

Abstract

The low number of women in top positions has been subject to numerous political debates, as are the measures taken to increase this number. One of these measures, is the implementation of a gender quota. Implementing a gender quota is about regulating equality in numbers, and not about creating cultural change. They are considered a controversial tool and are often contested, resistance is an inevitable consequence of the implementation of a gender quota. Several studies underscore the importance of resistance in equality strategies and acknowledge its discursive nature, however, little research has been conducted on what the nature of resistance entails. This research reveals the discourses of resistance as it answers the following question: *How is resistance towards a gender quota in the Netherland discursively constructed?* An interview study was conducted including twelve respondents, followed by a critical discourse analysis. Four discourses of resistance were found: a discourse of ineffectiveness, a discourse of false universalisms and political principles, a discourse of male power and political survival and a discourse of gender and leadership norms. This research shows how resistance towards a gender quota is constructed and how these constructions differ between the respondents working in listed and non-listed companies.

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1. Introduction

Gender inequality in organizations remains a key issue till this day (Acker, 2006; Kirton & Greene, 2015; Voorspoels & Bleijenbergh, 2019; Wang & Kelan, 2012), even though discrimination based on gender has been made illegal in many western Europe countries (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015). Nowadays, there are more women than men graduating from universities (Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek, 2019), showing the progress in gender equality (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015). It would appear as if the tables have been turned, however, discrimination might be banned on paper, the presence of gender inequality in organizations remains (Ainsworth, Knox, & O'Flynn, 2010; Greene & Kirton, 2015).

The inequality can be found in the number of women in top positions being very low (Heilman, 2012; Hillman, Shropshire & Cannella, 2007), which has been a popular subject to numerous political debates and articles in the media (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). The increased attention towards this subject leads to a growing pressure for large organizations to apply gender equality strategies. These strategies are not only applied by organizations, for example by investing in diversity management (Kirton & Greene, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018), but also by governments, by implementing a gender quota (Krook, 2016). Gender equality strategies – like quotas – are popular research topics (e.g. Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015; Krook, 2015, 2016; Mölders, Brosi, Bekk, Spörrle, & Welp, 2018; Mensi-Klarbach, 2014; Poggio, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018; Voorspoels & Bleijnebergh, 2019). A gender quota enforces a predefined percentage to be women (Sojo, Wood, Wood & Wheeler, 2016), and can therefore also be described as a form of affirmative action (Unzueta, Gutiérrez, & Ghavami, 2010). Norway was the first European country to take measures regarding the matter, by introducing a quota stating that 40% of corporate board members needed to be women (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014), with many countries and organizations following this initiative, including the Netherlands (Mölders et al., 2018). By implementing a quota, it has been proven that the importance of gender equality is acknowledged in politics and the implementation of quota has proven to effectuate change (Benschop & Verloo, 2011).

1.1 Resistance towards gender quota

Even though the number of countries and organizations taking measures increased, gender quotas remain a heated topic of discussion (Mölders et al., 2018; Sojo et al., 2016). Gender equality strategies are prone to resistance, especially those strategies that radically aim for equality on a structural basis, such as a quota (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). Quotas are

controversial tools, (e.g. Peterson, 2015; Schandevyl, Woodward, Valgaeren & De Metsenaere, 2013) which is expressed by many arguments against the implementation of quotas. One of these arguments suggests that the women who are hired through quota, do not necessarily have the skills or legitimacy for the position (Krook, 2015), and more qualified candidates might be overlooked (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). In addition, opponents argue that women are favored because of quotas, (Mölders et al., 2018) therefore their actual achievements are being undermined (Kakabadse, Figueira, Nicolopoulou, Hong Yang, Kakabadse & Özbilgin, 2015). The controversiality also lies in its radicality: change of the status quo by recreating the opportunity structure (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). Going beyond equal opportunities, by ensuring equal outcomes, which is why resistance is inherent to the implementation of quota (Benschop & van den Brink, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). By acknowledging a quota is a radical tool for change, it shows that this strategy is a contested one (Benschop & Verloo 2011). A quota provides advantages for one group, therefore it is often perceived as unfair to other groups, and therefore it invokes resistance (Benschop & Verloo, 2011).

Equality strategies are often presented as attractive to everyone (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014) and therefore resistance is seen as something to be avoided, it is often considered a negative force (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). However, recent studies show that resistance can also be used as a productive tool (Courpasson, Dany & Clegg, 2012; Thomas & Hardy, 2011; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018), to expose inequalities and to challenge the existing values and beliefs of inequalities. Thereby allowing to construct alternative values and beliefs. From this point of view, resistance does not necessarily has to be avoided, but can be seen as process of adaption (Thomas & Davies, 2005). The literature sees resistance in different ways and therefore lacks consistency in how to cope with resistance. However, whether it is used as a productive tool or seen as a negative force, resistance does affect the outcome of gender equality strategies, (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018) which makes it important to examine the nature of resistance. Even though there is many research on how to cope with resistance (e.g. Courpasson et al., 2012; Thomas & Hardy, 2011), the nature of resistance is often not taken into account (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). Studies found several values and beliefs that may cause resistance (Krook, 2015; Mölders et al., 2018, Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018), however, these values and beliefs are not examined in depth, as foundations of resistance. Krook (2015) did examine the nature of resistance towards a gender quota and argues that resistance is built upon three micro foundations: false universalisms and political principles, male power and political survival, and gender and leadership norms. However, Krook (2015)

applies these foundations on politics, whereas their meaning in organizations, as perceived by employees, it not examined yet.

This research addresses this gap by examining the discursive nature of resistance towards a gender quota in organizations, by exploring the values and beliefs that are rooted at inequality in organizations (Dennissen, Benschop, & Van den Brink, 2019). Recent studies do acknowledge that resistance has a discursive character (Mumby, 2005; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018), it allows for alternative constructions of the several different beliefs and values that are rooted at resistance (Krook, 2015; Mölders et al., 2018, Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). The values and beliefs that are at the foundation of resistance need to be clear in order to change them and to understand the resistance. A critical discourse analysis was applied to examine the discursive constructions of resistance (Zanoni, Janssen, Benschop & Nkomo, 2010).

1.2 Research goal and question

This research aims to provide insights in the discursive constructions of the resistance towards a gender quota in the Netherlands in order to cope with the resistance, by exposing underlying values and beliefs that form its nature. The quota in the Netherlands is still to be implemented, so the influence of resistance in the organizational context can be examined in a pre-implementation phase. In order to achieve this goal, the following research question is developed: *How is resistance towards a gender quota in the Netherlands discursively constructed?*

To answer this question, a qualitative research is conducted. Qualitative research concerns collecting and interpreting linguistic sources, in order to make a statement about a social phenomenon (Bleijenbergh, 2015). Since this research is concerned with the resistance, the interpretations and opinions about gender and gender inequalities are examined, in order to explore this phenomenon in depth. The research is concerned with resistance towards a gender quota and not the actual effect of the quota itself, since the quota is still to be implemented. The perceptions can be examined through interviews, therefore a qualitative research is appropriate. Furthermore, the research is focused on employees working in companies where the quota will be implemented. By including multiple companies, insights in the different perceptions of resistance towards gender quota in different branches can be explored. This research is focused on the situation in the Netherlands. Therefore only the perspective from employees in the Netherlands is included.

1.3 Theoretical relevance

The theoretical relevance of this research stems from the gap in literature about what causes resistance towards gender quotas and the lack of examination of the discursive nature of resistance. Even though gender equality strategies have been the subject to numerous studies, gender quotas – despite their controversiality – remained a black box in literature for quite some time (Voorspoels & Bleijenbergh, 2019). Resistance in organizations has been subject to numerous research projects as well. However, research is often focused on how to cope with resistance, avoiding it or using it (e.g. Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Thomas & Hardy, 2011). Since resistance is inherent to the implementation of a gender quota, it cannot be avoided. To use resistance, its nature needs examination (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018).

Even though several authors conducted research on the matter, there is not much consensus yet on what exactly causes resistance towards gender quotas. In their research on resistance towards gender equality strategies, Benschop & Van den Brink (2015) argue that resistance as a result of gender equality strategies stems from the changing processes of power. The authors dive into the meaning of resistance itself, and not so much the discourses of resistance and the underlying values and beliefs. The authors do conclude that resistance is crucial in the success of a gender equality strategy, which is why it is important to examine the nature of resistance. In another research, Van den Brink & Benschop (2018) argue the nature of resistance needs further examination, as they do mention certain triggers of resistance and because resistance can be used as a tool in achieving gender equality by managing it (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). Krook (2015) on the other hand does dive into the nature of resistance, by defining three foundations of resistance towards gender quotas, these three foundations align with several other theories about resistance and gender equality strategies, for example stereotyping being a key concept in support for gender quotas, as discussed by Mölders et al. (2018). However, quotas are not only implemented in politics, but in organizations as well. Therefore the nature of resistance should not just be examined in a political context, but also in an organizational context. Thus, this research contributes to theory by examining the discursive nature of resistance in organizations, as based upon the implementation of a gender quota.

1.4 Practical relevance

The practical relevance of this research is formed by the contemporary aspects of the problem. In 2012, the Dutch female board index presented in their annual overview that only 4,6% of the

board members and 13,3% of the supervisory directors of 96 listed companies was female (Bakker & Kartner, 2013). To provide a solution for this low number, the Dutch government implemented a target in 2012, stating that 30% of the board members of listed companies should be female. If this target could not be met, the annual report of the company should provide reasons for this lack of women on the board, however, there were no consequences tied to failing to meet the target.¹ In 2019, according to the female board index, there has been an improvement in the number of women in the boardroom. (Lückerath-Rovers, 2019) The number grew to 8,5%, however, a number that is not even close to the target. The percentage of the supervisory directors grew to 26,8% (Lückerath-Rovers, 2019), however, the 30% could still not be met. With this in mind, the Dutch House of representatives came to the conclusion in December 2019, that the target of 30% can no longer be just a target, in order to really make a change, this percentage needs to be mandatory. As the bill is currently being shaped, discussed and amended, it is expected the bill becomes a law and will be enforced by January 1st 2021, as according to the minister van Engelshoven (Kockelmann, 2019). The quota is a new tool in the battle for gender equality in the Netherlands and resistance is inherent to the implementation. To cope with resistance, its nature needs to be examined. Thus this research contributes to practice by exposing discourses that are rooted at resistance towards the quota, thereby not only exposing several values and beliefs that can be coped with, but also to voice concerns that employees have towards the quota (Courpasson et al., 2012). This research can be used to cope with resistance that employees might feel, as the nature of resistance is explored.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The outline of the thesis is as follows: in the next chapter, the theoretical framework will be provided. The key concepts will be elaborated, along with assumptions and conditions. After the theoretical framework, the methodology will be discussed. This chapter will indicate the applied methods, the data collection and the applied data analysis methods. Next, the results will be elaborated and analyzed. This will be followed by a conclusion and a discussion.

¹ Art. 2:166 & 2:276 Burgerlijk Wetboek.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, an outline of the theory will be provided. The key concepts will be enlightened, alongside with the existing theories about these concepts. Since this research concerns the resistance towards a gender quota as an equality strategy, first, gender and gender inequality will be discussed through a critical perspective. These are important concepts to examine, because the quota aims to overcome gender inequality and differences between men and women are rooted at the resistance as well as the implementation of the quota. Second, the literature about the quota as a gender equality strategy will be examined, to establish how gender quotas have been perceived so far, and to provide information about this particular type of equality strategy, as it is one that involves resistance. Third, literature about resistance will be discussed. Resistance may make or break the quota. To examine its discursive nature, the foundations of resistance towards the gender quota will be explained.

2.1 Gender and gender inequality through a critical diversity perspective

Critical diversity studies have been applied to examine concepts in this research; meaning that the concepts are seen as social constructions and not as reality. For a long time, gender was described as being either a man or a woman. Gender is therefore seen as something we are born with, along with gendered characteristics men and women possess (Zanoni et al., 2010). However, in the mid 1990's critical diversity studies emerged, providing an alternative perspective (Zanoni et al., 2010). Critical diversity studies address the existence of legitimized practices of asymmetrical power (Duberly, Johnson, & Cassell, 2012). From a critical diversity perspective, reality is a product of social construction. Therefore, concepts as gender and gendered characteristics are creations of our cognition, and do not exist independent of our knowing (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Moreover, a social construct is produced in context-specific practices and discourses, it contributes to the existence and maintenance of unequal power relations (Zanoni et al., 2010). In line with a critical diversity perspective, the social construction of concepts as gender and how this maintains gender inequality is taken into account (Gremmen & Benschop, 2011; Zanoni et al., 2010). Therefore in this research, gender is seen within context, meaning that gender is not something you are born with, but something that is shaped and developed through culture and nurture, to quote Simone de Beauvoir: "one is not born a woman, one becomes one".

2.1.1 Gender

Applying this lens on gender means gender is seen as a social construct. Conceptualizing gender is therefore complex, since the definition can change from day to day (Poggio, 2006). Gender is, unlike sex, a product of humans and can be described as the socially learned behaviors that are attributed to masculinity or femininity (Andersen, 1988). Moreover, Acker (2006) describes gender as “the socially constructed differences between men and women and the beliefs and identities that support difference and inequality (Acker, 2006, p. 444). In both definitions, gender is seen through a critical diversity perspective, the social construction of differences between men and women is acknowledged. Acker’s (2006) definition also emphasizes the inequality that these differences support. Even though beliefs that support inequality may change over time, it is important to stress the inequality that arises from gender differences today. Therefore in terms of this research, gender is seen as “the socially constructed differences between men and women and the beliefs and identities that support difference and inequality” (Acker, 2006, p. 444).

2.1.2 Gender inequality

When taught to act a certain masculine or feminine way, this behavior will reflect on the work floor as well. Gender is constructed through cultural and symbolical practices (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001), these practices are created through interactions and discourses. Moreover, these interactions and discourses are deeply embedded in organizational processes that maintain gender inequalities. and therefore depend on organizational culture (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000). Culture can be described as a set of shared values, understandings and assumptions, this set influences how a group thinks and reacts to its environment (Schein, 1980). Assumptions lie deep within the core, and is therefore difficult to be recognized or changed. Moreover, one of these assumptions, is the ‘universal’ concept of equality (Krook, 2015). When there is a belief that there is equality, inequalities are hard to recognize. In order to achieve equality, the inequalities that contribute to unequal treatments need to become visible and delegitimized (Acker, 2006). Inequality in organizations can be described as: “Systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations” (Acker, 2006, p. 443). Equality in this would mean to overcome these disparities.

In order to overcome gender inequality, multiple countries have applied gender equality strategies over the past few years, the Netherlands being one of them (European Parliament, 2012). Gender equality strategies can be subtle, creating equal opportunities step by step, or radical, aiming to radically create equal opportunities and equal outcomes (Acker, 2006; Benschop & van den Brink, 2015; Kirton & Greene, 2015). Equal opportunities can be created by focusing on an individual level or on a structural level (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). By focusing on the individual level, a gender equality strategy is to make sure that the potential of women in organizations is maximized, to ensure women are productive in the workplace (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). Moreover, from an individual perspective, a strategy can also focus on re-evaluation, by emphasizing and valuing the differences between women and men. Equal opportunities can also be created on a structural level, meaning that the whole structure of organizations needs to be rebuilt, as the structure allows for unequal opportunities. This type of gender equality strategy does not just aim for equal opportunities, but also for equal outcomes (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). Fair procedures alone are not enough, because the organizational opportunity structure is different for men and women (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015), the rewards should be equal as well (Kirton & Greene, 2015). However, when focusing solely on the structure, without taking into account the underlying culture and gender norms, this type of strategy is less likely to create gender equality in a positive way (Benschop & Verloo, 2011).

2.2 Gender quota as equality strategy

Quotas qualify as a structural equality strategy, as they aim to overcome gender inequalities by ensuring equal outcomes (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). A quota is an obligated-to-use-tool for companies to enforce change, that they could not regulate on their own (Benschop & Van Den Brink, 2015). Quotas are often enforced by the government, and not so much through mutual agreement, therefore this type of strategy is often contested (Benschop & Van Den Brink, 2015; Benschop & Verloo, 2011). By implementing a quota, the number of the underrepresented groups in top positions increases. The idea behind a quota is to compensate for historical inequality (Benschop & Van Den Brink, 2015), therefore the quota as a tool is more focused on equality on structural organizational level (Voorspoels & Bleijenbergh, 2019), to create equality in numbers, without taking the underlying cultural norms into account (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). In this research, a quota is defined as radical tool for gender equality on the structural organizational level.

Even though quotas are a highly debated topic, they are often broadly encouraged (Krook, 2009, 2015). The reason for countries to set a quota can either lay in equality motives, or an actual belief that a quota can positively influence a company's performance (Mölders et al., 2018). There are enough women who are qualified to fulfill powerful positions, meanwhile women are underrepresented in such positions (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). Previous research shows the way a board is composed can affect the performance of a company, although a lot of different research, show a lot of different outcomes (e.g. Böhren & Staubo, 2014; Campbell & Minguez-Vera, 2008; Joecks, Pull, & Vetter, 2012; Kirton & Greene, 2015).

Legally enforced quota are one of the most effective tools to increase equality in numbers (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015; Hoel, 2010). However, the quota also invokes negative reactions. The enforcement of quotas, and thus the requirement to hire a certain number of women, is often referred to as an affirmative action (Mölders et al., 2018) and can therefore be considered as controversial, as quotas ignore the existing regulations (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). The increase of the number of women goes hand in hand with a decrease of the number of men in top positions, which can be perceived as an unequal treatment towards these men (Krook, 2015). As a consequence, the legal status of a quota is often questioned, as it is said to go against equality laws (Krook, 2016). Moreover, women's qualities may be second-guessed when there is a quota enforcing gender diversity (Benschop & Van Den Brink, 2015), as the ability to choose people for their actual skills becomes limited. (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012; Marinova, Plantenga & Remery, 2016). This might raise concerns about whether someone is chosen for their qualities and if this choice was fair towards other candidates (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015). However, quotas are not about offering easy access, but about overcoming barriers for qualified women (Krook, 2015). From a critical perspective, what we perceive to be good qualities for a leader, is what we have learned through social processes, these norms are socially constructed and are embedded in everyday practices (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015). The implementation of a quota is a useful strategy to uncover inequalities. As the implementation of a quota causes resistance, it helps increase the visibility of these inequalities, and decrease their legitimacy (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018).

2.3 Resistance

A quota is a radical form of gender equality strategy (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018), radical strategies are more likely to cause reactions, such as resistance (Benschop & Van den Brink,

2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). Since resistance is inherent to the implementation of gender quota, it is the main concept of this research. Resisting something can be seen a result of rooted practices that are being questioned, as these rooted practices are perceived to be normal, inequalities are invisible and therefore change is seen as not necessary (Krook, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). Resistance has a discursive character, it involves challenges about meanings and alternative discourses and the production of knowledge that is different to what is perceived as normal (Ashcraft, 2005; Johansson, Andersson, Johansson, & Lidestav, 2019; Thomas, Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Resistance is therefore seen as an expression of challenges and complexities that are associated with gender equality strategies (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). By exploring the values and beliefs that are rooted at these challenges and complexities, not only can resistance be used to change the values and beliefs as it exposes inequalities, but also to voice concerns (Courpasson et al., 2012). Since this research is concerned with gender quotas as equality strategies, resistance is defined as: the discursive expression of the complexities and challenges that arise from a gender quota.

Resistance is usually higher when inequalities are deeply rooted in the organizational culture (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). The meanings and interpretations attributed to gender depend on the organizational culture and the embedded symbols and beliefs (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). Due to this culture, people act in ways that are according to these embedded symbols and beliefs (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). In order to achieve equality, embedded assumptions and practices need to change, which will go hand in hand with resistance. However, resistance can be seen as a negative force to this process, or as a productive tool. The former stems from research advocating that resistance is something to be avoided (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). The ‘small-wins’ theory has argued to be successful in trying to get rid of inequalities, while avoiding resistance (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018; Weick, 1984). This theory claims that practices and assumptions can be changed by a campaign of incremental changes (Benschop & Van den Brink, 2015; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The implementation of a quota is not a process of incremental changes, but one that radically makes a change, thus resistance cannot be avoided. Resistance however can also be seen as productive, from this perspective, resistance is not necessarily a bad influence on organizational change and does not need to be avoided at all costs (Ford & Ford, 2010; Ford, Ford & D’Amelio, 2008; Thomas & Hardy, 2011; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). When applying a critical perspective, resistance is seen as a social process of learning. In this process of continuous adaption (Thomas & Davies, 2005), resistance can be used as a tool. Using resistance as a tool is to see resistance

as “a challenge to normal power relations and founded in established, specific and legitimate power relations” (Courpasson et al., 2012, p. 814). By expressing challenges and complexities, not only concerns of the intended change can be exposed and discussed, but also the gender inequalities become more visible. Because while discussing gender and equality, stereotypes and inequalities can be exposed (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). In order to do that, the discursive construction of resistance towards the gender quota needs to be made clear. According to Krook (2015, 2016), there are three foundations that help to comprehend resistance. These foundations have in common that they contribute to the legitimacy of inequalities, while claiming to have universal or neutral ideas about gender (Krook, 2016).

2.3.1 False universalisms and political principles

As early feminist studies revealed, the way we perceive equality is biased by the male perspective (Krook, 2015; Lawson, 1999), as women were excluded in political theories. The former exclusion of women, makes it difficult to fully include them now, since the traditional ideas of family and sex roles remain (Krook, 2015). Simply increasing the rights and number of women is not inherent to being treated equally, since there is a belief that equality already exists. Thus, this concept of equality can be characterized as a false universalism. Universalisms are supposed to be homogenic, when in fact they are a reflection of what the majority thinks (Feldman, 2018). The perception of false universalisms, such as a false perception of equality, may lead to resistance when implementing a gender quota (Krook, 2015). Gender inequality is agreed to be unacceptable, at the same time, it is believed to be something of the past, there is no need to be concerned with it today (Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014). Since there is a belief that equality is present, the quota can be perceived as a tool for inequality. Therefore an act of resistance would be to question the legal status of a quota (Krook, 2016).

2.3.2 Male power and political survival

Quotas are promoted to be beneficial to everyone, however, the increase of the number of women, is inherent to a decrease in the number of men, which may cause men to perceive resistance towards the quota (Krook, 2015, 2016). This foundation stems from the need to maintain male privilege and to see accomplishments to be the result of their own success, and not a result of this privilege (Johansson et al., 2019). Moreover, research shows that men feel resistance towards gender change due to lose of control and status (Ashcraft, 2005; Krook, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018), since a quota would reduce the number of men in top

positions and questions the legitimacy of their earned positions. It questions the existence of meritocracy; your success being the result of your own achievements and abilities (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). Resistance and control are intertwined, they react to each other (Ashcraft, 2005). As a survival tactic, expressions of resistance would be to commit acts of violence or intimidation towards women, such as blaming and shaming (Krook, 2016). Women may also feel resistance, due to their access to top positions being a consequence of a legally enforced quota, instead of their capabilities (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018; Van den Brink & Stobbe, 2014).

2.3.3 Gender and leadership norms

Even though society moved largely past traditional roles based on stereotypes, still, certain characteristics based upon stereotypes are ascribed to men or women (Phillips, 2005). Stereotypes can be described as the generalizing of people based on their gender e.g. (Heilman, 2012). Gendered stereotypes can involve characteristics men or women have, which is referred to as descriptive stereotypes, or characteristics men or women should have, which is referred to as prescriptive stereotypes (Heilman, 2012). Both forms of stereotyping can be of influence to the number of women in top positions. For instance, women are said to be less ‘agentic’ and more ‘communal’ (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001, 2012; Krook, 2015, 2016; Mölders, 2018) and therefore they would be less fit to fulfill top positions. These positions require characteristics such as being ‘agentic’, as according to the social construction of desirable leadership qualities. Being communal is associated with qualities as being caring and collaborative. Being agentic involves confidence and assertiveness; characteristics that are often associated with qualities of good leadership (Heilman, 2012). Moreover, certain characteristics, like being communal, seem to be desirable for a woman to have, according to prescriptive stereotypes (Heilman, 2012; Krook, 2015). Women who are agentic however, often face penalties, e.g. being disliked or described as cold or psychologically less healthy (Heilman, 2012). Their qualities are disregarded due to ‘lack of fit’ with gendered stereotypes (Krook, 2015; Krook, 2016).

Van den Brink and Benschop (2018) found in their research that respondents thought ‘traditional’ candidates were more qualified than ‘non-traditional’ candidates, an example that represent the construction of gender-based qualities. Resistance can be a product of these socially constructed gender and leadership norms that are based on stereotypes (Krook, 2015), since the socially constructed qualities that leaders are supposed to have, are more often associated with men. Therefore appointing women would be to choose the less qualified

candidate, thus invoking resistance. The implementation of a quota implies concepts like ‘skill’ and ‘talent’ are products of social construction as well, the members of the underrepresented group are expected to prove themselves more than the members of the dominant group (Kirton & Greene, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2018). As a result, to choose women would be to choose the ‘less qualified’ candidate, thus evoking resistance. The resistance can be expressed by questioning women’s qualities and delegitimizing their position (Krook, 2016).

In conclusion, there are several implications that can be made for this research. First of all, that gender is the result of socially constructed differences, these socially constructed differences are rooted at gender inequality. Gender inequality is based on beliefs and values that are deeply rooted in organizational cultures, therefore it is hard to recognize. In order to achieve equality, there are several equality strategies that can be implemented, one of them being a quota; a radical tool to create equality on a structural level, a tool that invokes resistance. In order to cope with this resistance in a productive way, its nature needs to be examined. The nature of this resistance is built upon three foundations: false universalisms and political principles, male power and political survival and gender and leadership norms.

3. Methodology

In this chapter the research methods will be discussed that were used to conduct this research. This includes an elaboration of the research approach, followed by a description of the epistemology, the data collection, the data analysis and the research ethics.

3.1 Research approach

In order to examine the discursive construction of resistance, a qualitative research was conducted. Qualitative research concerns types of research that focus on the collection and interpretation of linguistic sources, in order to make statements about a phenomenon in real life (Bleijenbergh, 2015). This phenomenon can be investigated in depth and context can be taken into account. Therefore, this type of research approach is appropriate. This research is about perceptions of resistance towards a gender quota. Gender equality might be perceived as a sensitive subject, making qualitative research also more suitable, since sensitive subjects are easier to capture through a research that leaves the respondent in control of what is said (Boeije, 2010).

This research was conducted with an abductive approach, as this approach offers the flexibility of using a mix of inductive and deductive approach, providing the ability to shift between empirical and theoretical dimensions and therefore elaborating on theory (Alrajeh, Fearfull & Monk, 2012). Thus, the foundations of resistance by Krook (2015, 2016) are examined, as well as the possibility of additional discourses and other additional information.

3.2 Epistemology

The underlying epistemology of this research is social constructivism. Social constructivism sees reality as a social construction, created through interactions, where context plays an important role (Lee, 2012). Moreover, the purpose is to examine a social phenomenon, without being fully objective (Duberly et al., 2012). Language and the way the meaning is attributed through concepts play an important role (Lee, 2012). The underlying premises of social constructivism are reality, knowledge and learning (Kim, 2001). Reality and knowledge are products of humans, creating meaning through interaction, perceptions and interpretations. With a constructivist approach, knowledge is generated by focusing on the socially constructed meanings, such as the meaning of gender and equality (Al-Saadi, 2014).

From a social constructivist point of view, the researcher is likely to construct meanings as well, based on those of the respondents (Al-Saadi, 2014). The subjectivity of the findings is

acknowledged, since the results are an interpretation of the social constructions and not the reality. As a result, a challenge that I faced as a researcher was the relationship with some of the respondents. As some of the respondents I know personally, the subjectivity needed to be even more so kept in mind. Another challenge I faced as a researcher is being a woman, which was brought into light in the interview with respondent 11. The respondent suggested that women are often better at being punctual, while asking the researcher to confirm this, being a woman. Lastly, one of the interview questions was unconsciously formulated as a closed question: ‘do you feel as if the quota contributes to equal treatment or unequal treatment?’ which needs to be taken into account as well.

3.3 Data collection

This research focused on interviewing multiple employees working in different organizations, and can therefore be referred to as an interview study (Bleijenbergh, 2015). In total a number of 12 interviews were conducted and this took approximately 45 minutes each. The interviews were held in Dutch. The respondents were found through personal contacts and through ‘snowballing’. From the interviews, discourses of resistance were recognized, along with the underlying values and beliefs.

By interviewing multiple employees in different branches, the phenomenon is compared and explored in depth. The respondents may each face different consequences due to the quota, which lead to resistance. Six respondents working in listed companies and six respondents working in non-listed companies were interviewed. Four of the respondents are women, eight respondents are men. Since the quota will be implemented in listed companies, differences can be examined between the respondents working in listed companies and the respondents working in non-listed companies.

The data for this research was collected by semi-structured interviews. This means that the questions are formulated in advance, but there is room for flexibility (Brennen, 2013). This research is concerned with perceptions, beliefs and opinions about a phenomenon which also can be considered a sensitive topic, therefore interviews are an appropriate way to collect data (Boeije, 2010). An interview guide was created based upon the theoretical framework, to make sure all the relevant topics are discussed. Since this research aims to explore the foundations of resistance towards a gender quota in the Netherlands, the interviews were held with people working in different companies. Both men and women were interviewed, to fully explore the

discursive construction of resistance towards a quota as an equality strategy and to compare differences between the cases and sexes.

Before the interviews were conducted, the gender inequality and resistance were operationalized, providing relevant indicators which could be used in the coding process and as a basis for the interview questions. The operationalization based on literature is provided in Appendix 1.

Gender inequality. Gender inequality is operationalized as it forms the basis of this research, to dive deeper in the underlying beliefs about gender inequality. While resistance might be the main concept, the resistance is based on a tool to overcome gender inequality and it is rooted at the values and beliefs that resistance is built upon. Gender equality in this research refers to the systematic disparities between participants (Acker, 2006) and gender equality strategies aim to achieve this equality, therefore gender equality is divided into gender disparities and equality strategies. Gender disparities in turn is divided into nature and nurture, as there are different ways to look upon gender and the differences between men and women. Equality strategies is divided into equal opportunities and equal outcomes, as there are different ways to achieve equality. By examining the this concept in depth, the beliefs and values that lead to the discursive construction of resistance become clear.

Resistance. The key concept of this research is resistance. As discussed in the theoretical framework, there are several ways to conceptualize resistance. Because this research aims to discover the discursive nature of resistance and the underlying values and beliefs, resistance in terms of this research is defined as: the discursive construction of the complexities and challenges that arise from a gender quota. In the operationalization, resistance is divided into three dimensions; the three foundations by Krook (2015, 2016). Moreover, these three foundations each are divided into several indicators. For false universalisms and political principles, there are two indicators: equality and inequality. Because when there is a belief that there is equality, inequality is hard to recognize. Since equality is also operationalized separately, as an indicator it is only interpreted as a false universalism. Male power and political survival is divided into two indicators: man-woman ratio and decrease of men. These categories are based on the idea that the increase in the number of women means a decrease in the number of men and how the division between men and women might change. Gender and leadership norms is divided into stereotypes and qualification candidates. Because there are certain qualities ascribed to men or women, which also has consequences when these qualities are present and because of the idea that based on gender and leadership norms, to hire women would mean to hire the less qualified candidate.

3.4 Data analysis

The data collection was followed by a data analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and they were coded, by making use of the indicators (Appendix 1). First, the transcripts were analyzed through a process of closed coding, coding fragments using the indicators derived from the operationalization. Second, a process of open coding was used to find additional codes. A lot of the codes found in the process of open coding corresponded with the codes that were found using the indicators, however, some additional codes were discovered as well. For example, some respondents felt resistance towards the quota as it is obligated to implement, therefore one of the first-order codes that came up is 'obligation'. As a third step, in a process of axial coding, the codes were clustered into several second-order themes. In total five second-order themes were discovered and 17 first-order codes. An example of how the quotes are organized is as follows: when a respondent said that the quota would lead to discrimination, this was coded as the first-order theme 'unfair' and the second-order theme 'unsuitable measure'. Which is why the quote can be found in the data matrix 'unsuitable measure' under the sub code 'unfair'.

In further analyzing the interviews, critical discourse analysis was applied. Discourses are described by Oswick (2012) as the use of talk and text to create meaning, they are implemented in subtle every-day practices and therefore contribute to social constructions (Zanoni et al., 2010). Discourse analysis is concerned with how meaning is constructed through these linguistic sources, therefore it is also used by constructivist to understand how the sources are used to create reality (Bleijenbergh, 2015; Lee, 2012; Oswick, 2012). More specifically, critical discourse analysis examines how individuals use constructions in order to gain an understanding. The use of language can be examined in wider social and political context (Lee, 2012), and how context influences the power relationships. Moreover, this type of analysis is often used to study inequalities and how they are produced or resisted, which is the main topic of this research (Van Dijk, 2004). Critical discourse analysis therefore involves three aspects that need examination: the language, the processes of text production and the context in which the discourse is located (Oswick, 2012). As there are men and women being interviewed from both listed and non-listed company, this was taken into account as context. This type of analysis was used to examine what the respondent said, how they said it and what this exactly implies, as the discursive constructions of resistance were examined. To discover the discursive constructions of resistance, as one of the first questions the respondents were asked how they felt about the quota, and why they felt this way. When a respondent laughed, or seemed uncomfortable in sharing an opinion, this is described as well. For example, a discourse that

was found was the discourse of false universalisms and political principles. One of the interview questions where this discourse revealed itself was to what degree the respondents believed equality to exist nowadays. The foundations of resistance are examined as socially constructed through beliefs about e.g. stereotypes and equality. The foundations of resistance as social constructions were explored which led to finding the discourses of resistance.

3.5 Research quality and ethics

There are assessment criteria that need to be taken into account when conducting qualitative research (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Since this research is conducted from a constructivist epistemology, the assessment criteria are: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. This is taken into account in the analysis of the data. The research is credible, by using a semi-structured interview, the questions were mostly similar for all respondents, but there was flexibility to address new relevant topics as well. Dependability is focused on the stability of data over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To ensure the dependability, the interviews were recorded for later evaluation. Moreover, by documenting certain choices, the thinking process can be made understandable. The confirmability is present due to documentation of the data, that is based on literature and the aim to stay objective to a certain degree. However, when applying a constructivist view, the possibility to be fully objective is rejected, as the results are a subjective interpretation, requiring to take my position as the researcher into account. As for the transferability, by aiming to provide enough information about this specific research, rather than generalizing the outcome, readers can interpret the research in the specific context and apply it to their own case.

Regarding the research ethics; to assure the respondents would feel free in answering the questions, their anonymity was guaranteed. The respondents' names, specific functions and companies were left out. The discussed information was treated carefully and confidential and the respondents were told about the possibility to withdraw from the research at any given time. Prior to the interview, the respondents were asked for permission to record the interview and for the interview to be transcribed, as the records would be deleted afterwards. For questions they were assured to make contact. Moreover, the purpose and the expected duration of the research was made clear and the respondents were informed about the results.

4. Results

In analyzing the interview transcripts, a few results became clear. This research is concerned with how respondents discursively construct resistance. Therefore, the respondents were asked how they felt about the quota and why. Meanwhile, their beliefs about equality and stereotypes e.g. were examined, in order to link these beliefs to their discursive construction of resistance towards the quota. In this result section, resistance towards the quota is examined in depth. First, the general perceptions of gender quotas are described, followed by the discourses that were discovered, including: a discourse of ineffectiveness, a discourse of false universalisms and political principles, a discourse of male power and political survival and a discourse of gender and leadership norms.

By interviewing respondents working in listed companies and respondents working in non-listed companies and both men and women, differences between the respondents can be examined in the resistance towards the quota. Therefore in the quotes has been made clear whether the respondent works in a listed or a non-listed company and whether the respondent is a man or a woman.

4.1 General perceptions of gender quotas

Before the discursive constructions of resistance are analyzed, first some of the general reactions to the quota are enlightened. One of the first questions in the interview study, was how the respondents felt about the quota as a tool to increase to number of women in top positions. Some of the respondents believed the quota to be a good step towards equality and felt that it is a shame that a measure like this has to be taken at all. Other respondents were in favor of taking equality measures, but felt as if the quota is not the right measure to take. However, for those arguing that a quota can be considered a good step, there was often a ‘but’ that followed, resulting in the several found discourses. All the respondents showed – to varying degrees – signs of resistance towards the quota. The arguments for resisting the quota differ between several reasons. Some of respondents believe that the quota will negatively influence the opportunity to pick to most qualified candidate for the job, others believe the quota contributes to an unequal treatment e.g. These constructions of resistance will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

4.2 A discourse of ineffectiveness

One of the discourses that became clear is the discourse of ineffectiveness. Some respondents felt resistance towards to quota as it is ineffective. The arguments named by these respondents are not necessarily against the quota regulating equality, as most respondents agree that measures have to be taken to achieve equality. However, as the quota is a tool to regulate equality on a structural level, without really taking into account cultural change, these respondents are not in favor of this particular equality strategy. The quota is a tool enforcing change in numbers, and not through mutual agreement. A few examples of this can be found in the next statements:

R1 (listed company - man): This measure sounds to me like you are trying to set the record straight at the end. But the more you can influence this in an earlier stage, the better, it would seem to me. So if this can be handled in earlier stages, on the work floor, that would be better I think.

R2 (listed company - man): Ehm yes, but it has to come from an actual belief from our fellow human beings and ehm, to come back on an earlier question, do people get rewarded equally, no that is not the case. Because a lot of people do not think the same. So that is not the solution, but it is a better solution to raise them then to implement some rule, because then the only thing people do is check the box, to see if they have 30% and then they are done, while they do not even believe that it is healthy to have a composition of men and women.

R3 (limited company - man): I think this is not the right way, I think the quota... it is sort of a tool of power, and I wonder if that actually enforces a change in behavior or that it is just an administrative rule.

The first respondent is concerned that the quota is just a tool to equal the numbers in the end, but does not really achieve a change in people's minds. So the respondent – referring to 'you' in general – suggests to take measures at earlier stages, in terms of management. Because in the company where the respondent works, he sees that diversity is already being stimulated and celebrated. Thus, implementing the quota would be ineffective, as its goal is already accomplished at earlier stages. The respondent feels like this particular measure does not overcome the cause of inequality and therefore does not believe in the quota resulting in an actual change, as this measure is focused on the outcome. Respondent 2 also believes that the quota as a tool is not the right equality strategy, as people will just fulfill their obligation to hire women, while they do not actually see the value in it. The respondent believes that the quota will only make a change if people believe it to be important. This strategy evokes resistance, as

it is mandatory, which the respondent considers as something negative. The third respondent also is afraid that when people are forced to do something, this form of power – force – will not effectuate change, as people do not believe in it.

These quotes show a few similarities. All three the respondents see the quota as a way to fight symptoms, and not the cause. The respondents construct resistance towards the quota as the quota does not effectuate change. They feel that when something is obligated, this will negatively influence the outcome of the intended change. However, resistance can be seen as a negative force, or as a productive tool. Through this radical strategy, resistance is inherent. To see resistance as a productive tool means that resistance does not have to be avoided. Resistance can be used to discover current beliefs and values and the complexities that are felt when these are being challenged. In this process, these values and beliefs can be brought to light and changed in a process of continuous adaption. By uncovering inequalities and stereotypes, resistance creates change through a social process of learning. As one of the respondents also stated:

R5 (listed company - woman): I think it [implementing a quota] can help to legitimize it [women in top positions]. Eventually, you won't need it anymore, but for now, it is important to draw attention and maybe a quota is helpful to normalize the image of women in top positions so that people can get used to it. Sometimes it is necessary for people to first be forced to do something, before it is eventually seen as something normal. Then it will come naturally. It turns out this is the way it works, because there is a reason that this is not normal yet. What that reason is, I do not know, but this way people are forced to look at things differently.

The respondent acknowledges that resistance can be productive, by stating that sometimes people have to be forced to do something, to draw attention to the inequalities and to effectuate change as a process. Resistance is a helpful tool in exposing inequalities and stereotyped beliefs. Through these beliefs, the low number of women in top positions is legitimized, as can also be seen in the quote. By stating that the implementation of the quota can help to create a world where women in top positions are considered the standard and not the exception. A noteworthy aspect is that the respondent feels as if women in top positions is not considered normal just yet. When asked about why this might be not normal yet, the respondent felt this may be the result of a long history of women being considered stay-at-home-moms and that this might be no longer the case, but many people might unconsciously associate women with staying home.

The discourse of ineffectiveness shows a very subtle form of resistance. The respondents do not seem openly against equality strategies, as they argue to be not in favor for this particular equality strategy, as it is an ineffective way to create change. By regulating equality in numbers as a way to fight of symptoms, the cause remains unchanged.

4.3 A discourse of false universalisms and political principles

Another discourse that was found is the discourse of false universalisms and political principles. False universalisms and political principles are about a belief of equality, and whether equality strategies are necessary or not, as some people might question if inequality still exists in 2020. To examine equality as a false universalism, respondents were asked about gender inequalities. Among other things, how they would describe equality, if they were asked if they believed there are inequalities in their company if the company adopts equality strategies and how they felt about equal opportunities and equal outcomes. When asked if they believed there was equality, a few things became clear, leading to different categories of this discourse: invisibility of inequality and legitimization of inequality. Before discussing these two categories, how the respondents see equality will be elaborated.

4.3.1 Describing equality

When asked how the respondents would describe equality, a lot of the answers involved statements about opportunities and treatment.

R1 (listed company – man): Ehm equality, well at least equal opportunities, ehm, yes equal possibilities, equal treatments.

R2 (listed company – man): Without external help equal opportunities.

R3 (listed company – man): Just respect, in everything. See when you have equality, it means that you do not have to look top-down, but also that my boss does not bark at me like I am a dog, or a manager I mean. That should be the starting point of everything. Everyone is equal and only when... of course there is hierarchy in a company, but next to that, everyone is equal. And of course my manager can say that I have to do something... But it should not depend on my sex. And if you have that, equal opportunities follow, then you get respect.

R5 (listed company – woman): How would I describe equality, I think that equality does not mean being treated equally, but receiving equal opportunities. So receiving opportunities in what is fitting for you. However that does not mean all being treated the same, have to do something the same way, because people are too different to be treated equally

R6 (listed company – man): Ehm, well that everyone is being treated the same way. That someone with the same competencies, both men and women, have the same opportunity to get hired for a job.

These respondents have in common that they all associate equality with equal opportunities. While some of these respondents see equality as merely as the same opportunities, others see equal opportunities as the minimum standard, and sometimes measures need to go further than just receiving the same opportunities. These respondents add equal treatment as a part of equality. Being treated equally seems to go one step further than equal opportunities, as the opportunity structure in organizations might be unequal. Respondent 5 states you should receive equal opportunities in a way that is fitting for you. The respondent believes that to receive equal opportunities, sometimes people need to be treated differently. Therefore a quota is a way to guarantee these equal opportunities.

4.3.2 Invisibility of inequality

Now that the way the respondents feel about equality has been made clear, their discursive construction of resistance based on false universalisms and political principles can be analyzed. One of the ways that this discourse is expressed is through the invisibility of inequality. As a result, a quota is not necessary or can even be seen as contributing to inequality. The invisibility of inequality is divided into two categories: ‘not in my company’ and ‘discrimination’.

The first category was brought to light when the respondents were asked if they believed that these forms of equality are currently present, an aspect that stood out was that nearly all respondents acknowledged the existence of gender inequality. At the same time, these respondents believe these inequalities do not occur in their own company, but that it is a problem in other companies, as can be seen in the following statements:

R1 (listed company – man): What I can see in my company, absolutely [equality]. However, I do not believe that this is the case for every company in the Netherlands, let alone the whole world.

R9 (non-listed company – woman): Within our company, there absolutely is [equality]. I am very positive about the company for that matter, otherwise I would not be working here. But I think in general, that there is still a lot that can be improved.

In these statements, the existence of inequality is acknowledged, by stating that equality in general needs improvement. However, the respondents believe this is not the case for their own company, where there is equality. This way of thinking fits the micro foundation by Krook (2015, 2016), false universalisms and political principles. Both respondents discursively construct resistance towards the quota. Respondent 1 for example is resistant towards the quota because measures should be taken in earlier stages and the company where the respondent works sets an example of this, as diversity is already being stimulated and celebrated. Since equality is already present, the quota does not need to be implemented. As for respondent 9, as a firm believer of hiring the right person for the right job, the resistance towards the quota stems from the possibility of hiring the wrong person for the wrong job. According to the respondent, there is equality at the company where she works, there is no need for a quota. Another respondent does not see inequality in the company where he works, but neither in the companies around him.

R3 (listed company – man): Well I say this from my own experience, from the company where I work, if ehm I see the companies around me ehm, and there I do not think it is necessary to implement a quota, because you already see diversity, and the majority of those people who.. if there is a woman that applies for a job, she already has the advantage because we already want a balance in our teams, so a quota is a bit outdated

The respondent sees in the company where he works, and the companies around him, that there is a lot of gender diversity. And that women actually have the advantage when applying for a job, to increase the diversity even more. Therefore the respondent believes the quota to be outdated already, as he believes that equality is already present, which is in line with Krook's (2015, 2016) description of false universalisms and political principles. Moreover, when asked about the quota as a tool to regulate equality, the respondent felt as if the quota contributes to inequality:

R3 (listed company – man): Well, if you look at equal opportunities and a quota, you can never combine these two, because it goes beyond equal opportunities. And therefore you do not even have equal outcomes, because the moment you implement a quota, equality ceases to exist.

The respondent believes equality means to receive the same opportunities, and therefore feels resistant towards the quota as it goes beyond equal opportunities, since the goal is to create

equal outcomes. The quote illustrates that the respondent feels that when implementing a quota, there can be no equality. The respondent sees these two as opposites.

The second category is reveals the invisibility of inequalities through a believe that a quota is discriminative. To see the quota as discriminative tool is to not see the existing inequality.

R1 (listed company – man): Yes, I think that when you implement a quota, and it is about equality, why would you... It is something binary, either you are a man or a woman, why would you ehm, implement it for women and not for men, but I assume that this is the case due to the low percentage of women.

R2 (listed company – man): Yes, or actually it [the quota] is negative discrimination, depends on which side you see from.

R8 (non-listed company – woman): Yes, actually it sort of is discrimination [the quota]. I think that when you apply something to a certain sex, it easily turns into discrimination. So yes, I feel like the opportunities have to be at least equal to everybody.

R10 (non-listed company – woman): Yes I think that there will be positive discrimination [when implementing the quota], so a bit of an unequal treatment because companies have to comply to the quota and I don't know whether there is a penalty or a fine or how they are going to look at that.

The quotes show that the respondents see the quota resulting in discrimination. Although the first respondents does not use the exact words, he feels as if the quota as a tool for equality should apply to men as well when the goal is to achieve equality. Because as it only applies to women, the quota is unequal towards men. When asked why, the first respondent refers to industries that are often dominated by women. The resistance is constructed as the quota being a tool to increase solely the number of women in top positions. When asking respondent 2 to elaborate, he expresses his concerns about women receiving advantages while men are left behind. The respondent sees equality as equal opportunities and sees equal outcomes as discrimination. According to respondent 8 the quota results in discrimination, since the quota distinguishes between men and women, therefore automatically generating inequality. The respondents believes that whether something is applied to someone, whether it is to men or women or people with a disability, you think inside boxes. The respondent says to never consciously have witnessed inequality, and that it is a matter of interpretation, by thinking in a negative way. Therefore it seems as if the respondent denies its existence, but rather sees experiencing inequality as a way of looking at something. Respondent 10 phrases the

discrimination as positive, favoring women, resulting in unequal treatment. These respondents construct resistance based on the quota being discriminative.

In conclusion, as these respondents believe equality exists, as they do not see its presence, they discursively construct resistance towards the quota based on this false universalism of equality.

4.3.3 Legitimization of inequality

The discourse of false universalisms and political principles is also expressed through the legitimization of inequality. Most respondents do believe that there is inequality, but ascribe this to three factors: ‘difference in interests’, ‘biological differences’ and ‘time’. As the respondents name causes for inequality, they legitimize its existence. A few examples of respondents seeing inequality as a result of difference in interests:

R3 (listed company – man): I think from a traditional point of view, there are a lot of women that cannot stand the idea to not see their kids grow up, to be gone all the time.

R8 (non-listed company – woman): I cannot speak for the entire group, but women have a slightly different state of mind when it comes to this area (work-life balance). Traditionally, men have always been the breadwinners and nowadays we see both men and women taking on this role. However, for a woman this is something that stops at a certain point, because they like to work but to a limited amount.

R12 (non-listed company – man): Yes I think so, but I am an old-fashioned thinker in that matter haha [that women feel the need to stay home more than men].

The quotes illustrate how many people still think in a traditional way. Associating women with staying home, instead of making career. According to the respondent 3, the society still tends to look at things from a traditional perspective, where the man works and the woman stays home to take care of the children. And while this traditional pattern might have changed, many women still feel a strong need to take care of children, which does not comply to most top positions, as these positions require a lot working hours. The second quote illustrates that the respondent feels that traditional patterns might have changed, however, the respondent also constructs gender inequality as a product of different interests. By stating that women tend to care more about their private life, and as a result there are less women fulfilling top positions. This is also one of the reasons mentioned by Krook (2015, 2016) for people to resist the quota. Respondent 12 believes the inequality to exist due to the need that women have to stay home.

The respondent describes himself as an old-fashioned thinker, followed by a laugh, thus acknowledging that this point of view does not mean that this is actually still the case. By laughing it seemed as if the respondent was a bit uncomfortable to admit to this way of thinking, as he acknowledges that it is old-fashioned. Because women have other interests, the respondents see it as a logical consequence that there are less women in top positions, a myth that is also described by Van den Brink (2011), as the author describes how having children is often ascribed to the lack of women in top positions. The respondents legitimize the inequality as it can be ascribed to different interests.

The other factor that plays part in the legitimization of inequality is biological differences, as can be seen in the following statements:

R2 (listed company – man): No I do not think so [if there is full equality], because women get pregnant and men don't.

R4 (listed company – man): Ehm because it [working in construction as an example of working in 'male branches'], is physical work. I think that is determined genetically.

The difference in equality is explained by these respondents as something almost impossible, because of biological differences. According to respondent 2, full inequality cannot be achieved, because women are the ones who get pregnant, instead of men, thus forcing them to leave the company at least for a short amount of time. This respondent sees equality as receiving the same opportunities and because women get pregnant, these opportunities cannot be equal. When asked to elaborate, the respondent refers to the time that women are absent, due to pregnancy, therefore possibly missing opportunities. The respondent feels that equality for that matter is a choice between children or carrier. Respondent 4 believes certain branches to be more male-dominated and therefore less attractive to women. Because it involves genetic differences, such as psychical aspects and that is – according to the respondent – something that is difficult to change. These respondents see inequality as a result of biological differences, thus legitimizing the inequality as it is hard to overcome such biological differences.

Another way of resisting the quota by legitimizing inequality stems from the element of time. One of reasons ascribed to this because it is just a matter of time before there are more women in top positions, as women are relatively newer to the field than men, as was also found to be a myth according to Van den Brink (2011). These respondents see the lack of necessity from an evolutionary point of view.

R4 (limited company – man): Ehm yes, I think so. Because what I said about building resumes, the number of women is already increasing, of women who do that. Maybe in about 10 years, it is even more and it goes from 8% to 16% and then to 50%. I think it needs time to just. I look at it as a ladder. I think that you start at the bottom of the ladder and that you have to create a pool so to say. That pool has to enlarge.

R6 (limited company – man): And besides, I wonder if... if you look at history, women did not work or not much at least, and that has changed over the past few years. I wonder if the problem does not just fix itself if we are a few years further. That is develops on its own and that within a few years this kind of problems are gone.

These respondents believe that equality is only a matter of time. It might not be there today, because women are relatively new to the market, but following this line, it will be there in a matter of years. Therefore, according to the respondents, the implementation of a quota is not necessary, thus they legitimize the inequality that is present today.

In conclusion, the respondents discursively construct resistance based on false universalisms and political principles, because there is belief that this type of equality is legitimate.

4.4 A discourse of male power and political survival

The discourse of male power and political survival entails the decrease in the number of men in top positions that is a consequence of the quota and the resistance that comes with this decrease, as the achievements of the men in top positions are being undermined. This discourse was found when discussing the consequences of the quota, which resulted into two categories: meritocracy and fear of disempowering women.

4.4.1 Meritocracy

The first category is based on the respondents who found the quota to be disadvantageous to men, as it only applies to women.

R2 (listed company – man): I was raised in an environment where you have to go get what you want, and then everything is possible if you work hard enough. Than you would see it as discrimination because now people are excluded because of the quota rules, while they [women] maybe did not even work that hard for it, it is just handed to them.

R10 (non-listed company – woman): Yes I find that strange [women being hired through quotas], I at least want to be judged by my qualities and how I work, and not coincidentally that I am a woman.

As there is a belief of meritocracy, the first quote shows an subtle attempt to conserve male privilege. Because from this point of view, the men who achieved success earned this by themselves and are now being discriminated for working hard. Respondent 10 reflects the situation on herself, as a quota would mean to go beyond meritocracy, while the respondent want to be judged by her qualities. Thus assuming that meritocracy now exist, and would be influenced by a quota. This way of thinking can also be found in the description of male power and political survival, as mentioned by Krook (2015, 2016) because there is a decrease in the number of men, who experience their achievements being undermined.

The respondents construct resistance towards the quota as it questions the existence of meritocracy.

4.4.2 Fear of disempowering women

The discourse of male power and political survival can also be found in arguments about the hired women being disempowered. Some respondents speculate about the consequences of the quota, as they believe that women might be simply hired to fulfill the quota, which may cause reactions.

R3 (listed company – man): If they are going to say: you are hired because we needed to hire a woman, because it will be said in such a black and white way, then someone's qualifications will be second-guessed.

R6 (listed company – man): But if I were a woman, I would feel as if it [the top position] is just handed to me instead of looking at my qualities. I feel like people would look very differently towards those women and I cannot imagine that this is the intention of the quota.

These quotes show a few similarities. The respondents are worried about the qualities of the hired women not being taken seriously, as they are hired based on one job requirement: being a woman. According to respondent 3, some companies will simply aim to fulfill the quota, thus violating the spirit and letter of the quota rules. A goal that stems from male power and political survival (Krook, 2016). By only taking the minimal steps in this process, women are disempowered, as their qualities are second-guessed. Respondent 6 aims to empathize with the

women that are hired due to the quota, as he imagines he would feel disempowered. While these respondents state to not feel this way themselves, they are worried that others might disempower women due to the quota.

The respondents discursively construct resistance towards the quota based on male power and political survival, as they fear that the hired women will be disempowered.

4.5 A discourse of gender and leadership norms

A fourth discourse that was found, is the discourse of gender and leadership norms. Gender and leadership norms are about beliefs about gender and stereotypes that are rooted at resistance towards the quota. To examine gender and leadership norms, respondents were asked about leadership qualities and characteristics of men and women. In discussing these qualities, the resistance towards the quota based on gender and leadership norms became clear. The discourse can be divided into two categories: selecting the most qualified candidate and achievability. Before discussing these categories, first how the respondent see gender will be described.

4.5.1 Describing gender and gender differences

To gain a clear view of the gender and leadership norms, respondents were asked to describe gender. There are different ways to describe gender. For the majority of the respondents, the answer was based on sex; being a man or a woman. An example of this description can be found in the following statement:

R4 (limited company – man): Well, someone is born and that can be either a boy or a girl, that person has certain genes, when looking at x and y chromosomes, there is a difference in genetic material. If you are a boy you have different qualities then when you are a girl, so I see it in a biological way.

In this example, gender is described as something you are born with, where it is determined that you are either a men or women. In this description, it becomes clear that the respondent sees gender very black and white and corresponding to your sex. The respondent supports his point of view by using biological facts, to show this is the logical way to think, as it is based on facts. This response is in line with how most respondents feel, as they describe gender as sex, or from a black and white point of view, as a man or woman, this view is opposed to a social constructionist point of view. Something noticeable about the answers to the this question is a certain discomfort that some respondents seem to feel when gender is the subject. When asked

this question, a lot of the respondents seemed a bit confused, or got a bit giggly. Some associate gender with the controversy of gender neutrality, as this has been a broadly discussed in the media over the last view years.

Other respondents, recognized gender in a more fluid way. By not labelling gender as being either men or women, but to describe gender as an individual process, how someone feels and something that develops. Which is explained in the following statement:

R5 (listed company – woman): Nowadays we live in a world were not everybody per definition feels as they either are a man or woman. So I do not think you can label certain characteristics to men or women, this differs for each person. I think this is hard topic because there are all kinds of things that we use to link to gender, like pink for women and blue for men, which I think is a bit rubbish. [...]. I think it [gender] is mostly about how someone feels, aside from the sex that you are born with. I think gender is more a label of how you feel and the characteristics that come along with that.

In this statement, the respondent describes gender on a personal level, as to how one feels. And how this process is influenced by the characteristics and things like colors that are used by society.

Gender was discussed to make clear how the respondents see men and women and how they differ from one another, to eventually make clear how potential differences play part in their resistance towards the quota. Therefore, when discussing gender, respondents were also asked if they felt as if men and women have different qualities. A lot of the respondents felt like that is true, as can be seen in the following statements:

R1 (listed company – man): I think that men and women in their nature have different kinds of characteristics.

R4 (listed company – man): Of course there are women who, how do I say this, pretty much possess the same qualities as men, and men who pretty much possess the same qualities as women. Ehm however if you look the nature of the animal, you are better in things in general, let me think, how do I say this in the right way. Ehm, for example women can do multiple things at the same time, generally speaking.

R9 (non-listed company – woman): But I can imagine that men have certain characteristics and women have certain characteristics and that you develop these during your life and that what crosses your path, your education and your friends and how your social life has been.

R11 (non-listed company – man): There are certain characteristics in men and women that you can't change.

The quotes show how a lot of respondents believe that men and women in general differ from each other. A difference can be seen in the respondents who believe men and women are essentially different, they are born with different characteristics, and the respondents who believe that nurture plays a part in these characteristics as well. For example respondent 4 believes, when looking at the bigger picture, there are some things that women or men in general are better at, but he also acknowledges that this does not always have to be the case. Also this respondent tries to choose his words very carefully, by reflecting two times on how exactly he should phrase this statement, meaning that he wants to make sure he does not generalize or uses stereotypes too much. Respondent 9 shows an example of nature and nurture, acknowledging women and men to have different characteristics, but that these can change and develop, therefore the respondent sees nurture is a major influence on what characteristics someone has.

The description of gender and gender differences illustrate that a lot of respondents see gender as something you are born with, as are certain characteristics that men and women have based on their gender, which can be used to interpret how the respondents look at selecting the most qualified candidate and the achievability of the quota.

4.5.2 Selecting the most qualified candidate

Almost all of the respondents agreed – to varying degrees – that the qualities of the hired candidates might be an issue, or that this might at least be considered an issue by others. This is expressed through three different factors: 'less qualified women', 'limited choice' and 'construction of leadership'. The first factor plays part in arguments by respondents who are afraid that the hired women may in fact be less qualified for the job:

R3 (listed company – man): By the way I know an example of unequal suitability. A while ago, my sister applied for a job, but did not have the right papers. There was also a male candidate with the right papers, he had performed the same position in another company. Eventually, my sister got the job because she, and this sounds a bit harsh, is a woman and immigrant. Within a year she had a burn-out because the job was way too tough for her.

R7 (non-listed company – man): No I believe they can both be suitable, and you will see in the long term. In our company they are here for about 5 years and some who are really

struggling for 1 or 2 years, then you can see the suitability. You don't know beforehand who is more fit for something. But with the quota, you should not just appoint a woman who is not fit, when you know she is going to walk away crying within six months. No that should not be good for the company, because the ones who decide about that is the supervisory board.

These respondents associate these positions as being tough for women – as is described by respondent 3 – since they have seen examples of women struggling and caving. Therefore, a quota would entail a decrease in quality. The respondents are afraid that selecting a woman may result in selecting the less qualified candidate, as a result of how the respondents look at gender and leadership norms. This way of thinking aligns with Krook's (2015, 2016) description of gender and leadership norms, since acts of resistance based on this micro foundations would be to question qualities of the women who are hired.

The second factor is expressed through a belief that the quality might be of issue because the choice for selecting the most qualified candidate is being limited.

R1 (listed company – man): Well I think, it can still be achieved [selecting the most qualified candidates], but I think that the group to choose from becomes smaller. Maybe you would rather have another candidate if the quota was not implemented, but this person cannot be hired. You have a smaller group to choose from.

R2 (listed company – man): Ehm, the teamwork between men and women is good, but I think this does not mean that you should implement a quota, because a few candidates will be excluded by definition, who might have been better for the job.

Both respondents are afraid that narrowing the group may result in selecting the less qualified candidate. Because sometimes a man could be the better choice for a job, but this person cannot be hired due to the quota. A question here is how to define the most qualified candidate for the job. Since men are more often associated with top positions, they would be considered the better candidate, based on a traditional thinking pattern. This thinking pattern is challenged by Van den Brink & Benschop (2012), as the authors argue that the qualities of the best candidate is a gendered social construction. As a consequence, men are often considered the better candidate.

The third factor explicitly shows this thinking pattern, because men are more often considered as leaders by some respondents:

R3 (listed company – man): I think that a lot of the fuss that men have makes them a good leader at first sight, their bravado. But I think, and we have also seen that in past years, in bankruptcies, it comes with a lot of risk.

R11 (non-listed company – man): I think leadership comes more naturally to men, there are of course exceptions [...] Because, in my point of view, most men are in their nature more fit to be a leader, and women often have other qualities. For example in the vice president kind of positions, you sometimes see more women. Because this is a position that allows you to survey and that is something that from my point of view, women can do better. Also for example thinking rationally, e.g. what is going on? And men are often more to the point when it comes to making decisions, but there are always exceptions.

Both respondents associate leadership with men and the qualities that men possess. Respondent 3 acknowledges an image of leaders by society that is about their chatter, as an example he names Donald Trump. However, the respondent does question whether this form of leadership is what we [society] should want, as it mostly includes a lot of ‘blah blah’, as later stated by the respondent. Respondent 11 constructs resistance from a nature-perspective. The respondent sees men and women as essentially different, and leadership is something that men are born with, therefore it makes sense to the respondents that there are less women in top positions, as a result of leadership norms.

Despite these three factors showing concerns about selecting the most qualified candidate, there are also respondents who acknowledge the social construction of good leadership.

R1 (listed company – man): I think that it can change [our image of leadership]. Because you have a perception from society about leaders. If all of the sudden the next day those leaders are female, then that would change the perception of good leadership. Then everybody sees that she is a good leader and she is also caring for example. I believe that we can associate those things with each other and that the perception can change.

R5 (listed company – woman): I feel like maybe we don’t know many examples of women in top positions, of whom you really hear something. If I think now from the top of my head I can name Angela Merkel, or Aletta Jacobs but that is pretty much it. While we have numerous men who we could name.

The quotes show a nurture perspective of gender norms and view leadership norms as a social construct, something that is also acknowledged by Van den Brink & Benschop (2012). By stating that because we see so many male leaders, our image of good leadership is associated

with their qualities. When a lot of women would be associated with such positions, their qualities would also be the norm for good leadership. The respondent does see the qualities between men and women as different, as he believes women to be more caring and that these qualities might be seen a leadership qualities in the end. Respondent 5 indirectly agrees to this point of view. The respondent acknowledges there are many examples of male leadership, while female leaders either are not much in the spotlight, or do not exist to the same level. A point that was also brought up with respondent 6, the respondent was asked why he knew only the names of the male board members and not of the female board members, to which he did not really know the answer to. Moreover, since leadership qualities are often associated with men, another respondent noticed certain qualities of the women in top positions:

R10 (non-listed company – woman): I often find women in higher positions having more male qualities. So that you get... hard to describe, but a bit more assertive and less, if you look at stereotypes, women are often sensitive and more emotional. And men are more tough and more business focused. And if see women in higher positions that are often women who also are more focused on business.

The respondent sees the leadership qualities as male qualities and that the women who perform such positions are often less stereotypical women, as was also found by Krook (2015, 2016).

In conclusion, the respondents construct resistance towards the quota based on gender and leadership norms, because based on these norms, they worry about whether the most qualified candidate for the job can be hired when the quota is implemented.

4.5.3 Achievability

The discourse of gender and leadership norms is also expressed through the achievability of the quota. The differences between men and women were often used to construct resistance towards the quota, as the 30% is difficult to achieve. The respondents blame this on several factors: 'lack of ambition', 'different characteristics' and 'branches'. Each factor will be elaborated.

The first factor was brought to light by the respondents who felt as if the differences between men and women contribute to low number of women in top positions, because there are not enough women who are ambitious.

R4 (listed company – man): And if I look at my own company, ambition-wise, what I notice is that with us, the men choose to specialize into the banker-side, we want to grow quick,

fast and we use a big mouth to get there. While, in my point of view, the women are more focused on communications, marketing etc. There is the affinity.

R10 (non-listed company – woman): Ehm, yes I wonder if those companies really do not want to have women in such positions are that there are just not that many enthusiastic women. That there are not that many women on the market who want to be in these positions. I think in the end, and that sounds lame haha, but that men have more ambitions than women eventually.

These respondents construct resistance towards the quota based on women lacking ambition. The respondents believe men are the ones who aim to get to such positions, while women consciously choose not to. A myth that is also discussed by Van den Brink (2011), as the author argues that a woman's ambition is often underestimated. Respondent 4 states to see the lack of ambition in the company where he works, as there are less women interested to specialize and more interested in other areas. Respondent 10 seems a bit ashamed to share her point of view of this matter, as she laughs and says that this opinion sounds 'lame', as she believes men to have more ambition, and the quota cannot be achieved due to lack of willing women.

The second factor stems from men and women having different characteristics. When elaborating how men and women differ in their qualities, as a reason for the quota to be hard to achieve, a lot of the respondents perceive women to be more caring and believe women tend to value the private life more. A few examples can be found in the following statements:

R1 (listed company): I think women in general are more caring, I think this is not necessarily something that is ascribed to them but that it is something they are born with.

R3 (listed company): I think men can be more opportunistic in negotiations, it has to do with what you care about. I see this with my girlfriend as well, she tends to care for the harmony and the overall picture. While for me, that is less the case, I care more about my paycheck and negotiate to see what is possible, she does not think like that.

R4 (listed company): I think you need to have a certain bluff to get places and to break through ceilings. You have to have 'balls' so to speak. If you look at millionaires, you do not just become so rich, you need to take risks and show your guts. Not that women cannot be like that, but maybe more in general they have a more caring nature, where a men is more selfish and in general thinks more about himself.

In these examples, the respondents construct qualities as different, as a result of someone's gender. Women are described as more caring, and men as more selfish. These examples show

how differences between men and women are socially constructed. Based on gender norms, women are seen as less interested in performing top positions, making the quota a strategy that cannot be completed.

Not only is the quota seen by the respondents as unachievable due to women's caring nature or lack of ambition, but also because of the branch. Some respondent argue that the quota cannot be achieved in all of the branches, as these branches are dominated by men:

R3 (listed company): Well if we take a look at the statistics I think it is not even possible to take 30% of the labor force. Not in some branches, in some branches you laugh out loud because there it is impossible to implement 30% men.

R4 (listed company): But I think that it is very difficult to say for each company that 30% has to be implemented [...] Because you look at certain requirements that someone has to meet. And the same goes if you say 30% has to be male, that should not have to work either.

R7 (non-listed company): Yes for some positions [the 30% can be achieved], but not for all. Because with some positions they [women] know too little about it, but for the majority it should be achievable I think.

These respondent have in common that they feel resistant towards the quota, because some branches are dominated by either men or women, making it – as perceived by the respondents – impossible to implement a quota. Either because women are not interested in these branches or because women lack the required knowledge in these areas. Respondent 7 thinks the quota is a good strategy, but that it should not apply to all branches, because they – women – know too little about it. The respondent feels like there are some branches where there are just more men than women, because for example it concerns technology and machinery, and that women seem to know less about these branches.

The respondents believing the quota is an unachievable tool, discursively construct resistance based on gender and leadership norms. Because due to these norms, women are seen as less ambitious, less interested due to different characteristics or because of the branch. In essence, the respondents believe women and men to be different.

4.6 A comparison between respondents

Now that the discourses of resistance have been discussed, the respondents will be compared. The interviews were conducted with employees working in listed companies and non-listed companies, with both male and female employees. Each will be discussed.

One female respondent works in a listed company, the three other female respondents work in non-listed companies. A noticeable aspect is that the woman working in a listed company, is one of the respondents most in favor of implementing the quota, while the other three women are not really convinced. The three female respondents (all working in different branches), share the opinion that the quota prevents the best qualified candidate to be selected. One of these three respondents specifically states to find it curious that you would be hired because one of the requirements is to be a woman. The respondent working in a listed company, sees this more as a way of opening doors for these women, a difference that perhaps stems from the opportunity to get to these top positions, as the respondent said to be open to.

For the male respondents, five of them work in a listed company and the other three work in non-listed companies. A noticeable aspect is that three of the respondents working in listed companies are clearly against the quota, for several reasons. The respondents have in common that they all feel that something like this should not be enforced. The two other respondents working in listed companies work in the same company as the aforementioned female respondent. All three of these employees working in the same company, seem not necessarily against the quota, they all want more women in the top, just one difference between the men and the woman in this case is that the men both believe that we are halfway there, and that it is only a matter of time to full equality without the help of a quota. The three male respondents working in non-listed companies, have in common that they all find it insane that it has to come to a measure like this. All three respondents are not against the quota, but they have their concerns. The respondents worry about the hiring the most qualified candidate for the job, and two of these respondents specifically name to be concerned that for some jobs or branches women may not be capable.

Overall, all the employees working in non-listed companies worry about selecting the most qualified candidate, with the noteworthy aspect that the three women seem to more against the quota than the men. The employees working in listed companies are mostly against the quota, except for the one female respondent and with the side note that her colleagues are also not firmly against the quota. This difference may be caused by the quota only being implemented in listed companies, as this would have a positive effect for the woman working in the listed company, and a negative effect for the men working in these companies. Whereas the men working in non-listed companies, will not meet the consequences of the quota, therefore they may be inclined to encourage the quota. The same might go for the women in non-listed companies, as there is no effect for them, they might be inclined to discourage to quota.

5. Conclusion and discussion

In this final chapter, the results will be summarized and discussed, the main question will be answered and the limitations and implications for future research will be elaborated.

5.1 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to provide insights in the discursive constructions of the resistance towards a gender quota in the Netherlands in order to cope with the resistance, by exposing underlying values and beliefs that form its nature. In order to do that, the following research question guided this research: *How is resistance towards the quota in the Netherlands discursively constructed?* To provide an answer to this question, an interview study was conducted, leading to several results. The resistance towards the quota is constructed by the respondents in multiple ways, divided into four separate discursive constructions of resistance: a discourse of ineffectiveness, a discourse of false universalism and political principles, a discourse of male power and political survival and a discourse of gender and leadership norms.

The discourse of ineffectiveness was expressed through respondents who discursively construct resistance by arguing that the quota as an obligated tool forces people to do something, so change does not occur in a positive way. Ironically, the respondents resist the quota because it may cause resistance, since it is enforced. This subtle form of resistance is based on the quota being a tool to fight the symptoms instead of the cause.

The discourse of false universalism and political principles was discovered when discussing equality, and what the quota means in relation to equality. Since the discourse stems from a false belief of equality, inequalities are hard to recognize. This discourse manifests itself in two ways: through the invisibility of inequality and through the legitimization of inequality. The former includes the respondents believing that equality only exists in other companies or by not seeing it at all, thereby arguing that the quota is discriminative. The latter meaning that equality is acknowledged, but legitimizing it as this is due to differences in interests, biological differences or a matter of time. Respondents construct resistance towards the quota based on false universalisms and political principles as they do not see inequalities or because they find a legitimate reason for the existence of inequality.

The discourse of male power and political survival was found when discussing the consequences of the quota, as an increase in the number of women goes hand in hand with a decrease in the number of men and their achievements are being questioned, resulting in resistance. There are two categories to be distinguished in this discursive construction of

resistance: meritocracy and fear of disempowering women. The former entails the quota questioning the legitimacy of men's earned positions, while the latter stems from the worry that women are solely hired to comply with the quota rules. The resistance is discursively constructed based on male power and political survival as the quota questions the existence of meritocracy and may cause the disempowerment of women.

The discourse of gender and leadership norms is based on the beliefs about gender and stereotypes. There are two categories through which this discourse is expressed: a belief that the quota would result in hiring the less qualified candidate for the job and a belief that 30% women cannot be achieved. Hiring the less qualified candidate stems from a belief that women are not considered leaders as a result of the social construction of good leadership. The unachievability stems from beliefs about different interest, lack of ambition or due to the branch. The respondents discursively construct resistance based on gender and leadership norms as their beliefs about gender and stereotypes lead them to believe that the quota results in hiring the less qualified candidate or that it cannot be achieved.

In conclusion, resistance towards the quota in the Netherlands is discursively constructed in four ways, each discourse manifests itself in multiple categories. These results were found by examining the respondents values and beliefs about gender and gender equality. When comparing the respondents, a few differences became clear. The respondents working in listed companies seem to be mostly against the quota, except for the female respondent, while the respondents working in non-listed companies show an opposite pattern; the men seem mostly in favor of the quota while the women are more resistant. However, each respondent – to varying degrees – discursively constructs resistance towards the quota.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This research contributes to theory in three ways. First of all by recognizing Krook's (2015, 2016) micro foundations in an organizational context and extending these foundations with other discursive constructions of resistance. As Krook (2015, 2016) research on resistance towards gender quotas is focused in their implementation in politics, the foundations of resistance needed to be examined in companies, where quotas are also often implemented. By recognizing the three foundations as discursive constructions by the respondents, it shows that the resistance these respondents experience corresponds with the resistance that is experienced in politics. As equality as a false universalism is an issue of societal scale, the results regarding this foundation were as expected regarding the invisibility of inequality. However, the discourse

was not expected to include the legitimization of inequality. In analyzing gender and leadership norms, which concerns stereotyping and our social construction of leadership, the achievability as a category of gender and leadership norms was not anticipated, as this discourse was expected to focus mostly on stereotypes and the qualification of candidates. Therefore these two discourses correspond with what is known in literature so far, but they also provide new information about the nature of resistance. However, less results were found concerning male power and political survival. This foundation mostly concerns the reaction of the men who fear for their position and how they would handle the quota. Since interviews were not held with board members of companies who would face consequences of the quota, this was difficult to examine. The construction of resistance based on male power and political survival is therefore more based on the speculations of the respondents, and how they perceive the male power and political survival. Beforehand, the possibility of additional discourses was taken into account, which led to the discovery of the discourse of ineffectiveness. Based on literature, resistance based on the quota aiming for equality in numbers was expected, the scope – making it a distinguishable discourse – was not.

Second of all by exploring the discursive nature of resistance towards gender quota, as how this construction of resistance towards gender quota takes place, remained underexamined in literature so far. Even though literature acknowledged the discursive nature of resistance, the discursive construction of resistance towards gender quota had not been examined in depth. By parsing the discovered discourses to their core, the nature of the resistance and the rooted values and beliefs were unraveled. Even though beliefs about gender and gender equality were expected to be rooted at the resistance. The number of categories and subcategories of each discourse was not expected. This research contributes to this gap by providing several discursive constructions of resistance towards the quota and what values and beliefs are rooted at the constructions.

Third, in comparing the respondents, it became clear that there is a difference between the respondents working in listed companies and the employees working in non-listed companies. Beforehand there were no clear expectations about this comparison, since the discursive construction of resistance towards a gender quota was not yet examined in a business setting. Comparing the respondents contributes to theory as it shows that a difference can be found in the construction of resistance between the respondents who work in a company where the quota will be implemented and the respondents who do not face the quota rules.

In conclusion, this research contributes to theory by revealing the discourses of resistance towards a gender quota in the Netherlands, exposing the values and beliefs that are

rooted at the discourses of resistance and clearing the path for further examination of the differences between the construction of resistance.

5.3 Practical implications

Since resistance towards the gender quota is based on deeply rooted values and beliefs, it is difficult to provide concrete practical implications. However, three practical implications can be made. This research indicates that the implementation of a gender quota will face resistance, constructed in multiple ways. To cope with the resistance, it is important – especially for listed companies – to properly understand the resistance. Therefore this research contributes to practice, by providing an extensive description of the nature of the resistance. In doing so, underlying values and beliefs are exposed, as well as concerns that employees face regarding the quota. Furthermore, by exposing where the challenges and complexities may occur, companies are provided with the ability to address and discuss the challenges and complexities.

Another implication is that listed companies who are obliged to implement to the quota, would benefit from providing a narrative about the quota to their employees and what the impact of a quota is on the company, an implication that is also suggested by Van den Brink & Benschop (2018) to cope with resistance. Because many respondents draw conclusions based on myths and speculation. Resistance cannot, and does not need to be avoided, by addressing the discourses of resistance it can be used as a tool and allow for alternative constructions, instead of being seen as a negative force.

Furthermore, a third practical implication that can be made entails the monitoring the developments and successes of women by media and government (Van den Brink, 2011). Because – as some respondents also argued – our image of leadership is associated with men. Thus, by focusing on successful women in media and by the government, the social construction of leadership may change (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012).

5.4 Limitations

There are several limitations to this research that need to be addressed. First of all, this research was conducted during the corona-crisis. Therefore, the number of respondents is limited and wide-spread, because it was no longer possible to do the research in one company, as planned. Because of Covid-19, it was not possible to visit the company in person and there were very few employees available for an interview. Therefore, interviews were held with employees working in different companies, creating the possibility to compare the results to each other.

However, due to the low number of interview, it is difficult to make statements about what the results and comparisons mean. Due to Covid-19, there were solely one or a few employees involved per company, there was no actual company involved, making it hard to gain documents or to do an observation-study. Moreover, some interviews were held face to face, were other interviews were conducted through skype or by phone, which in my experience lacked a certain personal touch, as compared to the interviews face to face. This difference in communicating may cause a difference in follow-up questions or the longitude of the answers, especially when there were background noises e.g. kids playing, or deficient internet connection.

Another limitations concerns the research quality. Even though from a social constructionist point of view the subjectivity of results is acknowledged. The subjectivity may provide some limitations for the research, as the confirmability cannot be guaranteed. This limitation concerns the relationship between the researcher and the respondents. Gender equality can be a sensitive subject. Even though full anonymity of the companies and names was guaranteed, it still sometimes concerns strong opinions, which are asked to be shared with me, the researcher. Even though all respondents seemed comfortable in sharing their opinions, there is not guarantee that they felt fully free, as sometimes respondents notably very carefully framed their words. Moreover, some of the respondents I know personally, as for others I reached out through these personal contacts. This may provide a limitation, since this possibly knowing the respondents led to a more familiar sphere, causing them and myself to speak more freely as compared to the other interviews. However, even though from my point of view there was no noteworthy difference between the interviews with respondents I know personally and the ones I do not, it may have caused me to be less aware of my role as a researcher. Furthermore, as one question was formulated in a closed way, this may have affected the scale of information surrounding the question. However, after asking the question, there was always a follow-up question asking why the respondents felt this way, thus making sure sufficient information was provided.

Lastly, that interviews were held with employees, not with board members. Although this is not a limitation in examining their resistance, it was difficult to examine the foundation of ‘male power and political survival’, as the respondents would not face direct consequences of the quota.

5.5 Future research

There are several implications that can be made for future research. Even though the foundations of resistance by Krook, (2015, 2016) have been recognized in an organizational context, future research should include interviewing (supervisory) board members or aspiring (supervisory) board, as they are the ones who particular face consequences due to the quota, it would be interesting to see the results of conducting a research in an organizational setting from a top-down perspective, as this has not yet been examined. Moreover since the results about the discourse of male power and political survival were not very extensive, it would be interesting to see if future research about board members of listed companies can find more results about this discourse.

Another implication for future research is that the subcategories of the discourses of resistance can be further explored. Especially the subcategories that were not expected beforehand can be further examined as foundations of resistance, as these are not yet taken into account in a political context. Moreover, the additional discourse of ineffectiveness could be examined in a political context as well, to gain a full perspective of resistance towards gender quota in politics.

Furthermore, since the quota is still to be implemented, future research could include the post-implementation phase of the quota. It would be interesting to see differences between the pre- and the post-implementation phase, as the consequences of the quota are not yet experienced and might lead to different results.

Lastly, since the number of respondents is limited, future research should include more respondents, male and female, from listed and non-listed companies, in order to fully explore the differences between the respondents and make statements about these differences.

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