benefits of research as it facilitated the collection of rich and meaningful experiences. Occasionally, when the conversation went too far off-track, I

asked the participants to return to the subject of our discussion to stay focused. Towards the end of the interview, I invited participants to identify a few personal characteristics, such as age, level of education, the composition of their family, etc. Most of the participants responded positively. Overall, participants found the interviews stimulating, frequently commenting: "*Thank you, it was very enjoyable"*", "*Very-interesting questions!*", "*It was lovely, really, really great!*".

4.4 Ethical considerations

Selby-Bigge (1975) distinguished between relativist's and rationalist ethics, advocating the view that an aspiration rather than cognisance directs people's conduct. Researchers are encouraged 'to be methodologically responsible', especially as they are 'relationally bound to the phenomenon of interest' (Kuntz, 2016:16). Therefore, the ethics of the relativist attitude, appealing more to feelings rather than to mental doctrines, became a matter of personal integrity. This qualitative study is more than a simple compilation of people's experiences, but a moral and representational assignment (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). I guarded each stage of the research process following advice of staying sensible and trusting Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*, especially when facing unexpected dilemmas (Gray's, 2018:180).

4.4.1 Ethical code of practice

The ethical code of practice has been considered to safeguard the participants' and the researchers' interests as well as the research itself (Maxwell, 2013). The code of practice is thoughtful of the participants and the impacts on the research design, the process and fairness of the investigation (Bell and Bryman, 2007). The ethical codes, however, are criticised for not being specific and presenting researchers with abstruse situations (Esterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). I endeavoured to stay ethically reflective (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015) by engaging in critical evaluation of this work's moral standards.

The research had to comply with the University's Ethical directives and obtain Ethical approval prior to conducting interviews (Appendix 5). The research recognises the

importance of the code of ethics (Bell and Bryman, 2007), ensuring that there are no detrimental impacts to the participants from the research. Considerations were given to the discretion of research files, protection of the privacy of the participants, transparency about the aims and nature of this research, as well as to any potential conflicts of interests and accuracy in reporting research findings (Matthews and Ross, 2010). Informed consent was attained from participants as this research involved interaction between people (Crow *et al*., 2006). Participants gave free consent for participation in this project after the accurate information concerning them in relation to this research was provided. They also were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage of this research course without providing reasons (Appendix 3).

Furthermore, issues of confidentiality and anonymity (Wiles *et al.*, 2008) were discussed with each participant to ensure that we both had mutual understanding of implications. All participants taking part in this research were assured that they would remain anonymous (Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011). The anonymity of participants was agreed with each female leader prior to conducting the interview. The participant information letter outlined the main points of the interview discussion, and issues of confidentiality (Appendix 2), re-iterated in the Consent form (Appendix 3) and at the beginning of the interview, highlighting participant's rights of withdrawing from the study at any point as they wish.

All interviews were audio recorded. In accordance with data protection regulation (GDPR, 2018), it was explained to the participants that their identity and all sensitive information obtained during the interview would be stored in confidence. The interview data converted from the audio recorder into electronic files, coded and stored electronically. Participants were assured that only the country where they live, the industry and profession in which they work would identify them. Thus, all participants were assigned with pseudonyms and codes, being identified only by their country of residence and the expertise in the industry where they work (Table 1). All sensitive data is stored electronically with a secure password. Prior to the beginning of the interview, the conditions of data protection were agreed with the participants to their complete satisfaction.

4.4.2 Relational ethics and researcher positionality

Relational ethics addresses people's relations in respect to moral issues as 'it is within human-to-human relationships that the origin of ethical commitment to self and other is expressed' (Evans *et al.,* 2004: 463). Scholars accentuated the importance of relational ethics for qualitative researchers. Metz and Miller (2016) analysed relational ethics through feminist and care deliberations. Drawing on Noddings' (1984) concept of caring, yet criticising her gender essentialist's connotations, they identified relational facets of care ethics, appealing to a relational aspect of social ontology, recognising responsiveness and compassion, significance of emotions for moral judgement and importance of the context. They also regarded 'our relation with one another as mutually vulnerable', which is a fundamental motive for moral responsibility (Metz and Miller, 2016:8), thus the very essence of care ethics is relational. Furthermore, Caine *et al.* (2019:267) view 'researcher as carer, and participants as the cared for', where research relationships are thought of as 'human love and caring'. Therefore, Clandinin *et al.* (2018) emphasised that relational ethics is central to the methodology of those researching experiences through the stories lived by the participants. Moreover, Holmes (2020) addressed the importance of understanding that the researcher's positionality affects the research process and highlighted the significance of integrating reflexive practices for clarifying the researcher's positionality. In his guide to researchers, he underlined that positionality starts from defining researchers' world views and the position adopted for their research regarding their societal and political stance, which then influences all steps of the research process. I follow his recommendations in my positionality statement.

This research involved interactions with people, and I recognise that the nature of such interactions is contingent on the research process, which is in turn susceptible to the researchers' fundamental beliefs. Influenced by relativist and feminist views, I do not recognise reality without social exchanges, thus the nature of relations with the research participants in this investigation is of exceptional importance. I cherish these relations and consider them as precious, imperative and I feel responsible for them. Starting this research being a 'soft' believer in feminist values, as it progressed, I grew into a strong believer in the social construction of gender and became an ardent supporter of the radical feminist cause. I describe myself as a

radical feminist, believing that in a gender unequal society, gender equality could not be achieved without the help of radical policies (see radical feminist approach by Jewson and Mason (1986) in section 3.2 pp.55-56). Furthermore, as a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher, I recognise the subjective nature of knowledge produced by this research. I acknowledge that I am an important part of this investigation and giving voice to the participants, I take responsibility for interpretations (see section 1.4 p.18). Moreover, I appreciate that research undertaken is not value-free. Therefore, reflexivity was an important part of this investigation. I regularly and continuously tried to analyse my own involvement and influence on the research process and outcomes, striving to stay consciously and emotionally tuned into the ethos of relational ethics.

Furthermore, considering that this research has taken place in two fields, Russia and the UK, I reflect upon my 'insider' and 'outsider positionality'. Cultural studies, especially those related to cultural minorities are often criticised for being performed by 'outsiders' (Smith, 2016), who do not have much in common with their participants. I recognise the importance of 'insider' and 'outsider' positionality and discuss how 'insider' and 'outsider' positionality unfolded in both countries.

'Insider' identity, professed through a variety of cultural indicators, apart from language, also comprises mind-set and social values (Chereni, 2014). Sharing several primary identities with the participants, I believe my social standing is gendered, and to some extent is aligned with the cultural background and educational status of the participants. Like the participants of this study, I was born and raised in the former Soviet Union. I speak Russian and have experience of working professionally in both Russia and the UK. Thus, in this respect, I was regarded as an 'insider', concerning relations with the participants. This was advantageous for data collection, breaking down the formality of interactions for capturing authentic stories, valuable for phenomenological studies.

However, the 'insider' outlook also might produce a certain degree of epistemological bias, appearing through human interpretations. Thus, shared identities create common grounds for relaxed and open communication, yet participants might presume 'it is just common sense and clear anyway' avoiding elaborations and

explanations (Gray, 2018: 169). Also, the 'insider' positionality is open to possible prejudice favouring an own social group (Dweyer and Buckle, 2009). Therefore, I was determined to stay engaged in reflective practices throughout the whole duration of the study to avoid misunderstandings and partiality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). The benefits of 'insider' positionality include the ability to enter an array of social environments and an ability to comprehend the nuances of language and cultural indicators. The language might also expose the undertones of cultural views. Some of the participants' stories were emotionally charged, creating an atmosphere of trust, expressed through sentiments of language. This was especially the case in conversations with the participants who relate to my identities in several ways. For example, in addition to gender, also being of a similar age. In both Russia and the UK, I often heard: 'remember how we grew up in Soviet Union?' or 'like our Soviet mums did'. This would instantly create an invisible bond among us.

Nevertheless, I still sensed there was a finer subtle difference between the two fields of study. Overall, I felt more of an 'insider' in the UK than in Russia because apart from a similar background and comparable social status, I shared a newfound homeland with the UK participants. The social system in the UK is also more familiar. In Russia, I felt that my status as a Russian living abroad added an element of being perceived as an 'outsider'. I was aware that even when research takes place in the country of origin, the fieldwork interfaces might occur in unknown social conditions (Shahbazi, 2004). I moved to live in the UK in the early 1990s, and on my yearly visits to Russia each time I noticed how the language evolved. I often found myself in awkward situations, especially when I occasionally was presented by acronyms that were not used in the past. Therefore, although I regard myself as a native speaker, I did not take it for granted and remained mindful while being in the research field. Openness about my identities from the very beginning (Keikelame, 2018), allowed engaging in further clarifications, whenever I felt they were needed. At times, I asked the participants in Russia: 'Things have changed now, could you please explain.'

Being influenced by the fluid nature of the study, West *et al.* (2013) highlight that the positioning of researchers is not static. Qualitative researchers often find positioning themselves in a 'multidimensional way' (Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008:667), turning on their most appealing side depending on situations. Bicultural researchers

negotiate the twofold character of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ by employing symbolic competence in response to presented circumstances (Hult, 2014). Hence inevitably, researchers often find themselves positioned in-between, exposing themselves to potential tensions (Zhao, 2017). Appreciating the merits of reflexivity on ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ statuses, I learned to assess the situation during the data collection process (McSweeney, 2019).

In conclusion, issues of equality have inspired this research. I feel compassion towards fairness and was motivated by social change towards unleashing opportunities for women. This research is enthused by a drive to champion the course of enhancing knowledge about the prospects for women in attaining leadership roles.

4.5 Data analysis process

Esterby-Smith *et al.* (2012) advised selecting data analysis processes congruent with the main philosophies and research design approaches. This phenomenological study aimed at producing thick and rich descriptions (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015) through learning about the authentic experiences of female leaders from their own perspectives. Although the interviews helped testing the existing theories, aiming at building detailed interpretations, the inductive analysis was used, consistent with interpretivist perspectives (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This analysis revises all collected information for comparisons between corresponding data, generating descriptions for occurrences of the phenomenon (Ragin, 1989:16). It was believed that within each national context female leaders were influenced on the individual, organisational and national levels (Romani *et al*., 2018).

By exploring personal lived experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009) of women, the analysis was conducted in a delicate manner (Silverman, 2017). Participants’ personal experiences during their career (Ahn *et al*., 2017) were captured with careful consideration of the circumstances of their occurrence. Analysis incorporates distinctive perceptions of every participant. The awareness of data was built using coding (Bell *et al.,* 2019), presenting intricate interpretations in regard to the research objectives. The interpretations retained the participants’ insights in the direct

quotations. This process corresponds to Thematic Analysis, which guided the data analysis in this research. Thematic Analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2014) is a flexible form of data analysis, particularly suitable for qualitative researchers, who expect to gain a better understanding of people's experiences. Thematic Analysis is defined as

> *a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It… organises and describes… data set in rich detail…*
>
> (Braun and Clarke, 2006:6)

The data sets are selected for specific reasons (Silverman, 2017) from all information gathered (data corpus). Qualitative data analysis included the examination of the audio recordings of the collected interviews. To enable a better comparison, the identical analysis was performed for two data sets, the interviews collected in Russia and the interviews collected in the UK. Scholars do not agree about the exact way of proceeding with thematic analysis (Tuckett, 2005). I followed by and large the stages of the data analysis process proposed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of Systematic Reflective Thematic Analysis.

At the initial stage of familiarisation with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I transferred all recordings into electronic format and transcribed them verbatim (Bird, 2005). The transcription process was very labour- and time-intensive, creating the material to produce data for enabling accurate data processing (Bell *et all*., 2019). These texts were then translated from Russian to English, which was again highly time-consuming, yet a significant task for data quality. Overall, the interviews captured valuable data, enabling comprehensive understanding of the nuances of the participant's career paths. I gathered a sizeable volume of material concerning the participant's career path development and barriers to their career progression. This rich data permitted the analysis of the complex interplay of career progression influences of women from the former USSR now working in the UK and in Russia.

Initially, I considered using the Nvivo software systems for the analysis because of the relatively large number of interviews intended. However, Denzin and Lincoln (2017) regard the software 'coding' problematic because software judgements have been attributed to inept representation and resolution of the data evaluation. Quinlan

et al. (2015) suggest that the manual method of data analysis is equally suitable for both, small and large data sets. Thus, the transcripts with thick and rich data from different participants were studied, manually coded, and analysed. I read each of the produced transcripts a few times to familiarise myself with the data (Clarke and Braun, 2014), immersing myself into the interview experience, revisiting the feelings during the interview and capturing the essence of the conversation.

At the stage of the Introductory Data Coding, I noted the significant ideas from each interview (Bell *et al*., 2019) about the female leadership phenomenon from the semantic data set content (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The coding system is a way of labelling the sections of the data (Bell *et al*., 2019). I methodically worked throughout the whole data set, inscribing notes in the transcript, being thoughtful about every data piece, which could have built the foundation for the future themes. I searched for the emerging patterns while examining the identified introductory codes throughout all of the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Some scholars suggest using a different terminology for this stage of the analysis. For instance, Denzin and Lincoln (2017) emphasise that the patterns are not 'emerging' in data, but rather ought to be discovered by the researcher continually looking for recurrences in the entire data corpus.

I then revisited and refined the codes by inspecting how they work for the passages, building up a 'thematic map' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage I searched for periodical reappearances of coded issues (Bell *et all*., 2019), watching connections between codes and re-coding some of the issues (Evers, 2016). The thematic map was revisited many times until the new modifications did not bring considerable enhancement (Clarke and Braun, 2014). This stage is also known as the horizontalization (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015). I scrutinised all transcripts for building a schedule of all codes arising from the data, to the point of saturation when no more fresh matters appeared.

Specialists in qualitative data analysis agree that it is imperative to decide how then to distil the multifaceted material (Esterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). Bell *et al*. (2019) state that the data analysis is about data reduction. However, Kunz advocates the idea of breaking the traditional boundaries and to open-up concepts instead of 'adopting

reductionist strategies that would see concepts pinned down or defined' (2016:22). I recognised the importance of extracting the quintessence of the data and aimed at reducing the list of codes, combining some, 'moving away from the row data' towards a 'deeper level of abstraction' (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015:320) for resolving the research objectives. Eventually I discarded a dozen codes, ending up with the final register of 38 codes for Russia and 45 for the UK (Appendix 6).

I thoroughly evaluated individual codes, developing a coherent description and connecting it back to the research objectives. In order to understand the data further, I investigated the resemblance of coded themes with the Literature Review. Thus, moving to the next stage of the analysis, known as interpretation, I tried to elucidate on what was marked in the data (Quinlan *et al*., 2015:320). I then assembled a few coded themes into wider themes (Appendix 6). The wider themes later formed sub-sections for Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Information has been depicted from what participants have said, therefore the final analysis includes direct quotations from the data, carefully selected for its' vibrant representations (Esterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). The depicted themes uncover the perceptions of the participants shared for advancement of this research. The aim was to exemplify their experiences in developing an argument, which addresses the research objectives. I analysed the information to relate data with existing conceptual theories to build core interpretations. This process allowed a practical way of linking the data with research aim and theoretical framework identified via the literature review. This helped addressing the research objectives of evaluating the female leaders' career paths to explore the factors, influencing their career growth and examining their attitude towards these influences, effectively expounding on the phenomenon of female leadership.

4.6 Research Rigour

The main advantage of Thematic Analysis is attributed to flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as qualitative researchers have freedom to choose the instruments for data analysis. Though, Holloway and Todres (2003) assert that the flexibility of

thematic analysis might result in irregularity and lack of lucidity within the themes. Ensuring effectiveness and integrity was a very important consideration for this work. Epistemological perspectives guided this investigation in establishing principles for rigour (Levitt *et al*., 2021).

Feminist scholarship challenges conventional rigid and fixed attitude to science, opposing the mainstream scientific approach, which failed to represent women's experiences (Wiggington and Lafrance, 2019). True to the ethos of feminist scholarship, I endeavoured to remain attentive to the authentic experiences of the participants to comprehend the forces that influence their realities. Committed to keep this investigation fluid and flexible, I recognised that it cannot be entirely value-free. Qualitative inquiries are influenced by the context and the researcher at all stages, from formulating the research objectives, throughout data collection, analysis up to writing the conclusions (Teo, 2015). The ethos of interpretive investigations implies that the conclusions are subjective by nature, drawn via researchers' creative depictions of storylines, holding a mixture of researchers' own perceptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Nevertheless, strong principles of methodological integrity underline the research trustworthiness (Lincoln and Cuba, 1985). The criteria for rigour in qualitative investigation are around fidelity for sustaining close relations to the chosen topic and utility related to efficiency in achieving goals (Levitte *et al.,* 2021). Fidelity is achieved through prolonged study and personal experience with the phenomenon; utility safeguards that research processes manifest the research purpose and epistemic views. Committed to delivering coherent results within the chosen research direction, I ensured that research tools enable achieving research goals and attain the research objectives.

Concerning prolonged engagement (Morse, 2016), I immersed myself in the subject matter, putting substantial effort, time and thought into developing data collection tools. I studied participants' professional profiles and connected to them prior to the interview. This helped establishing trust between us for achieving mutual understanding regarding the nature of the study and issues concerning integrity and confidentiality. Levitte *et al.* (2021) assert about the challenges of achieving data adequacy, perspectives of management in data collection and analysis, as well as grounded-ness. I tried to attain data adequacy through appropriate sample to ensure

well-saturated data (Morse, 2016). The representation was improved through the sample selection mechanisms (Schreier, 2018). Research participants ranged from a variety of industries, and the parameters were set to fix the participants' responsibilities within the organisation. Additionally, the stipulation of the type of organisation where participants work, positively contributed to the sample quality. Regarding perspective management in data collection and analysis, I aimed at collecting evidence to 'reflect reality' (Gray, 2018:182), recognising that it would be impossible to achieve bias-free results in a study, where the researcher remains part of the investigation. Understanding that this investigation will not attain entire objectivity (Bryman, 2016) as personal values and feelings influence the research outlook, I established an ethical approach of safeguarding rigour. I was guided by reflexivity during data collection, aiming at endorsing mutual respect and dignity in communications with the participants (Palmer, 2016). I followed the bracketing technique (Quinlan *et al*., 2015), engaging in a reflexive practice of awareness about personal beliefs, re-evaluating my own viewpoints, aiming to avoid being influenced by them and keeping them apart. During the interview I stayed mindful of careful wording when probing with additional questions to achieve depth in understanding of the phenomena (Kindsiko and Poltimae, 2019).

The attention to details ultimately helped in achieving grounded-ness (Levitte *et al.,* 2021). The interview questions were carefully designed based on relevant literature guided by the research objectives and were pre-tested in a pilot-study (Wilson, 2014) contributing to the rigour of research mechanisms. Cross-national studies are associated with linguistic challenges regarding translations in constructing questions for the interview (Wilson, 2014). Being fluent in both languages, which mitigated this problem to some extent, I also involved a personal friend, a professional Russian-English translator and interpreter, in editing the interview schedule. Concerning data analysis, I detailed the process, considering precise phases suitable for the phenomenological research (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015) and revisited the raw data for formulating the ultimate judgements. Following the tradition of qualitative enquiry, I carefully presented the original thoughts of the participants in quotations accompanied by explanations of the context. These measures ensured further accuracy of this study.

Furthermore, the conception of utility in achieving goals is safeguarded through thorough considerations of the coherence between the goals and epistemic viewpoints. The use of a consistent interview schedule, asking each participant similar questions proved to be effective (Morse, 2016). Nevertheless, this study did not aim for definitive data; it explored evocative and genuine stories from all contributors for indicative rather than conclusive resolutions (Pringle *et al.,* 2011). Therefore, during the interviews I often probed for elaborations. The contextualisation in this study is enhanced through the descriptions of the context alongside the original quotations of the participants. Without aiming for generalisation, the objectives were around achieving depth for accumulating genuine and unique insights of the phenomena (Kindsiko and Poltimae, 2019) ultimately attaining acuity as an indicator of achieving goals (Levitte *et al.,* 2021).

4.7 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I have explicated and justified the underlying foundations of this research and explained how I collected data. I have been influenced by the interpretivist views considering the social nature of reality (Davis and Fisher, 2018). The relativist ontology (Kuntz, 2016) as well as the subjectivist (Davies and Hughes, 2014) and feminist (Maruska, 2017) epistemological viewpoints led me towards the explorative path, providing strong grounds to stand for gender equality, recognising hidden social complexities. I explored the research objectives with the help of qualitative methodologies (Silverman, 2017) to attain evocative data. The path of phenomenology (Giorgi, 2012) was my focus for achieving a deep grasp of the female leaders' experiences. Cross-national study (Romani *et al.,* 2018) allowed for comparison of the career experiences of women from the former Soviet Union who attained leadership positions during their careers in contemporary Russia and the UK. I engaged reflective practices (Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011) throughout the whole project to reinforce the phenomenological direction by staying vigilant, attentive and thoughtful, especially in regard to data collection and analysis. I was aware that my background potentially might influence the decisions taken along this journey. Thus, I was determined to sustain my dedication to ethical practices. I believe that my positionality as an insider and outsider (Keikelame, 2018) improved the communication channels.

I provided justifications for the groundwork of this investigation. Semi-structured individual interviews (Mayers, 2015) were conducted, collecting rich data. Women from the former Soviet Union, professionally working in the private sector organisations in Russia and in the UK, were selected for participation by means of purposive sampling (Maxwell, 1997). Twenty interviews were conducted with equal representation from each country. All stages of this research were safeguarded by the code of ethics (Bell and Bryman, 2007) to achieve fairness (Quinlan *et al.*, 2015), protecting participants' privacy (Wiles *et al.*, 2008) and allowing transparency (Matthews and Ross, 2010). Informed consent (Crow *et al*., 2006) was obtained from each participant and confidentiality was discussed, reiterated and secured according to data protection regulation (GDPR, 2018).

I employed thematic data analysis for data evaluation. The process of evaluation was a rather intimate experience, immersing myself back into the atmosphere of the interviews, it was in many ways special. Although I was guided by thematic analysis literature and largely followed Braun and Clarke (2006), I have taken a combination of data analysis mechanisms. I specified the steps performed for the analysis and claim that this method was the best for analysing the data gathered. This enabled in-depth evaluations of participants' experiences, allowing elaborative interpretations. The identical analysis performed for two data sets permitted national representation (Silverman, 2017).

I believe the rigour of this work was enhanced through careful design of research methods, such as consistent interview schedule (Morse, 2016). Principles of reflexivity and practices of bracketing (Quinlan *et al*., 2015) helped staying true to the qualitative feminist tradition in achieving the objectives of this study (Levitte *et al.,* 2021). Without aiming for generalisation, I pursued indicative, not conclusive resolutions (Pringle *et al.*, 2011). This research methodology endeavours to contribute to the body of knowledge on female leaders' career experiences. The next chapter discusses the details of the findings of this research, feeding into the final conclusions.

Chapter Five Personal factors affecting career paths

5.1 Chapter introduction

The preceding chapter outlined the details and justifications for the data collection procedures. This chapter is the first of the three chapters assessing the findings that emerged from the collected data. Following the Systems Theory Framework (Patton and McMahon, 2019), key themes unfolded from the data were formed into three main categories. This framework considers different levels of career path influences, including the personal stimuli and the structural forces related to social as well as wider socio-environmental aspects. The interconnection of influences within each level and between the personal and structural levels under this framework is considered as a very important characteristic for this study. In this chapter I analyse the participants' career experiences, distinguishing the major impact of personal factors on their professional achievements. The main purpose of this chapter is to address the objectives of this study regarding personal influences on the participants' career progression.

The major factors of the participants' career advancements are those influences that the participants themselves perceived as central and essential. Thus, I examine the data in relation to the dynamics of the participants' career progression in the UK and Russia. The results for the two countries were compared. The key themes evolved through the analysis of the primary data derived from the interviews with the participants. The main categories comprise the sub-sections. Subsequently each sub-section includes the themes linked to the factors that influenced the participants' career paths and the attitudes of the participants towards their career progression barriers. Four main sub-sections form this chapter. Firstly, I address the importance of personal interests in the professional lives of the participants. Secondly, I examine the significance and value of education that the participants emphasised during interviews. Thirdly, I discuss how gender affects the participants' career progression. I then explore the connection between the personal attributes of the participants and the barriers to their career progression.

The thesis analyses how the participants' interests influence their career progress through the application of the protean career development model (Hall, 2004). The analysis highlights the complexity of career decision choices in the context of career transitions. I examine how the participants' personal interests form the basis for choice of education and influence their professions. The participants of this study identified the exceptionally high value that they place on formal education. I continue with the analysis of how education and the value that the participants place in education prepared them for their careers in a competitive labour market in the UK and Russia. I proceed to comparisons of how the participants' careers were sustained in Russia and the UK. Furthermore, I examine how gender, as a fundamental factor, impacts the participants' professional experiences and the underlying role of gender stereotypes in these experiences. Subsequently, the barriers to career progression are analysed in regard to gender attributes. The personal attitudes of the participants towards these barriers are examined and evaluated in both countries. Finally, conclusions are drawn about the findings concerning personal factors.

5.2 Interests and aspirations for work: *'I absolutely love what I do'*

The theme of personal interests and aspirations appeared as one of the main threads throughout my conversations with the participants about their career paths. Though I did not plan specific questions about this topic, it came up in almost every interview. I noted how passionate and appreciative the participants were about their professions. Bella (Financial Services, UK08) emphasised: '*I really enjoy what I do! I absolutely love what I do. I am very happy, very grateful for what I've been doing so far… I never get bored at work!*'. Eugenia (Telecommunications, RU02) admits: '*Work gives me feeling as you are given the opportunity to create the future… It is very inspiring… I wanted to be part of some global project and feel that I make a difference*'. Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) simply admitted: *'I very much like my profession… many just don't understand how it is possible to love it!*'.

The starting point of the decision regarding the choice of profession was around initial interest for most of the participants. For example, Lidia ardently wanted to become a lawyer and chose to study for a law degree. Her education came around

the transition period in the former USSR. At that time there were very few lawyers around the territories of the former Soviet states knowledgeable to serve the market economy. She says:

> *It was very interesting for me to be part of this new construct! I wanted to see how this new profession shapes up, how the new relations form, how it will be regulated. I thought it was unbelievably interesting!*
>
> (Lidia, UK07, Legal Services)

Lidia was intrinsically motivated to a career in law, following this path out of her own inner desire, which brought her joy (Rayan and Deci, 2000). Galina (Information Technology, RU10) wished to study for a psychology degree, yet her parents suggested that software engineering would be a more practical choice as psychology was not a reputable profession in Russia at that time. In addition, there were no psychology courses available nearby, therefore Galina first graduated and started working as a software engineer. She soon realised that '*technical things are utterly uninteresting and difficult*' for her, and she decided to pursue her initial interest in psychology. Combining her day work with studies, Galina accomplished a psychology degree and then found her passion in Human Resources. These examples reveal that logic and rationale might not be pivotal to the ultimate career choice (Zunker, 2016). Following the participants' stories, I heard reasons for choosing a job such as '*I really liked the name of the company, it sounded very interesting*' (Valeria, Insurance Services, UK01) or '*I always liked London… I always thought that living here could be fun*' (Bella, Financial Services, UK08). Individual interests impact not only on the initial choice of the profession, but also on how careers evolve, fuelled by aspirations (Brimrose and Hearne, 2012). Galina believes that the move towards her passion for psychology subsequently brought her to a new career, where she could apply her knowledge to her full gratification. She says:

> *It was very interesting! I liked everything I did, everything I learned… I liked the people with whom I communicated. It was interesting to be among them. The speed of their reaction to events… was much faster than mine, it was fascinating! To learn together with them was a joy… I was very interested to build a corporate culture, I graduated with an MBA in HR Administration and it was very interesting to put it into practice!*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

The new career also allowed Galina's rapid upward transition to the position of HR director in a fast-growing company, employing four thousand people under Galina's management. Sullivan and Al Ariss (2021) highlight the complexity of career decision choices. Galina's example demonstrates how she found a way to fulfil her interest in psychology, attesting that the wisdom and practical considerations of her parents did not withstand the long term. The thesis supports Kidd's (2008) view, emphasising the importance of feelings and emotions in career development. Personal interest is an important motivational factor (Hidi *et al.*, 2017). Galina's personal interest activated her professional changes and brought feelings of happiness and accomplishment: '*I liked everything I did, everything I learned*'. Zhang *et al*. (2019) explain that the realisation of the intrinsic aspirations provides a sense of meaning in work as well as an overall meaning in life. Nella (Telecommunications, UK06) believes that her desire to learn new things within her profession not only helped her to progress in her career, but also gave her a sense of being different. She says:

> *I always had a feeling that whatever I am given is not enough. I wanted to learn something else… I liked working closely with people… I wanted to take on more projects to produce something, so things started to happen around me. I was given things that other people were afraid to do… my husband says that I am running in front of the locomotive! I thought that if I do only what I have to do, I will be like everybody else, but I did not want to be like everybody else.*
>
> (Nella, Telecommunications, UK06)

Similarly, Valeria (Insurance Services UK01) underlined that she also benefitted in her career taking extra assignments, strongly believing in an *'I can!*' attitude, which became her motto. However, in Valeria's view women usually are not ready to take additional assignments, which might put their career on hold. She says: '*It depends how focused you are, and whether you really want it because not so many people want to take these additional responsibilities, especially women'*.

The desire of the participants to follow personal interests and aspirations throughout their careers featured in fourteen out of twenty interviews and is analysed through the protean career model. The protean career is mainly driven by individuals themselves, rather than by the company (Hall*,* 2004). The above-mentioned

participants acted instinctively upon their personal desires and were motivated by their innate attainment rather than rational extrinsic objectives, which is one of the distinctive attributes of protean careers (Hall, 2004). The participants revealed that they often followed their personal interests at the expense of immediate career success or financial rewards. During her career in the UK Lidia, who works as a lawyer, moved from one company to another losing out financially, yet following her interest. She says: '*even though it was a loss in earnings, it was very interesting!*' (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07). Consistent with Wolf (2019), the professionals at times take a provisional downward career transition in line with their personal agenda, allowing for the learning of additional competencies. Victoria (High Technologies, RU04), who works as HR director, recalls that there were instances when motivated by intrinsic interests, she was ready to lose out considerably in financial remunerations during her transition from one company to another:

> *Moneywise it was significantly lower than in my previous position, but it was important that the pennies were still coming in; yet it was an interesting experience and it was very stimulating to get involved in it*.
>
> (Victoria, High Technologies, RU04)

Similarly, Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) had a successful career in a multinational science-based technology company, managing Regional Sales. She decided to change her professional direction, explaining:

> *I decided that I have been in marketing, I have been in sales, and now I want something more intellectual. The highest intellectual point for me at that time was consulting. So, I joined a company accepting a basic position of business analyst, simply to understand how the consulting business works and how business tasks are solved by consulting. Business implementation is good, but I thought that to develop further, consulting would be the best thing to do.*
>
> Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05)

Nadezhda wanted to acquire new skills and was prepared to take a downward career turn (Wolf, 2019). This transient career move permitted her later to advance towards the directorship. Her desire '*to develop further*' was her source of inspiration. However, during the interviews I also noted that some of the participants were not exactly sure where and how to start their career. When Darya (Distributions, RU01)

graduated as a teacher of foreign languages from the Institute of Pedagogy, she understood that although she liked teaching, she did not want to be a schoolteacher. She says: '*I did not want to be a teacher even though I have a sense of calling to teach! I am sure about it!... I did not understand where to go and what to do*' (Darya, Distributions, RU01). Hall and Chandler (2005) regard the sense of calling as a highpoint of the protean career. Darya appealed for help to the recruitment agency, which directed her towards Human Resources in a large international corporation. While working there, she became familiar with opportunities offered by the HR department. She believes that her sense of calling made her realise: '*I always wanted Learning and Development! I am a teacher!*' She found her dream profession, following her heart and finally found ways to move into Learning and Development department, starting a new career. It seems her career understanding was latent until she had been exposed to a certain environment, then she found the way to head towards her purpose.

However, a loss of interest as a result of stagnation might be an equally powerful force in the participant's protean career transition. For instance, Evelyn (Financial Services, RU07) is passionate about accountancy and finances. She started her professional career in Financial Services while studying for a degree in economics. By the time of her graduation, she was already working as a chief accountant. She then progressed to be the Enterprise Manager in the same firm in her hometown outside of Moscow. Nevertheless, she decided to leave it all and to start from ground zero, highlighting her reasons as: '*I was bored and lost interest*' (Evelyn, Financial Services, RU07). Aspiring to a corporate career, she moved to Moscow and started from a basic auditor position in a multilateral organisation. Yet, she had to resign within eight months because there were no interesting assignments for her there: '*I am very active, enthusiastic and I like it this way!... I cannot sit still and be static at work!*' Evelyn moved to another corporation, working there for over three and a half years. Once she felt a lack of stimulus, she decided to start her own business.

> *My nature is as such, simply sitting and waiting for time to pass by - it is not who I am… Everybody would work in a calm and quiet environment, I did not want calm and quiet – it is not interesting, it is boring... There were very comfortable and good conditions for work. The salary, actually, was not bad at all… but I wanted more!*
>
> (Evelyn, Financial Services, RU07)

Evelyn's experience is consistent with Wolf's (2019) view that 'non-events' often trigger short-term lateral or downward transitions. Evelyn (Financial Services, RU07) noted that although '*it was not an easy decision to leave such a good company*', she followed her instincts. She now runs her own Financial Services firm, remarking: '*I really adore my work! I love it very much!*' (Evelyn, Financial Services, RU07). Careers often serve as means of self-actualisation (Shepard, 1984). For example, for many years Claudia (Events, UK09) built a successful career in software engineering, first in Russia, then in Germany. Alongside this career, she was organising art exhibitions and other events as it was her passion. Moving to the UK, she decided to leave her engineering career and open her own company, organising cultural events. She explains:

> *I am some sort of a 'roly-poly'. I opened my Culture club, where there are literature and music programmes, there are some big and developed cinema projects, we did amazing theatre performances… as well as just simply interesting talks with interesting people… there is no end to them! It is around the world now! It is fascinating!... How many amazingly interesting people I met and how many interesting events we organised – it is of course an incredible story!*
>
> (Claudia, Events, UK09)

Claudia's dramatic career turn from programme engineer to an event organiser led her to find herself in a new profession. She carried her longstanding hobby into developing a new career. Many of the participants in both Russia and the UK see their work as a source of inspiration and that intrinsic interest in work can be an essential strategy for success. Locke and Schattke (2019:277) emphasised that achievement motivation as a desire 'to do well' is equally important though different from both, intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli, where individuals driven neither by 'pure pleasure' nor by 'means to an end'. Bella (Financial Services, UK08) explains:

> *A couple of things that I'd probably say is that we should always do what we like doing… If we do what we think we should be doing or if we do what somebody else thinks we should be doing, we are never going to succeed… I think we do what we enjoy, by definition we will be good at it because we enjoy it… I think that we just need to be true and honest to ourselves, so I think that doing what we like and enjoying what we have a genuine interest in, matters a great deal.*
>
> Bella (Financial Services, UK08)

Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01) is of a similar opinion, and she explains how important it is for leadership: '*if you like what you are doing, if you really enjoy what you are doing, you can probably engage people'*. She emphasised that, most importantly for her, this way '*will be absolutely natural'*. At the same time, she cautions that '*if you don't like what you are doing – it doesn't matter how good you are in managing people, you will not encourage them to do anything*'. Thus, having a career is one of the important ways for the participants to achieve self-actualisation. Regarding career achievement, many participants felt lucky for having successful careers. I often heard from the participants in both countries: '*There is an element of luck in my career!*' (Darya, Distributions, RU01) or '*I was lucky I got into a good team, which believed in me!*' (Eugenia, Telecommunications, RU02). Similarly, Claudia (Events, UK10) recalls: '*perhaps I simply was lucky*' and Bella, Financial Services (UK08) reflects: '*maybe I got lucky because luck has a lot to do with how our journeys unfold and where that takes us'*.

The experiences of women from the former Soviet Union indicate that their careers evolve through aspirations. Placing intrinsic motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2000) above rational goals, they often follow the protean career model (Hall, 2004). Their initial personal interests (Hidi *et al.*, 2017) guide their choices. However, career transition could be also triggered by a lack of interest. Therefore, the thesis signifies that following one's own inner interests is the important factor in the career directions of the participants, which stimulates their self-fulfilment. The importance of education for the women's career development is considered next.

5.3 Value of education: *'I was yearning very much for edification'*

When I asked the participants about their work history, all but two, began their stories with their formal education and many also concluded emphasising the significance of education. The theme of education and pride in high academic achievements seems to be an important topic for all the participants. Clara (Science and Innovation, RU06) highlights: '*I always studied very well. I studied a lot. I very much wanted to discover new things, I was yearning very much for edification, absolutely!*' The participants in both Russia and the UK highlighted initiating further education and professional studies to enhance their professional skills and reported

about their wide-ranging formal education. However, if the UK participants seem to value professional courses, participants in Russia are equally interested in academic degrees as well as professional qualifications. Inga (Information Technology, UK04) outlined that while working full-time in her first job, out of her own interest she '*found a professional course to learn a few programming languages*' that she did not cover during her university study. Similarly, within six months of '*becoming a full-time broker*', Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01) initiated her '*professional education in insurance'*.

The participants in Russia are particularly determined to attain both, a good array of formal academic and professional qualifications. All but two of them have an MBA, as well as other Masters' and Doctorate level qualifications. Before proceeding to their postgraduate education, they often studied towards their second bachelor's degree. For example, Evelyn reports '*I have a degree in economics and a degree in law, as well as a PhD in economics'* (Evelyn, Financial Services, RU07). It is not uncommon among the Russian participants to commit to one course straight after another. For instance, once Zhanna (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03) graduated from Further Education College, she entered part-time university study in Russia; she then took a course in an American University specialising in Tourism to enhance her professional skills set. Straight after successfully accomplishing that course, she enrolled on a Postgraduate Certificate programme in Strategic Marketing, followed by an MBA. At the time of the interview, she recounted that '*I am just about to start a program for Flexible Team leadership*' (Zhanna, Tourism and Hospitality, RU03).

Orser and Leck, (2010) underline that education encourages women to compete with men for jobs; it is their 'role investment', which boosts confidence and prepares them for career success. Education is seen as an asset and investment because it is also a contribution to human capital (Shao and Wang, 2018). The exceptional personal value that the participants place in education, enables them to compete with men for jobs. Veronica (Information Technology, UK03) believes that it is because historically '*in order to get to the same position, women had to be considerably better than men'* and she thinks that *'some of that still remains*.' Besides, Darya's work (Distributions, RU01) involves recruitment. She observed hiring more women than men in her

organisation. From her professional point of view, for the same advertised position, female applicants are generally more competent than men. She explains:

> *I deal a lot with the recruitment. I noticed that within my industry, except for engineering professions, if I have candidates for the same position, there are always more qualified women than men. This is very interesting. I understand that for the same money I can take a higher qualified woman than a less qualified man. That is why women constitute 70% of our workforce, they are more competent, but their expectation for compensation is lower.*
>
> (Darya, Distributions, RU01)

This quotation demonstrates that higher qualified women are prepared to perform work, which interests only a few men. Consistent with findings by McDonald and Thornton (2007) there are indications that except for engendering professions, the organisations benefit by trading costly male employees for relatively inexpensive female workers. Coherent with Ogloblin (1999), this research indicates that highly educated women in Russia, especially those working in 'female' professions are underpaid compared to men and have an inadequate return on investment in their education. Furthermore, '*the exception of engineering professions'* highlighted by Darya (Distributions, RU01) has been addressed by other participants of this study. For instance, Ksenia (Information Technology, RU09) believes that there is a shortage of experienced female engineers because girls are not choosing to study engineering because it is regarded as a 'male' oriented profession. She thinks: '*it is all about the stereotypes that society imposes! It always was that the engineer is a man and all the boys go into engineering*'. There is an apparent division of predominantly 'male' and 'female' spheres. For example, even though Eugenia works in a company with a strong emphasis on diversity, she feels that it is an exception in Russia: '*For an IT industry, which is seen as 'male', we are quite diverse because mathematics and programming is not something women chose first of all*' (Telecommunication, RU02).

These comments suggest that although women in Russia put significant value in education, the choice of the subjects for their education might be predisposed to the traditional societal gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987). However, the analysis of the participants' demographic profiles reveals that Russian participants initially were

equally interested in academic subjects, potentially converting into ‘male’ and ‘female’ occupations. Yet, none of those who studied subjects converting into ‘male’ occupations, such as law, economics or engineering sustained careers within these professions. For example, Victoria (High Technologies, RU04) studied economics, Eugenia (Telecommunications, RU02) studied law, and Galina (Information Technology, RU10) studied software engineering. They all at some point of their career for different reasons moved into ‘female’ oriented Human Resources. In comparison, most of the UK participants (seven out of ten) have chosen to study subjects converting in ‘male’ oriented professions, such as law, management, and computer science. They all sustained their careers in ‘male’ professions working as insurance brokers, software engineer manages and lawyers, including three participants who studied in Russia at the start of the *perestroika*.

The thoughts about the importance of education brought my memories back to *pre-perestroika* Soviet Union. One of the main slogans imposed by Soviet leaders was ‘Learning! Learning! Learning!’ Further analysis of the participants’ demographics shows that those participants who studied ‘male’ oriented subjects in the former Soviet Union for their first degree are in the 35 – 44 age group. Their university education falls into the period around beginning of *perestroika*. Inga remembers:

> *the way we lived in the Soviet Union – there was a feeling of fairness. When I grew up, I assumed, and I sincerely believed that there is equality between men and women, and it is absolutely the same whom they respectively wanted to study for.*
>
> Inga (Information Technology, UK04)

This observation is in line with the demographic outlook of the participants of this research. Half of the participants who studied in the former Soviet Union have chosen to study disciplines converting into ‘male’ professions. However, in the *post-perestroika* period the societal gender stereotypes might have strengthened. None of the Russian participants who have chosen disciplines oriented towards ‘male’ occupations could sustain careers in these professions, those who left Russia did.

Furthermore, the reason for the Russian participants placing exceptional importance in postgraduate education might be that by streaming their careers in ‘female’

industries, they had to compete there with other women. These women might have similarly high values attached to the importance of their education. In relation to career progression, Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) believes that on the one hand achieving positions of leadership '*is easier in traditionally female industries.'* On the other hand, '*competition among women becomes much more serious there*'. Clara (Science and Innovations, RU06) elucidates:

> *There are two men in our organisation, the majority are women. We do not have any requirements connected to gender or age. When we invite for the interview or bring people for internships, anybody can come, people of retirement age or very young men or women. The only criteria, which exists is the quality of work, there are no other criteria. In our organisation the majority have very high qualifications. People have one or two university degrees; most speak a minimum of two or three languages, etc. They have graduated from the best HE institutions that exist in the country today. Therefore, in this respect the requirements are very high for someone to work with us.*
>
> (Clara, Science and Innovations, RU06)

Clara's observation illustrates how women in Russia must demonstrate exceptionally high levels of proficiency because of the high requirements in the organisation where the '*majority are women*'. The level of education is one of the decisive entrance criteria. In agreement with Singh and Vinnicombe (2004), women accrue a higher level of skills as they experience a much more intense level of competition in the labour market. Interestingly, Clara emphasised that entry criteria were determined purely by equal procedures for all and not attached to a specific gender, which corresponds to the liberal model of equality (Jewson and Mason, 1986). It appears that although these procedures seem to be fair, without emphasis towards equal gender representation, they help to sustain a gender segregated environment.

The participants emphasised the exceptional importance of their education. However, traditional gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987) in both countries influence the choice of education and future professions via societal expectations. The high value of education held by women helps them to compete in the labour market with men. The research findings signal that gender stereotypes seem to be strengthening in Russia compared to *pre-perestroika* Soviet Union with a new implication. The rivalry among professional women in Russia is intensifying, which brings extra pressure on

them to attain higher levels of academic and professional qualifications. Though liberal equality procedures open equal access for all, they do not encourage equal gender representation in a gender segregated environment.

5.4 Gender stereotypes: '*apparently this is a problem'*

The research findings show that the participants in both Russia and the UK work in gender-segregated environments. However, it seems that Russian participants are particularly attracted to jobs in 'female' areas of business, such as those in Human Resource Management or in 'female' industries such as Tourism and Hospitality. There were repeated messages emphasising the nature of the occupations regarding gender. Eugenia, (Telecommunications, RU02), who works as an HR Partner explains: '*From the HR point of view, there is a stereotype that HR is a women's sphere*' (Eugenia, Telecommunications, RU02). Tamara (Tourism and Hospitality, RU08) also noted: '*in general here in Russia, the overwhelming number of the workforce in Tourism are women. There are very few men here, and most of those men are non-conforming individuals*.' Both Eugenia and Tamara work in a predominantly 'women's sphere', it is mostly women, who work in their respective professions. Interestingly, Tamara's observations suggest that the '*non-conforming individuals*' are also seen as belonging to the same category as women, and men working in predominantly female environment have more in common with women than with men. So, such '*non-conforming individuals*' are perceived 'as women'. The issues of gender identification are outside of the scope of this study, however further research around unconventional gender identity perceptions is required in this field.

In contrast to the Russian participants, who work in the predominantly 'female sphere', most of the UK participants work in 'male' environments. Bella (Financial Services, UK08) represents one of the extreme experiences of exposure to the male workplace. She explains: *'Look, I sit on a trading floor… there are… maybe three women out of five thousand men. I am in a very male dominated environment!*'. Many participants, who work for Information Technology companies in the UK also reported being in a male territory. Veronica, a senior software engineering manager, highlights that '*there are many more male engineers than female engineers, it's just how it is*' (Veronica, Information Technology, UK03). Furthermore, Inna (Information

Technology, UK06) reports that when she started her employment in Sales and Marketing, '*there were just eight women working in the company among 200 men and now there are only four women left*', she is the only woman in her department. Interestingly, Inga studied and began her software engineering career in the USSR. She compares her experiences in the former USSR and the UK:

> *Of course, things were not so simple (in the USSR). But I still think that there was more equality in the Soviet Union than in Western countries because of the gender ratio in professional spheres… there was no (situation) such as that when I came here to England… there were fifty people in the engineering department and I was the only woman!'*
>
> (Inga, Information Technology, UK06)

The views of the participants presented above are evaluated via the theory of societal gender role stereotypes (Eagly, 1987) that generally people tend to choose professions consistent with gender conventional beliefs. Stereotypes constitute individual views and attitudes towards particular categories of people and are attributed to 'cognitive activities of thinking, learning and remembering distinctions between various groups of people' (Powel, 2011:5). The general societal views prescribe that jobs related to services are more consistent with the 'female' characteristics of caring and nurturing. The findings indicate that the society in both the UK and Russia, largely impose specific gender roles on individuals by fostering appropriate 'male' and 'female' behaviour. This ultimately affects people's work attitude and choice of professions. When I asked Tamara (Tourism and Hospitality industry, RU08) why tourism is perceived as being suitable mainly for women, she replied: *'Perhaps… because it is associated with caring and emotions – I think that is why*'. Reskin and Roos (1990) assert that societal stereotypes influence individual's views about professions, implying which job is suitable for which gender. The specific reference to 'feminine' characteristics such as '*caring and emotions'* effectively means that the whole industry is perceived as gendered. This implies that specific 'female' traits are required for performing professional duties in tourism and hospitality, and women are more suitable than men there. Consequently, when women enter 'male' professions, it is seen as 'abnormal' because it is not what women are 'supposed' to do according to social gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987). Inga (Information Technology, UK04) represents those who work in a 'male' industry.

She shared that once during a professional conference in the UK, a male sales representative of the company where she works, was very surprised to learn that she is an engineer, exclaiming: '*how is that possible?*' Inga comments:

> *Unfortunately, there is such a perception of women – as if you perform technically specialised work, it is going against the rules rather than by the rules. In any way, this is social and gender stereotypes… and apparently, this is a problem!*
>
> (Inga, Information Technology, UK04)

Thus, the participants reported that gender stereotypes (Eadly, 1987) persist in both countries. However, most of the participants (fourteen out of twenty) seem to be content and understanding of the social gender differences. For example, Veronica (Information Technology, UK03) reasons that male and female professionals are different because '*there is a difference in how men and women express themselves*'. I asked the participants whether there were situations at work when they felt they were being perceived differently. Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) replied that she personally could '*not recall such things.*' However, she reported that there were occasions when she has not been considered for a position '*because a man was required'*. Nadezhda clarifies that this could be easily explained '*by the specifics of the business*' as there are traditionally male and female specialties. She says: '*I believe that there is a business, in which a man would fit better; take a construction site - a woman master-builder probably would look strange since it presumes another business approach*'. Moreover, Victoria also justifies the division into 'male' and 'female' occupations by gender differences:

> *Whatever we say about supposedly 'gender equality'… we are different anyway; our approach and style are different. Here it is important that a woman uses her strengths, but understands her weaknesses… There is place for everybody, I would not purposefully reset things and say everything should be equal – if a man is better here, let it be a man, there are other industries where women are better*
>
> Victoria (High Technologies, RU04)

The evidence indicates that there are apparent essentialists' views prevailing among the participants. This position suggests that biological hormones are responsible for women being, arguably, more emotional, and effectively substantiates societal

discrepancies between the two genders (Goldberg, 1993). Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) elucidated her point of view, highlighting that at times she was not appointed to a position where a manager was a man as it would be '*much more comfortable for him to work with a man'* on an *'emotional level'*. She justifies that gender differences are '*more on an emotional level than on professional one*'. She continued, that *'in the same way women sometimes have more emotions and that is why she could not fit in a certain context'*. Being rejected for a position, Nadezhda feels understanding because of 'emotional mis-fitting'. In Victoria's (High Technologies, RU04) comment '*I would not purposefully reset things'*, the biological gender differences sufficiently justify keeping things in the social sphere as they are. Therefore, the hegemony of men in 'male' industries has to be accepted because men and women are not equal from the very start. Realising there are inequalities, Victoria does not believe that '*everything should be equal*'.

Moreover, the participants conforming to an essentialist position often regard male and female individualities as eventually complementing each other and gender difference is an impetus of effective management (Kurger, 2008). For example, Regina (Insurance Services, UK10) claims that '*women in Insurance are less inclined to take risks; they are thoughtful, careful. Men are adventurous*.' Thus, in her view '*a good combination of both is a key to success in Insurance*'. Similarly, Zhanna (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03) thinks that in general '*men are more strategic, women are tactical'*. Victoria (High Technologies, RU04) sees women as more emotional, highlighting that '*with a woman - it is more feelings, it is an empathy'*, adding that '*men now also work on developing themselves'*, even though they still lack such qualities. Regarding leadership, Clara explains:

> *Male leaders very often push their point of view in a tougher quarrel or in a tougher interface. A woman leader should not do it! Simply she shouldn't! This has no purpose! The female leader can bring to the organisation more harmonic interactions to situations, more tolerant relations. This is her task as a leader.*
>
> Clara (Science and Innovations, RU06)

Essentially, in Clara's view the characteristics of softness and easy-going are typical 'female' qualities, whereas men are more 'masculine', justifying them customarily

exercising their strong will (Kelly *et al.*, 1993). Therefore, '*a tougher quarrel*' is expected from a man. The research findings align with Eagly *et al.* (2020) that the stereotypical labels of 'male assertiveness' and 'female amenable' as descriptors of men and women, are still prevailing in the society. People usually view these stereotypical attributes as depictions of 'male' and 'female' characteristics (Pryzgoda and Chrisler, 2000). That is why women, who '*push their point of view*' (Clara, Science and Innovations, RU06) might be perceived as 'less feminine' as it is inappropriate for a female leader, they '*should not do it'*. In addition, some of the participants also believe that the conventional social settings bring opportunities for women (Kelly *et al*., 1993). Those who follow the essentialist point of view often see social advantages of women over men (Kurger, 2008). The participants in both countries shared examples, demonstrating how their gender might help in their day-to-day professional duties. For instance, Valeria (Insurance Industry, UK01) believes that it is easier for a female professional to ask a superior male colleague for help. In her view such a simple tool could create a special bond between people, which might result in favourable treatment. Valeria explains:

> *For a female it could be really her advantage, because you go to an underwriter and say: 'Look, I don't understand it. Could you please help me?' It's amazing what a positive reaction a woman can get! And occasionally you can get better terms as well. Just simply doing this, asking for help. I think being female it is easier to ask for help and advice. I use it all the time.*
>
> Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01)

Valeria views this tactic as exclusively available for women because this tool is inaccessible to her male colleagues. She explained that this is because in general '*men do not like to admit that they lack knowledge in something*' (Valeria, Insurance Industry, UK01). Therefore, by exposing 'weaknesses' in men's eyes, preferable terms might be obtained as men in superior positions would have the chance to exercise their ego in a paternal way. Furthermore, Victoria (High Technologies, RU04) shared an example of how being a woman brought her advantages in the professional sphere. She recalls that there was a situation at work, '*it was a project on a building site'*, where '*manly looking builders*' were working. Victoria's' aim was to receive feedback from their manager to be able to proceed with her part of the

companies' project. She revealed the dialogue, which happened between her and the manager on the building site:

> *He says: 'No Victoria, I don't have the time!' I tell him: 'Please understand, we need a result!' And he says: 'OK, come at such and such a time!' I came at this time… and it was already about 6.30 pm, after the workday is over. He says: 'Victoria, maybe I will email it to you?' I understand that it will never happen… and here I turn on my 'womanly' side, I say: 'I freed my evening specially for you!'… I was not pushy, no! It was somehow soft… And it worked… And he says: 'OK'. It was so amusing!*
>
> Victoria (High Technologies, RU04)

Analysing Valeria's and Victoria's professional experiences, I thought about the reasons behind why women have to use equivocal tactics to get on with their daily duties. Victoria had to switch on her '*womanly*' soft manner addressing a male colleague, who failed to appreciate the value of her work. He would have easily brushed off her professional request if it was not for Victoria's subtle comment. She had to find a '*womanly*' way of conversing with a male colleague in the given circumstances. She did not consider an option of reminding him that he dismissed their mutual agreement twice. If she did, perhaps she could have lost her chances for a successful collaboration and ultimately would have not achieved the desired result. Interestingly, many participants defended persisting gender differences, and some openly questioned or disapproved of women using 'womanly' tactics. Thus, elaborating on gender differences, Eugenia (Telecommunications, RU02) queries whether women are entitled to employ 'female' tactics at all:

> *This contest is unambiguous – we want to be taken as equal to men, yet we are not ready to give up our feminine wiles, i.e. smiles, etc. and we understand where our strength is. Therefore, women are crafty beings and thriving on it, and it helps in building a career.*
>
> Eugenia (Telecommunications, RU02)

Moreover, there are also participants, who find these tactics unacceptable in the professional sphere. For example, Regina (Insurance Services, UK10) says that '*some women in Insurance fields can flirt... in heels and a short skirt*.' In her view these are the attributes of inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour. Regina

continues: '*And if women want to use such methods, then they should not complain in the future if they receive unwanted attention'*. Stereotypical 'female' seduction tools have been judged as unsuitable at work, yet the '*unwanted attention*' typical of men, in this case is justified.

Therefore, the participants in both, the UK and Russia work in a gender segregated environment. The Russian participants work predominantly in 'female' oriented industries or occupations, whereas the UK participants work in 'male' oriented professions. Nevertheless, the essentialist position is dominant among the participants. This constitutes an additional implication arising from this research, indicating that women from the former Soviet environment largely follow essentialists' views and explain social inequalities by biological differences. A combination of gender stereotypical qualities is seen as an advantage for businesses. Thus, social inequalities are often perceived as plausible and justified.

5.5 Barriers towards career progression: '*Gender is an obstructive factor'*

Gender stereotyping is recognised as one of the main obstacles for women in the professional environment (Smith *et al.,* 2013). Women are expected to be careful of being perceived in the right way. The way women look might be the first point of judgement, they are assessed by both, men and women. The participants' experiences in both countries demonstrate that gender stereotyping has further implications, especially for those considering leadership positions as terms of appropriate behaviour there are regarded as being 'intrinsically male' (Wilson, 2014:24). Thus, the way women look might become an impediment to the suitability of their professional duties. For example, Darya (Distributions, RU01) believes that the way she looks is one of the barriers in her career. She explains:

> *I smile a lot and I have such a look - I am not a typical female leader in the Russian sense. A female leader – she smiles less, she is more serious, authoritative… so my status has been proven only with work, only with the right decisions and customer orientation… I have not been taken as a leader at once… Blonde girl… she must cook borscht or… dance, or arts… yet I am about business*
>
> Darya (Distributions, RU01)

‘Female’ attributes such as smiling put Darya straight into the category of less ‘serious’ and being blond she might be perceived as less professional. She concluded that it took her some effort to be taken seriously: ‘*my entire path is about building trusting relationships*’ (Darya, Distributions, RU01). She had to earn the trust of her colleagues and bosses. Furthermore, Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) shared a story, which happened in the Law firm at the start of her career in London. Lidia observed that men in senior positions there were married to their former secretaries, who had stopped working upon marrying their bosses, moving to beautiful countryside houses. Lidia noted that all the women, who were the secretaries and administrative assistants in their office were very beautiful, ‘*they were dressed unbelievably stylishly’*. Lidia recalls: ‘*When I came to that firm, I was stunned! There was an impression that I am on a podium!’* and ‘*it was a very big difference in comparison to the female lawyers*’. Once there was a client’s party planned. Three weeks prior to the party women from the administration office were ordering and trying on beautiful dresses in the restroom. Lidia recalls: ‘*there was a build-up and I also decided to order something*’. However, a female colleague stopped her. Lidia explains:

> *A female lawyer advised me: ‘No! You just open one button on your jacket and put on a brooch because you should look like you have been working, done your hours and just arrived. Please leave these ball-gowns to the secretaries. This was the talk in a London City law firm! Maybe it depends on the company, of course! But I just had a feeling… What a great model – to hire beautiful girls, marry them, put them in a country house and work calmly these crazy hours… And where is a woman here? … As for me, there is always a modest brooch to wear… because ‘you are a lawyer’!*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07)

Lidia’s colleague tried to highlight how important it is to set yourself aside as a professional woman, the emphasis of presenting a beautified image would make Lidia look ‘too feminine’ and therefore, less professional. This is because in her colleague’s view, looking and being feminine is incompatible with being professional. The colleague tried to explain to Lidia that ‘a professional’ is ‘other’ than ‘feminine’, and she cannot be both. Gender stereotyping contributes to the manifold of hidden barriers that women face, disadvantaging them from building a successful career. The effect of labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007) represents a plethora of concealed

practices that create inequalities along the female leaders' career path. The above example demonstrates that these barriers might be imposed by female colleagues, who conform to gender stereotypes.

Darya (Distributions, RU01) highlighted: '*there were always barriers.'* When I asked her to explain, she added: '*I had to put in an extra effort to earn authority. I don't know whether it is because I am a woman or because of how I loo*k'. When I asked her: 'Do you mean you were not taken seriously?' she replied: '*Yes!*'. Consistent with Durbin (2016), women often are not regarded as professionals; they must attest it. I heard from the participants in both countries: '*I had to prove things*' (Eugenia, Telecommunications, RU02). I already referred to how Inga (Information Technology, UK04) feels being disadvantaged in an engineering profession because it is stereotyped as 'a male' domain. It seems that attaining leadership posts there is even more difficult. Inga continues:

> *I think that until now in industry, especially in our industry, gender is an obstructive factor… because I think to get someone to take you as a technical professional is easier than as a manager. When one of the interim Technical Directors asked my colleague: How come she wants to manage? How come she thinks she can manage those blokes? I did not think about it for a long time. Now I am certain that there are gender stereotypes and without a doubt they are the obstacles! For many years I simply did not want to think about it… I always thought that we live in the twenty-first century and the situation now is much better than it was some time ago. But analysing what is happening around, I think it is absolutely obvious – without a doubt the situation now is better than before, but it is much more difficult for a woman to be taken seriously.*
>
> (Inga, Information Technology, UK04)

The interim director made his judgment at a glance and was surprised that Inga wanted to manage *'those blokes'*, implying that it is not what women do. He did not trust Inga to be capable, undermining her abilities, which is upsetting for Inga. Even though the metaphors of the glass ceiling effect (Hymowitz and Schelhard, 1986) and labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007) have been in discussion for decades, Inga's experience demonstrates that these hidden discrimination practices still prevail to her disappointment. The stereotyping seems to be one of the major contributors because as per Koenig *et al.* (2011), the positions of management are still perceived

as being suitable for men, not for women. That is why women often had to prove their competences to be taken seriously. Victoria (High Technologies, RU04) explains: '*It is interesting how you are perceived in the beginning and after they know you*'. She continues:

> *In the beginning… men can be condescending, meaning you will not understand it. But when people know you, they treat you differently. Now I work with people with whom we are together for a few years - with some it is five years, with some four and some three… people see how I think, how I make decisions, how I communicate. There is no such thing any more as: Oh, Victoria, you will not understand it.*
>
> Victoria (High Technologies, RU04)

It appears that it takes years for women to build trusting relationships with their colleagues and superiors to be taken seriously, to be appreciated. Walking through the labyrinth of obstacles (Eagly and Carli, 2007), it is only when their career is well established, female leaders may feel recognised, yet it had to be earned. Clara (Science and Innovation, RU06) confirms: '*I think now… somehow it happened… that I see a great respect, either to my point of view or to what I have to say'*. Clara said she feels it '*even when people are not in agreement*' with her point of view, adding '*perhaps this is because of my career or other things, but it is there'*. Similarly, Evelyn (Financial Services, RU07), who managed to build her own company, confirms that when she speaks, people listen to her, adding: '*I do not know why… perhaps I devote too much energy for that*'. These extracts demonstrate that it takes time for female leaders to shape their relationships with colleagues from '*condescending*' to trusting '*when people know you*' (Victoria, High Technologies, RU04). Clara's hard work and career attainments as well as Evelyn's energy earned the desired appreciation.

Careers develop differently, often women do not have much power to control its' direction. Taking into consideration that it is mainly men who make promotional decisions (Bjerk, 2008), women are often left at their mercy and therefore, remain vulnerable. There were indications from the Russian participants that men in positions of power often influence promotions for motives other than professional. For example, Eugenia (Telecommunications, RU02) shared the experiences of her friends:

> *My friends told me that the fact that they are women, is troublesome (for their career) …that they were offered conditions of their career growth prospects via, let's be blunt, the (bosses) bed, i.e. (if agreed) everything would start developing much faster. When they refused, some of them had to leave. It does happen!*
>
> Eugenia (Telecommunications, RU02)

Although Eugenia added that it had not happened in her professional career and '*it does not happen in HR*', during her career she also came across unwanted attention from her former male colleagues. She continued: '*but I think if you behave with dignity and set boundaries, an adequate person would understand straight away!*' Evelyne also noted: '*I understood that those who work with anything other than the brain, can proceed faster, but my moral principles did not allow me*' (Financial Services, RU07). These comments indicate that career progression might be advanced for reasons other than professional since men are in charge. Eugenia had to be on guard and behave herself, as well as having to rely on her male colleague to be '*adequate*'. Her friends were less fortunate. The thesis upholds that if positions of power are opened mainly to men (Scholten and Witmer, 2017), masculinity culture solidifies (Sheerin and Linehan, 2018) because women left in a susceptible position are doomed to being treated as inferior.

Furthermore, the participants in both countries indicated the practices of being excluded from company politics. In the UK the participants referred to the 'old boys' network' (McDonald, 2011), where decisions are made while socialising in 'men only' environments. Similarly, the Russian participants referred to men deciding on company politics in the 'masculine' environment of a smoking room or a traditional Russian *banya* (a sauna-spa). Zhanna (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03) says: '*they really do decide on some of the issues in the banya… This is for sure! Even now some of the decisions are still made in the banya!*' Although there are differences in manifestations of the exclusion practices, i.e., in the UK it might be a traditional English pub and in Russia it is a traditional *banya*, the meaning is similar, there is no place for a professional woman there.

Thus, gender seems to be an obstructive factor for female leaders' career progress in both countries. The participant's career experiences fit with the metaphor of a

labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Gender stereotypes are seen as one of the major barriers, influencing societal expectations of conforming to the traditional 'female' attitude regarding women's conduct and appearance. The barriers concerning gender role expectations might be imposed by both, male and female colleagues. Women often feel that they had to put in extra effort to earn authority at work. There are indications of unethical behaviour in work-related situations in Russia, when male superior colleagues exploit women's vulnerability. In addition, exclusion practices such as 'men only' socialising are common in both countries. The thesis advocates that while men largely occupy positions of power, women remain being susceptible to be treated as insignificant.

5.6 Attitude towards the barriers: *'I mind my own business'*

The overall attitude of fifteen out of twenty participants towards the barriers to their career progression is tolerant. Regarding social exclusion practices, although it is recognised as a barrier, obstructing career advancements (Cyr *et al.*, 2021) the participants in both countries do not view it as a problem. Clara (Science and Innovation, RU06) explains:

> *Perhaps some issues were decided in a smoking room, but it does not mean that it always supports the career. I think women have many advantages in careers because a woman can negotiate some of the things which are not always easy, or negotiate it in a different way… may be you don't go to a smoking room or a banya together, but there are other mechanisms of discussions, other ways of influence, other manner of arguments that have their own advantages.*
>
> Clara (Science and Innovation, RU06)

Furthermore, Bella (Financial Services, UK08) also explains:

> *I am in a very male dominated environment… Would it be easy if I were a guy? I would probably pop into a pub with some of my mates. Would that help me forge warmer relationships? Probably. But I don't think that it's so terrific that I cannot do it any other way, and then I form different types of friendships, and at the end of the day I figure out how my relationships can evolve in a way that fits to being a woman than being a man. So far, it's been OK. I just think that it depends on the industry and… where I am in my industry, it is probably a bit harder*
>
> (Bella, Financial Services, UK08)

It seems that neither Clara, nor Bella appreciate the traditional networking business practices outside of work (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). For Clara, such socialising '*does not mean that it always supports a career'*. Bella thinks that while it could '*forge warmer relationships'*, it is still of questionable value for career progression (Bella, Financial Services, UK08). Acknowledging that exclusion practices (Claringbould and Knoppes, 2007) take place, it seems that informal socialising is not of significant concern for the participants. This position resembles essentialist views. At least nine of the participants in Russia and half of the UK participants believe that '*women have many advantages'*, as well as *'there are other mechanisms of discussions*' (Clara, Science and Innovation, RU06) essentially complementing each other, which makes women and men equal. Thus, the participants seem to be content and understanding of the social gender differences. I often heard phrases such as: '*to say that I had any problems because I am not a man and therefore could not achieve something, probably not*' (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05). Also, *'personally, I never experienced any barriers at all because I never had any barriers within me*' (Valeria, Insurance Services, UK01). Therefore, though the participants evidenced that practices obstructing the careers of women take place in both countries, they largely felt relaxed about it.

Among those who detest discriminatory practices is Inna (Information Technology, UK06). She recalls that coming back to Russia from working abroad in her early 30s, she struggled to enter the labour market there. She was refused sales and marketing positions because her potential employers were troubled by her age and a possibility of her getting pregnant. She says: '*the worst thing in Russia is ageism, so even 30 years old, it is old*'. She continued: '*I would be struggling to get a job even in retail because I'm not young enough*'. In her view, one of the reasons for that is '*a submitting culture*' in Russia. Inna refined it: '*they prefer to take very young people to whom they can shout and know that they cannot answer back'*. Compared to the UK, she finds '*it is completely different here'* because *'nobody judges you*' (Inna, Information Technology, UK 06). Inna's experience presents an example of direct gender discrimination with references to her possible pregnancy and age. This could be an isolated incident and exception to the real picture in relation to the employment issues in Russia. However, Inna is one of the youngest participants of this study,

who tried entering the labour market relatively recently. Other participants' experiences of entering the labour market were around the start of the millennium. Thus, apart from gender matters, further research on issues of ageism is required to address the considerations indicated by Inna.

Even though the participants largely were content with how things are in relation to gender equality, there were differences in the general spirit of fairness. I noticed that the attitude of the UK participants was less positive compared to the participants in Russia. Many UK participants who lived in both countries believe that there is more gender discrimination in the UK than in the former USSR. Inga (Information Technology, UK04) whole-heartedly believes that there was more gender equality in the Soviet Union than in the UK. She exclaims: '*In England! Something that surprises me - it is a motherland of progress! Apparently, it is not about us. Perhaps it is a motherland of progress – but not for women!*' Furthermore, Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) says: '*it's incredible! I think that there is much more of it here (gender discrimination) than in Russia'*. She continues:

> *Let's see… It is a very interesting phenomenon. In Russia… if we speak about Russians with Soviet background, they can voice some absolutely unpleasant sexist remarks, they can allow some unwanted sexual advances – yet at the same time if a woman is highly professional, they will appoint her to the Board of Directors… But here, you know, there is a prejudgment… Here, as I came across, they are very careful with the language!*
>
> Lidia (Legal Services, UK07)

Lidia's observations indicate a different gender equality undertone in the UK compared to Russia, suggesting that Russian men can be chauvinistic, yet more egalitarian. At the same time, in Lidia's opinion, British men appear to be less provocative yet biased at heart. Lidia's comment suggests that men in Russia may allow behaviour, which would be considered completely intolerable in the UK. Still, Lidia later noted that she '*left Russia long time ago*' and she does not know how things are there now. She says: '*Perhaps women in Russia will tell you a different story*'. There were participants in Russia, indicating that although they personally did not experience discrimination, they heard that the discriminatory practices happen to women, aspiring to reach top executive positions. For example, Zhanna (Tourism

and Hospitality, RU03) feels she did not experience discrimination herself, but she highlighted:

> *I now think that if a woman is smart and highly intellectual, they probably feel different because really there are men who are stupid. If she is bright and there is someone not so bright next to her, they do not move her because she is a woman - this happens in Russia for sure*
>
> (Zhanna, Tourism and Hospitality, RU03)

Zhanna continued that the reason why it never happened to her might be '*because… I mind my own business*'. She clarified:

> *I never wanted to be the first person, I am happy to be second, third - that is why I never experienced it! Yet those women who are very smart, who could be strong and above a man, yes – they might experience problems*!
>
> (Zhanna, Tourism and Hospitality, RU03)

Similarly, Galina (Information Technology, RU10) started with: '*I never felt discrimination*', strongly reassuring: '*explicitly, in my case, I never came across it*'. Yet then she added: '*Without a doubt if I dreamed of becoming a director of some sort of Industrial Holding, perhaps I would come across discrimination there*'. Still, Galina recognised that the industry might be the differentiating factor. She added:

> *I know female leaders who complained that there are such cases. If we talk about a distinct sphere, it was a gaming business. My friend holds quite a high position there and she talked about it all the time, that it happens at every step! In order to be heard – you first must get the right to speak! You are not given it because you are a woman. When I heard her speaking like that, I thought I never came across it in my career. I think it is exactly because of the sphere of business. There is different money there, different people and the rules of the game are different there as well.*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

Zhana's comments show that she would not dream about a top position, where the trouble starts. Galina also suggests that women who hold high positions, especially those who are predisposed to the 'male' environment, find it is very difficult to navigate in a masculine world. Galina's friend feels discriminated against for being a woman as she finds it is difficult to communicate her message across. Lidia (Legal

Services, UK07) highlighted that there are possible gender discrimination practices evident for women in top positions in the UK. Referring to the experiences of a female partner in the law firm, where she works, Lidia emphasised:

> *She is… very competent and a male partner is constantly trying to outbid her… they are trying to rub her out, and she is the one who does all the fundamental work… She is simply wonderful; you can see she is a professional!*
>
> Lidia (Legal Services, UK07)

This colleague warned Lidia that it is important to recognise the discrimination practices and not to let these things happen to her. The glass ceiling practices (Hymowitz and Schelhardt, 1986) linked to gender stereotypes, impact the participants' careers. Although the discrimination practices are evident in both countries, very few participants felt that they were discriminated against. The thesis argues that the essentialist position exhibited by the participants helps sustaining gender stereotypes by approving them (Heilman, 2012). Those accepting gender stereotyping cannot detect gender discrimination (Cundiff and Vescio, 2016). This is very challenging as it requires an attitude shift (Atencio and Pasadas, 2015).

Nevertheless, when I asked the participants whether career progression is similar for men and women in their respective industries, six of the participants in Russia and nine in the UK indicated that it is easier for men. Galina (Information Technology, RU10) is confident: '*speaking about who it is easier for to build a career, for a man or for a woman, the answer is for a man!*' She provided an example that she observed in her IT company '*when a husband and a wife started from about the same position, and everything was equal*'; the man attained a leadership position more quickly. With an example from the Tourism and Hospitality, Zhanna explains her view:

> *Perhaps it happens quicker with men because… (here) there are very few men. For example, a sales manager - women are often responsible for Tour and Travel. Let's say you are a manager in my hotel. A man comes to you – what is the chance that you find a common language with him quicker than with another woman? Even this might be a problem!*
>
> (Zhanna, Tourism and Hospitality, RU03)

Furthermore, Inna (Information Technology, UK06) was certain:

> *When I was about to get a good role to work for a Russian-speaking publisher as a Russian speaker, they preferred to choose a man for this role. The decision maker for this role was a man and he was a chauvinist. Oh yes! Being a man would help! I believe so. Because they are thinking that women will be emotional, they will not be hard working, they would be after kids or something, so it's a bit difficult.*
>
> (Inna, Information Technology, UK06)

Therefore, Zhanna indicates that even in a 'female' industry such as Tourism and Hospitality, it is easier for men to build a career. Similarly, Inna feels that being a man would help her career. Both examples suggest that male decision-makers might be prejudiced, often disadvantaging women. Inna works in a company and industry with a high concentration of men and where the decision-makers are men. It seems that this is also the case in Tourism and Hospitality, where Zhanna works. Though the industry is regarded as 'female', it appears that the decision-makers there are men as well. Here is what Zhanna says:

> *In our head office all top positions are held by men… There was a woman in HR, she implemented a lot of programmes, she is a good speaker, a very interesting woman – she is not there anymore for some reason. Maybe she'd had enough, maybe they had had enough of her… And this is our Head! We feel it. The Board of Directors can be very harsh. I don't like it! It is not about the gender when the person as a person is the least of the consideration, i.e. the person has no value… it was not directly in my branch, but in any case it is there because when they wind me up, I come to my team… I have to function as a buffer*
>
> (Zhanna, Tourism and Hospitality, RU03)

The female leader, whom Zhanna views as a forward-thinking contributor to their companies' Board of Directors, could not sustain her career there. It created an unpleasant atmosphere, trickling down the consequences onto the employees, resulting in an additional strain for Zhanna to act as a buffer between her team and her superiors.

The findings arising from this research indicate that in an atmosphere of persisting barriers to career progression of women, the participants in both countries largely comply with the existing status quo. This research argues that the logic of the essentialist position helps to explain the 'natural' gender differences, supporting

gender inequalities. Many participants reported never experiencing barriers to their career progression, though admitting that men progress faster in their careers than women. The next imperative implication from this research is that the UK participants seem to have a nostalgic attitude towards more progressive gender equality in the former Soviet Union compared to the UK. However, the Russian participants exposed severe glass ceiling problems regarding access to top leadership positions.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

At the personal level of influences, the women from the former Soviet Union who now work in Russian and the UK organisations place importance in their interests as well as emphasising the exceptional value of their education. These personal factors largely influence the start of their careers and trigger career changes along their career path. Furthermore, gender is a fundamental factor affecting their career progression. This chapter analysed the career barriers related to gender equality in both countries and evaluated the attitude of the participants towards these barriers.

The research findings indicate that the participants in both countries largely follow their inner personal interests in their career path. The decisions for career start and career changes fit the protean career model (Hall, 2004) intrinsically motivating the participants (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, consistent with Sulivan and Arisis (2021), this research reveals the complexity of their career choices. Career changes of the participants involve a combination of personal stimuli (Sansone and Tang, 2021) as well as often being triggered by a lack of interest (Wolf, 2019).

There are indications that the participants, especially those who work and reside in Russia are interested in accumulating a wide range of academic and professional education. This helps women in both countries to compete with men in the labour market. However, the research indicates that there are profound differences in how the participants' careers have developed in the UK and Russia. Although the Russian participants are equally interested in academic subjects converting into 'male' and 'female' jobs, they sustained their careers mainly in 'female' oriented professions with specific interest in HR. On the contrary, most of the UK participants sustained their careers in 'male' oriented industries and occupations. The thesis

argues that this might be connected first to strengthening of gender stereotypes (Eagly,1987), influencing occupational choices in contemporary Russia. Secondly, being streamed towards ‘female’ sectors and occupations, female leaders in Russia have to compete among other educated women. This competition results in an additional pressure on female leaders in Russia for perusing extra qualifications.

The main implication of this research is around indications of the predominantly essentialist attitude of the female leaders from the former Soviet Union background. This position justifies social inequalities by the biological gender differences. The thesis argues that such a position of accepting societal gender dynamics strengthens traditional gender stereotypes. Gender appears to be an obtrusive factor for the participants’ career development. The traditional gender stereotypical expectations around ‘female’ attitudes implicate chances of female leaders to be taken seriously at work by their male colleagues in both countries. Moreover, socialising practices in ‘man only’ environments are customary in both countries. There are also instances of inappropriate work ethics by male superior colleagues reported in Russia.

Nevertheless, the participants largely take a passive position in regard to gender equality, conforming to the existing state of affairs. Despite reporting gender discrimination practices, the participants do not feel that they have personally experienced gender discrimination. Furthermore, the UK participants perceive gender equality issues being better addressed in the former Soviet Union compared to the contemporary UK. Yet the Russian participants indicated severe glass ceiling problems for accessing top leadership positions.

The System Theory Framework (Pattern and McMahon, 2014) regards an interconnection between different factors influencing career paths. Therefore, the personal factors, discussed above, will be viewed in connection to structural factors. The thesis now considers the structural forces which influence career progression of the participants in Russia and the UK. This includes discussions about issues concerning domestic division of labour and organisational factors in both countries.

Chapter Six Social structural factors affecting career paths

6.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter is the second of three dedicated to the analysis of the findings unfolding from this research data. In the previous chapter, following the Systems Theory Framework (McMahon and Patton, 2018), I analysed the personal factors that affect the careers of women from a Soviet background working professionally in the UK and Russia. In this chapter, I reveal the influences and barriers for participants' career progression, arising from the structural forces related to social and organisational aspects. This is done via evaluation of the participants' career experiences with a view of addressing the overarching research questions.

Similar to the analytical approach in the previous chapter, I investigate the perceived influences on career advancement that the research participants in Russia and the UK view as imperative. The key themes emerging from the participants' experiences through the interviews conducted in the two countries, are compared. These themes evolved through the methodical analysis of the primary data derived from the interviews with the participants. Four main sub-sections constitute this chapter. They expose main themes connected to factors and associated barriers to women's career progression. The themes relate to the importance of childcare, domestic division of labour, organisational issues, and work-home balance.

Among the structural influences, the priorities that the participants in both countries identified as crucial, are childcare arrangements. These arrangements in the UK and Russia are compared and discussed. Next, gender equality issues are addressed through the structural forces of the domestic division of labour in the two countries. The current provisions in how household duties are shared between the members of the participants' families are outlined. The participants in both countries identified the overwhelming number of professional responsibilities that they perform at work daily and the issues linked to maternity leave. Then, the structures of the contemporary organisations in the UK and Russia are compared, and the participants' maternity experiences in both countries are analysed. Finally, the perception of work-home balance is compared in both countries before conclusions are drawn.

6.2 Childcare: *'My child is my priority'*

Progressing with the interviews, I noticed that the participants in both countries draw attention to their priorities around children, repeatedly emphasising the importance of their childcare responsibilities. For example, Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) noted that her '*high point is motherhood*'. Similarly, Darya (Distributions, RU01) highlighted: '*my child is my very first priority*!' Regarding childcare arrangements, the participants in both countries mainly appeal to the help of nannies. Darya continues: '*The first thing I did, I found a good nanny, whom I trust*' (Distribution, RU01). It appears that there are noticeable variations in the childcare provisions available in the UK and Russia. The findings are consistent with Aassve *et al*. (2012) reporting that grandparents in Russia seem to be intensely involved in helping young families with childcare and household duties. Clara, a managing director of a Science and Innovation company, commented referring to childcare that '*without the really serious help of family members it is not easy*' (RU06). Evelyn (Financial Services, RU07) also appreciates the support of her parents, which allowed her to see through her university studies and to kickstart her career early. She recalls:

> *In my student years my motivation was my daughter; she got me through because I wanted her to have it all. I was seventeen when she was born... My parents were looking after her until she was eight years old; so, I had a chance to dedicate myself to work, I worked… How is it possible to manage if someone doesn't have a grandma?*
>
> (Evelyn, Financial Services, RU07)

Although the Russian participants appreciate the close family connections and substantial help from grandparents, they also often referred to a well-established and affordable network of kindergartens. For example, Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) believes that Russia has an exceptional advantage concerning day-care arrangements due to '*a rather good social system*'. She compares childcare arrangements in Russia and elsewhere with example of her friends in Germany:

> *They do not have such kindergartens which work from 8am till 8pm or such afterschool clubs, etc. Often a woman in Germany cannot continue her career because it is difficult to organise childcare process. I have friends who lived in Germany and when a woman was building career, her husband was sitting at home looking after children*.
>
> (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05)

The childcare arrangements of Nadezhda's friends in Germany, where a man takes prime responsibilities to look after children are seen as unusual. Nadezhda believes that this is because not many men would be '*ready for that*', as well as men are not expected '*to work part-time*' (Electronics, RU05). The participants' experiences show however, that women usually take childcare responsibilities by default as their priority. Thinking back, Ksenia (Information Technology, RU09) realises that it was hard combining childcare responsibilities with her tasks of managing projects at work. She recalls rushing from work daily to collect her son from day-care: '*Now I understand how difficult it was for me, especially with childcare - you collect him from kindergarten - he is, a poor soul, the last one there, waiting for me…*' (Ksenia, Information Technology, RU09). Therefore, those Russian participants, who did not have the help of family members and nannies but relied on kindergarten provisions, found it very challenging combining their career with childcare duties. On reflection, Ksenia feels that the main reason for her difficulties is related to societal stereotypes: '*there is such an attitude in the society that the prime place in a woman's life must be family and kids.*' Eagly (2020) asserts that gender stereotypes are strong and persistent as they are deep-rooted in gender roles, which people learn from early childhood. Society expects both men and women to behave according to these prescriptions. Those who behave unconventionally, often meet peoples' disapproval (West and Zimmerman,1987). Traditionally men were regarded as breadwinners and women were supposed to look after house and children. Theoretically the stereotypes could be un-learned, being attributed to learned behaviour (Powell, 2018), yet society is still holding on to these arrangements. Women's experiences demonstrate that they often feel disadvantaged as their choices conform to societal expectations.

Contrary to the Russian participants, who commented on reasonable childcare costs, the participants in the UK reported considerable childcare expenses. In addition, unlike in Russia, there were no commentaries regarding the help of grandparents in the UK. The UK participants mainly relied on nannies or boarding schools. For example, by the time Emma had her second child, she was a partner in one of the law firms in the City of London, she explains:

> *I think it's never easy. It's manageable though, it is just to find what works for your family. With us… when the kids were small, we had a full-time nanny. When the kids started school, we used an after-school nanny, and now it is a boarding school… I always tend to do my job during the week... For me it is very important that I am at home at the weekend… so we have family time*
>
> (Emma, Legal Servicers, UK02)

Emma seems to be comfortable with childcare arrangements. However, some of the UK participants recall how problematic it was to combine their careers with organising childcare. This is especially apparent for young families newly arrived in the UK. When Lidia and her husband decided to move from Russia to the UK, Lidia was already a well-established lawyer in Russia. However, upon arrival to the UK, their family lived on her husband's salary before Lidia found a job. Her husband was working as a lawyer, yet Lidia's professional experience was a struggle in many ways. Lidia attributes a big portion of this struggle to challenges associated with childcare provisions. She recalls:

> *We came to England as a family because my husband got a job in London… We found ourselves in such a situation that even he, who previously lived in London could not imagine, for example, how much childcare costs... Childcare is very expensive. We could not afford it. Suddenly, from such a very successful early career, I am with a small child… in a foreign country! That was a major challenge!*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07)

The childcare responsibilities played one of the major roles in Lidia's difficulties in establishing her career in the UK. Lidia highlighted that taking the decision of moving to the UK, they as a family '*did not account for it'*. Lidia believes that those of her Russian friends in the UK, who started their careers before having children, had considerable advantages because '*they had a space for manoeuvring*' (Legal Services, UK07). Due to the differences in the UK and Russian professional qualifications, Lidia had to start her career in the UK from basics. One of the constraints was '*the financial side of things*' because '*starting salary positions would barely cover childminder's costs'* (Legal Services, UK07). Though Lidia wanted to advance her career, she initially stayed at home looking after their child and the household.

The analysis of the participants' demographics reveals that seven of the UK participants (from which six represent 45–54 age group) and half of the Russian participants (from which, all but two represent 35–44 age group) have children under eighteen years old. This might be an indication that professional women in the UK tend to have children at a more mature age compared to women in Russia. Childcare costs in the UK might be one of the reasons why young professional women delay birth of their children. At the start of their career, they might find it is hard to justify paying a high portion of their salary to childminders.

The participants also suggested that it is often difficult to think about their career while children are small. Referring to the choice between her career and the commitments of looking after her son, Inga (Information Technology, UK04), clarifies: '*You see, while Peter* (pseudonym) *was little and until he'd grown up, I simply did not have any space in my head for that'*. Betz (2002) underlines that with the arrival of children, a career does not take central stage for many women. Claudia also recalls that although she was progressing fast in her career in *pre-perestroika* Russia, she had to leave a senior engineer position. She explains that the company where she worked *'had night shifts and they could not let me go part-time'* (Claudia, Events, UK10). Claudia had to change company to be able to work and look after her child, ultimately putting her career on hold. These examples demonstrate that women often compromise their career opportunities to accommodate childcare responsibilities. Corby and Stanworth (2009) refer to such experiences as '*satisficing*', when environments predetermine women's choice, so instead of satisfying their interests, they are '*satisficing*' as it appears to be sensible in a given situation. When work arrangements allow women to fit their career around childcare and other family duties, their 'choice' seems to be good enough for now.

Thus, the participants in both countries expressed the importance of childcare. Although childcare provision in both countries depend on nannies, there are nuances. In Russia the participants reported affordable childcare as well as the help of grandparents and other extended family members. In the UK the participants seem to be under pressure of expensive childcare without the help of extended family members. Additionally, the UK participants experienced particular difficulties in

childcare when newly arriving in the UK. The main implication appears to be that women are prepared to put their careers on-hold whilst prioritising childcare.

6.3 Domestic division of labour: '*Borsch and cutlets … on weekdays – it is definitely not from me!'*

The data analysis regarding the domestic division of labour in the participants' households reveals that most of the participants in both Russia and the UK, prefer to outsource their domestic chores to paid services. There are also indications that outside of the outsourced arrangements, home tasks are mostly divided equally between the adult members of the participant's households. Some of the participants identified other types of arrangements between their family members. For instance, Nella (Telecommunications, UK05) highlighted that in her family '*everyone does his or her bit*'. She clarifies: '*Mama can cook only during weekends. She needs to be fed during the week*'. Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) seems to be in a strong agreement with this attitude, highlighting:

> *It is important that the family supports you because if my husband would demand borsch* (a traditional dish) *and cutlets from me every day, possibly he would have to find another wife because borsch and cutlets on weekdays – it is definitely not from me!*
>
> (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05)

Arguably, the time when women from former USSR had the double burden of combining work responsibilities and domestic duties, might be disappearing. Ashwin (2001; 2018) explained the 'Soviet paradox', where full-time employed women in *post-perestroika* Russia still hold onto the traditional values of being fully responsible for domestic life. This research results, however, show that there seems to be a profound change in negotiations of 'who is doing what' (West and Zimmerman, 1987:143) at the home of a professional post-Soviet woman. The research findings suggest that the participants in both the UK and Russia do not follow conventional domestic division of labour arrangements. McGinn and Oh (2017) suggest that as women progress in their careers and as they get better paid, they have greater bargaining power, being in a stronger position to negotiate their preferences. Thus, there are indications that women from the former Soviet Union, who work

professionally in the UK and contemporary Russia put considerably less effort into unpaid household duties. However, such changes are not apparent in all households, there are exceptions. Towards the end of each interview, I asked the participants if there is something else that they may feel is important in relation to the topic of our discussion. Ksenia, who is an experienced IT project manager, cited that her first marriage experience was '*quite different*' from how she lives now:

> *Then I had huge problems... Now I understand that it was difficult for me… we even had some 'domostroi'[4] moments… from the side of my mother-in-law. I was accused of paying too much attention to work. Yes, in my first marriage that really happened.*
>
> (Ksenia, Information Technology, RU09)

The customary *domostroi* rules mentioned by Ksenia have been known in Russia since the 16th century, regimenting women's priorities around the household duties. It seems that there are still traces of it in modern Russia, which puts women under tremendous pressure. I asked Ksenia how such family attitudes impacted on her professional life. She replied that it did not stop her desire to continue her career; she loved what she was doing professionally, adding: '*of course I lacked the support of my family, they did not approve it*'. Ksenia refers to her career: '*It was my success! I enjoyed it!*', still revealing that '*it was, frankly, very hard psychologically'* (Information Technology, RU09). Ksenia's experience demonstrates the turmoil that women might experience if their family members condemn their professional attainments. When I asked Ksenia whether her situation is unique, she answered: '*It is not unique. It's in the society'*. Though '*it happens less and less now*', she still highlighted that *'it happens here in Russia'*. While feeling very comfortable in her second marriage, Ksenia commented on the overall status of women: '*I see what happens around; of course, many things are appalling*' (Information Technology, RU09). Therefore, there are indications that traditional roles that society arranged for women centuries ago, still persevere (Eagly, 2020). A few of the participants also confirmed that conventional attitudes towards home priorities are still very strong in Russia. For example, Galina (Information Technology, RU10) concludes:

[4] *Domostroi* (Rus) - translates *house order,* alleged to be written during Ivan the Terrible reign by a Russian Orthodox church clergy. Amid other recipes, it teaches how to fix a wife (Stanley, 1994)

> *Well, there is no gender equality; at least there is none in Russia… Perhaps there are some single cases… any way, the house is regarded as a woman's field of responsibility, and children are there as well. In the best scenario the man is earning the money. No doubt, he contributes, but not the half. Most men do not consider it is their responsibility. If he helps his wife around the house, it is already very good.*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

Both, Ksenia's and Galina's comments demonstrate that though men might be willing to contribute to household duties, in general their contribution remains peripheral. Those women who experience full support and help of their partners, feel their circumstances are rare compared to the general public. For instance, Victoria (High Technologies, RU04) highlights:

> *My situation is not ordinary. I have an absolutely understanding husband, who supports me in everything. We have full… mutual trust in each other. I support him in his career; he supports me… now there is a development more towards my career, though he also holds a managerial post. In terms of household duties, my husband cooks, as for cleaning, it is nowadays possible to delegate it to cleaning services.*
>
> (Victoria, High Technologies, RU04)

Victoria represents the youngest age group among the participants. She and her husband do not have children. Victoria feels comfortable about her husband's contribution towards household tasks. Yet, she underlined that it is unusual to have an '*understanding husband'*, who supports her career endeavours. Therefore, there are indications that it is generally rather an exception for a husband to contribute equally or to a bigger share of house-care. Most of the participants in both countries specified that men and women in their households share home responsibilities equally. It seems that in those households where women work professionally, there is more opportunity for egalitarian environment, even when societal stereotypes persist otherwise. A professional career woman has a higher bargaining power by holding a higher societal status (McGinn and Oh, 2017), manifesting opportunities for de-feminising domestic duties (Rath *et al.*, 2019: 30) in her household. The research indicates that it happens despite the perseverance of the traditional domestic division of labour in the wider society.

Nevertheless, there is a concern about outsourcing household duties to professional services and grandparents. Also, there are further implications for single parents and those households where both spouses build equally demanding careers. Galina explains:

> *My personal feeling is that of course you need to choose between building a career or looking after your family, especially after your children are born… (if) there is need for help from someone else… they grow up with grandma and grandpa, plus a nanny, and they see their parents only on holidays. Then neither the man nor the woman looks after the home. Then the home is looked after by specially trained people, grandma and grandpa govern the process. Formally there is a family, yet in fact no one sees the children.*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

Galina suggests that those women who build careers are trapped between professional strains and the demands of their household. The understanding and support of family members for women's career progress is very important. Delegating both, childcare and domestic duties, seems to be helpful. Yet members of the family, especially children, might miss out on a spirit of unity, doing things together daily.

Thus, the professional women from the former Soviet Union in both Russia and the UK tend to outsource a big portion of house duties to paid services and share home responsibilities with the members of their family. Therefore, this research attests societal changes regarding the notion of 'Soviet paradox', which concerns a double burden of women from the former USSR being fully occupied at work and at home. This concept might no longer be relevant concerning the professional women's milieu. However, there are indications that the traditional division of labour might still persist outside of professional households due to gender role stereotypes. Furthermore, a concern has been raised around possible implications of families outsourcing house- and childcare duties as children might miss spending time with parents, especially in single-parent families and in those households where both parents work.

6.4 System barriers: *'There is no direct discrimination! It happens via secondary factors if you have the whole system designed for men'*

All the participants in both, the UK and Russia reported taking extensive responsibilities at work, and they find their work very demanding. For example, Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01) is a director of an Insurance Business in the City of London and responsible for a large area of business in her firm. She says: '*In London I am effectively coordinating the work of two departments.*' In addition, Valeria also has people working under her management in other European countries. Often high-profile work involves extensive travel. Bella (Financial Services, UK 08) looks after international teams in her organisation. She noted that: '*up until this world pandemic started, I've been living on an airplane commuting between New York and London… it does not get more intense than that.*' Furthermore, Victoria (High Technologies, RU04) has organised the Human Resources department in her company from ground zero. She says: '*I built all the departments, starting from very basic staff administration… finishing with… developing corporate culture, relationship management. All HR aspects are under my responsibility*'. Clara, who manages a Science and Innovation Company, says:

> *I am a managing director, i.e. I am someone who delivers the overall management of the company's performance and at the same time in charge of strategic planning, reporting to the Board of Founders… it is difficult because a lot depends on you. I think when someone manages an organisation, there is a lot of responsibility on them, not only in terms of doing the job, but also in terms of the personnel, the people who depend on you*
>
> (Clara, Science and Innovation, RU06)

Thus, the participants amass numerous responsibilities for the jobs to be done and for people who work under their leadership. Many participants' work involves extensive business trips. The participants often feel overwhelmed and stressed because '*a lot depends*' on them. This professional strain includes responsibilities for both the work and results to be delivered as well as for the people working under their management. No participants reported working part-time at any point in their career. Even though there are opportunities in both countries to work reduced hours, none of the participants has taken advantage of them. Ksenia (Information

Technology, RU09) commented that '*if necessary, it is possible to negotiate with an employer, let's say, a six-hour working day, and it is possible to document it, it will be an attachment to your work contract'*. However, Zhanna (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03) underlined:

> *I know that everything that is prescribed by the law is there... But overall, we have a very commercial structure. I do not know anybody who would work half-day. I know that in Holland they can come for two or three hours to do some sort of work. I did not even hear about such things in any company in Russia.*
>
> (Zhanna, Tourism and Hospitality, RU03)

Zhanna's comment aligns with the statistical evidence that part-time work is not popular in Russia (OECD, 2018). When it comes to professional careers, women in both countries did not contemplate working part-time. Although the part-time option officially exists in both countries, it seems not to be suitable for developing a career in a commercial organisation. It appears that intense and extensive working hours are an essential prerequisite for career success in commercial organisations. The participants in both countries recall feeling stretched to their limits from work pressure. Ksenia, remembers being overwhelmed while managing software engineering projects:

> *I did not have just one or two projects. There were moments when I had twenty projects… even though perhaps ten of them were frozen, still…. There were those moments. At a later stage the pressure was growing further, and the responsibilities constantly widened. There was never a border line where the responsibility of a project manager stops and the responsibility of someone else starts…There were moments when you are… entering into some sort of condition that you do not understand… how is it possible to meet these deadlines that you were given… a condition close to panic did happen*
>
> (Ksenia, Information Technology, RU09)

Women revealed experiencing stress from excessive work demands and a high level of responsibility. The work settings of wide-ranging responsibilities and unreasonable deadlines would not suit reduced working hours. That is why part-time options are not compatible with the women's career progression. Galina also noted: '*from what I have seen, any career entails a lot of work. It is not eight hours per day, it is fourteen hours per day, and it is an absence of weekends*' (Information Technology, RU10).

From Galina's experience working in a corporate environment, whatever little time was left out of office hours, might not be as 'free' as it seems. She explains:

> *If you want to build a career, say to HR Director, you will have to work more than ten hours per day, you will spend all evenings and weekends. Yes, you will earn a huge amount of money, but there will be no time! Plus, what I noticed, this is not only work, you need to spend your holidays with those people whom you work with. Spend your free time because if you break out of the herd, you cannot share their interests. If you are not interested, then there will be a different attitude towards you.*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

Thus, it is not only time spent at work that matters for those building a career. It seems that staying in '*the herd'* is an important component for advancing in modern organisations. The sheer amount of work is not limited to the professional duties at the workplace. In addition, there is pressure to socialise outside of work. The informal interactions outside of work help career advancement. Practices of socialising are important for career progression (Agarwal *et al.,* 2016). However, the pressure of getting involved in '*socialising*' out of office hours underwrites the implicit inequalities (Acker, 2009). It helps to reproduce stereotypes allied to unspoken privileges of those who network, which presents one of the major barriers for women. This career barrier constitutes a glass ceiling effect (Hyowitz and Schelhard,1986) and the labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007). It is not a formal requirement to be part of '*the herd'*, yet an expectation. Such a barrier is not obvious, but it is there. Women who have multiple responsibilities outside of work are particularly disadvantaged. The metaphor of 'unencumbered worker' (Acker, 2009) helps understanding of how modern organisations create pressure. Such a worker is an 'ideal employee' of traditional organisations, who has full dedication to work, and is completely focused on work duties demanded by the company. The company's expectation is that an 'unencumbered worker' does not have interests outside of work. Galina's experience demonstrates that to be able to succeed, one is expected not only to work excessive hours, but be ready to dedicate out of office time to work. This could only be possible for someone who does not have responsibilities outside of work. Women, however, have constraints imposed by both society and biology. Childbirth presents one of the challenges for women's career development.

Except for those whose maternity leave had fallen into the *pre-* or soon *after-perestroika* period in Russia, the participants in both countries admitted that they did not have prolonged career disruptions. Although they were entitled to full statutory maternity leave, they did not take advantage of it. The participants often emphasised that in Russia there is very generous statutory maternity leave time allowance. Regina (Insurance Services, UK10) compared the maternity situation in the two countries: '*In Russia the compensation is lower, but in Russia you can stay with your child for up to three years!*' However, none of the participants on recent maternity leave had taken this opportunity. Darya (Medical supplies, RU01) recalls that due to the demands of her work she '*came back to work very quick, in six months*' after giving birth to her daughter. Galina (Information Technology, RU10), had an interesting maternity experience. After giving birth to her son, she took a short maternity leave, and she says: '*in one-month I was already at work with a child'*. She continued working while having her son with her in the office until he was three years old. Referring to her experience of having a baby at work, she noted:

> *It was probably too much, yet it was entertaining for everybody. It was no trouble. Of course, for the serious meetings the baby was in the pram; someone would take him around the block. Therefore, he always was with me, at the same time I was at work. Therefore, the first three years of his life he was working!*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

Galina felt it was important to stay close to her son as he had difficulties in settling down in her absence. When Galina's son turned three years old, it became difficult to continue working in the same way. She says: *'I understood that it is very difficult to combine a child and work, and I took maternity leave'*. Towards the end of her maternity leave she came up with an idea of establishing her own kindergarten business to ensure that her son did not suffer. She carried it through, and she now runs her kindergarten business as well as working in her firm as a consultant. The key reasons behind the decision to cut the maternity leave short in both examples relate to work demands. Darya remembers being very emotional about going back to work and leaving her daughter with a nanny. In Galina's case, the company made an exceptional concession, which Galina appreciated at the time.

In comparison, many of the participants in the UK shared stories of not only cutting their maternity leave short, but often going into labour 'on-the-job' in order to keep up with work tasks. Nella (Telecommunications, UK05) explains that she '*worked till the weekend and went straight into labour'*, adding: '*and in six weeks' time I was back to work'*. Each story revealed by the participants is unique and special, yet the experiences of childbirth and maternity indicate that women building careers in the UK are more stressed than in Russia. In the sample, women from the UK Insurance and Legal Services reported particular tensions. Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01) gave birth to her first two children in Russia around *perestroika* time and had full-term statutory maternity. At the time of giving birth to her third child, she resided in the UK. She explains how her UK experience was dramatically different. She recalls that '*there was no break'*, she went into hospital to give birth with her phone in her hand, highlighting: '*I did not stop working!*' Once out of the hospital, she '*was urged to work remotely from home*'. Valeria believes that there was no other way around this, concluding: '*my portfolio of clients was big enough and I had too many responsibilities, so I simply could not afford to take a longer maternity leave'* (Insurance Services, UK01). Similarly, Regina draws on her experiences:

> *It would be funny if it wasn't so sad, I was at work each of the days when my children were born, i.e. in the morning I am at work, in the evening I am having a caesarean… In two or three days I was out of the hospital. Still, I was in contact with my clients over the phone all the time… then, literally in three or four months I was back to full time work. During these three or four month I never stopped interacting with clients.*
>
> (Regina, Insurance, UK10)

Regina's and Valeria's experiences echo each other. The work demands are intense, it seems that there was no breathing space for either of them. They both were connected to their respective clients while in the hospital and as soon as they were out. Likewise, Nella (Telecommunications, UK05) went into labour '*on-the-job*' with maternity leave of just over one month. When I asked the participants how they felt about going back to work, their responses in both countries were divided. Overall, participants have a positive outlook towards their work. Yet, some were very happy to go back to work, others found it was exceptionally difficult. For example, Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) went back to work '*with a great pleasure!*' emphasising she had an opportunity to return to work gradually:

> *I would go back, stay with my third child, first month for half a day, then adding up hours. The company was supportive. I was working, say from 10am till 3pm. I could go home and finish something at home. The important meetings, where my presence was required, would be booked at my convenience. The company was ready to support me the first, second and third times.*
>
> (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05)

It seems that the support of the company and the prospects of flexible working hours meant that Nadezhda had a positive experience of transition from maternity leave back to work with three of her children. For Darya though (Distributions, RU01) the transition period was difficult. She recalls: 'I came back to work very quickly… It was difficult because it was my first baby. Work is very intense. Work involves a lot of travel'. Although Darya delayed business trips, she says: '*it was very difficult to part with my daughter, she was only one year old*' (Darya, Distributions, RU01). The UK participants would often recount stories of significant emotional strain. For example, Emma (Legal Services, UK02) had to cut her maternity leave un-expectedly short with both of her children. She says: '*I had to start working while on maternity'*. She explains her struggle of going back to work:

> *For the first maternity… when I had to go to work it was absolutely horrendous because she* (daughter) *would not settle in the nursery… For the whole month I would feel physically sick because I would leave my daughter in the nursery, she would be crying. I would be thinking: 'oh my god, why am I doing this? This is… devious… I was very close to giving it all up. I thought I cannot be both… a mum and work in the city… then my daughter very quickly settled in… With my second child I thought: No, I am staying the whole year, I really want to enjoy the whole, or I thought that ten months would be good… but then again during my maternity… I had to start working*
>
> (Emma, Legal Services, UK02)

Similarly, Regina (Insurance Services, UK10) recalls:

> *It was hard to go to work, the baby is crying, he wants mummy, breast milk, etc… it was difficult for several days, then they adapted. This is a downside… Daddy stayed with both children... With the second one we had help, not a grandma or a granddad, there was a nanny, they were in good hands, yet physiologically and emotionally it was very difficult to leave a three- or four-months old baby for a long time*
>
> (Regina, Insurance Services, UK10)

The concept of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990) explains concerns underlined by the above examples. The organisational processes are detached from the individual worker. In the current organisational arrangements, there is no consideration to the vital and significant portion of peoples' lives outside of the organisation, disadvantaging women. There is an expectation that issues related to pregnancy, childbearing, looking after children, etc. are regarded as completely private matters, interposing the organisational processes (Acker, 1990). Therefore, an 'ideal worker' is the one who either does not have pregnancy, childcare responsibilities or deals with it promptly and gets back to work. Although such an organisational attitude is not explicit, it nevertheless underpins organisational practices.

Comparing experiences of the Russian and the UK participants, young mothers in both countries seem to experience stress and anxiety leaving their babies while they go to work. The UK participants appear to be more distressed. It seems that the UK companies have particularly high expectations and exceptionally lack the understanding of women's sensitive positions. Emma (Legal Services, UK02) was torn between her daughter's needs and her obligations towards her company to the point that she felt '*physically sick'*. This tormenting experience was repeated with a second child. Regina (Insurance, UK10) experienced challenges, going through labour while staying in contact with her clients as well as upon returning to work from maternity. Interestingly, Regina mentioned that '*daddy stayed with both children*' upon her returning to work, yet there were no participants in Russia whose partners were taking responsibility for a baby. However, in Russia companies seem to be more understanding of women's situation. Although Darya (Distributions, RU01) was similarly anguished leaving her daughter, she had the opportunity of delaying her business trips. Nadezhda's (Electronics, RU05) company was also supportive, allowing a gradual transition from maternity leave back to work.

Regarding the working environment, at least half of the UK participants were critical of their work environment. Lidia (Legal Services, UK) reported on '*some ethical moments'* concerning her work experiences in a law firm in the City of London. She found that there was '*a very rigid attitude towards employees'* because apart from '*excessively long hours'* she also observed a complete '*rejection of the more*

personal aspects.' She says: *'I was leaving at four o'clock in the morning. I did not see my family*'. Such a work routine persisted and at some point, Lidia was ready to give up her profession. The combination of excessive amount of work and an outlandish company attitude caused Lidia to seek the professional help of a counsellor, who returned her back to the profession. She compares her experience of working in a law firm in the UK and in Russia:

> *We had an incredible amount of work, we could not bill a client more than 50 hours per week, in reality it was 70… and when I was on a business trip, it would reach above 100… My child was very young. For two years I only saw him sleeping… You see, in Russia… if the employee was valuable, there was a willingness to extend each other some professional courtesy with flexible work hours… The important thing is, stay with us and do your work! Here all I was asking for… I would like at least twice a week to have an opportunity to take my child to bed, read him a bedtime story. Absolutely not! … There were such conditions created where your female side must be suppressed! It was crushed!*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07)

Lidia presented another example of companies' expectation of an 'unencumbered worker' (Acker, 2009). Lidia's experience in the UK demonstrates that her company expected her total dedication, working up to 100 hours per week, as there is no life outside of work. Considering that the social stereotype implies that women generally take the bulk of home responsibilities (Eagly,1987), such 'unencumbered worker' is unlikely to be a woman. In the situation where both Lidia and her husband worked full-time, the only solution was to find help from paid domestic work. Lidia mentioned that as she progressed in her career, her neighbour pointed out: '*Lidia, I see you less and less, but I see more and more of some other women in your house – nanny, cleaning lady, etc. Who are they?*' (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07). In contrast, many Russian participants commented on the possibilities of flexible work arrangements. Although the earlier example of Galina working as HR director with her baby in her office is an exceptional case, it endorses Lidia's views on the Russian organisation's flexibility compared to the UK ones. It seems that in Russia organisations are more likely to show willingness to find solutions for keeping valued employees. Galina, however, highlighted that this also allows companies to lure employees in, '*so they continue working*' to enhance the organisational outcomes. It can be argued that flexible work arrangements escalate overtime hours, adding unpaid duties to the paid

work to be completed (Glass and Noonan, 2016). Thus, it might worsen gender disparities as it is more difficult for working women than for working men to dedicate the same amount of time, therefore men may be perceived as more committed. Lidia's concerns could be explained through the concept of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990). The core problem remains in the organisational processes, which are detached from the individual worker. The organisational processes do not account for the vital and significant portion of women's lives. The issues related to children are regarded as 'strictly private' as they intervene with the organisational processes (Acker, 1990). Therefore, an 'ideal worker', who deserves a promotion, is the one who gets on with work. Such an organisational attitude is not obvious, it is hidden. Lidia explains:

> *How does it work? Let's see! Can a pregnant woman cope with 100 hours of work per week? No! She cannot! If your career growth is contingent on a number of billing hours, the young single guys will be always in the lead. And at this stage the decision will be taken as to who will get a new case… You see, there is another moment. In some Russian organisations where I worked, we could easily take two days' work from home or just not go to the office if you have bad PMS or critical days. Here I haven't even heard people talking about it. Let's see! I have three bosses in my company. I have very bad PMS, I have a migraine and I need a couple of days to sleep a bit longer and not to travel to work, just to stay under a warm blanket. It does not affect productivity. I cannot tell about it! There is no, how to say, space you can reveal it. Of course, there is no direct discrimination! It happens via secondary factors if you have the whole system designed for men.*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07)

Lidia's experiences depict how established organisational arrangements can potentially constrain women's opportunities for career advancement. The lack of concern by organisations about women's' private matters, also forms a perception of them being underrated, their needs being unrecognised. The only positive commentaries about the work environment from the UK participants were those referring to work for the organisations outside of the UK. For instance, after leaving the former Soviet Union, Veronica (Information Technology, UK03) built her professional career in Israel. She recalls that her employer there was '*very supportive'*, especially regarding '*flexible working hours*.' When Veronica came back from the maternity leave, she recalls: *'I was also, sorry for the detail, breastfeeding*

for an extended period of time. I was given access to a room where I could pump my breast milk'. Apart from Israel, Veronica has experience of working in the USA. I asked Veronica how the current organisation compares with other places where she has worked, she replied that '*from the professional development'* point of view her current company '*is very similar to the previous organisation'*. Yet, she believes that

> *from the working conditions for the young mothers, I think my previous company was much better! If I would be in the situation where I need to pump my milk, I don't think I could find a place at (my current) work where I could do it and store it. I don't think it is possible*
>
> (Veronica, Information Technology, UK)

Thus, the UK commercial organisations are perceived as particularly unsupportive to women's basic physiological needs. Furthermore, when I asked the participants about the barriers that they may have had experienced in their organisations, they often referred to not being taken seriously. For example, Ksenia (Information Technology, RU09) said: '*I became a manager at thirty years old. There were moments when I felt that I am not taken seriously*'. Ksenia believes it might be attributed to her age as well as her gender. However, Clara (Science and Innovation, RU06) recalls a situation, involving a British colleague, who '*instead of conversing around the substantive content*' was picking on her. Clara explains:

> *It became obvious at some point that the matter is not in an essence of work, but explicitly attributed to the fact that I am a woman, who happened to hold this post. It was interesting, but I view it as more of an atypical incident… Perhaps now I would have dealt with it differently, but at that time, so to speak… I claimed the lead and did not let him do a few things that I saw as substantially wrong… Here there is exact characteristics of men, which may be due to their social upbringing, are not accustomed to someone raising an opposition, saying that I do not think it is correct, even though we discussed only professional issues.*
>
> Clara (Science and Innovation, RU06)

Clara's male colleague could not accept her as an equal and the focus of his attention was outside of the professional content. Clara feels it was explicitly a gender related issue. Interestingly, she noted that this colleague was British, working in Russia. Therefore, being perceived as 'other', a cultural aspect might have an influence on perception here. However, a few of the UK participants also mentioned

feeling uncomfortable in work situations. Nella (Telecommunications, UK05) reported coming across sexism practices while professionally interacting with men in her company. She feels that men in the UK *'think that a woman... not that she should not be a manager, but if she is a manager, she should have to have many more positive qualities than a man.*' Inga (Information Technologies, UK04) felt hurt by one of the male consultants invited by her company for coaching leadership. He pointed out to Inga that she should work ten times harder than a man to be able to manage a team. Inga cried: '*Why? Why should I work ten times harder than a man?*' She feels that it is unfair to expect more effort from an equal professional. The expectation of women to work harder than men is another obstacle in the labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007) towards career progression. Women often work harder to prove themselves to be taken more seriously. Their efforts and work might be unrecognised. Evelyne (Financial Services, RU07) recalls that before she founded her own company, she worked as a head of department for a large Russian organisation. Her position was downgraded after organisational re-structure. She tells the story:

> *I became a leading expert because they brought their own manager, a young man who was my boss. But to be honest, he was the manager 'de jur', and I was the manager 'de facto'… I was managing the department, I was doing everything, and everybody was happy. Once he came to me, I remember it vividly, I was at my desk, he says:*
>
> - *Evelyne, somehow, you now happen to be doing less than before!*
> - *OK. Let's see! ... Am I doing less than my colleagues?*
> - *No!*
> - *Is my salary higher than my colleagues'?*
> - *No!*
> - *What's the problem then?*
> - *You used to do five times more than everybody else!*
>
> (Evelyne, Financial Services, RU07)

This story shows how Evelyne's efforts were taken for granted. Her new boss was happy that she was working more than her colleagues in a similar position. Evelyn was expected to perform extra work. Such a situation is not unique in an organisational context. Inga (Information Technology, UK04) also reported being asked to perform extra work without recognition of her status and without the financial remuneration that her job deserves. She was asked to perform work outside

of her job description for a possible future career advancement. Her manager conditioned this arrangement: '*we do not give you a position for now and we will not raise your salary to the full'*. However, Inga was promised a role review of her work upon completion of the project. Inga continues:

> *I asked if we could put it in the contract. The management did not agree… It was all forgotten because another person came to the old bosses' place and I tried to battle for this position and for the salary because I knew that I performed this work… But because the managers were moving, they did not know about it and did not care much… It happens differently with different people. There are people who have it smooth, i.e. they were offered a role, they started doing it, they get a position and a salary, have got a promotion… In my case it was far from that, I had to fight for this*
>
> (Inga, Information Technology, UK04)

In Inga's case, she had an agreement with her manager, which was unnoticed as her previous manager was not around any longer. Inga accepted the position with prospects of future benefits because it presented an opportunity to be noticed and taken seriously. Inga feels it is unfair that she had to '*fight for it*' as her efforts were not recognised. The participants also reported being interested in projects and assignments out of the scope of their role. Nella (Telecommunications, UK05) regards such assignments as a unique opportunity to be '*different from everybody else*' and views it as her personal tactic for success.

To be noticed and to be taken seriously, women often put themselves forward for assignments with doubtful success. For instance, Darya (Distributions, RU01) shared how she initiated her first serious assignment. One of the company directors, where she worked was an expatriate in Russia on an excessively high salary, which was much higher than their General Manager's salary. His role was no longer required in the organisation, yet '*nobody was ready to dismiss him*' because of possible '*consequences, employment disputes, etc.*' Darya continues': '*I said: Colleagues, I am ready to take everything into my hands. I will think it through, talk to lawyers and will lead this process*.' Darya highlighted that '*in reality this moment was pivotal'* for her because she '*was noticed in this company'*. Darya explains: *'they understood that I am a soft client-oriented person, but I can take decisions fast and act firm if*

work requires.... Even though it was not my task, I was ready to do it'. After successful accomplishment of this project Darya's career took off. Galina (Information Technology, RU10) shared her story of how her organisation noticed her decisive character. During the crisis, when the company was downsizing, their HR director left and there were no one curating the process of dismissals. Galina noted that '*the process was violated from the legislation point of view. People were dismissed, the conditions were not observed'*. Galina came to the Board of Directors and said: '*First of all, you cannot do this. Secondly, this might have serious consequences!*' She continues:

> *When they asked how much the right dismissal procedures would cost, none of the directors were happy about it and I had to convince them that this was the right way. It was very difficult because it was about big money. I had neither functional nor nominal power at that point. And we had to find an appropriate compromise for both sides. There were five hundred people dismissed and we found this compromise. We started a transfer of these people to our main clients. Practically, after this no one was dismissed. And then in future when the company started a fast growth, firstly we had our own people with the main clients, who had already grown there, and secondly, we had a very good reputation on the market.*
>
> Galina (Information Technology, RU10)

The examples presented by Darya and Galina fit the glass cliff metaphor (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). Glass cliff assignments are presented to female leaders in situations that are set to fail. Bechtoldt *et al*. (2019) highlight that female leaders are often invited to 'set-to-fail' appointments. The participants have willingly taken on risky assignments. These cases brought the attention of their management. In both cases, there were financial considerations that were important triggers for the management. Upon successful outcomes, both Darya and Galina were noticed and rewarded. This research indicates that female leaders often willingly seek such assignments. These ideas are stimulated by their interest and desire to help their firm. Upon successful accomplishment of these tasks, they were noticed by the highest level in the organisation, which consequently opened further promotion opportunities. However, there is still an issue remaining about women being unnoticed and unrecognised in current organisational settings without them having to do extraordinary things. The

implications of not being taken seriously manifest a serious career progression barrier for women.

This perception of organisational environment, in turn, affects the participants' overall affiliation towards the organisation. Those participants, who reported being noticed by their companies, progressed in their careers, stayed loyal to their organisations (Abbasi and Belhadjali, 2018). For example, before Veronica moved to the UK, she worked within one company for eighteen years. She progressed '*from software engineer to technical fellow during these years*' and was streamed towards a director, by which stage she and her family '*decided to move to another country*' (Veronica, Information Technology, UK03). Also, Nella started her career outside of the UK and stayed within her organisation for more than twenty years:

> *My situation is quite unique. I work in the same firm, everything is changing around me, and I remain in the same place. I mean that I did not change my firm, i.e. my career was growing in the same firm, but because the firm is big, I had an opportunity to change directions. I started as a program developer, and then became a team leader within an infrastructure; it is environment support, etc. and I started growing in this direction. At some point… I was offered relocation to another country… That is how we came to England*.
>
> Nella (Telecommunications, UK05)

Both, Nella and Veronica started their career development outside of the UK. Staying with their company for around twenty years, they both see their situation as very unusual. It is when women feel unappreciated and undervalued, they might want to switch to another company. Inga (Information Technology, UK04) worked for a UK company for fifteen years. However, she noticed: '*until the last three or four years there were only two or three women there. Among the directors there was only one. I really was going to leave them a few years ago!*' Inga did not agree with some of the organisational processes, yet her decision to stay with the company was because '*things then changed'*. Inga appreciates she has been given opportunities to manage projects and to implement the new methodology that she offered, which was seriously considered. Inga believes that there is a feeling of positive transformation, she says: '*I don't even want to leave them now*'. Nella also noted that in the Telecommunication industry '*people change companies quite often and I did not*

have to do it'. She then added: '*Actually, I thought about it too and then I understood that why to trade one over the other when there are so many opportunities here?*'

Therefore, the absence of an organisation's appreciation of women as well as their struggles to be recognised can discourage women from building a career. However, when women feel valued and understood, they build special relationships with the organisation, they stay loyal and often aspire to leadership (Fritz and Knippenberg, 2017). Many of the UK participants think that it is difficult to stay loyal to a company in the UK. When I asked why this is the case, the participants highlighted that moving from one company to another brings more career opportunities. Valeria explains:

> *If you want to build your career in London, you just need to look around, you need to be open to offers… if you are a loyal employee, it might be very hard for you to do it. But if you want to progress in your career, you just need to get through it. In London there are very few possibilities to go up the career ladder within your company*.
>
> (Valeria, Insurance, UK01)

Veronica, who holds a senior management position within an Information Technology company in the City of London, agrees with Valeria's view. She says that from her own '*experience of hiring people'*, she strongly believes that '*it is easier to do a career progression when you move from… one company to another'*. When I asked Veronica why this is the case, she replied that '*when you work at the same place a long time, the market outside moves faster. Many people use this… they get better compensation'* (Veronica, Information Technology, UK03). It seems that generally in London the situation is different and loyalty to the company often is not valued.

Therefore, the professionals consider opportunities outside of their company. This outlook fits the concept of boundary-less career development (Arthur, 1994), when career progression is not bounded to the constraints of a single organisation. I find that the careers of most of the participants in both countries are consistent with the boundary-less career perspectives. If the aspirations of an individual cannot be fulfilled within the boundaries of an existing company, people start looking

elsewhere. The boundary-less careers allow upward mobility (Greenhouse *et al.*, 2008). It seems that the type of industry might also command certain career transition guidelines. Zhanna, who works in the Hospitality industry in Russia regards it as very dynamic, suggesting that '*previously it was five years in one place*' before you start looking around for a change and '*now it is three years and then move on or take wider functions even in the same place*' (Zhanna, Tourism and Hospitality, RU03). I also noticed from discussions with the participants that at a certain level of professional recognition, other companies within the sector could approach well-established professionals in the fields with offers for career transition. I follow the career progression steps of Bella (Financial Services, UK) and Nadezhda (Electronics, RU) to demonstrate this point.

Bella studied political science and economics in North America, and her first role related to '*technical assistance and corporate finance*' for one of the International Financial organisations. This role involved extensive travel around the world. Bella believes that this opportunity gave her '*an appetite to look at how political shifts impact on economies*', allowing her to reflect on her initial interest in political science and economics. Bella then worked for another financial organisation before a third International Finance organisation approached her, offering a role in London. Bella joined this organisation, being involved in a wide variety of their programmes. After a brief time studying for the MBA course, her current company approached with an interesting offer. She has now worked for them for more than ten years, taking assignments around the world (Bella, Financial Services, UK08).

Nadezhda was studying for her history degree in Moscow when *perestroika* happened. She soon realised that '*there will be troubles with history in this period as well as it will be difficult not to work'*. She transferred to the university's evening faculty and went to work. She started as a marketing coordinator in the Moscow branch of an international company. After the closure of this branch, she moved to the Regional Sales manager position in another international company branch in Moscow. Nadezhda then decided that she needed more 'intellectual stimulation' and went to work in Business Consultancy. Afterwards a large European corporation approached her with an offer to work in their Moscow team, which Nadezhda accepted. She went for their '*international assignment working on emerging markets*'

and moved to Italy. At twenty-eight she became a Marketing director, the only woman among twenty-five of their directors. She then returned to Moscow working in marketing for an international company, rising to the head of department before a competitive international firm approached her with an offer '*to take charge of their business*' in Moscow, which she did for four years (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05).

The career trajectories presented by Bella (Financial Services, UK08) and Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) demonstrate how once a certain level of expertise and recognition is attained, new opportunities arise. At this level, the female professionals often are approached by other companies with encouraging offers, stimulating career transitions. These experiences also demonstrate how the boundary-less career (Briscoe and Hall, 2006) may travel not only beyond boundaries of different organisations, but across different industries and sectors (Silver and Jansen, 2017). Here is what Nadezhda thinks about career trajectories:

> *I think it will be unique for each individual. Somebody would make a career in one organisation, would start in a basic position and step-by-step.... In this respect, I mixed industries; I worked in the computer industry, in the automobile industry, in healthcare... I think that a professional can understand, unless of course it is some very specific thing. Plausibly, if I have to become a design engineer… it is unlikely I would be able to do it without a specific and very profound education. But from a business point view, if you understand the main business processes and how to implement them, you can bring in the specialists… From my perspective, it is very good when there is a mix of industries because often the ideas of higher levels come to new business when you bring to the new industry something that was not practised in the industry before… I think, every team has to have a mix, including a professional mix*.
>
> (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05)

Therefore, the participants in both countries revealed working excessive hours, with their work often involving travel. Part-time appointments seem to be incompatible with leadership in commercial organisations with the expectation of the 'ideal workers' attitude of being fully dedicated to work (Acker, 2009). Women experience particular difficulties at the time when their children are born. These difficulties are attributed to tensions emerging from the desire to stay close to their children and work demands. The findings indicate that although general statutory maternity arrangements and childcare provisions seem to be more advanced in Russia

compared to the UK, these are still not geared for those women who aspire to advance in their careers. It appears that the opportunities offered by statutory maternity allowances in both countries are not compatible with career development in commercial organisations. The participants seem to 'choose' leaving maternity earlier than their statutory allowance due to the demands of their organisations. Though both the UK and Russian organisations have high expectations from those in leadership positions, Russian organisations compared to the UK, seem to be more attentive to women's explicit essential requirements. This research upholds that commercial organisations are gendered (Acker, 2009) because their processes are detached from individual workers, thus disadvantaging women. Women in both countries experience not being taken seriously at work and are expected to put in more effort than men. In this atmosphere women pursue challenging glass cliff assignments (Rayan and Haslam, 2007), which if successful, might open further career opportunities. The participants in both countries tend to stay loyal to their organisation if they feel valued and appreciated, yet they move companies when unrecognised. The boundary-less careers model (Arthur, 1994) offers opportunities for women to explore their career interests. At a higher level of professional recognition corporate businesses might approach female leaders with interesting career development offers.

6.5 Attitude towards the barriers: *'Everything is a trade-off. Everything is a compromise'*

All the participants except for one in Russia and two in the UK reported feeling satisfied about their work-home balance. For example, Regina (Insurance Services, UK10) emphasised: '*I cannot remember a period in my life when my work-home balance was not steady. Of course, when children are born, everyone has less sleep*' She also added: '*If I did not have enough sleep for two or three months, it does not affect the overall wellbeing.*' Similarly, Emma stated:

> *I would say, there is a reasonable balance. I still have time for myself. I do yoga once a week. I do pilates. I work from home one day per week, which helps a lot to catch up with, you know, housework… it is manageable*
>
> (Emma, Legal Services, UK02)

However, although the Russian participants were fairly positive, they were not as definite in their assessments of their work-home balance. There was a trace of doubt with *'trying*' undertone. For example, Darya (Medical Supplies, RU01) highlighted: '*I am trying to reach it. I cannot say I have it a hundred per cent… I still have this undercurrent; I'd like to spend more time with my child*'. Similarly, Zhanna (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03) affirmed: '*I strive to reach it… But I think my husband lacks (attention)… because most of my energy… I leave at work.'* Furthermore, Nadezhda elucidated:

> *I always tried combining these processes… I like to combine these two stories. I love my family and my children, but at the same time it is not enough for me for a full life. It is not enough staying at home and getting on with some home tasks. I like it when it is possible to add some sort of professional activity. Each has its' own appeal.*
>
> (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05)

Nevertheless, it seems it is not easy to achieve. For example, Clara highlighted:

> *In the beginning it looks like it is not that difficult, in reality though… it is not easy. I think there is not enough time in a twenty-four-hour day. I think I equilibrate quite well… some sort of balance had to be found, maybe not all the time. Some time it feels that more time had to be put towards the home or the children, who demand more attention. Yet it is not clear, if I had to leave my career, I would have wanted to return for sure or to get started with something different.*
>
> (Clara, Science an Innovation, RU06)

Further to the above examples, the participants indicated that a work-home balance is not possible for them without work as it is an integral part of their life. The quotations presented above demonstrate that there is an element of uncertainty that many Russian participants feel. Thus, Darya and Clara would like to spend more time with their children, Zhanna feels that she leaves all her energy at work and her husband lacks her attention. The societal expectations of women prioritising home duties over work demands creates a dissonance between their desire to build a career and to be an exemplary wife and a mother (Rath *et al.*, 2019). Women strive to equally attend the needs of their family members and demands of their organisations. In given circumstances the participants in both countries indicated that

they each find their own way of achieving better work-home balance. For example, Tamara (Tourism and Hospitality, RU08) highlights that once she started working in the tourism industry, she began exercising an essential practice of '*at least once per month to go somewhere together*' with her family members. She believes that it allowed her to achieve the balance, highlighting: '*there were no problems since I work in tourism for the last twelve years. Before that there was no balance at all; there was much more work'*. Nadezhda's point of view explains such an outlook:

> *I think it has to be not the quantity, but the quality of contact. I do not work during weekends and I spend holidays with my children. I have my own life rules. And I try whatever time I come home, to have a cup of tea together or to chat to them, sharing news with them. Yet they have their own portion of responsibility for what they do… I do not get involved in their homework daily, and I do not work as their personal driver, in this regard they are fairly independent.*
>
> (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05)

Both, Tamara and Nadezhda aim to spend quality time with their family. Tamara has found a way to combine her work with enjoying the company of her family. Nadezhda has ensured that her life principles safeguard her own space, allowing quality time with her family. In attempting to find a work-home balance some of the participants indicated being ready to change positions or organisations and moving countries. For example, Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) feels that she has a good work-home balance now, acknowledging that this is because of her current employer. She believes that it is not only she, who feels this way, highlighting that this is the reason why many other '*brightest women*' from her profession are moving to this company even though it means '*losing earnings'*. Instead, the company allows flexibility for a better work-home balance. Lidia added: '*in the end my choice of this company was determined by a possibility of a balance, at least the company thinks about it and I see it'*. Bella (Financial Services, UK08) continues: '*I think by now we have enough flexibility in our workplace allowing us to balance what we need to do at home and some of our aspirations from our hobbies'*. However, Veronica (Information Technology, UK03) believes that there are variations between the companies, and a work-home balance depends on the company culture. She compares her previous employer in Israel and her current employer in the UK:

> *In my current company it is usually busy… I cannot say that my work-home balance is great at the moment, which was not the case in my previous company. It was really good in my previous company; the work-home balance was absolutely satisfactory… so it depends on the company culture and what the company does. At the moment I don't feel like I have a good balance in my work and my family life.*
>
> (Veronica, Information Technology, UK03)

Veronica feels that there is lack of support from her current company in her achieving a work-home balance. It seems, that it is particularly difficult to accept as she has an example of a previous experience where things were done differently. Lidia and her colleagues, on the contrary appreciate the changes in their company, moving from their previous places of work where work-home balance was not taken seriously. These examples reveal that women are sensitive to issues associated with work-home balance; those who found it, feel that this is outside of the norm. For instance, Inna (Information Technology, UK06) says: '*I am not quite a typical woman maybe… I have a good balance because my husband likes to cook… And he likes to stay at home when I go for some after-work drinks.*' Inna thinks work-home balance is easy to achieve '*especially in the modern world'*, where *'you can take-away, or you can eat out.*' Similarly, Victoria reports:

> *I do not have a feeling that all I do is just working all the time without having a rest… we like very much travelling… I do not work on weekends. I can allow myself to stay late at work during the week, at the same time I feel comfortable as my husband also often comes home late, so… in this regard, there is no lack of balance. We dedicate all weekends totally to each other and switch off from work. In our company the balance is well safeguarded. Nobody will ever bother you during weekends... Regarding holidays, the connection (with the office) has to be maintained all the time because I am a negotiator in many issues. Here it is possible to self-organise more or less - they bother only on some really significant matters. And my team is lined up in such a way… they are really great – they deal with all the queries.*
>
> (Victoria, High Technologies, RU04)

Both Inna and Victoria represent the youngest age group among all the participants. They both are married without children; both feel comfortable in realities of the '*modern world'*. Though they both highlighted that their respective situations are '*not*

typical' and '*not ordinary'*. They managed to organise their work-home life to their full satisfaction. Yet, there are indications that this might be rather an exception. However, it is not to say that there are no challenges for those who advance with their careers. Bella explains her personal experiences:

> *Yes, there are a lot of challenges, but self-inflicted challenges. I enjoy things that I find help me contribute to the world in a way that I want to, but at the same time everything is a trade-off. Everything is a compromise. I don't spend too much time at home and don't spend much time with my family. My son has started boarding school, but before he was at home, it was hard… I was travelling, doing things… but it is always by choice… I think we have to be honest with ourselves to say that yes, it is difficult for sure! But is it difficult by choice or by necessity? It is never a simple journey… for anybody. But to me at least it feels very rewarding. You have to be comfortable in it… There are compromises and I don't see my family as often… I don't know my son's friends or parents of his friends. I haven't gone to plays at school; I haven't attended all the teacher's conferences… so, you sacrifice! But each time I make my choices and I spend my time wisely and I do what is important to me. As long as you can figure out what is it that makes you, then it is a pretty good ride.*
>
> (Bella, Financial Services, UK08)

Bella highlights that '*everything is a trade-off*' and it seems that those making a choice in favour of a career are more likely to compromise on family and friends. Yet Bella also mentioned '*we have to be comfortable'* with it, because if it feels right, this price is worth paying. Ultimately neither in Russia nor in the UK were the participants regretting the decision of pursuing their career. As hard as it was for Darya (Distributions, RU01) to cut her maternity short, she concluded: '*Anyway, I returned back to work and I do not regret it!*' Likewise, Regina (Insurance Services, UK10) says: '*I do not have any regrets… I do not think that my children were somehow traumatised psychologically because mummy is not there. At the end of the day, I saw them in the evening, during weekends, on holidays!*' Nella highlighted that '*many people are often surprised'* at how she managed not slowing down her career while ensuring that '*at the same time the family did not suffer'* (Telecommunications, UK05)*'*. She shared though: *'I was worried about it at some point because I thought that it can affect them, but Thank God, it did not!'* Nadezhda (Electronics, UK05) believes that returning to work was very helpful because children would not have had a good experience seeing how '*their mother suffers*'. This is consistent with

Crompton and Lyonette's (2005) view that those women who don't follow the traditional approach feel happier at home. Bella underlines that though she feels her industry would have let her take a prolonged career break, she did not go for it. She elaborates:

> *Maybe I should have? … I really enjoy what I do! …I am comfortable… I never really felt the need… I took four months off when my son was born and maybe if I had a different type of a career, I would have had more kids? I don't know, it's hard to say, but… I don't sit here thinking 'I wish I could take a break!'… I know… that if I wanted, the industry would allow me.*
>
> (Bella, Financial Services UK08)

Galina (Information Technology, RU10) on the other hand, does not seem to feel easy about women having to choose between their desired careers and staying close to their young children, for those who want to succeed in both. She explains:

> *How would it be possible to sort out both, to make a career and at the same time to be with your child? I could not do it… Those first three years once he was born (son), he was with me, but I understand that it is a rather exceptional story. There are very few places where you could bring your child to work; very few places would allow such freedom. Ordinarily, he would have to be with nannies, grandmothers, then no one would see each other… Therefore, there is utterly no gender equality!*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

Galina believes that it is fundamentally unfair that women have to choose between their career and staying close to their young child. The quotations above epitomise the dichotomy of work and home life for modern household and organisational arrangements. Prolonged career breaks might hinder women's career development (Christofides *et al.*, 2013). Zhanna, who builds her career in Russia, is thinking about having a child, revealing: '*this is one of the most sensitive topics for me!*' She is hesitant because she is not sure whether she can combine her responsibilities as a mother with her accountabilities of managing her team: '*How come? If I got pregnant now, I'll let the whole team down!*' (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03).

Therefore, the participants mainly feel satisfied with their work-home balance, yet there is some ambivalence amongst the participants in Russia. This might be explained by a dissonance between societal expectations of women to prioritise home and their desire for professional realisation. In such circumstance women in both countries often create strategies for balancing paid work duties and unpaid home demands. However, the overall perception of the 'balance' is a trade-off experience of 'choosing' the career at the expense of missing children's school plays or delaying childbirth.

6. 6 Conclusion

The main themes of this chapter include structural factors, encompassing the importance of childcare arrangements, domestic division of labour, organisational issues, and work-home balance. These factors influence the career trajectories of the participants.

The childcare measures constituted one of the vital considerations for the participants. The participants with small children in both countries mostly used help of nannies. In Russia childcare was reported as being reasonable, in addition there was help from extended family members. The participants in the UK indicated childcare being perceived as expensive, especially for those newly arrived in the UK. Women revealed, they had 'to choose' between a career and looking after their children. Regarding professional women, the thesis attests a profound shift in 'Soviet Paradox' (Ashwin and Isupova, 2018), when following traditional values around domestic labour, women combined their paid work with the burden of unpaid home duties. In the context of career-oriented professional women, among both the UK and Russian participants, the domestic obligations now are likely to be outsourced with remaining household responsibilities equally shared between members of the family. The thesis agrees with McGinn and Oh (2017) that by achieving a higher societal standing, women's behaviour in both work and home changes due to the shift in gender power relations.

The participants in both countries shared stories of their excessive work responsibilities and long-working hours demanded by their organisations. Also, their

work often involves extensive travel, separating them from their families. The participants in both countries identified the difficulties around the birth and early development of their children. The main challenges connected to the participants' work demands conflicting with their desire to stay close to their young children. The participants' experiences exposed pressure by their organisations to curtail their maternity leave, missing-out on opportunities for the full statutory maternity period allowed in their respective countries. Although women in both countries found it difficult to return to work after maternity, the UK participants revealed being particularly stressed. The UK organisations are seen as rigid compared to Russian ones, which are perceived as more sensitive and understanding to women's needs.

The participants in both countries reported a wide range of work duties, with no opportunities for career development with part-time work. Yet, the disproportionate demands of the UK organisations seem to be more apparent. There is evidence that organisational structures in both countries, especially in the UK, are gendered with expectations of an 'unencumbered worker' attitude (Acker, 2009), with work prioritised. Structural factors create barriers, particularly in relation to women not being taken seriously at work and expected to work harder than men in both countries. In such environments, women seek glass cliff assignments (Ryan and Haslam, 2007) for their talents to be noticed and recognised. Those achieving recognition, tent to stay loyal to their organisations in both countries. Otherwise, the participants also often follow a boundary-less career progression (Arthur, 1994), moving between different companies, as well as often between different industries.

Though the participants felt positive towards their work-home balance, there seemed to be a 'trying to achieve it' undercurrent among the Russian participants. This might be related to a conflict in gender role expectations for women choosing their profession to prioritising home (Rath *et al.,* 2019). Women in both countries develop strategies for balancing work and family interests, being ready to move to work-home balance friendly companies. The main implication is that in these circumstances, female leaders' experiences are seen as 'trade-offs' in 'choosing' between career and family with examples of women delaying childbirth not to 'let the whole team down'.

Thus, structural factors regarding current social and organisational arrangements, influence the career span of the participants. The participants emphasised the unprecedented impact of family and organisational influences on their professional achievements. The next chapter will evaluate wider environmental factors affecting the career development of women from the former Soviet Union, including culture and national policies relevant to Russia and the UK.

Chapter Seven Structural factors: socio- environmental factors

7.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I discuss wider environmental and cultural factors affecting the experiences of women from the former Soviet Union, who now live and work in the UK and Russia. First, I consider how the political and historic trends influenced their career trajectories. The key event in the modern history of the former Soviet Union is attributed to *perestroika* towards the beginning of the 1990s. I start this discussion with how *perestroika* changed the course of opportunities for women in the former USSR. In particular, I analyse how *liberal* and *radical* gender equality agendas impacted on the career trajectories of women. I continue by evaluating career trajectories of women from the former Soviet Union professionally working in the UK and Russia. The intricacies of their experiences and the pattern of their career directions form the basis for this critical evaluation.

The significance of *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union is recognised as one of the major themes by both the participants in the UK and in Russia. The changes brought by *perestroika* resulted in two key events dramatically impacting the lives of women in the former Soviet Union. Firstly, *perestroika* opened the door to new opportunities in the labour market. Secondly, it allowed people to leave Russia, resulting in a massive wave of emigration from Russia to the West. This chapter analyses the opportunities for professional women, prompted by *perestroika* in view of these events. The analysis considers the dramatic alterations in gender equality policies from a radical towards a liberal direction in Russia. Then, gradual alterations in gender equality policies from liberal towards radical discussions in the UK will also be considered. These analyses are presented through the perception of equality by women from a former Soviet background, now working professionally in Russia and the UK. I compare the attitude of women from the former Soviet Union towards work and careers in Russia and in the UK.

I analyse the experiences and perceptions of women in Russia and the challenges of working within a ‘female’ sphere of professional expertise. I also investigate the glass ceiling challenges in accessing top managerial positions in Russia. The experiences

of the UK participants are examined through the *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989) approach where issues resulting from immigration are analysed in the context of the intersection between gender and minority culture. The Model of Stereotyping through Associated and Intersectional Categories by Hall *et al.* (2019) assists this analysis. Finally, the nuances of the UK participants' multifaceted background are analysed and the impacts on their identity experiences are evaluated.

7.2 Perestroika: *'We had perestroika… we absolutely loved it!'*

One of the themes that the participants of this research identified as critical to their life relates to *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union. This is especially the case for those participants, who are over 45 years old. Perestroika is regarded as the single most important political event that many of the participants witnessed and lived through. Claudia (Events, UK) recalls how she and her family experienced *perestroika* while she lived in the former Soviet Union:

> *We had perestroika… we absolutely loved it!... We read enormous number of journals… Concurrently queuing for milk, sausages and fresh publications… the queues could be as long as four hours - we lived in hardship as the rest of the Soviet Union, yet still the time was awesomely interesting!*
>
> (Claudia, Events, UK)

Perestroika reversed the longstanding involvement of Soviet women in the labour market. Racioppi and O'Sullivan (1995:825) advocate that after *perestroika* Russian women largely went back to their 'traditional deities' at home. Similarly, Metcalfe and Afanassieva (2005) highlighted that *post-perestroika* women in Russia were financially dependent on men. The findings of this research, however, indicate that it was not the case in the context of professional women. None of the participants reported that at any point of their career, were they interested in abandoning work. On the contrary, often they attested to an immense interest in work since *perestroika*, recognising the opportunities it brought. Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) started her career as a lawyer when perestroika had just begun, she recalls: '*I was very interested to contribute to this new development… to see the new changes and the start of new relationships*… *from a professional point of view*' (Lidia, Legal

Services, UK07). Moreover, the participants of this research indicated that despite the many adversities of *perestroika*, they were determined to actively seek professional recognition. Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) recalls:

> *I always studied and worked! I finished school in a most interesting period for Russia. It was 1989, and I had started university. My first degree was in history and while studying it, it soon became clear that a) it will be difficult with history as a subject in this period and b) it will be hard without work. I moved to the evening faculty and went to work.*
>
> (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05)

Nadezhda had to alter her *pre-perestroika* plans of studying full-time and due to the uncertainties of *perestroika* she began working. In agreement with Pollert (2005), this research recognises that *perestroika* brought dramatic changes and insecurity to the job prospects for women in Russia. When *perestroika* started Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01) lost her job because '*many companies ceased to exist, and it was difficult to find jobs'*. She continues: '*I was trying all sorts of activities, and eventually I decided to try a head-hunter company*'. These newly opened employment agencies in Russia were instrumental for professionals in searching for jobs (Yakubovich and Kozina, 2017). Thus, on the one hand *perestroika* brought instability. On the other hand, it brought new job opportunities for professional women. In addition to a wide range of private employment agencies, an entirely new stream of foreign companies entered Russian markets during *perestroika.* This allowed Russian female professionals to step into unknown employment territories. Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01) eventually found employment with a British Insurance company in Moscow. Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) started working for one of the biggest international corporations. She explains:

> *I went to work with a foreign company because they had only just started operating in Russia. There was a time when there was no need for a high qualification to get anywhere because nobody had them. It was enough, so to say, just to be bright and to speak a little bit of English and you were already employed by their representative office because they required people whom they could rely on*
>
> Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05)

Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) recognised the new opportunities with foreign companies because their entry requirements were temporarily lowered. This allowed

Nadezhda to find a niche in entering the labour market during the crisis following *perestroika*. She believes that her foreign language skills were valued and regarded as a prime prerequisite. It seems that smart and educated women in the former Soviet Union had an advantage for entering a new and unknown professional territory brought by foreign investors, enabled by *perestroika*.

Another significant change brought by *perestroika* is associated with the opportunity for geographical relocations from the former Soviet Union. Half of the UK participants came to settle in the UK leaving the former Soviet Union. Others, consistent with Isurin (2011), left the former USSR to reside in Israel, Germany, and the USA before arriving in the UK. Once abroad, all the participants were seeking employment and professional recognition. For example, Claudia (Events, UK09) moved to Germany following her husband's career in the early 1990s. Much to the disapproval of her neighbours there, she took the first opportunity that came her way to continue working as a software engineer. She recalls:

> *All my neighbours appallingly condemned me, and they all told me that I was not a mother but a sort of cuckoo because at that time in Germany women still did not work… There was no equality there at that time at all! Simply none! Yet I, being a Soviet woman, was eager to work… as our mums did… certainly not like German mums did, or like mums do here - they are devoted totally 100% to children, taking them to clubs, that sort of thing*
>
> (Claudia, Events, UK09)

Claudia refers to the stereotype of a Soviet woman with a fundamental desire to work. This stereotype does not seem to be shared by social expectations in the West. Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) was astonished when during a counselling session in the UK about her work-home balance, the therapist kept asking: '*Lidia, why would you not consider to be a housewife?... Why do you need all this?'* Lidia's response was: *'What are you talking about?*' Lidia added that the counsellor was an elderly woman, which might explain the differences in societal expectations. Lidia clarifies: '*here women started working not such a long time ago! We had a generation of grandmothers… working in 1920s… 50s… 70s… it was sort of normal… otherwise there is no model in your head*'. Lidia also recalled a conversation with a senior male colleague. While making coffee in their office kitchen

they got into a dialogue. Upon learning that Lidia's child was four years old, he said: '*How come you work?... My wife is at home, and I see the difference; she tells me how children are calmer if a woman stays at home*'. During the interview, Lydia exclaimed: '*Wow! It is the twenty-first century! We only spoke about children, and it came out of him!*' Consistent with the societal role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012), this research stipulates that there are variations in gender beliefs by different societal clusters. Lidia was appalled by the comments of her counsellor and her male colleague. Her reaction demonstrates shock and insult. Both, Lidia's and Claudia's comments reveal that there is a profound and fundamental difference in societal attitudes towards working women in Soviet culture and Western cultures. It seems that the thought of staying at home is alien to professional women brought up in the former USSR, who take pride in their professional attainment.

The above considerations are analysed from cultural perspectives and gender equality policies. Culture is recognised as a multifaceted fusion of societal beliefs, customs, and connotations (Schwartz, 1999). One of the important cultural dimensions attributed to gender egalitarianism, refers to 'the extent to which a society encourages gender equality' (House *et al.*, 2004:30). The GLOBE study determined that although the gender egalitarianism in England measured higher than the average around the world, it was still lower than the score in Russia soon after the *perestroika* (House, 2004). The current study indicates consistency with the GLOBE findings in this regard. Former Soviet women brought up in a higher egalitarian society, feel it is normal for women to work and develop a career. In an encounter with lower egalitarian society values, women from the former Soviet Union feel that they are misjudged in their desire to work and build a career. Also, culture is formed amongst other factors through the 'ideological belief systems' as well as 'heritage and history' (House *et al.*, 2004:16). Thus, it is important to consider the ideological policies affecting gender equality interpretations in both Russia and the UK. There is close inter-connection between cultural characteristics and people's perceptions (Lyness and Judiesch, 2014). People's perception influences the cultural dimensions, at the same time the overall culture influences perceptions and attitudes of individuals. The thesis traces how government policy directions in both, Russia and the UK influenced the attitude of people within the respective cultures.

The radical Marxist views were implemented in the former USSR (Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995), encouraging women's participation in the labour market including through quotas (Chinyaeva, 2003) and promoting a 'superwoman' mindset (Klimova and Ross, 2012). The participants in both countries had examples of professional women in society and in their families. Some were dreaming about a career from early childhood. Zhanna (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03) pictured business suits in her wardrobe since she was seven years old. Referring to the career topic, she says: '*we are children of the USSR… this theme (career) was always interesting for me!*' Similarly, Darya (Distributions, RU01) recalls: '*I always saw my career, saw myself in a leadership position even from my student years.*' Thus, the thoughts around work and career for women in *pre-perestroika* USSR were nurtured from early years. The example of mothers and grandmothers throughout the Soviet history as Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) earlier commented, was a significant contribution in the education of girls about careers. She exclaims: '*My grandmother was in a very high position; she was engineer-in-chief of a steel plant'*. Regina (Insurance Services, UK10) also says: '*I looked up to my grandma. My grandma was one of the leading doctors in the USSR in 1920s'*. Thus, consistent with GLOBE (2016) findings, women in the former Soviet Union were professionally progressive. Comparing historic perspectives of women's' positions in the UK and Russia, Regina (Insurance, UK10) noted:

> *Our women held high positions in accountancy and as finance directors from the very beginning… In Russia there were many women in broking and banking… In the UK up until 1970s, boys mostly… in the City of London… would come to the big firms… There are many more women now, especially after the Sexual Discrimination at work law was passed. Before that Lloyds, the oldest Insurance market, did not have women underwriters or brokers. In the middle of 70s it suddenly happened, they started to emerge.*
>
> (Regina, Insurance, UK10)

Regina refers to the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), which changed the British attitude to gender equality towards the end of the twentieth century. However, the UK equality policies followed liberal tactics (Webb, 1997), safeguarding equal procedures for all, rather than endorsing radical equal representation (Jewson and Mason, 1986). The UK liberal policies were unproductive, and the radical views gained eminence towards the twenty-first century (Conley and Page, 2017). Regina

(Insurance, UK10) notes that there were mainly men working in London city firms until recently, '*there are many more women now*'. Comparing the relatively egalitarian outlook of early *post-perestroika* Russia and the UK of the same period, Inga (Information Technology, UK04) says: '*How we lived in the Soviet Union - there was a feeling of equality. When I grew, I thought, and I sincerely believed that there is equality between men and women'*. Lidia among other UK participants, believes that regarding the sexism practices, '*surprisingly… there is more of it in England than in Russia*' (Legal Services, UK07). However, she continued: '*I don't know how it is now in Russia. I think women (in Russia) might tell you a different story, I only can judge by some sort of retellings and rumours.*'

Thus, *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union changed the lives of all the participants. Contrary to early *post-perestroika* reports about Russian women moving to the traditional home duties and towards being dependent on men, this research indicates the opposite in the context of professional women. Although *perestroika* brought uncertainties, the participants reported exploring career opportunities. In addition, *perestroika* enabled geographical relocations outside of the former Soviet Union. As a result, the UK participants left the former USSR. The UK participants find gender equality measures in the UK insufficient compared to their former Soviet experiences. This is analysed through gender egalitarian perspectives of culture in the UK and Russia. Throughout the twentieth century the UK and the former Soviet Union governments had different gender equality directions. If women in the former Soviet Union were encouraged to work and build careers with the support of radical policies, the liberal gender equality policies in the UK were only safeguarding equal procedures for all. The current liberal gender equality approach with the hesitant help of radical activities in the UK seem to be having a slow effect.

7.3 *'Now there are no women in executive management positions in factories and plants at all'*

In my earlier discussion about personal preferences, I already revealed that most of the participants in both countries work in gender segregated professional settings. However, a minority of two Russian participants compared to nine of the UK participants work in 'male oriented' professions, such as marketing, broking, and

engineering. Women in Russia seem to gather in female professions, such as Human Resources as well as the Tourism and Hospitality. The social pressure from social gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987) partly explains such a 'choice'. However, considering that both the UK and Russian participants were brought up in a similar cultural environment, there is a substantial difference in how their careers evolved.

In discussions about gender equality in their organisations, the UK participants often commented on both equal procedures and equal representation actions, which denote liberal and radical views on fairness. This is consistent with Conley and Page (2017) arguing that the British government is trying to implement simultaneously both liberal and radical measures to gender equality. There were those UK participants, who strongly support liberal policies with equal procedures as well as those who favour radical measures through equal representations. For example, Regina (Insurance, RU10) criticises the UK efforts towards radical changes, emphasising:

> *The problem is that now they try to bring positive discrimination, i.e. if you are a minority or a refugee, there are preferences for entering the university and for work offers… If you are a middle-class boy, you will have to fight more than a woman*
>
> (Regina, Insurance, RU10)

Regina believes that all people must be recognised and accepted purely on their professional virtues disregarding their demographic characteristics. In her view:

> *If a woman is ready to perform in the same way as a man or a woman who does not have children, if she works the same hours, if she does not leave work for a school play or take a child to the doctor or the nanny did not come, then you have to judge equally. If the women's input at work is less, we cannot talk about discrimination, she simply does not cope with her duties. And it is not clear why her other female colleagues, who have perhaps grown-up children or who don't have children or male colleagues… have to be a shoulder? Especially when it is all the time. Perhaps once a year is OK… but if you want to be considered as an equal, offered a career progression, no concessions are to be given!*
>
> (Regina, Insurance, RU10)

However, Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) appears to support radical positive discrimination measures, arguing: '*You see, there is never direct discrimination, you*

will not see it in law firms, but… I feel it is potentially there'. Thus, Lidia cannot pinpoint any discriminating practices in organisations where she worked since it appears that all procedures are followed to the letter. Yet, she sensed that there is still no fairness for women. Thus, she supports radical efforts towards equal representation, noticing:

> *I see what is happening… when women deliberately try to promote women and help them in their career… We need some sort of extra chance! Without compromising on professional qualities… this is a sort of social responsibility... now! Not just a sisterhood because she is a woman, but when it is professionally reasoned. I can see it is not easy.*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07)

Lidia believes that an equal procedures policy by itself will not suffice in achieving gender equality if '*the whole system is designed for men'* (Legal Services, 07). Lidia's female colleague inspired her, advocating: '*You know, we must support each other. We know what challenges we meet. We must find such practices which work for us, not only for men who have their rears protected*.' Lidia supports such a position, exclaiming: '*Yes, it is really cool!'* Furthermore, although Bella (Financial Services, UK08) recognises the obstacles that women face compared to men, she is cautious that positive discrimination practices might be misused:

> *I have a very unconventional view about gender diversity… Without a single doubt I think that there are quite profound challenges that we have seen in the past. I equally think that we've come such a long way… I do think that very often, and it upsets me to be honest, I see people start to use it to their advantage. I think that is very disappointing because I think that ultimately, we should be recognised based on merit. It absolutely been harder for women. Well, maybe you can argue that because we all have children, we have responsibilities, but I think we are just different personalities, different people and we approach things in a different way. That's absolutely fine… I think we should now celebrate it and acknowledge and recognise it rather than trying to be the same*
>
> (Bella, Financial Services, UK08)

Bella suggests that it is important to be recognised purely on merits to prevent opportunists manipulating the system. However, recognising women's hardships and supporting diversity, Bella still does not favour radical strategies. Her position is in

celebrating gender equality and diversity achievements rather than dwelling on its difficulties. The overall participants' position in both countries seems to be in favour of equal procedures consistent with liberal policies (Jewson and Mason, 1986). However, there is a difference in how the UK and Russian participants approached this discussion. The UK participants often expressed their views, debating between both liberal and radical gender equality strands. Yet, the Russian participants appealed exclusively to equal procedures for all, demonstrating their undoubted sympathetic views towards liberal values (Jewson and Mason, 1986). For example, Clara (Science and Innovation, RU06) highlighted: '*we do not have any requirements connected to gender... when we invite for interviews or placements, we bring everybody*'. Tamara (Tourism Industry, RU08) says: '*nobody would raise any barriers from outside, no one and never'*. Similarly, Eugenia (Telecommunications, RU02) emphasised: '*We do not welcome sexism! The requirements are equal for all.*' The participants in Russia did not refer to radical policies neither in an approving nor in a disapproving mode. Such an attitude might suggest either that liberal policies work to completely accomplish gender equality in Russia or that a liberal versus radical discourse is not on the agenda in contemporary Russia. Further examples illustrate that there are gender equality issues in Russia still to be solved.

All Russian participants reported extensive opportunities for women in those organisations where they work. However, there are limitations to their career progression. When Darya (Distributions, RU01) worked in her '*dream company*', she recalls: '*I wanted to grow, but in two and a half years I understood that I had reached the ceiling, they were not going to let me develop further*'. It emerges that currently career prospects of women in Russia are not only confined to '*female industries'* but are also capped at the top of corporate hierarchies. This is especially the case in large organisations. I already provided the example of Zhanna (Tourism and Hospitality, RU03) emphasising that although she has '*never experienced any discrimination as a woman'*, she indicated, it is because '*I mind my own business'*, yet women at the top of the hierarchy are likely to '*experience problems'.*
It seems that women are aware that there are limitations, yet they are satisfied with their current situation. Furthermore, Victoria (High Technologies, RU04) in discussion about promotion prospects for women in her organisation, emphasised

the fundamental importance of *'personal qualities and a person's abilities… regardless whether it is men or a woman*'. She continued:

> *If you look at our management team of a first line minus one, those who report to the general manager… there are three women out of seven… Well to be honest, we are responsible for administrative functions. Technical functions after all are men, but it is because there are very few women in the industry, there are simply a very few of them*
>
> (Victoria, High Technologies, RU04)

The substantial pipeline problems caused by gender segregation results in weakening the bargaining power of women in management (Klimova and Ross, 2012). Fedorova *et al.* (2016) reported that since 2005 gender segregation discussions in Russia moved away from the government's attention. This situation created an environment where the position of women in management declined as their responsibilities condensed to a 'female' area of expertise. Galina explained how the value of her function as HR director predisposed her to being rated lower compared to her male colleague. She demonstrates it with an example of a conflict that happened between her and another director within their organisation:

> *We were holding equal positions from a hierarchical point of view, but from a practical point of view, he had a higher standing. This is even though he was the one who ran down the whole state of affairs… I had to clean it all up simply because his department was sales, an earning unit, and mine was, roughly speaking, servicing… Luckily, we sorted it out. But when I talked with our General Manager, our main shareholder, he was blunt with me. He said: "if I had to choose between you and him, I would choose him, not because I am unhappy with your work, but because he brings this much money and I am not giving that up!"*
>
> Galina (Information Technology, RU10)

This episode from Galina's professional experience demonstrates that there is an undercurrent of structural powers set to undervalue 'female oriented' positions. HR is regarded as a '*services*' function and '*not the earning part of the businesses'*, therefore it is valued less (Galina, Information Technology, RU10). Although it was Galina's male colleague, who '*ran down the whole state of affairs*', the general manager was prepared to protect him, not Galina in order to secure immediate profits. Galina agreed with the common understanding and the logic of her general

manager around the power of monetary resources. Even though Galina and her male colleague, involved in this incident, had equal official standings in the organisational hierarchy, she highlights: '*I should have been more flexible… in this whole story simply because he had more weight*.' Therefore, 'female-oriented' and 'male-oriented' management positions of equal standing in organisational hierarchy seem not to be equal. The tendency of women in Russia to progress along a 'female-oriented' route sets them in potentially more vulnerable positions than men.

Thus, there are indications that an unchallenged *post-perestroika* course towards liberal policies in Russia brought hidden implications for women's career progression. Although the representation of women in management in Russia remains one of the strongest in the world (Grant Thornton, 2020), there are ramifications in relation to the value of this representation. Further to Ogloblin (2005), there are indications that men in Russia advance towards money-oriented professions and positions. As Racioppi and O'Sullivan's (1995) assert, there is declining interest of government in radical equality measures in Russia in the beginning of *perestroika*, and this study evidences the experiences of hidden challenges for women. Unimpeded liberal discourse in favour of equal procedures overlooks structural nuances of equality. A commonly accepted understanding of equality without radical enquiry, strengthens the existing status quo. Klimova and Ross (2012) cautioned that as women in Russia moved to the 'female industries', their representation in 'male' professions declined. For instance, Ksenia (Information Technology, RU09) was promoted from engineering to a project management position early in her career soon after *perestroika.* However, her career stagnated in this position for fifteen years. Due to a combination of reasons, she recently changed company and moved to another town, accepting a '*more female*' post. In Ksenia's opinion, the management positions in technical spheres are now particularly difficult to access in Russia. She says: '*if we are talking about a chief designer, who leads an expert part of the product, we had only men there, just because there are mostly men in those departments*' (Ksenia, Information Technology, RU 09). Thus, this research indicates that there are pipeline problems associated with the lack of channelling of female specialists to the management positions in male dominated organisations. Consequently, the participants in Russia believe that it is particularly

difficult for women to attain executive level positions in male occupied industries. Galina (Information Technology, RU10) explains:

> *If you take the entire management, of course there are considerably more male managers than female managers. There is a very high division by industries. If we talk about kindergartens, primary schools and senior schools, the owners and directors are mostly women. If we talk about information technology, resources and production plants, of course those are men. I think that now there are no women in executive management positions in factories and plants at all. At least from what I see*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

From the gender egalitarianism perspectives, culture and gender roles are interdependent (Martin and Nakayama, 2008). Gender egalitarianism acts as both a cultural dimension of gender equality as well as a regulator of cross-national differences (Lyness and Judiesch, 2014). The government gender equality approach seems to be instrumental as a correcting mechanism. The dynamics of a *post-perestroika* gender equality discourse in Russia created a desirable environment for men to advance towards more valued industries and positions, leaving women progressing towards those professions that are less attractive for men. The UK participants such as Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) and Inga (Information Technology, UK04) previously presented nostalgic views about opportunities for women in *pre-perestroika* and early *post-perestroika* Russia. There are indications that there are undercurrent shifts in equality of opportunities for women in Russia. It appears that liberal equality policies allowed men to advance in 'equal competition' towards more remunerative industries and positions. Darya noted:

> *For me, the example of a Russian woman is very positive. When abroad, people say that it is a combination of beauty and intellect, as well as hard-working. Sometimes my director asks me: Why are you, Darya, always hiring women? All your managers are women! What are men doing (in Russia)? I answer: Men are working in Oil and Gas!*
>
> (Darya, Distributions, RU1)

The research findings are consistent with Ogloblin's (2005) reflections that following *perestroika*, men are more interested in better paid 'male' professions. It seems that the liberal approach to gender equality policies since *perestroika* in Russia intensifies

the situation regarding both vertical and horizontal gender segregation. On the one hand, access to professional 'female' occupations such as HR open substantial career opportunities for professional women in Russia. On the other hand, it seems that women's choices around traditional ideals, ultimately disadvantage them. All the participants in Russia were very positive about their career progression prospects to higher-level managerial positions. To my question whether there are opportunities for women to progress in their career, Galina (Information Technology, RU10) replied: '*Yes, of course! Especially in the case of HR'*, yet the limitations presented by the 'female spheres' were also strongly outlined:

> *I think particularly in HR women take leading positions. It is possible to choose any industry; nobody restricts the growth. It is more difficult in technical spheres though. I think in some industries women cannot get to higher positions of management at all! This is in resources – there are no variations! But from the HR point of view – Yes!*
>
> (Galina, Information Technology, RU10)

The research shows that the combination of strong egalitarian tradition and liberal equality discourse in *post-perestroika* Russia continues to support women in management. However, Russian women seem to be trapped in a 'female' sphere of influence. Nadezhda (Electronics, RU05) works at the highest level of corporate management in a 'male-oriented' industry. She believes that although it is easier for women to build a career '*in traditionally female industries'*, there might be further obstacles for women there because '*there is much more serious competition among women*' (Nadezhda, Electronics, RU05). Thus, she believes there might be more opportunities opened for women progressing in 'male' professions. She continues: '*perhaps sometimes it is good to compete amongst men because you can add different views to the task, which might be appreciated*'. Correspondingly, creating an environment for Russian professional women to progress in 'male' professions would provide extra impetus for entering 'male' spheres. Therefore, it can be argued that radical equality measures might encourage highly educated women in Russia to enter 'male' professions and boost their confidence in developing careers there.

Thus, it appears that the radical gender equality approach is no longer in favour in Russia. Although there are indications about sufficient career opportunities in

Russia, these appear to be limited in 'male' industries and capped at the top of hierarchies. While Russian men proceed to more remunerative industries and positions, women are confined to traditionally 'female' industries and occupations. Therefore, a *post-perestroika* direction towards gender equality under the umbrella of liberal policies gives rise to implications for women's career progression. Consequently, it leaves women in Russia in a contented but vulnerable place where opportunities are formally there, yet these are profoundly limited. The opportunities for the UK participants are discussed next.

7.4 *'He saw an Eastern-European blonde... it was a definition'*

Although each of the participants had a unique story to tell about their career development, patterns emerged among the UK participants on their career trajectories from the point of arrival in the UK. Half of the participants had a relatively smooth career start or career transition in the UK, others had difficulties. For example, Emma's career start could be regarded as traditional in the UK Legal Services. Upon graduating with a law degree from a UK university, she *'completed a training contract'* and then '*the company offered (her) a permanent contract'* (Emma, Legal Services, UK02). The participants who came to the UK following a transfer within the same company either directly from Russia or from other countries also had a relatively smooth transition. Thus, Valeria (Insurance Services, UK01) started her insurance career in Russia and then came to the UK on a '*transfer within the same company'*. Nella first emigrated from the former Soviet Union to Israel, where she developed her career in Telecommunications. The company offered Nella a relocation package from Israel to the UK, and Nella with her family came to the UK (Telecommunications, UK05). These examples demonstrate a relatively seamless career development at the point of moving to the UK.

However, another half of the participants moved to the UK following their husband's careers. Their experiences are different. For example, Inga's family (Information Technology, UK04) came to the UK when her '*husband found work in London… as a software engineer*'. Likewise, Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) came to the UK as she explains: '*because my husband had got a job in London'*. Both Inga and Lidia were building their own careers prior to arriving in the UK, yet they moved to the UK

following their husbands' professional appointments. In both cases the husband's career was organised on their arrival to the UK. However, both Inga and Lidia reported acute challenges in establishing their own careers in the UK. The main difficulties were attributed to securing their first job. For the first six months on arrival to the UK Inga did not start looking for jobs, she was full-time looking after their son and learning English (Information Technology, UK04). Lidia also recalls that her English was very *'peculiar'* at that time, explaining: *'I could read legal documents and decrees, yet I could not buy a carrot in a local shop'* (Legal Services, UK07). However, language was not the main challenge for Lidia. She shared her experience of being restrained without contacts:

> *Suddenly from a very successful… career… here I am at 27 with a small child in a foreign country… I realised that I was in a confined space, though it was zone two in London… I started volunteering in a small community centre, teaching English to Bengali women… and I found myself in a large international community of mothers with children, mostly Soviets and Eastern… we were women with no connections… there was also one 'lost' English woman, she also belonged to the same category because of class differences… highly educated, yet somehow she did not have anybody to speak to*
>
> Lidia (Legal Services, UK07)

This was an initial shock for Lidia, finding herself without acquaintances. Social connections are essential for those brought up in the Soviet Union. Accustomed to collectivistic values, people from former USSR might experience extra difficulties being exposed to the western individualistic culture (Isurin, 2011). This is because people from collectivistic cultures tend to depend on in-group standards compared to more independent and self-reliant people in individualistic cultures. Lidia felt that she was locked '*in a confined space'*, longing to find people who have something in common, so she could relate to other '*women with no connections*.' Lidia's experience demonstrates that women may be more sensitive to issues imposed by immigration (Al-Ali, 2013). Lidia found friends from other *collectivistic* backgrounds, such as '*Soviets and Eastern'* women. Interestingly, a highly educated English woman found refuge and felt close to the same group being marginalised '*because of class differences*.' Lidia mentioned that she keeps friendships with many of these women (Legal Services, UK07).

Russian culture is often portrayed as accepting both Eastern and Western values, resembling Western culture on egalitarian characteristics (House *et al.*, 2004). Thus, careers are important for professional women from former USSR. Following her husbands' career to the UK, Lidia's problem of social isolation deepened as she had an additional problem of securing her first employment. Having her husband's career in hand and planned, Lidia noted that moving to the UK, they did not think about her career. Lidia says that '*in fact, we did not even consider how it would affect me and my profession*' (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07). Although Lidia emphasised the all-embracing support of her husband, she feels that at that time her main strain was the lack of opportunity for integration in her new life in a foreign country.

The transition from a collectivistic to an individualistic culture might be easier for professionals as they display more individualistic behaviour in all cultures (Triandis, 2001). However, Lidia amongst other UK participants who followed their husband's careers, found that it was exceptionally difficult to secure her first employment in the UK. Inga (Information Technology, UK04) recalls that '*much energy was spent on simply finding a job and to make sure that this job is in line with my professional specialty*'. She adds: '*I put in a considerable effort to get it'*. Furthermore, although Inna (Information Technology, UK06) had an extensive experience in Public Relations and Marketing on arrival to the UK, yet after a long struggle of finding a position within her expertise, she recalls: '*I was so desperate, I even tried to get a job in an off-licence shop to sell vodka at night... again I was not accepted... it was very challenging in London*.' Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) also found her career start in the UK exceptionally challenging. She had to obtain another law degree in the UK because at that time her Russian degree and extensive experience as a lawyer were not recognised in the UK. It took Lidia a long time to get back to her profession. Further to Isurin (2011), this research recognises that highly educated emigrants from the former Soviet Union might find a lack of appreciation abroad. Even upon obtaining the UK law degree, Lidia experienced many difficulties pursuing her first professional contract. She recalls: '*I faced a great number of rejections, I cried bitter tears.*'

However, there are indications that once in professional employment, career progression constraints might still persevere. Coming to the UK via transfer within the same company, Valeria (Insurance, UK01) compares the dynamics of her career development in the UK and Russia. She says:

> *I was lucky enough to start in Russia… there were many opportunities for talented people to succeed… in my company I was very well treated and highly valued… As I moved to London… I suddenly realised that… everything stopped, nobody really noticed what I did, nobody took care about my performance… I was not motivated at all.*
>
> (Valeria, Insurance, UK01)

Thus, Valeria feels the difference in how she was treated within the same company in Russia and in the UK. She did not find the same level of appreciation in the UK and felt disappointed. Furthermore, Regina works in the same industry. When I asked her how gender has affected her career trajectory, she responded:

> *It is more the fact that I am from Russia that made my situation more complicated… Not the language – I can write and read better than most English people, many of them do not know their own grammar… The thing is that people tend to perceive foreigners with suspicion*
>
> (Regina, Insurance, UK10)

Regina feels that being from Russia complicates her situation. Her colleagues perceive her as different to themselves. She feels that this is because she is a foreigner. I realised that experiences of women from former Soviet Union in the UK are complex as they might be equally affected by culture as well as by gender. The intersection (Crenshaw, 1989) of the different demographic attributes, such as culture and gender, impacts the professional prospects of women from the former Soviet Union in the UK. To be able to understand the nuances of their career progression, I examined the intricacies of social relations (Cho *et al.*, 2019). To explain how gender and culture intersect in the context of women from the former Soviet Union, who work professionally in the UK, I look closely at an example presented by Inna (Information Technology, UK06), who built her Sales and Marketing career, reporting how her promotion had been blocked. When I asked Inna whether she was ever treated differently at work, she answered:

> *Yes. I think I was not taken seriously by our CEO… he saw an Eastern-European blonde (in me). For him… it was a definition… it does not matter what I did… he was not aware of my achievements – so I got some managers to support me, they showed him how much I had achieved. He was quite amused and then I got the role*
>
> (Inna, Information Technology, UK06)

Thus, Inna feels that the decision maker in her organisation saw her as no more than an '*Eastern-European blonde'*. It was only after she asked her line manager to interfere and demonstrate her achievements, that she was promoted. The social complexities presented through Inna's experience are evaluated using Model of Stereotyping through Associated and Intersectional Categories (MOSAIC). This framework considers different categories of stereotypes that work simultaneously forming people's expectations (Hall *et al*., 2019). Following this model, the *fundamental* category for Inna as a Russian woman is a *woman*. Yet women from Russia and the former Soviet Union in the UK also represent an ethnic minority. Therefore, the *ancillary characteristic* of a Russian woman is an *ethnic minority*. Thus, *intersectional demographic categories* meet where Russian culture intersects with the *fundamental category* of a woman. Thus, the intersectional categories are between the perception of the Russian mainstream culture (in Russia) and Russian ethnic minority culture (in the UK). The *associated demographic category* of Russian mainstream culture also associated with a woman (Hubbs, 1983; 1993), influencing the integrated stereotyping outcome. Therefore, in the general public's view the categories of a woman and Russia merge, creating an *amplified stereotype* of a woman. Amplified as a woman in the eyes of the general UK public by merging the categories of a woman and the Russian, women associated with Russian culture are seen as too feminine. Considering that leadership is traditionally attributed to men, implying masculinity (Koenig *et al.,* 2011), Russian women might be seen as 'too feminine' for leadership positions. That is why when Inna (Information Technology, UK06) applied for a promotion, she experienced an additional barrier in attaining a leadership position. Her competences were not recognised. Despite her professional achievements, the main decision maker in her organisation saw her as no more than an '*Eastern-European blonde'*.

The MOSAIC framework (Hall *et at*., 2019) shows how prejudices are created on more than one level. Social stereotypes are recognised as one of the biggest barriers in career progression because they form people's expectations and create bias against certain groups of people. However, Inna (Information Technology, UK06) also acknowledged that being a Russian speaker played to her advantage in the beginning of her career in the UK. She secured her first professional contract in the UK because the company *'needed a Russian speaker'*. Inna acknowledges: *'it allowed me to start a new career'*. Nevertheless, Inna now recognises a shaky ground there:

> *Once you establish yourself as a Russian speaker… you get jobs only with the Russian market… It's very tricky! I was working for four and a half years in one company… they did not give me the opportunity to work with any other markets, not the Middle East, which I knew very well, not even Central Europe. In their mind someone like me is only a Russian speaker*
>
> (Inna, Information Technology, UK06)

Thus, there are further implications, it seems to be recognised as a serious potential constraint for the UK participants career progression. Although Inna has knowledge of the Middle East and other markets, she says that *'someone like me*' is perceived purely as a '*Russian speaker'*, hence would not have opportunities to develop elsewhere. Lidia also recognises this as a potential barrier. That is why at her job interview to her current employer, she emphasised:

> *During the interview… I said: "You know, if you only want me to work with Russia… I am not interested! If you are ready to give me the opportunity to do something else"… They said: "Yes, of course!" And they stick to it… It is important for them… I understand that this is my unique selling point that I can do Russia and some other former Soviet bloc countries, but it was important for me that I could do everything else as well!*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07)

Thus, the association with the Russian culture on the one hand presents opportunities and many of the UK participants found a niche working along the Russian-speaker route. On the other hand, it is also recognised as a professional and career impediment among the UK participants. Upon joining her current company Lidia (Legal Services, UK07) insisted that they provide her with opportunities of using a wider spectrum of her expertise to ensure that her talents

are appreciated. Lidia is now happy with her career trajectory. Yet, she believes that the profession of a lawyer is the least suitable for immigration because of the differences in legal systems. This impacted negatively on establishing her professional standings in the UK. She believes that if she had stayed in Russia, her career would have developed much faster. Lidia explains:

> *Without a doubt I would be a Head of Legal of a big company by now… it is my female destiny that I followed my husband and generally speaking, sacrificed myself…. Still, at the end of the day… perhaps it was worth it? … Did I lose anything financially and in my career progression? Yes! No doubt… Anyway, it was my own choice!*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services)

However, those participants who did not have professional implications regarding differences in the system also may find their experiences problematic. Veronica (Information Technology, UK03) came to the UK, following her husband's appointment in London. Joining her current company, she was soon promoted to a senior software engineering manager. Although Veronica believes that her skills and competences are fully appreciated, there are indications that the barriers do not disappear at the intersection of culture and gender. When I asked Veronica whether she ever felt treated differently at work, she replied:

> *It depends whom I talk to… I work for a company which has a lot of female leaders in senior positions, so if somebody does not hear me, it is not because I am a woman... I am the only non-British person in a senior management team, so… there is a cultural difference… In general, I am a well-regarded member of a senior management team… But I do not feel being an integral part of it… I feel as I am needed there, but… as someone who has to prove things all the time… often I would be waved aside and not listened to… I think I work harder than others to get my point across*
>
> (Veronica, Information Technology, UK 03)

Veronica feels that although her skills and professional expertise are fully appreciated, her boss still does not take her seriously and she '*has to prove things all the time*'. Veronica also noted that it is different for other female colleagues within the same level of hierarchy as herself. Though Veronica's professional expertise is recognised, she does not feel an integral part of the senior management team. It seems that the glass ceiling effect of exclusion practices (Plaut *et al.,* 2011) at work appears on an additional level. Veronica feels that she had to '*work harder to get her*

point across'. She is certain it is somewhat more than her gender to be blamed. She observed that other female senior managers, who were brought up in the UK, are treated differently from her. She feels that her cultural background might be the reason that she '*had to prove herself*' as she is the only senior management team member from a '*non-British background'*. The complexity of the intersection components makes it difficult to understand which of the components is stronger (Mahler *et al.,* 2015). Following MOSAIC framework (Hall *et al.*, 2019), Veronica's character might be perceived by her colleagues as too feminine by association to Russian culture and different from women who were brought up in the UK. Thus, Veronica is officially part of the team, yet on a social level she is excluded from their circle. The analysis suggests that the systems of domination on two levels, cultural and gender are overlapping (Hancock, 2016), revealing how glass ceiling barriers work on a more nuanced level.

The implementation of gender equality policies in the UK from the second part of the twentieth century (Jewson and Mason, 1986) was far too gradual. I previously noted how the UK participants viewed gender equality outcomes in the UK as un-progressive compared to the former Soviet Union. The combination of liberal and radical gender equality policies by the UK government is making slow progress in the twenty-first century (Colney and Page, 2017). However, it seems that the apparent issues connected to the intersection of gender and minority cultures, were not adequately addressed. Earlier in this chapter I cited how the UK participants criticised the government's attempts in implementing radical policies. While some attempt for the radical versus liberal gender equality discourse is evident, further to Colney and Page (2017), neither policy implementors, nor the general public in the UK recognise the difference between the two approaches. This research indicates that the inferences of systemic structural forces regarding the intersection of gender and minority cultures are not recognised in the UK. It is in the government's power to influence the dynamics of equality. The thesis argues that further and stronger efforts are required in these discussions with clarifications of the benefits that minority cultures contribute to a wider UK society. Moreover, the benefits of the radical equality tactics require additional amplification and implementation.

Further intricacies of the intersection between culture and gender are presented by Nella, who works as a senior manager in a Telecommunication company. Nella feels that there is a combination of complications, which are partly attributed to gender and partly to additional predicaments of her cultural background. She explains:

> *There is sexism in England… they still think that a woman… not that she shouldn't be a boss, but if a woman is a boss, she should have to have many more positive qualities in comparison to a man… on top of that, I am also Israeli, and I am Russian! Not many advantages there at all! I had to prove myself that despite of all of these 'deficiencies', I am still worth something and they have to listen to me, and I am nice and easy to work with! That was a challenge!*
>
> (Nella, Telecommunications, UK05)

Nella feels that being simultaneously Russian and Israeli disadvantages her. The employees contested her leadership and she had to work much harder to be accepted as a boss because of these '*deficiencies*.' The traditional leadership perception implies masculinity (Koenig *et al.,* 2011). By association with Russian culture Nella might be seen as '*too feminine'* for a leader, that is why her employees might have tested her abilities. It is also important to recognise that the participants of this study represent a highly skilled and educated layer of former Soviet intelligentsia (Heleniak, 2012), yet their cultural background is not homogeneous. The experiences of the UK participants revealed the intricacies and multi-layered cultural and social identities (Werbner, 2013). Bella highlights:

> *I have been raised in an environment that is very familiar and very aware… I come from a Jewish family, so obviously again that adds an extra layer of not a very straightforward and not a very simple background. I think with all of those things combined… it makes you more conscious and more conscientious and a lot more sensitive. You do not look at things as black and white… But I also think that to some extent it maybe allows you to have a personality that may be a little bit more nuanced and to some extent more patient, more tolerant. So, I think that the way we were raised plays a huge role – it's everything from the books that we read to the family history that we hear from our grandparents. I think that it matters. It matters a great deal*
>
> (Bella, Financial Services, UK08)

Thus, it is important to consider that the background of people who are born and brought up in the former Soviet Union is multifaceted (Byford, 2012). The UK participants of this study represent a third wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union (Isurin, 2011). The intelligentsia of the third wave of immigration were often deprived of opportunities before their immigration (Heleniak, 2012). Jews leaving the USSR before or soon after the *perestroika* were largely disadvantaged in access to equal higher education and career opportunities in the former Soviet State (Isurin, 2011). Claudia (Events and Entertainment, UK09) has her first memories of anti-Semitism from her childhood playing with other kids and '*in summer camps for young pioneers*[5]'. Though her most painful memories are about her formative years and choice of profession. Despite her high academic achievements and passion for mathematics, she could not enter the prestigious *Mech-math*[6]. She recalls:

> *We had many Jews in our school… and we all tried to enter Mech-math. None of us could get through because at that time no Jews could get to Mech-math… and I thought: "I want to study fundamental mathematics". I went to the University of Pedagogy, where in my opinion mathematics was taught well*
>
> Claudia (Events and Entertainment, UK)

Claudia recalls that despite her abilities and interest in mathematics, she had difficulties in building her career in this profession. She says: '*At some point I thought there is no point to try to get into mathematics. I need to find something else, anyway there is no career for me there*'. Claudia got herself involved in software design as a second best, since she already had experience in programming: '*I learned it as early as in school and then I had it as casual work while in the university'* (Claudia, Events and Entertainment, UK09). Claudia's route to the UK from the former Soviet Union was via Germany, where she built a successful career in software engineering. Then her husband's career brought them to the UK, where Claudia followed another of her passions, organising cultural events. The stories of the participants are consistent with Isurin (2011), emphasising that many representatives of the third wave of immigration moved from the former Soviet Union to Germany, USA, and Israel. Also, among the third wave of immigrants from the former Soviet Union there are those

[5] *Pioneers* are members of the Soviet Pioneers' organisation, who were viewed as young communist supporters (auth.) For further information see Schlesinger (1967)
[6] *Mech-math* (Rus) is a short for a Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics in Moscow University

who never lived in Russia, but resided in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other former Soviet Republics (Hagendoorn *et al*., 2013). For example, Veronica (Information Technology, UK) says that she is '*very well-travelled'* and '*very often relocated'* in her life. Born in Ukraine, she then lived in Uzbekistan, from where she '*moved to Israel, then from Israel to America, then came back to Israel, and then came to England'*. Thus, the UK participants' culture is further nuanced and complex (Isurin, 2011). I asked Veronica how she feels to have such a wide array of cultural experiences. Veronica explains:

> *I lived in many places… As soon as we moved… whatever we gained, stayed with us, but when we left, we did not follow what happened in that place which we left. We fully immersed ourselves in the place that we moved to… So, we are now in England for seven years and we immerse ourselves in the local culture here. Something that stays constant with us is the Russian language. We try to keep the Russian language; we are trying to keep it in our children.*
>
> (Veronica, Information Technology, UK)

Therefore, the background of the UK participants is not homogenous, and the generalisation as 'Russians' might be at times problematic. As per Cohen (2013), Veronica and her family had an authentic fresh start in each place where they moved to. Yet they managed to keep the Russian language for their children and as a means of communication within their family. When I asked which language the UK participants would prefer to speak during our interview, six out of ten have chosen Russian. '*Native tongue is a mother tongue'* noted Lidia (Legal Services, UK). The Russian language is indeed one of the fundamental parts of the émigrés from the former USSR. Even though Veronica (Information Technology, UK) and her family have lived in many places, she added: '*Something that stays constant with us is the Russian language'* as well as they *'are trying to keep it in our children'*. Consistent with (Platt, 2019) many participants refer to make the effort of taking their children to Russian weekend schools. Lidia highlighted: '*my son goes to Russian gymnasium and this is an incredible intellectual golden fusion*', where she finds *'it is amazingly interesting to communicate with parents*'. Thus, apart from enhancing children's education, it is also an opportunity to meet people of similar '*cultural capital'* and those whom they can relate to in many ways (Morawska, 2016:341). Lidia noted that

there she met wonderful women, who like herself, work professionally. Lidia added that perhaps they would not have had the chance to meet if not for immigration:

> *Perhaps in Moscow I would not have had an opportunity to meet a woman who is a mathematician or a biologist – we would spin around different orbits there. But here I know them, and they are absolutely splendid!*
>
> (Lidia, Legal Services, UK08)

It is important to consider the plethora of inner issues imposed by immigration (Esman, 2009). The affiliation with gender and other collective entities is vital because it affects in many ways how individuals see themselves (Kirton and Greene, 2016). Lidia continued that even though she has lived and worked in the UK for a long time now, she still identifies herself more closely to her Russian friends. She says: '*it is more difficult for me to run close relationships with the English than within our diaspora… we have much more in common as we grew up in the USSR, whichever way you look at it!*' (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07). Furthermore, regarding belonging, she added: '*I consider myself as British of Russian origin, I am Russian British'* (Lidia, Legal Services, UK07). However, other participants find the identity issues much more problematic. Inga moved from Russia to Israel before coming to the UK. She experiences difficulties in determining how she identifies herself:

> *To be honest, on the one hand I feel… as a cosmopolitan… On the other hand, I do not belong fully to any of the cultures. This is because we will never become 'belonging here'. No doubt! I have a deep layer of a Russian culture, but when I come to Russia, I don't feel at home there… I feel that I don't belong to any culture 100 percent… It is very difficult to say! Because you cannot wipe out Russian culture from us, you cannot rub it out!*
>
> (Inga, Information Technology, UK04)

Further to Harrison *et al. (*2018) Inga, on the one hand feels a stranger in the UK, saying *'we will never become as belonging here'*. On the other hand, she does '*not feel at home'* during her trips to Russia. This is consistent with Isurin's (2011:168) view that Russian immigrants often find themselves 'feeling like outsiders on their trips to Russia'. Inga has difficulties in identifying herself as belonging to a specific culture. She views herself as a cosmopolite. This signifies Inga's readiness to accept others (Vertovec, 2013), symbolising an equality between different people and

nations (Miller, 2016). Inga's basic human need for belonging is manifested in inclusion in social groups (Leary and Baumeister, 2000).

Thus, the complexity of the cultural background of the UK participants might add sensitivity to concealed discrimination practices at the intersection of culture and gender. A rich and nuanced cultural background and perceived cultural differences become a source of concern for the UK participants. Oyet *et al.* (2020) indicated that cultural differences in an intersectional context often result in incidents of uncivil behaviour between representatives of minority cultures and dominant groups. This research did not identify practices of direct clashes in the professional environment in the UK. However, there were instances of confrontations involving members of the general public. Lidia explains: '*when one of the BREXIT's narratives was expressed against Eastern Europeans… we were worried'*. Lidia shared an example, where she felt that someone deliberately tried to insult her. The incident happened in the English countryside when a woman asked her about a footpath. Lidia continues their dialogue: '*I said: "Just a minute". She said: "Do you even speak any English?" … It was, you know, a scornful face expression and utterly clear intention to insult! I know English enough to understand such nuances*.' Still, Lidia reassured that '*from professional point of view it never happened… Perhaps they are… sort of … circumspect*'. Thus, there might be a concealed animosity towards cultural minority groups from the general public. Furthermore, during the interview Lidia expressed her gratitude for this research. She explained:

> *You know, when you meet a view that Russian women are some sort of gold diggers… The general public does not know very much about its' feminist dimension, the professional dimension, which is much advanced*
>
> Lidia, Legal Services, UK07

Thus, the UK participants' stories exposed a pattern. The participants who arranged their career transition prior to arrival in the UK and those who are UK educated and have taken the traditional career development route, did not report difficulties in career start or transition in the UK. However, those women who followed their husbands' career transition, reported implications attributed to their careers. Following their husbands' careers, they abandoned their own careers and often had

to start from basics. The UK participants reported additional challenges connected to the glass ceiling effect but referred also to the cultural facets. These experiences are analysed through the lens of the intersection between gender and culture. Model of Stereotyping through Associated and Intersectional Categories by Hall *et al.,* (2019) was applied to understand how prejudices are formed by the intersection of gender and culture. Women from the former Soviet Union are likely to be perceived as too feminine for leadership positions. In addition, this research identifies complexities regarding participants' identities, which are closely linked to the cultural experiences of the UK participants. The thesis upholds that further consideration is required to issues of the intersection of gender and minority cultures in the UK. Furthermore, the cultural background of women from the former Soviet Union now professionally working in the UK is not homogenous. Although Russian culture and Russian language is part of their heritage and identity, generalisation as 'Russians' might be problematic.

7.5 Chapter Conclusion

The female leaders with a Soviet background, who now work in the UK and Russia, indicated that *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union was pivotal for major changes in their lives. This research does not share views of scholars such as Recioppi and O'Sullivan (1995) or Metcafe and Afanassieva (2005) that soon after *perestroika* Russian women stopped working, returned to domestic work, becoming dependent on men. Despite the insecurities brought by *perestroika*, the participants in this research found job opportunities with newly opened enterprises, including foreign companies entering Russian markets, or they left the former USSR and pursued career prospects abroad. The UK participants emphasised the difference in gender equality perception in the UK and in the former Soviet state. The example of Soviet mothers and grandmothers working professionally seems to be a significant contributory factor in the desires of the participants to work and develop their careers. The Soviet tradition encouraged women to work throughout the twentieth century ensuring their representation through radical policies. In the UK liberal gender equality policies have taken precedence towards the second part of the twentieth century. Although the recent UK policies gradually introduce radical measures in addition to liberal equality procedures, the changes seem to be slow.

Many of the UK participants perceive their work environment in the UK as sexist compared to their experiences in the former Soviet Union.

The analysis of the Russian participants' views on gender equality reveals that a radical equality approach is not on the agenda for discussions in contemporary Russia. Currently, women working professionally in Russia indicated a strong support for liberal equality procedures, pointing to extensive career progression opportunities for women in Russia. However, the research identified serious limitations of current gender equality efforts because the professional opportunities of women in Russia are capped at the top of a vertical hierarchy of the traditionally male industries. These challenges are linked to profound pipeline problems, which is seen as a dramatic change compared to *pre-perestroika*. The changes enabled men in Russia to advance to money-oriented businesses and positions, leaving women with progression along less appreciated 'servicing' industries and positions. The thesis argues that an unchallenged *post-perestroika* course towards the exclusive power of liberal policies brought implications for Russian women's career progression. Although the liberal approach seems to be fair to the participants, it overlooks the structural nuances and strengthens the existing status quo.

The analysis of the participants' career experiences in the UK revealed differences between two types of career trajectories. Those who came to the UK with pre-arranged career offers as well as those who progressed from UK higher education, had a relatively smooth career start or career transition. However, those participants who followed their husbands' careers, reported difficulties in securing their first employment in the UK. The intersection approach contributes to an understanding of the underlying forces acting on different levels related to the perception of minority cultures in the UK. I applied Model of Stereotyping through Associated and Intersectional Categories by Hall *et al.* (2019) to demonstrate how women from the former Soviet background might be perceived as highly 'feminine' by their association to Russian culture. Considering that leadership is traditionally attributed to men and implies masculinity (Koenig *et al*., 2011), women linked to Russian culture might be seen as too feminine, and therefore unsuitable for leadership positions. Thus, the participants presented evidence of being refused promotions, challenged by their employees and colleagues, indicating cultural undertones. It

appears that the glass ceiling mechanisms work on an additional layer, ultimately diminishing professional value of women from a former Soviet background. Subsequently, I suggest that the glass ceiling is getting thicker at the intersection of gender and culture. Although there is no evidence of direct confrontations at work in an intersectional context, there are indications that such clashes are possible outside of work involving the public. Therefore, discussions about gender equality require further attention to the issues presented by the intersection of gender and minority cultures in the UK. Additionally, the UK participants indicated nuances associated with their multifaceted background which affects their identities with implications to the sensitivity around them being generalised as ‘Russians’. The next chapter provides the conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter Eight Conclusions

8.1. Chapter introduction

This research has been inspired by persistent and continuous gender inequalities in our society. I have endeavoured to contribute to the current body of knowledge addressing gender disparities in leadership from an original angle. I investigated how women from similar cultural backgrounds experienced gender equality issues having been exposed to different national settings. The thesis aimed to critically explore the factors influencing the career experiences of female leaders with a former Soviet Union background now working professionally in private sector organisations in Russia and the UK. To achieve this aim, I set up two major objectives. First, I critically evaluated the career paths of female leaders from the former Soviet Union working professionally in the business environment in the UK and Russia and explored the factors that influenced their career progression in both countries. Second, I examined the attitudes of female leaders from the former Soviet Union in the Russian and the UK organisations towards the barriers to their career progress.

Although contemporary literature on female leadership has a wide range of rich and eminent information sources, it still lacks qualitative inquiries analysing the issues in different national contexts. Most importantly, the academic community is missing empirical studies contrasting the experiences of female leaders from a similar cultural background, who are exposed to rather different national environments.

The analysis in this study is attained through the comparisons of the female leaders' personal experiences, critically evaluating their equality perceptions. Twenty face-to-face interviews provide rich in-depth data for the evaluations. I planned to conduct all the interviews in person and travelled to Russia on several occasions. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, a few of the interviews have been conducted with the help of online resources, which I have discussed in Chapter Four.

I was guided in this study by the research aim and the overarching research questions and objectives. A phenomenological approach, revealing the lived experiences of the research participants and how they make sense of these

experiences as well as feminist viewpoints, were the key sources of inspiration for this cross-national qualitative comparison. The analysis of the experiences of women from the former Soviet Union working professionally in private sector organisations in the UK and Russia depict the intricacies of their career paths. Regarding the first objective, the thesis reveals how female leaders' career progression in both countries is influenced by a mixture of interrelated factors, which stem from different levels of intertwined stimuli. These include the female leaders' personal characteristics, the undercurrent of structural forces at home and at work as well as cultural and national discourses in the countries of their residence. These factors influence the formation of the impediments to the female leaders' career growth, which is idiosyncratically nuanced in the two national contexts. Concerning the second objective, the thesis exposes that the attitudes of female leaders towards their career obstacles is also largely predisposed to the same levels of influences. The thesis contributes to existing knowledge by highlighting the intricacies of cultural dynamics, which affects the career experiences of women, including an intersectional context where gender meets culture.

This chapter is structured around the two research objectives. First, I provide a critical reflection of the factors that influence the female leaders' career progression. Second, I critically evaluate the female leaders' attitudes towards barriers to their career progression. The implications, limitations and future research directions are acknowledged, and final reflections conclude the thesis.

8.2 Factors influencing career progression

Gender takes a central stage in the discussions about the factors influencing the career paths of the female leaders from the former Soviet Union living and working now in the UK and Russia. This thesis recognises gender as a social construct. The review of the literature revealed the societal gender stereotypes as an important factor in the performance of individuals. From early life people learn about appropriate gender behaviour, with 'female' demeanour becoming a norm for women (West and Zimmerman, 1987). In adult life, gender role stereotypes influence the choice of people's professions by approving what is regarded as 'normal' (Eagly, 1987). Women in traditional societies typically 'choose' jobs consistent with 'female'

values of nurturing and caring. Patterns have emerged in how the careers of women in Russia and the UK evolved. While participants in both countries were interested in a wide range of academic subjects, the experiences of women in Russia expose a tendency to move into ‘female-oriented’ professions, especially in Human Resources, which is seen as ‘more suitable’ for women. The UK participants did not develop careers in ‘female’ oriented professions. They work as lawyers, engineers, and insurance brokers. Although the participants indicated that gender stereotypes exist in both Russian and UK societies, the UK participants felt that their experiences in Russia and the former Soviet Union were more egalitarian than in the UK. Since earlier in their lives all the participants were predisposed to similar societal values and beliefs, it is their later life experiences that streamed their careers to diverse professional directions. Thus, this research proposes that gender stereotypes in Russia might have been recently strengthened.

Furthermore, the literature emphasises that education as part of human capital (Shao and Wang, 2018) acts as a role investment (Orser and Leek, 2010), helping women to compete with men for employment. Due to intense unprecedented competition with men, the chances of women to improve their return on investments grow by attaining postgraduate qualifications. The research findings indicate that although all the participants invest in professional qualifications, the participants in Russia also extensively invest in additional academic education, attaining PhD and MBA degrees. As female leaders in Russia primarily work in ‘female’ professions, this thesis upholds that a higher level of education allows women in Russia a better standing to compete not with men, but with women. This is because competition in ‘female’ professions intensifies with a growing number of highly qualified women.

Once in employment, the participants in both countries reported carrying out extensive responsibilities, working long hours due to high expectations of their organisations. Those on maternity leave, often cut it short due to excessive work demands, causing stress and anxiety due to the separation of mothers from their young babies. This is especially the case for the women in UK organisations. Thus, by prioritising work the contemporary organisations disregard people’s lives outside of work, demanding complete dedication to the job. The image of an ideal employee fits with a concept of an ‘unencumbered worker’ (Acker, 2009), who does not have

disruptions to the job. An ‘unencumbered worker’ is unlikely to be a woman, who has numerous societal demands on her time. The thesis strongly supports Acker’s (1990, 2009) view that the traditional organisational structures and processes are gendered, being designed for a man, not for a woman.

The ‘masculinity’ of organisational processes disadvantages women at work. While the heroic efforts of men are praised and rewarded, women often feel that their contributions are devalued. The participants emphasised that their male colleagues habitually do not take them seriously, they often feel that they need to prove their abilities to their male bosses, colleagues, and employees. Many feel they must work harder than men to be noticed and appreciated. Apart from the excessive volume of tasks and working long hours, there are also indications of exclusion practices when women are left outside the companies’ politics. There is a different undertone in the manifestation of exclusion practices in the two countries. In Russia men might make decisions in the Russian *banya*, whereas in the UK they might go to the pub, in both cases intentionally or inadvertently excluding women. These invisible barriers constitute a labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007) and a glass ceiling effect (Hymowitz and Schelhardt, 1986), which seem to be strong in both countries, working against women’s career progression. In such an environment woman seek glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam, 2007) assignments which are set to fail. Therefore, the professional experiences of women in both countries indicate that the ‘masculine’ organisations largely obstruct women’s opportunities for career growth.

The notion of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990, 2009) is closely related to societal gender role stereotypes (Eagly, 1987). Gender beliefs influence the logic of organisations, which entails that people’s life at work and outside of work are two separate spheres. The traditional values imply that work conventionally is a man’s domain, whereas a woman’s domain is around home duties. Integrating the logic of gendered organisations (Acker, 2009) with the logic of stereotypical gender beliefs (Eagly, 1987), the literature demonstrates that women are unwelcomed in conventional organisations. The research findings indicate that organisations in the UK are seen as particularly rigid compared to organisations in Russia. The Russian firms are perceived by the participants as being more empathic to women’s needs.

Gendered organisations supported by ‘masculinity’ culture, combined with gender role stereotypes create imbalances in women’s lives. The participants in both countries expressed that the balance between the two vital spheres of life, home and work, is still a constraint for them. However, this inquiry does not support ‘Soviet paradox’ conception (Ashwin and Iusupova, 2018), asserting that following traditional values, women from the former USSR are full-time occupied at work and at home. On the contrary, the findings of this research indicate that the image of a ‘superwoman’ is no longer valid for professional post-Soviet women neither among the participants in Russia, nor among the UK participants. In both countries the participants largely outsource domestic chores and share home responsibilities with family members. Nevertheless, the UK participants reported substantial difficulties attributed to childcare arrangements, especially for those at the start of their careers. A combination of inflexibility of their organisations with expensive childcare and absence of extended family members’ support, creates significant difficulties. To the contrary, in Russia, in addition to a relatively sympathetic approach of organisations to women’s needs, there is comparatively adequate provision of affordable childcare and significant help of extended family members. Still, the long hours and the demands of work make many of them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, this research indicates that long-lasting issues related to the work-home balance of female leaders could be attributed mainly to unreasonable demands of the organisations in the UK and in Russia and inadequate support for childcare provisions, especially in the UK.

Regarding the socio-environmental level of influences, *perestroika* as a single political event in the former Soviet Union, marked unprecedented changes in the lives of the participants. The literature illustrates that since *perestroika*, post-Soviet women were encouraged to return to their traditional duties at home, becoming dependent on men and reducing women’s share in the labour market (Racioppi and O’Sullivan,1995; Katz, 2002; Metcafe and Afanassieva, 2005). This research indicates that this was not on account of women working professionally. Despite the insecurities of the labour market following *perestroika*, the participants of this study were actively searching and succeeding in securing jobs. In addition, *perestroika* opened opportunities for geographical relocations, which triggered changes in the personal and professional lives of many participants.

Once abroad, the UK participants pursued work opportunities. However, those who arrived in the UK without pre-arranged job offers, reported exceptional difficulties in securing their first professional positions. It appears that women from the former Soviet Union see culture in the UK as bigoted compared to what they experienced in Russia and the former USSR. Consistent with the perception of the UK participants, the cultural studies literature (House *et al*., 2004; Schwartz, 1990) suggests that measures of gender egalitarianism in the Soviet Union were higher than in the UK. The participants in both countries often shared memories about women in their families working professionally and progressing in careers. This is coherent with the existing literature emphasising that throughout the history of the Soviet Union women were encouraged to work, empowered by the communist ideologies and radical policies (Pushkareva, 2012; Fedorova *et al.*, 2016). In contrast, the same historical period in the UK witnessed a very slow shift from traditional towards egalitarian values. The liberal gender equality policies were applied in the UK only from the second part of the twentieth century (Jewson and Mason, 1986). Thus, women brought up in the former Soviet Union, arriving in the UK beheld gender equality in the UK society far below that of which they had been accustomed to. The attempt to implement radical actions in the UK seem to be far too slow (Conley and Page, 2017) to have visible impact.

Nevertheless, the literature signifies that the government approach towards gender equality policies in Russia has altered the direction towards liberal policies after *perestroika* (Recioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995; Pushkareva, 2012). The analysis of the Russian participants' experiences indicates that now there are almost no traces of radical rhetoric left in Russia. The major implications of such changes are around the position of women in Russia, which seems to be deteriorating. Men are progressing in better paid industries and occupations. The participants commented that Russian men now work in well-remunerated industries such as 'oil and gas' and there are almost no women in top management positions in resource-based industries. Thus, the thesis supports previous researchers (Ogloblin, 2005; Klimova and Ross, 2012) advocating that sectoral and occupational gender segregation in Russia is changing structure and strengthening following *perestroika*. This study indicates that career progression opportunities of Russian women are currently capped at the top in 'male' oriented industries.

Patterns emerged among the UK participants in how their careers unfolded. Those educated in the West and those who arrived in the UK via company transfer had a smooth career start or transition, whereas those without a pre-arranged work contract, revealed that they faced considerable difficulties. One of the discoveries of this investigation is about the additional level of invisible obstacles experienced by the UK participants. There are indications that the whole spectrum of glass ceiling barriers works on an additional intersectional layer (Crenshow,1989) where gender meets culture. Applying the Model of Stereotyping through Associated and Intersectional Categories (Hall *et al*., 2019), this study suggests that women from the former USSR might be perceived as too feminine for leadership through their association with Russian culture. The participants signalled feeling aware that they had to work harder to be taken seriously by their bosses and colleagues not only because of their gender, but also because of the cultural differences with their colleagues. Thus, there are indications that the glass ceiling barriers (Hymowitz and Schelhardt,1986) are getting thicker at the intersection (Crenshow, 1989) of gender and culture in the UK. However, the thesis recognises that the background of the Soviet migration to the West is not homogeneous. The UK participants revealed the complexity of the cultural background of émigrés from the former Soviet Union, which is often nuanced and ethnically multi-layered. There are however indications from this thesis that issues of the complex cultural identities among immigrants from the former Soviet Union might not be adequately addressed in the UK. Hence, further sensitivity in addressing the complexities of intersectional contexts is required.

Both countries favoured liberal policies throughout the beginning of the twenty-first century; the radical equality agenda was largely abandoned in Russia and ineffectively advanced in the UK. This resulted in an ostensible horizontal and vertical gender segregation in post-Soviet Russia, negatively affecting career opportunities for women. In the UK, the current state of gender equality is still perceived as below that in the former Soviet Union. In addition, as intimated previously, this research reveals that issues related to the intersection of categories such as gender and minority culture are overlooked. In effect, this disadvantages highly educated and egalitarian post-Soviet women, who are eager to progress in

their careers. Thus, this research argues that the liberal policies proclaiming equal opportunities for all, neglect the systemic structural nuances when not supported by the robust radical measures of ensuring equal representation, effectively reinforcing the current status quo.

8. 3 Attitudes towards barriers to career progression

The research findings signify that essentialist views towards gender equality prevail in the attitude of the participants in both countries towards barriers to their career progression. The essentialist position regards biological differences as a core consideration (Goldberg, 2008). Thus, participants largely accept biological differences and 'emotional level' of reasoning as a valid rationale for gender segregation. Though the participants in both the UK and Russia have a good awareness about societal gender stereotypes which influence personal beliefs (Eagly, 1987), the essentialist gender equality position helps to explain and justify the apparent gender segregation. The participants overwhelmingly support a position of celebrating biologically derived gender differences, focusing on 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender traits complementing each other in the professional sphere. The main implication of the essentialist stance is that it underwrites the societal gender prejudices by disregarding the underlying societal forces. The thesis asserts that the essentialist gender equality position effectually assists the validation of the social injustice in the position of women in society.

The barriers, which constitute the labyrinth (Eagly and Carli, 2007) and glass ceiling effect (Hymowitz and Schelhardt, 1986) seem to be ardently defended by the participants. Thus, many participants regard the exclusion practices plausible, reasoning that if the decisions are made in *kurilka* (a smoking area), it 'doesn't always help the career'. The participants' attitude in both countries is largely percipient, tolerant, and compliant with the system aimed to accommodate men. The essentialist position often helps women to navigate in the male-dominated environment of contemporary organisations. Thus, the participants appeal to how differences between men and women often work 'for women's advantage'. The diplomacy methods often involve tactics of amplifying weakness in a 'feminine' way.

Such tactics might be successful, for example, in getting the attention of a male decision-maker when approaching him.

Furthermore, the participants approach the extensive responsibilities at work and long office hours with sympathy and understanding. For example, participants in Russia felt calm accepting work-related telephone calls at midnight or missing theatre performance for urgent work demands. None of the women reported working part-time at any point of their career, though this opportunity officially exists in both countries. In addition, the participants expressed pride and commended the generous statutory allowance of three years maternity leave in Russia. However, only those who went on maternity leave before or soon after *perestroika* benefited from it. There are examples of particularly short maternity breaks in the UK. Thus, this research proposes that the social systems in both countries are not working as intended in the context of women building careers in commercial organisations. Nevertheless, only a small minority of the participants in both the UK and Russia recognised the concealed social inequalities.

The UK participants perceived their experience of living and working in Russia and former Soviet Union as an advantage, as this opened opportunities for them to work with Russian and former Soviet Union markets within their professional field of business. However, the participants also recognised that such a career development strategy might in time become an obstructive factor for their career progression, presenting an additional barrier. This is because by specialising in a specific market, female leaders often narrow their professional proficiency and might be seen as inept at performing in other areas, hence diminishing their value for the organisation. Also, the intersection of gender and culture presents additional challenges expressed by the UK participants. For many of them, the complexity of their cultural background is a sensitive issue as the nuances of their cultural heritage are not sufficiently acknowledged. Therefore, generalisation of these women as ‘Russians’ becomes problematic. These implications inform their identities, which are often seen as challenging and complex.

Furthermore, the participants largely support a liberal approach towards equal opportunities, appealing to equal rights for all. Women in Russia principally indicated

their extensive career progression opportunities and confident approval of existing liberal equality measures in their organisations, highlighting that the procedures are equal for all. This is despite acknowledging the overwhelming supremacy of Russian men accessing more remunerative industries, occupations, and positions of power. The participants in the UK are also largely in favour of liberal policies, believing that people must be recognised by their merits, often expressing condemnation of recent radical changes. There are indications that current attempts for equal representation of minority groups in the UK were met by disapproval. Only rarely did I hear support for radical gender equality logic that advocates extra help for professional women. Thus, the liberal approach seems to be reasonable and just, yet it overlooks systemic inequalities. The radical measures are largely unpopular with the UK participants and are not discussed by the Russian participants, indicating that there seems to be no interest in radical gender equality policies now in Russia. I conclude that such an attitude complicates a call for changes because liberal policies encourage a passive, essentialist position.

Therefore, the attitude towards gender equality of the women from the former USSR working professionally in Russia and the UK, could be described as complying with the current status quo and protecting it. Most of the participants in both countries follow an essentialist position in relation to gender equality. The strongly supported essentialist position towards gender equality approves existing disparities, therefore strengthens the current situation. The glass ceiling effect is persistent in both, Russia and the UK. However, the hidden systemic inequalities are not taken seriously. Although the experiences of the participants in both countries reveal that daily organisational practices largely disadvantage women, many participants do not feel that they are being discriminated against. It appears that the liberal policies direction taken by Russian and UK governments, supports current structural arrangements and fosters the essentialist gender equality position of individuals. Such an approach strengthens the acceptance of gender stereotypes and impalpably affects the women's career path with a detrimental impact on their career progression.

In conclusion, this research uncovers a multitude of factors influencing female leaders' career paths encompassing personal and structural societal forces. The predominant essentialist gender equality views among the participants largely justify

the current status quo. Thus, unchallenged structural forces continue to create obstacles to female leaders' career progression. The unprogressively liberal gender equality position of the government in both nations reinforces the existing societal settings. The current structural arrangements supported by the government and accepted by individuals, reproduce the barriers for female leaders' career progression. Thus, the glass ceiling effect overlooked by contemporary organisations succeeds in obstructing female leaders' career progression in both countries. The additional aspect of intersection where gender meets culture presents extra challenges for women from the former Soviet Union, who now live and work in the UK. The intricacies of cultural background of the third wave of emigration from the former Soviet Union are not addressed in the UK, which complicates the position of the UK participants even further.

8.4 Contribution to knowledge

The research design of this empirical investigation allowed for the exploration of the phenomenon of female leadership in a rather unusual light. The research design is unusual because it focused on an evaluation and comparison of the contemporary experiences of female leaders from the former Soviet Union in two national contexts, Russia and the UK. The qualitative nature of this enquiry permitted depth of analysis of the female leaders' perceptions of their career experiences and how they made sense of these experiences. The thesis makes three main contributions to the existing body of knowledge on the career experiences of female leaders:

First, earlier studies (Recioppi and O'Sullivan, 1995; Metcafe and Afanassieva, 2005) reported that women in Russia at the beginning of *perestroika* left work to return to traditional values and became dependent on men. However, this research argues that this was not the case for professional women working in private sector organisations. Indeed, there are indications that the opposite happened. Since *perestroika* many professional women found opportunities with newly opening enterprises or relocated overseas, yet they did not stop working neither in Russia, nor abroad. Therefore, contrary to the understanding of how *perestroika* affected post-Soviet women, this study's research participants managed to realise their professional dreams and aspirations and develop their careers. This finding thus

advances our understanding of the role of socio-environmental factors on women's career experiences as outlined in McMahon and Patton (2014). The research findings manifest how the different levels of influences interrelate. When the political and economic systems crumbled and the national rhetoric changed towards traditional ideals, contrary to other strata of the population, female leaders mobilised their skills to fulfil their personal aspirations.

Second, earlier research indicated that Soviet and post-Soviet women are predisposed to traditional gender ideology (Ashwin and Iusupova, 2018), and being full-time employed in paid-work, they are also fully responsible for unpaid-work at home. Regarding traditional gender disposition, this research also indicates that the participants in both countries have embraced an un-progressive essentialist gender equality position, supporting biological differences and therefore accepting social injustice. However, there seems to be a significant shift in their attitude to domestic duties. This research indicates that women working professionally prefer to outsource their domestic chores and share the rest of the domestic work between the members of their family. Therefore, being better paid and holding a higher bargaining power, female leaders from a former Soviet background have managed to find a support system to re-negotiate the domestic division of labour within their families. Thus, the research findings suggest that a new post-Soviet paradox has taken place among female leaders. On the one hand, the participants' experiences revealed their largely essentialist gender equality position, underpinned by the exclusive power of liberal gender equality policies in their organisations. Yet, despite this compliant attitude towards traditional values, female leaders from a Soviet upbringing are strongly aspiring for professional, not domestic recognition.

Third, this research revealed the nuances of the cultural undercurent in gender discussions, especially regarding intersectionality between culture and gender. Female leaders from a former Soviet background professionally working in the UK indicated a spectrum of glass-ceiling barriers with a cultural undertone. They perceived that their professional experiences were affected by the cultural dimension. Applying Hall *et al. (*2019) model of stereotyping through associated and intersectional categories, the thesis advocates that by association with Russian culture, women from the former Soviet Union working in the UK were perceived as

'too feminine', hence unsuitable for leadership. I argue that the perceptions of a homogeneous Russian culture fail to acknowledge the complexities of the women's cultural backgrounds and have implications for their sense of identity. Therefore, generalisations of women from the former Soviet Union as 'Russians' impact on their career experiences and must be problematised in understandings of gender intersectionality and specifically that between gender and culture. Figure 4 locates the findings within the conceptual framework, which are illustrated in red font.

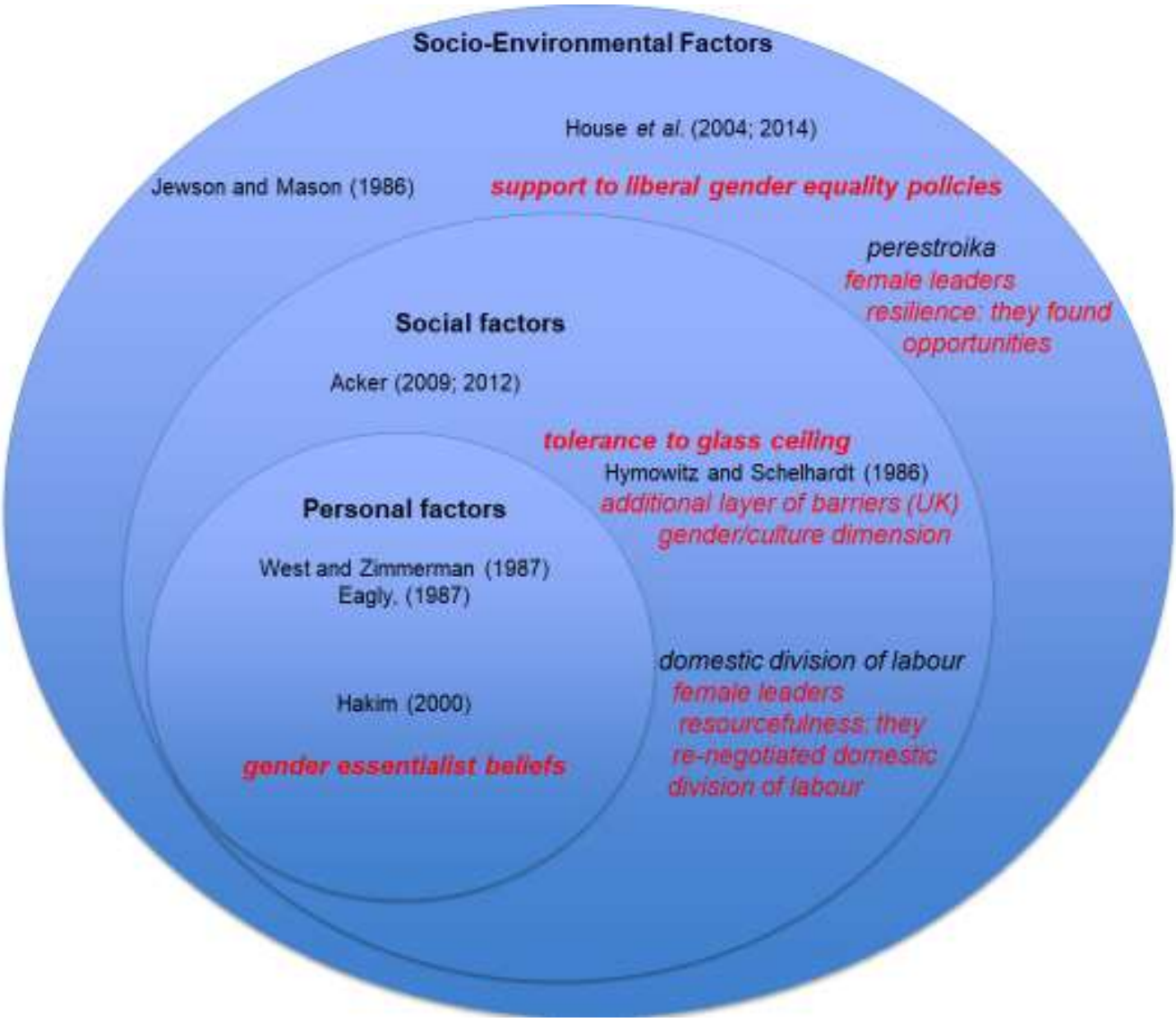

Fig. 4 Conceptual framework with findings

As can be seen from the diagram, the main findings advance our knowledge and understanding of the interdependence between the personal and structural factors

influencing women's careers. *Perestroika* embraced liberal gender equality policies in the USSR, changing the composition of the labour market with devastating effect on women, yet it opened new opportunities for those who aspired to professional careers. Support for liberal and a lack of interest in radical gender equality policies is underpinned by essentialist personal views. However, despite their largely essentialist gender equality beliefs, female leaders from the former USSR sought professional recognition and succeeded in re-negotiating domestic division of labour in their households. Nevertheless, the interrelated influence of support to liberal gender equality policies and essentialist gender beliefs substantiates existing glass ceiling barriers in organisational spheres in both countries. These barriers are further complicated for women from the former Soviet Union now working in the UK due to the intersection between gender and culture.

8. 5 Limitations and Future Research

In line with the nature of this phenomenological study, I did not aim for generalisation and conclusive answers. The findings of this study are of an indicative merit, contributing deep and insightful information about the experiences of women professionally working in commercial organisations in the UK and Russia.

The data for this research is collected mainly in the Central European part of Russia (Moscow) and Southeast of the UK (London). I recognise that there could be possible variations if this research was conducted in other geographical regions of the UK (such as Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales) and Russian Federation (such as Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Tatarstan or others).

Although the snowball sample, where participants were recommended by personal and professional network of contacts, offers opportunities, it also presents limitations by potentially revealing similar experiences. A more diverse sample might present further opportunities for the analysis of issues addressed in the thesis.

This research revealed that the intersection of gender and culture is complex. Further research is required into the intersection of culture and gender to address the heterogeneity of cultural backgrounds of the third wave of emigration from the

former Soviet Union to the UK. This is also pertinent for research within Russia where there exists a heterogeneity of ethnicities. This will allow for more depth of understanding of the nuances of the interplay between gender and culture both in the UK and Russia.

Also, there are other factors, which affect women's career progression in addition to culture. For example, intersections such as those between gender and race, gender and disability, gender and sexuality and others, which did not emerge from this study, yet might need to be considered by future cross-national studies.

In addition, further research into the experiences of professional women from the former Soviet Union who have now developed their careers in other geographical locations, such as in continental Europe (i.e. Germany) and beyond (i.e. the USA) might shed light on how the intersectional characteristics, especially regarding gender and culture interact in different environments.

Moreover, this research has focused on private sector organisations. Therefore, female leadership in other types of organisations, such as state-owned and not-for-profit organisations in both Russia and the UK, might be experienced differently. Empirical research concerning these contexts might inform gender scholarship further.

Finally, the issues of gender and leadership are not static and there might well be changes that occur over time. Thus, future longitudinal studies might be able to show how gender and leadership interconnect and influence the direction of female leadership in Russia and the UK over time.

8.6 Final Reflections

This research has been a journey of personal fulfilment. While learning about gender equality, I discovered my own position, moving from a 'soft' egalitarianist towards standing firm on feminist principles. This journey was not easy. I wrote, re-wrote and changed directions. I sobbed and wept, yet never thought of giving it up. Many events have happened in my personal and professional life since I started this

journey. It seems that this research has initiated my own personal *perestroika*. Together with the whole world I have witnessed the incredible and unprecedented changes, which have happened in our social lives from the coronavirus pandemic. Since the pandemic crisis hit the planet, I believe we have found a new understanding and meaning of life.

The Covid-19 crisis has dramatically transformed us as individuals, including the way we work. Conducting interviews during the first lockdown, I heard stories of women who due to changed working arrangements have slept only three or four hours per day, combining childcare with full-time work from their kitchens and bedrooms. One of the potential participants of this research had to withdraw from a pre-arranged interview because she experienced depression from stress and anxiety attributed to lockdown.

As I am writing this thesis, the world is still being affected by the pandemic. The situation is evolving and dynamic. Yet we still do not know how women's private and professional lives will be affected in the long run. This is not the time to stop and relax. Societal accountability and fairness to women is still far from being achieved. I hope that this research will contribute to the voices of the feminist community, bringing attention to gender inequalities around the world.

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Appendix 1 GLOBE Cultural dimensions Russia and UK compared

GLOBE (2016) and House *et al.* (2004) allowed comparison and analysis of English and Russian culture by GLOBE practice score. Cultural dimensions are as follows (Information in brackets represents the country value score as "should be" rather than the actual score as "is").

Performance orientation.

GLOBE average 4.08 (5.94) England 4.08 (5.90) Russia 3.39 (5.54)

This cultural dimension **"**reflects the extent to which a community encourages and rewards innovation, high standards, excellence, and performance improvements" (House *et al.*, 2004: 30, 239).

The Russian score is relatively low; whereas English score in the medium range and is GLOBE's average. These results indicate that English regard training, professional development and competitiveness higher than the Russians, they consider what the person does more then who he/she is compared to Russians. Russians put a higher importance in social and family values; they are more in harmony with nature, though they are uncomfortable with formal assessments at work, they see them as being disturbing and intrusive (GLOBE, 2016).

Uncertainty Avoidance

GLOBE average 4.16 (4.62) England 4.65 (4.11) Russia 2.88 (5.07)

This cultural dimension identifies "the extent to which a society, organisation or group relies on social norms, rules and procedures to alleviate the unpredictability of future events" (House *et al*.:30).

It shows how society regards ambivalent situations as being risky. The Russian score is relatively low, whereas the English score is relatively high, suggesting that English people are more relaxed in communicating with others, they trust straightforward norms, they are opened to changes and take risks more easily. On the contrary, Russians prefer to use austere communication with others; they obey rules and procedures, they calculate risks and combat changes (GLOBE, 2016).

In-group collectivism

GLOBE average 5.13 (5.66) England 4.08 (5.55) Russia 5.63 (5.66)

This cultural dimension is "the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organisations or families" (House *et al.*, 2004: 30).

Russia shows a high index here. According to GLOBE (2016) interpretations, this result suggests that Russians are accountable to commitments, recognising the importance of groups and inner circles and they have more gradual pace of life. The score of English results suggests that English people may place more importance on their own needs, they are more rational in their attitudes and they live life in full.

Power distance

GLOBE average 5.15 (2.75) England 5.15 (2.8) Russia 5.52 (2.62)

This cultural dimension is “the extent to which a community accepts and endorses authority, power and status privileges” (House *et al.,* 2004: 513).

Both cultures show a relatively high index for this dimension. Interpretation by GLOBE (2016) suggests that the class system exists in both cultures; there is limited access to power, resources, and information by a small minority (GLOBE, 2016).

Gender Egalitarianism

GLOBE average 3.37 (4.51) England 3.67 (5.17) Russia 4.07 (4.18)

This cultural dimension is ‘the degree to which a collective minimises gender inequality” (House *et al.*, 2004:30).

Although the Russian score shows an average result, this result is one of the highest in the whole range of results of the GLOBE study, indicating that Russia has one of the highest numbers of women in power and maintains more homogenous educational achievements for men and women. The English score is close to average result, suggesting that England has a higher gender division at work than Russia has, and there are less homogenous achievements for men and women in terms of education in England than in Russia (GLOBE, 2016).

Humane orientation

GLOBE average 4.09 (5.43) England 3.72 (5.43) Russia 3.94 (5.59)

This cultural dimension is “the degree to which an organisation or society encourages and rewards individuals for animation fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind to others (House *et al.*, 2004:569).

Both England and Russia arrive with an average score. The Russian score is slightly higher, and it is closer to the average GLOBE score. Russians regard the concerns of other people as more significant, they encourage and reward being good to others, as well as seeking affiliation more than the English do (GLOBE, 2016).

Institutional Collectivism

GLOBE average 4.27 (4.73) England 4.27 (4.31) Russia 4.50 (3.89)

This cultural dimension is “the degree to which organisational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action” (House *et al.,* 2004: 30).

The Russian score is higher than the average GLOBE score. People there see themselves as more dependent on the organisation that they work for. They are

more loyal to this organisation, even at the expense of their own interests, and the collective might be responsible for all major decisions. English score indicates that people are more independent within the collective, and individual goals have more value; individuals are responsible for major decisions (GLOBE, 2016).

Future Orientation

GLOBE average 3.85 (5.49) England 4.28 (5.06) Russia 2.88 (5.48)

This cultural dimension is "the degree to which collectively encourages and rewards future-oriented behaviours such as planning and delaying gratification" (House *et al.,* 2004: 282).

The English score on this dimension is moderate, yet it is higher than the GLOBE average, whereas the Russian score is relatively low. This is an indication of a greater desire among English people to save for the future; their organisational practices are easy-going, they put more importance in lasting results rather than short-term achievements. Russians prefer to spend now rather than to save for the future, their organisational practices are more rigid, and the short-term success is valued there higher than in England.

Assertiveness

GLOBE average 4.15 (3.82) England 4.15 (3.7) Russia 3.68 (2.83)

This cultural dimension is "the degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others" (House et al, 2004: 30)

Both Russian and English scores show moderate results. However, the English score is slightly higher, indicating that English people are more competitive, they strive for success, they try to take control over resources and expect initiative from those who work for their organisation. The Russians on the other hand are slightly more amiable, they are more in harmony with nature and value loyalty from those who work for them.

In conclusion, viewed via the lens of cultural dimensions English mid-managers are more "uncertainty avoidant" and "future oriented. However, they are less "in-group collectivistic" then Russian and most of other countries' mid-managers. Russia can be seen as more "power distant", "in-group and institutionally collectivistic", but less "performance" and "future orientated", "uncertainty avoidant" and "assertive" than England and others. Both, England and Russia are more "gender egalitarian" and less "humane" than others. Interestingly, when it comes to cultural practices, the English scores are identical or very close to average GLOBE scores in four out of nine cultural dimensions, i.e. Assertiveness, Institutional Collectivism, Power distance and Performance Orientation. In contrast, the Russian scores are in most cases at the extremes of the range of cultural practices with exception of two cultural dimensions, i.e. Humane Orientation and Institutional Collectivism.

GLOBE Culturally induced leadership dimensions

GLOBE researchers identified and measured Culturally Endorsed Leadership Theory Dimensions. Using 21 characteristics of leadership, they examined the ways in which societies classify leaders into effective and ineffective; they grouped these characteristics into six dimensions of leadership (Dorfman *et al.,* 2012). These six leadership dimensions are Charismatic, Team Oriented, Self-protective, Humane, Autonomous and Participative.

The comparison of English and Russian culturally induced leadership dimensions by the GLOBE study is as follows.

Charismatic leadership is "the ability to inspire, to motivate, and to expect high performance outcomes from others based on firmly held core values" (GLOBE, 2016). This leadership dimension is arriving from the characteristics of leaders such as *charismatic/visionary, charismatic/inspirational, charismatic/self-sacrificing, integrity, decisive* and *performance oriented*.

GLOBE average 5.83 England 6.01 Russia 5.66

This leadership dimension is characterised by the decisiveness of their leaders and the ability to inspire and motivate employees for better performance results, affirming core organisational values. England shows a high score on Charismatic dimension, which is above GLOBE's average, it means that English culture contributes to the performance-orientation of their leaders. The Russian score is not too far apart from the English; it shows that Russian culture contributes, but slightly less than British in this type of leadership. Consequently, the leaders in England value Charismatic style; leaders in Russia are slightly less interested in this type of leadership.

Team Oriented leadership arrives from the leadership characteristics of *team collaborative, team-integrative, diplomatic, malevolent* (reverse scored) and *admin competent.* GLOBE (2016) describe it as *"*the ability to effectively build teams and implement a common purpose or goal among team members"

GLOBE average 5.76 England 5.71 Russia 5.63

Concerning the team-oriented culturally endorsed leadership dimension, it is associated with affiliation and loyalty between the team members to achieve common goals. The UK and Russia show close scores, indicating that team-oriented leadership is valued across both cultures.

Participative leadership characterises leaders as being not *autocratic* and *participative*. GLOBE (2016) described it as **"**The degree to which managers involve others in making and implementing decisions".

GLOBE average 5.33 England 5.57 Russia 4.67

Participative leadership advocates the delegation in decision-making and implementation. England and Russia show more differences then similarities in this leadership dimension, i.e. England displays high index of participative leadership and

it is above the GLOBE's average, whereas the Russian result portrays it contributing only slightly to this type of leadership. Participative leadership appears more highly valued in England.

Humane oriented leadership arrives from the characteristics of leaders being *modest* and *humane oriented*. GLOBE (2016) describes it as **"**The degree to which leaders are supportive and considerate but also includes compassion and generosity".

GLOBE average 4.9 England 4.9 Russia 4.08

Humane oriented leadership encourages empathy, kindness and assistance in leaders. England's scores higher than Russia's, and it is also GLOBE's average score. Russian score indicates that Russian culture has no impact on preferences for this leadership type. English leaders prefer a more humane style of leadership.

Autonomous leadership arrives from the characteristics of leaders being *autonomous*. GLOBE (2016) describes it as **"**The degree to which leaders are independent and individualistic".

GLOBE average 3.85 England 3.92 Russia 4.63

Russia shows a high index of **autonomous** style in their leaders, it is above GLOBE's average and it is also at the top end of the range of all GLOBE's scores. The English score is close to average and it indicates that in Russia autonomy appears to be more valued as a leadership characteristic.

Self-protective leadership arrives from the characteristics of leaders being *self-concerned, status conscious, face-saver* and *procedural*. GLOBE (2016) describes it as **"**The degree to which leadership focuses on ensuring the safety and security of the individual and group through status enhancement and face saving".

GLOBE average 3.47 England 3.04 Russia 3.69

The results portray that there are differences in how English and Russian cultures contribute to self-protective leadership, i.e. Russian culture has almost no impact on this type of leadership, whereas the English score shows that English culture is slightly inhibiting to this type of leadership. Consequently, Russian leaders are more concerned about safety and security than the English, and they are also more than English leaders driven by status and esteem.

One of the crucial findings of the GLOBE study is that national culture affects the leadership through the social beliefs and expectations. Those leaders, who lead as society expects them to, are more successful. In addition, some characteristics of leaders are regarded as effective worldwide, i.e. charismatic leadership, whereas others are more culturally receptive, i.e. participative leadership. "When individuals think about effective leader behaviours, they are more influenced by the value they place on the desired future than their perception of current realities'' (House et al, 2004: 275-6).

Appendix 2 Letter of introduction

Dear **(Name),**

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project concerning female leaders in Russia and the UK. This project is aiming to look into the career paths of women from former Soviet Union now working in Russia and in the UK. I plan to interview women working professionally in private sector organisations. Your contact details have been given to me by (**Name**). If you agree to take part in the interview, I will arrange a time and place (**or media source**) at your choice and convenience. I would appreciate your willingness to participate in this research.

The interview and confidentiality: This interview will take no longer then one-hour. During the interview I will ask you questions about your career path. With your permission, I will record your answers. This will allow me later to analyse the information from different participants. At the completion of research, I will be very happy to share my findings with you.

Ethical issues are of paramount importance for researchers; therefore, conditions of data protection will be thoroughly discussed to your complete satisfaction prior to the beginning of the interview. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected. All research data obtained during the interview will be password secured and stored electronically. Your name will not be disclosed in this study's final report or in any publications related to this study. Your identity and your responses to the questions will be held strictly confidential and referred to in publications or in further projects in anonymous form agreed with you. I will email you a consent form prior to the day of the interview for your approval. However, if during the interview you reveal information that you later do not wish to enclose in this study, your wish will be fully respected. You are free to withdraw your participation at any point during this research without indicating your reasons.

Findings of the research:

The findings of this research will be used for academic purposes.

Any concerns: Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me or the University of Sunderland Faculty of Business and Law Research Office for further details.

I hope you find this project interesting and will enjoy answering questions about your professional life experiences. Your contribution to this research is very valuable; it will add to the advancement of knowledge about issues related to women and their career paths in different cultural contexts.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Lioudmila Milone
Faculty of Business and Law /PhD researcher
University of Sunderland: Lila.Moshtael@sunderland.ac.uk
Tell: +44 (0) 207 5317333 (Ext. 2311)

Appendix 3 Consent form

Research Title: Exploring the career experiences of Female Leaders from the former Soviet Union in Private Sector Organisations in the UK and Russia

I confirm that I have had the details of this research explained to me. My questions have been answered to my full satisfaction.

I understand I have the right to:

- decline to participate,
- refuse to answer any particular questions without giving reasons,
- withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons,
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.

I understand that the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

I understand that my name will not be used in association with the information I provide.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the letter of introduction.

Signed (Participant):

Name: Date:

Signed (Researcher):

Name Date:

Appendix 4 Interview guide

Good morning/*afternoon*. Thank you very much for your time and for the opportunity to talk to you. *Thank you for your consent.* Did you have chance to read the introductory letter?

With your permission I now will start recording.

- Please tell me about yourself, your role in the organisation, your background, how did you choose your profession and how you see yourself in terms of culture and your work history from leaving full-time education till your current position.

I'd like to ask you about your career

- Did you ever think that you could be a leader? How did you realise that you can lead people?

- What would be a typical career path in your profession? *Prompt if necessary*: How long does it usually take to get where you are?

- Do you think that the fact that you are a woman has impacted on your career? *If yes*, then how? Why? Please give examples.

- Have you taken any career breaks? *If yes:* tell me, how was it to come back to work?

- How do you feel about your balance between work and personal life? *Prompt if necessary:* Do you find it is difficult to manage your commitments at work and outside of work? Why?

My next set of questions will be about your experiences at work

- What do you consider as the most important qualities that you portray in your professional life? *Why?* Did it help your career? *If so, then how?*

- Tell me about the career progression opportunities for women in this organisation.

- Tell me about equality policies in your organisation above statutory minimum. *Prompt if necessary: for example, perhaps your organisation has flexible working policies, paid maternity/paternity, childcare provision?*

- Can you think of any situations where you felt that you were being treated differently from your colleagues? *If so,* please tell me more about it.

- You mentioned earlier that on average it takes (..) years to get to the position of _____. Is it the same for a man in your profession? Why?

- If you spot a talented professional woman in your organisation, would you consider encouraging her for leadership roles? Why/***Why not***? If you were to give advice to a young female professional, what would it be?

- Is there anything that I might have forgotten to ask, but you feel will be important to include for enriching the knowledge about female leaders?

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if at any later stage you feel that you might have further contribution to this research in terms of interesting observations, examples or stories that might be relevant.

Thank you for sharing your experiences. I will evaluate this information together with that of other participants for developing conclusions. The information that you have provided today will be kept secure and confidential. I would like to reassure you that your anonymity will be protected. If you are interested to read this research findings, I will be happy to send you a copy. If you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Once again, my sincere appreciations for your time.

Appendix 5 Ethics Approval[7]

Lioudmila Moshtael
University of Greenwich
Faculty of Business
Greenwich Campus

Direct line 020 8331 8842
Direct fax 020 83318824
Email researchethics@gre.a,uk
Our Ref UREC/16.1.5.8
Date: 4th November 2016

Dear Lioudmila,

University Research Ethics Committee – Minute 16.1.5.8

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Female Leaders in the corporate environment in Russia and the UK

I am writing to confirm that the above application has been approved by Chair's action on behalf of the Committee and you have permission to proceed.

I am advised by the Committee to remind you of the following points:

- You must notify the Committee immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware, which would cast doubt upon, or alter, any information contained in the original application, or a later amendments, submitted to the Committee and/or which would raise questions about the safety and/or continued conduct of research;

- You must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998;

- You must refer proposed amendments to the protocol to the committee for further review and obtain the Committee's approval thereto prior to implementation (except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the subject is paramount).

- You are authorised to present this University of Greenwich Research Ethics Committee letter of approval to outside bodies in support of any application for further research clearance.

On behalf of the Committee may I wish you success in your project

Yours sincerely,

John Wallace
Secretary, University Research Ethics Committee

cc: Dr Katia Iankova
Dr Natalya Rumiantzeva
Prof. Sue Corby

[7] (1) The original PDF file with signature is available on request
(2) This ethics approval was gained prior to transferring this PhD from Greenwich University to Sunderland University
(3) No substantive changes had been made to the thesis which warranted additional approval at Sunderland University
(4) My surname has been changed from Moshtael to Milone during this study (all documentation is available on request)

Appendix 6 Thematic Analysis

Themes	Code	Description	RU	UK
Interests and aspirations	IA	Intrinsic aspirations	IA	IA
	EA	Extrinsic aspirations	EA	EA
Value of education	DFE	Desire for Education	DFE	DFE
	FF	'Female' faculties	FF	FF
	MF	'Male' faculties	MF	MF
Gender	IWPW	I work predominantly with women	IWPW	
	IWPM	I work predominantly with men	IWPM	IWPM
	MGA	My gender as an advantage	MGA	MGA
	MGD	My gender as a disadvantage	MGD	MGD
	TGC	Two genders complement each other	TGC	TGC
Gender is an obstruction	PROW	Promotions for reasons other than work	PROW	PROW
	WAV	Women are vulnerable	WAV	
Attitude to gender barriers	TTGB	Tolerance towards gender barriers	TTGB	TTGB
	NTTGB	Not tolerant towards gender barriers		NTTGB
Children as a priority	CHA	Childcare arrangements	CHA	CHA
	SSUK	Social system in the UK		SSUK
	SSRU	Social system in Russia	SSRU	SSRU
Domestic division of labour	DD	Domestic duties	DD	DD
System barriers	RW	Responsibilities at work	RW	RW
	OF	Organisation's flexibility	OF	OF
	CPS	Career progression smooth	CPS	CPS
	CPP	Career progression problematic		CPP
	ME	Maternity experience	ME	ME
	NTS	Not taken seriously by male colleagues	NTS	NTS
	IHWH	I feel I had to work harder	IHWH	IHWH
	DAO	Difficult assignment as an opportunity	DAO	DAO
	EP	Exclusion Practices	EP	EP
	IFCB	I feel there are career barriers		IFCB
	IFNB	I feel there are no barriers	IFNB	IFNB
Work-home balance	IFSB	I feel satisfied and balanced	IFSB	IFSB
	IAFB	I aim for balance	IAFB	
	SFB	Strategies for balance	SFB	SFB
	PWP	Price worth paying	PWP	PWP
Perestroika	WP	Welcome perestroika	WP	WP
	PBS	Perestroika brought struggles	PBS	PBS
	PBWO	Perestroika brought work opportunities	PBWO	PBWO
	RO	Re-location experience		RO

	MESU	There was more gender equality in USSR		MESU
	MGRM	My mother/grandmother as a role model	MGRM	MGRM
Towards executive positions	ERFA	Equal rights for all	ERFA	ERFA
	RM	Recognition by merits	RM	RM
	WNH	Women need help		WNH
	EOFW	Extensive opportunities for women	EOFW	EOFW
	NOTP	No women in top-positions in resources	NOTP	
Culture/gender intersect	CSRS	Career start relatively smooth	CSRS	CSRS
	CSD	Career start difficulties		CSD
	RAD	Russian as advantage/disadvantage		RAD
	MCAC	My culture affects my career		MCAC
	MIC	My identity is complex		MIC