

What are challenges women face in the workplace, especially in the law industry in France?

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

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Abstract

Gender gap in 2020 still remains a hot-button issue, resulting in considerable inequalities. The aim of this research is to point out these gender inequalities among French law institutions. It will investigate gender diversity with regards to the hierarchical status in corporations, wages, and other externalities such as personal life and the major commitment it sometimes implicate.

Furthermore, in order to gain deeper insights about gender gap it is of paramount importance to define these concepts, as well as consider three phenomena bringing to light women's inferiority at the workplace. Therefore, a qualitative method has been applied, using semi-structured interviews of six female lawyers. Their approach will display to which extent they suffered or experienced the gender imbalances in the law industry. Since all of the six female advocates the author interviewed were working in their personal lawyer's office, they are not confronted to women discrimination or inequalities on a daily-basis. However, during their career they could observe these behaviors from time to time. All things considered, they affirmed that women discriminations in the law industry is not as present as in other industries.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background information

Gender and diversity in the workplace have become established subjects thoroughly discussed nowadays. In our globalized world, correct and genuine relationships between employer and employee is not solely of paramount importance, but also the key to succeed in complex and entangled markets (Sharma, 2016).

It is conspicuous that throughout the years the number of women and individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds working in the market, continuously increased resulting in an intricate working environment (Scarborough, Lambouths, & Holbrook, 2017).

This constrains the actual environment to adapt and evolve towards a direction supposing that policies and behaviors of employers need to change accordingly in order to give equal consideration and opportunities to all employees (Sharma, 2016).

1.2 Relevance of the research question

It is believed that women need to display a superior performance at workplace to achieve the same career outcomes as men, even if they have the same duties and responsibilities (Faniko et al., 2016). Furthermore, numerous studies have gathered information exposing that conditions under which women are expected to perform are less favorable for women than for men at the workplace (Sharma, 2016). Moreover, this corollary implies that women have to face and overcome more often important risks of failure than men (Faniko et al., 2016). Additionally, Faniko (2016) asserts that *„Women who invest in career advancement less often than men manage to succeed in finding work-life balance“*. This statement underlines the considerable divergence and inequality between men and women in the workplace remaining today (Glass & Cook, 2015). It is also significant to mention that women endure serious under-representativeness in corporate leadership positions.

Nevertheless, it is visible that the number of women in the workplace is becoming greater nowadays, competing with the number of men

represented in a company. However, it does not insinuate that women are being supported in their respective workplace. In fact, if women perceive a lack of workplace support, their general performance is enfeebled (Sharma, 2016).

The second issue that will be addressed throughout the thesis is the perception of diversity at the workplace. Individuals might believe that diversity alone is sufficient, however countless studies display that solely implementing diversity is not directly linked to achieving inclusion (Sherbin et al., 2017). Inclusion results in providing „*a potent mix of talent retention and engagement*“ asserts Sherbin (2017). Nonetheless, studies have shown that in recent years companies invest more money and energy than before into supporting workplace diversity (Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993).

1.3 Research question details

The main question that represents the research question is the following:
What are challenges woman face in the workplace, especially in law industries in France? Are concepts such as the „glass ceiling“ still existing and how do women try to overcome them?

The primary topic one is devoting effort to, is the perception of gender and gender diversity, especially the representation of women at the workplace and their significant role, as well as the challenges they fiercely have to overcome. The field investigated in will be law institutions in France. The purpose of the research is to understand how gender, as well as diversity is perceived in this specific field, in contrast to what is believed in theory. The research will be conducted in a qualitative method using interviews of several law firms in France. The key theories the study will expose are the „glass-ceiling, as well as the „glass-cliff“ and the „gender pay gap“. Additionally, one will discuss the cognitive diversity hypothesis, as well as the and the resource based theory. They will support the research question and therefore explain how gender and diversity should be included and how it benefits the companies, in theory.

Therefore, in this study the literature review will provide significant insight about the perception of gender, especially women, as well as women diversity at the workplace in general. Subsequently, one will query how gender and diversity is perceived and conducted in the specific field of law. In other terms, the study will gather information and collect data in order to see if the hypotheses and the content of the literature review can be conciliated with the latter findings in the data collection. It is crucial to determine if the theory and hypotheses discussed are applicable to the field investigated, in order to understand how divergent the market is from one field of business to the other. Especially, because law is the epitome of consistency and regularity and therefore one would assume that this industry would rank gender and diversity to their priorities. As well as including and setting up these recent tendencies as their policies. Indeed, they know justice better than any other working industry and consequently one believes that they should have a precise and accurate legal perception of gender and diversity. Besides they should know how to implement this in society, specifically in the workplace.

1.4 Outlook on subsequent chapters

In order for the reader to understand the research, one will clarify the successive and subsequent chapters of this thesis. First of all, the literature review will highlight the definitions of the notions „gender“ and „diversity“. Afterwards, one will investigate the gender diversity in terms of salaries and wages, displaying a considerable pay gap. Consequently, one will emphasize three crucial phenomena that illustrate women's subordinate status in society. As a second step, an academic methodology will be underlined in this paper. Subsequently, the author's approach and technique will be exposed, as well as the meanings of this approach. Furthermore, several interviews will be presented, since they have been conducted and designed for the main aim of the research. Hereby, one will step into the research results, which is believed to be the most important part in the agenda. Primarily, six interviews reflecting female lawyers position and experience at their workplace will be provided. Thus, the answers of these women will be cross-checked, resulting in a greater comprehension of the sample group.

Thereafter, the observations made by the interviewees' regarding the gender gap they might have experienced during their professional career, as well as their present impression of gender diversity in industries, will be analyzed.

Moreover, this chapter strives to examine how women manage to keep and balance their work and personal life. Ultimately, the conclusion of the thesis will deliver the cardinal findings of the research, as well as scrutinize their repercussions.

2. Literature review

It is essential to define the major terms of this research. In fact, „gender“ is a term that increased in popularity in the last decade, engendering debates and movements in order to sensitize the public about injustices between sexes. In this respect it is also fundamental to mention the term „diversity“ that implies the discrepancies between genders remaining nowadays in a myriad of aspects such as wage, hierarchical status, or promotions. Nonetheless, in order to gain further knowledge of the gender diversity in corporate environments and the inequalities it includes, one should also capture the corporate culture of enterprises and their hierarchic system, all well as their diversity management approach.

2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 The notion of „gender“

Gender is an immensely intricate, interrelated, frequently enigmatic, set of empirical phenomena (Connell et al, 2002). As specified by West and Zimmerman (1987) „*Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do*“. Additionally, Butler (1990) supplemented this statement by affirming that gender is something we perform.

According to Britta (2005) it is crucial to differentiate the word *sexe* and gender before conducting an academic research, since they have divergent etymologies. Indeed, while the noun *sexe* refers to the structural and functional traits determined by *sexe* chromosomes, gender originates from culture (Britta et al, 2005). In this matter one can assert that *sexe* is biologically oriented, and gender socially oriented. The word *sexe* derives from the latin form „*sexus*“ signifying „*either of two divisions of organic nature distinguished as male or female, respectively*“. In contrast, the word gender is identified as falling under behavioral, cultural as well as psychological characteristics. It derives from the latin word „*genus*“ meaning race. Nonetheless, it is a race that has been attributed to male

and female in a given society. It is not constant in time and varies according to present norms and values of society (Philips, 2005).

One has to point out that human beings will never be able to live their lives without two distinct gender categories. Indeed, these groups are continuously being distinguished on a daily basis, in virtue of a phenomenon called social practice. As reported by Eckert et al (2005), social practices stem from human activities. Some individuals might behave like existing common structures, resulting in daily practices that are recognized by the norm. However, some might reverse this preexisting social structures and therefore modify the signification of male and female, contributing to alter their labels and develop new categories (Eckert et al, 2005).

2.1.2 The notion of „diversity“



Fig 1. Erik Steiner’s model on diversity in the workplace (Stanford University, CA 2017)

According to Erik Steiner’s model (2017), diversity at the workplace is not solely resulting in a positive climate, but also enhancing team expertise and collective intelligence, as well as diversifying the knowledge outcomes and the research methods. Thus, one can believe that diversity generates several benefits that could lead to greater efficiency and profitability for enterprises. In this regard, it is pertinent to distinguish between diversity and inclusion (Sherbin, & Rashid, 2017).

Diversity can be defined in terms of observable and non-observable attributes. The observable elements are ranging from gender, race and ethnicity to age (Nielsen, Alegria, & Börjeson, 2017). Nevertheless, in recent years, non-observable factors as cultural, technical and cognitive

differences among personnel also redefine the term of diversity. Roberson (2004) states that diversity outlines mixed approaches to work with individuals of divergent identity groups. Inclusion on the contrary suggests the degree to which individuals can obtain information in group works and are likely to persuade and influence decisions. This demonstrates an individuals' capacity to participate in organizational processes (Roberson, 2004).

2.2 Gender diversity in terms of gender gap

In contrast to the previous section that focused on giving a general overview of diversity management in organizational structures, the main purpose of this section is to explore discrimination resulting from gender inequalities. Especially the female gender suffers from this in their organizational structures.

2.2.1 Gender gap

Three main phenomena can be observed in organizational structures, namely the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, as well as the gender pay gap. They are a considerable drawback for the female gender in society. The present section will define these concepts and point out which impact they have on gender.

2.2.1.1 *The Glass ceiling*

The Glass ceiling has a myriad of significations. However, in the first place it means that the female gender is underrepresented and therefore in terms of figures not proportionally equal with the male gender in higher management positions (Glass, & Cook, 2015). The notion appeared for the first time in 1986, created by two journalists named Hymowitz and Schellhardt. The initial idea behind this expression is that an invisible barrier in companies hinders women to move up the hierarchical ladder. Furthermore, it has been proven that the glass ceiling might engender higher costs for companies, since women who feel left out, are less

productive and loyal to their respective companies. To this extent, it is essential to mention that some women even leave their company in order to start as an entrepreneur and consequently build their own company from scratch (Glass, & Cook, 2015).

The *glass escalator* on the other hand is associated with men being pressured towards rapidly moving up the ladder during their career in order to work in higher positions (Glass, & Cook, 2015). Somewhat creating an extra glass ceiling affect for women again.

Secondly, the glass ceiling is a concept that can be referred with regards to wages. Indeed, a gender gap in revenue distribution between sexes in higher level positions is known as the glass ceiling. However, a strong wage gap in lower level positions can be defined as the *sticky floor* phenomenon (Faniko et al., 2016). This wage gap is measured by an indicator originating from the European Union that conducts analyses in order to underline and understand wage imbalances with facts and figures.

2.2.1.2 The Glass Cliff

This concept arose at a point in time where the number of women working in higher management positions increased largely. Besides, women were appointed as leaders at times when companies faced troubles, uncertainties and crisis (Kulich et al., 2017). In contrast, men were appointed as leaders at times of stable and solid performances. This notion has been firstly recognized by academics Michelle Ryan, as well as Alex Haslam in 2005. Women's position is always under control of masculine forces, meaning that they supervise women, resulting in insecurity, fear and a lack of self-confidence. Women face a myriad of obstacles when becoming successful leaders. Indeed, not only structural barriers, but also psychological barriers obstruct women's will to work in a high position (Barratt, 2018). While the structural barrier implies gender segregation, psychological segregation refers to gender stereotypes such as the incompetence of women in being leaders, or the fact that women cannot receive a promotion because they simultaneously play the role as a mother. According to Forbes Women the glass cliff can be described as follows: „*Building a picture of women being lured to the edge of a cliff and then unwittingly falling off it plays into the*

stereotypes that they are less capable and more vulnerable than men“ (Barratt, 2018). This citation insinuates that women should not lead a company where risk might be involved, because they are unqualified to manage it.

2.2.1.3 Gender pay gap France

Gender pay gap still persists nowadays in France and even worldwide (Chamberlain et al., 2019). The Glassdoor research conducted in 2019 affirmed that on average men still earn more than women. In this regard, it is interesting to mention that the study revealed the gender pay gap inequalities, not solely in France, but also in Germany, in the United States, or Canada. Nevertheless, compared to the Glassdoor research run in 2016, the pay gap slightly narrowed down. It is crucial to determine which factors drive the gender pay gap in society nowadays. The major ones are age, as well as differences in education and experiences. Then, factors like job titles or industry segregation can considerably influence the gender pay gap (Chamberlain et al., 2019).

In the last years, gender pay gap raised awareness throughout the world. The importance of this issue has been illustrated by rising movements like #MeToo. However, the genuine question one can ask himself is to which extent the gender gap has evolved lately.

The numbers that will be showed in Figure 2 and 3, underscore the major wage gap inequality between genders in France. Statistics originating from the European Commission’s office named Eurostat, certified that the gender pay gap in 2017 was approximately 15.4 %. Nonetheless, the Glassdoor research sample claimed that the average base pay per year was around 45 279 € for women, and 51 254 € for men. According to their calculations, French women earn about 88 cent for every € men earn on average. The gender pay gap is calculated with regards to controls such as age, education and the years of experiences. Moreover, Glassdoor asserts that 46% of the French gender pay gap in base pay is due to specific worker characteristics, in contrast to the other 54% which can be explained by divergences in the labor market, rewarding men and women differently. Additionally, these

findings display that France has a larger gender pay gap compared to countries like Germany or the United Kingdom.



Fig 2. Gender inequalities in pay gap in 2016 in Europe (Statista, 2016)

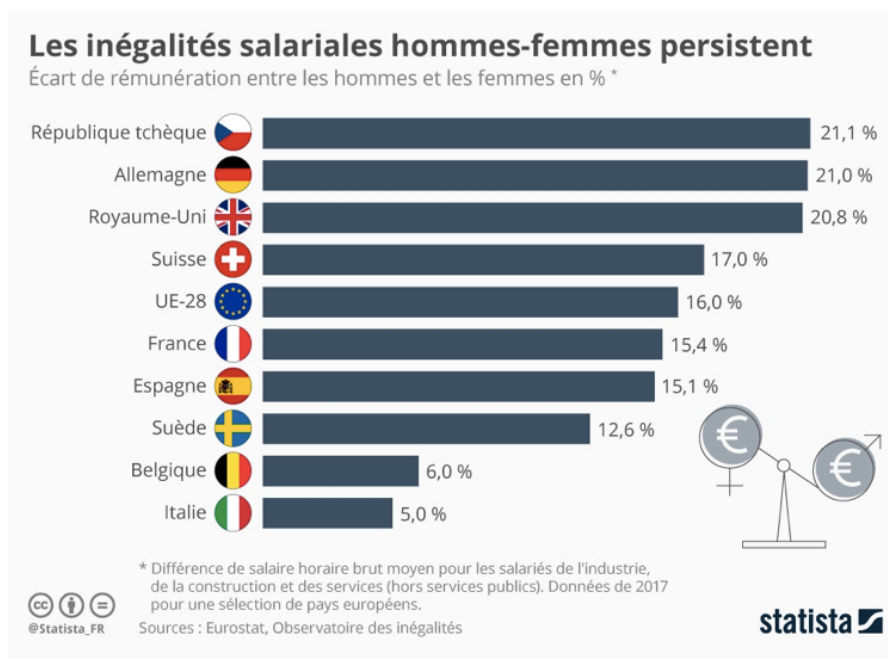


Fig 3. Gender inequalities in pay gap in 2017 in Europe (Statista, 2017)

2.3 Business cultures

Culture influences organisations in a myriad of ways, especially in today's growing diversity within the business industry.

Hofstede's study of IBM (1980) emphasized essential aspects of culture that could impact a firm's performance. Down this line it is interesting to mention that national culture includes „*attitudes, belief systems, values, and traditions, particular to a nation*“, whilst corporate culture reflects the behavior adopted by society given current norms and values (Dartey-Baah, 2011). Nonetheless, values and standards derive from one country or culture to the other. As a result, regulations, policies, human resources, communications and most importantly organizational structures will differ.

Hofstede (1980) characterizes culture as several programming activities which target to differentiate one group from another. Moreover, he declares that culture anticipates patterns of reasoning and feeling, along with acting. However, culture is a concept that magnifies into society and takes shape following the latest tendencies and phenomena.

2.3.1 Corporate cultures

Moreover, corporate cultures, emerging from industries in which the company intervenes, have an apparent and understandable vision and mission (Dartey-Baah, 2011). Furthermore, favorable corporate culture give rise to corporate values that are in accordance with the company's purpose and values of company's members. In addition, positive corporate cultures empower the company and appreciate employees irrespective of their hierarchical status. Beyond, they seek to incorporate diversity management into their structure and have the capacity to accommodate swiftly to external circumstances (Dartey-Baah, 2011).

2.3.2 National cultures

National culture can be limited to five dimensions as reported by Hofstede (1980), notably power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation.

Firstly, „power distance“ is a factor that estimates measures the extent to which a less powerful individual tolerates inequality and perceives it as ordinary. Nonetheless, this inequality acceptance fluctuates among

individuals in terms of culture. Additionally, power distance measures the degree to which individuals demand guidance from their superiors. In a high power distance society, members seek more guidance and direction from their superiors (Hofstede, 1980).

Regarding „individualism“ - it measures the primary interests and benefits to which an individual is searching for. In cultures considered as high individualistic, individuals solely look after their own interests, as well as relative's interests. In contrast to collectivistic societies and cultures, individuals are more likely to seek for group interests, since they are commonly known as being loyal (Hofstede, 1980).

The „masculinity“ factor is of heightened interest for this research. In fact, it measures the degree of discrepancy with regards to a social dimension between genders. While in a high masculine society, female individuals tend to focus on non physical needs, male individuals are more likely to desire materialistic needs (Hofstede, 1980).

„Uncertainty avoidance“ measures the degree to which individuals are perturbed when facing amorphous, disorganized, and vague situations. A society that concentrates on having a high uncertainty avoidance will result in higher security, greater serenity. However, it is more likely to be intolerant to changes. Contrarily, societies with low uncertainty avoidance are categorized as risk-takers, tolerant to changes, and combattants (Hofstede, 1980).

Lastly, „long-term orientation“ measures the degree to which individuals carefully plan and invest their time and energy for the future. Therefore, societies with a long-term orientation are genuinely valorizing traditions, making it arduous to allow change (Hofstede, 1980).

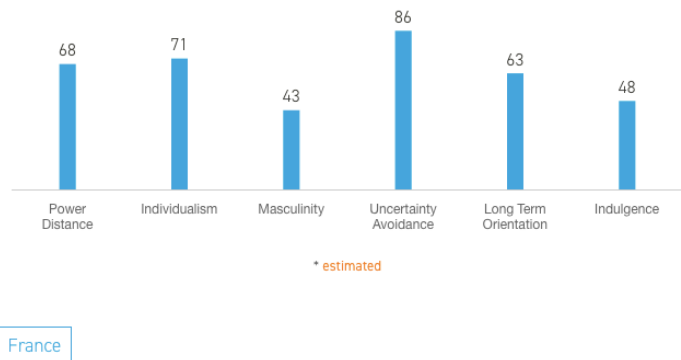


Fig 4. Hofstede's insights regarding national culture in France in 2019

2.3.3 Organizational structures

According to Monavarian (2007) „*organizational structure is a set of methods dividing the task to determined duties and coordinates them.*“ Furthermore, Rezayian (2005) asserts that organizations aim towards harmonizing the activities executed during work and the members that are executing these. Organizational structure includes paradigms of internal connections, communications networks, as well as decision making processes. Additionally, a proper and clear structure will result in greater conflict resolution between departments. In fact, three core dimensions define the concept of organizational structure. Firstly, it identifies relations as well as reporting within the organization and indicates the levels of hierarchy and thus the extent to which managers have some control (Monavarian, 2007). Secondly, organizational structure separates units within the organization and ascertains the position of employees within a unit. Lastly, it certifies that the system coordinates and guarantees effectiveness and favorable relations.

In this context, it is of paramount importance for an organization to meet favorable configurations in order for them to succeed in the market (Ali Ahmady et al., 2016).

2.3.4 Diversity management approach

Pro-feminist movements such as women's rights or actions towards gender equality and more specifically the #MeToo scandal illustrate the necessity of integrating gender diversity management into one's leadership approach. The term „diversity“ as utterly explained before, comprises individuals in terms of age, gender, ethics, or religion, as well as their experiences and skill set at their work place which results in their hierarchical status (Roberson, 2004).

In that sense it is crucial to mention the cognitive diversity hypothesis which brings to light the fact that opinions, approaches and experiences originating from cultural divergences between group members in organizations engender „*creative problem solving and innovation*“ (Miller et al., 1998).

Down that line it is also relevant to point out the observations made by Horwitz (2007). He stated that the physical attributes like race, gender or age are benefitting the organization, since the team members are contributing exclusive cognitive characteristics premised on their experiences from their demographic background (Horwitz, 2007).

Moreover, other theories are stressing the importance of diversity management. For instance, the institutional theory of diversity management (Konrad, & Yang, 2011). In fact, it asserts that an organizational structure should not divide the social aspect that exists in it. The behavior of employees is restricted by regulations, policies and professional norms. The company is also supposed to respect the pre-mentioned factors. Indeed, by doing so, companies have to comply with similar norms and administrative structures as employees (Konrad, & Yang, 2011). Consequently, a firm proves its legitimacy, not solely by demonstrating its priorities and actions, but also by implementing them. In other words, laws command companies to become diverse and therefore they have to achieve and enforce this diversity management by conforming to the legislation (Konrad, & Yang, 2011).

Furthermore, a resource based theory of diversity management has been introduced. It assesses how the execution of diversity management will influence organizational resources (Richard, 1999). In fact, an organization holds physical, financial, human and corporate capital. They are aiming

towards gaining profit and improving their business. According to Richard (1999) firms that operate diversity management „*experienced lower levels of turnover*, additionally he declared *that diversity management practices interacted positively with an innovation strategy, resulting in higher productivity and better market performance.*“

2.4 Summary

In the prior sections, the most significant concepts, phenomena and models have been enlightened. To conclude briefly, one will review these terms.

Corporate culture has to be distinguished from national culture within the general concept of business culture. Indeed, while the first implies that a business' prosperity is relying on trust, loyalty, employee satisfaction, the choice of industries and flourishing diversity management, the second asserts that a firms' performance is based on the culture in a specific society at a given point in time.

The notion of „gender“ on one side can be defined as behavioral, cultural and psychological attributes of an individual, showing evidently that two distinct categories of individuals, namely male and female exist. „Diversity“ on the other side can be understood in terms of observable attributes such as gender, race and ethnicity and non-observable attributes like cultural, technical and cognitive distinctions.

Concerning gender diversity, one could observe that the phenomena of the „glass ceiling“, „glass cliff“ and „gender pay gap“ appropriately describe the situation of inferiority that women encounter at their work place. In fact, the glass ceiling refers to invisible barriers that hinder women from climbing up the hierarchical ladder. In contrast, the glass cliff demonstrates that women are often promoted to higher positions only because the company faces phases of riskiness and uncertainty. The gender pay gap displays that men and women are confronted to unbalanced wage distributions. Lastly, the role of culture in organizations and as Hofstede points out, on a national level has a significant influence on how these concepts are managed. Or how the resource-based theory highlights, how a company is able to execute and implements priorities related to this topic. Overall, a company has various options how to embrace diversity management, advance women in their careers and battle the various

concepts of gender. The next section will explain the methodology applied in this thesis and furthermore highlight the most significant results.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative approach: definition

When conducting a research about gender diversity and women's challenges in law institutions in France, it is of best interest to adopt a qualitative approach. Since it includes a variety of methods of data collection such as observations, visual analysis and interviews (Gill, 2008). It gives a concrete and overall insight about the topic.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

In a qualitative approach, potential research techniques are numerous (Maxwell, 2005). However, this research will solely conduct interviews. According to Gill (2008), the purpose of interviews is to delve into experiences, motivations and specific views of individuals regarding some defined topics. Interviews are great techniques to gain insights on social phenomenon and gather deeper understandings of the matter (Ryan et al., 2009). Therefore when little data is available about a topic it is appropriate to conduct interviews (Gill et al., 2008). In this research participants impersonating lawyers, will undergo interviews in order to figure out gender differences among companies. The aim is to evaluate the experiences of women facing the inequalities. The thesis will focus on semi-structured interviews. This signifies that the interviewee will undergo a predefined questionnaire. Since several women will be interviewed the form is more appropriate. Besides, this form is more convenient because one has to compare and analyse the different interviews.

3.3 Interview guidelines

In order to provide primary data for the research one conducted several interviews with women working as lawyers in France, more specifically in competitive cities like Paris or Lyon. It was essential to interview women working in different geographical areas, with different working systems or business strategies. However, the position remains almost similar from women to women since an emphasis is put on law institutions.

The author questioned women about their professional career, their personal environment, their individual observations and experiences in their field regarding gender diversity, as well as how they would change gender inequalities if they were confronted to this.

The questions below were queried during the interviews:

1. Profile of each participant

- Career path and degree

- Personal background (little information)

- Aspirations and expectations

2. During their career:

- Have you heard about the concept of the *glass ceiling* (phenomenon which shows that women don't have easy access to higher positions in contrast to men) or even the phenomenon of the *glass cliff*? Have you experienced this yourself, or could you observe it?

- Gender gap:
 - i. Your personal observations and experiences

 - ii. According to you did inequalities alter over the past five years?

 - iii. Do you think the gender gap has is impacting promotions and wages?

 - iiii. How do you balance your personal life and your career?

- 3. In current position:

- Do you notice a discrimination against women in your particular industry? And if so, in leading positions? Do you think the issue differs from industry to industry? If so, how?
- Do you face any challenges in your function because of being female?
- How did you achieve building your own lawyer's office?

- 4. Overcoming the gender differences (i.e., gender pay gap)
 - To what extent are you personally contributing to overcome the gender differences in your company?
 - Which explicit actions do you take in order to standardize gender equality and women empowerment?

3.4 Sample

The author interviewed six female advocates working in Lyon, Paris and Marseille in France. The major characteristic they have in common is that all of them are independent lawyers, working in their own law office. Thus they have high positions and powerful status'. The author conducted these interviews per skype and also by sending the interview questions per mail. The skype calls lasted at least one hour, or less. The interview questions sent by email however, took longer time to answer. These women have been picked for the interview because the author has great contacts in France and is closely connected to the law department, especially with the university of Panthéon Assas Paris II. The university helped the author contacting these interviewees.

4. Research results

4.1 Interviewee's profile

Ms. Vray, and Ms, Juveneton are operating in Lyon, in contrast to Ms. Longeanie, Ms. Geitner and Ms. Sulzer who are working in Paris. Lastly, Ms. Trapé is in the South of France in Marseille. They are all working as independent lawyers in France, in a myriad of departments, ranging from civil law, business law to criminal law and property law. Only Jeanne Sulzer recently opened er own law independent lawyers since 15 years or even more.

Name	Position	Company	Year since they have this position + city
VRAY Véronique	independent	Vray's lawyer's office	2005 LYON
JUVENETON Isabelle	independent	Juveneton's lawyer's office	2006 LYON
LONGEANIE Laurence	independent	Martinet-Longeanie lawyer's office	1992 PARIS

GEITNER Jane	independent	Geitner's lawyer's office	1999 PARIS
TRAPÉ Laure	independent	Trapé's lawyer's office	1992 MARSEILLE
SULZER Jeanne	legal advisor before / International human rights lawyer	UNESCO / independent firm	2017 PARIS

Table 1. Interview partners

4.2 Interviewee's background

VRAY Véronique

Studied law at Université Jean Monnet Saint Etienne in the Loire region between 1996 and 1999. Afterwards I went to a Canadian university for exchange. I completed my Master studies at Université Jean Moulin (Lyon III) in public market law, as well as business law and contract law. I then pursued my academic education at the lawyer's school for barrister in Lyon. Since 2005 I am a barrister registered at the bar in Lyon. Currently, I am a lawyer and have my own office responsible for litigation regarding public law, especially town planning law, expropriation and local authorities law, as well as foreigner law.

I have my family with two children.

I always strived for the best outcome and the things that I am passionate about. Wanting to defend litigations and individuals was always on my list, even if I am not specialized into the private sector. I met a lot of individuals throughout my path that could not understand why I specialized in public law. However, I do not regret this choice.

JUVENETON Isabelle

I started to do my bachelor in law at Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 between 1991 and 1993. I specialized in public law and politics analysis in 1994. Furthermore, I gained several first hand on field experiences at CARMA (insurance company) and MICHALON lawyer's office, as well as GRANDCLEMENT. I decided to make a big step and build my own company. From 2006 on I am working in my office in Lyon which handles numerous litigations, such as insurance law, civil responsibility, automobile accidents, property law, criminal and family law. Therefore, I am registered as a barrister at the bar in Lyon.

As an independent lawyer I can have a normal family life and try my best to balance work and personal life.

I have several principles and values in life. I am a motivated and determined person that always believed in herself. I always aimed towards helping this world become easier for the individuals that live in it. My main purpose in life is to start with why. Always start with why and not with what when wanting to achieve something, when creating your own company. The book of Simon „Start with why“ helped me understand the real purpose.

MARTINET - LONGEANIE Laurence

Having knowledge in European law and private law, helped me build my career as a lawyer. I studied at Paris II Panthéon Assas. Currently I am a registered lawyer at the bar in Paris. I am notably solving cases in commercial law, social protection law, and labour law. Nonetheless I can also help in business law and family law matters.

I am fully concentrating on my career and on evolving myself.

I always aspired to be someone in which one can believe. I want my clients to feel that there are not alone in their matter and that I will help and support them in their litigation.

GEITNER Jane

I studied family law at Paris I university between 1994 and 1996. Afterwards I decided to study private law overall at Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin en Yvelines. Only then I gained experiences in lawyer's offices, for instance at Cabinet HENRI-LECLERC in 1998 or COUDERT BROTHERS. In order to have even more knowledge I went to a specific social sciences school. Since 1999 I am an independent lawyer which focuses on family law, children law. Furthermore, I am an active member of the „Antenne Mineur du Barreau de Paris“ (at the bar in Paris helping juveniles). I have my own office and with the help of my last studies specializing on social behaviors, I can help and support minority groups or litigations between individuals inside a family.

I am not married, meaning that I can fully dedicate my time as a professional lawyer.

Since I am working a lot with younger individuals I always feel very attached to them and help them as if they would be my children. I believe that doing good to other people, will also result in good things happening to me.

TRAPÉ Laure

I started my studies by doing a UER Lettres et Langues Allemand degree. Only afterwards I studied law at Faculté de droit Aix en Provence in 1986 in the South of France. My two majors were civil law and trade law. Since 1988 I am an independent lawyer.

My competences include business law, property law as well as social law. I took my oath as a lawyer in 1988 and firstly integrated the SCP BOLLET lawyer's office, before working with Monsieur Edouard Fouque specialist in business law. Since 1996 my office is located in Marseille.

I have my own family life besides work life and try to dedicate as much time as I can with my husband, since my children are already grown up. I would say that I have a successful career that enabled me to expand my horizon.

Growing constantly in all areas of life, my personal involvement was the key to success.

SULZER Jeanne

I have been studying at well-known French university called Université Panthéon Assas (Paris II). Afterwards, I did a school in order to become official barrister in Paris. Only from 1998 on I started working on the field, notably at the United Nations in Cambodia as Senior legal advisor. Then I have been lecturing a lot at prestigious French university Science Po. From today on, however, I am an official lawyer working for International Human Rights. I would consider myself as having several experiences in numerous departments. Furthermore, I worked all over the world, from the United States, to Cambodia and Burundi.

I have always aspired to have this career outcome. Additionally, I am grateful for having traveled all over the world and having being able to meet new cultures. This benefited my career since International Human Rights demands to be acquainted with other customs and mentalities.

4.3 Major evidences of gender imbalances

4.3.1 Their experience with the gender gap

The literature review has strongly proven that gender categories were delimited and specified earlier on. Notwithstanding, we should not stereotype the gender categories and think of the ulterior role of women in the past. Customs, ways of thinking and manners changed nowadays, leading to the obligation of rethinking and recreating the gender roles. In fact, as reported by Laure Trapé current generations and the emergence of globalization and the digital world ensure that females have the same opportunities as males. Women are being discriminated even without consciously being aware of it. They believe some behaviors towards them have become standardized and thus they do not even question their inferior position.

According to Véronique Vray, the law industry is not as harsh and tough regarding gender equality, as in other industries. She deems that every single individual that strives to have a job in the law department, regardless of sexes, has to work hard. In her opinion, the severity and brutality comes along with wanting a successful career in this specific industry. Therefore, she believes *„that it is less about discriminating women and more about being competitive and outstanding. In this regard, I think that lawyers (men and women) want to be the best in their field and therefore behave in a competitive mindset.“*

Isabelle Juveneton however has a dissimilar perception: *„During the interview I felt pressured demonstrating my self-confidence and knowledge to a larger extent than usually, given the fact that I slightly had the impression that the male interviewers were looking down on me.“*

In fact, since she has been hired, she suffered from discrimination in her previous company. This example depicts that gender gap still is an issue that one should be aware of.

The fifth interviewee Laure Trapé specified that in her opinion discrimination against women can take place at any time at any place in similar forms. However, what differs from company to company is the degree of discrimination, because it depends on the leader of the company.

Nonetheless, she alleged that she was never explicitly confronted to women discrimination during her career.

4.3.1.1 The glass ceiling phenomenon

i. During their career

Women challenges in the working industry nowadays include the phenomenon of the „glass ceiling“. As previously described, this phenomenon is rather modern. According to the literature review, an invisible barrier hinders women to move up the hierarchical ladder to reach top positions.

The female interviewees confessed that during their internships or first jobs in the law departments they had difficulties inflicting their will and their idea to the rest of the team, since it was not taken into consideration seriously.

Two to three of the interviewees remarked that they did not exactly know if it was because of their age, their experience or their gender at first. Nonetheless, they could perceive minor discrimination behaviors from their supervisor after working in these respective companies for a year or more. In fact, Laurence Longeanie pointed out *„I felt like I needed to express and impose myself in order by my older male colleagues, this leads to the gender gap issue.“* She also stated that: *„From time to time I could see that my male colleagues are being promoted more easily than female colleagues.“*

Most of the female lawyers that have been interviewed are not genuinely aware of the term „glass ceiling“. Nonetheless, they knew what the idea behind the concept meant and had to endure it, as mentioned before.

Nonetheless, Jane Geitner affirmed that at the United Nations, where she worked as a legal advisor before becoming a lawyer, she noticed that *„there has been a tendency to address the issue of gender balance.“* Moreover, in organizational structures like the United Nations in the justice department, Jane Geitner observed that recruitment processes have strongly been influenced by this new mindset and consequently *„women have started holding positions of Chiefs of Sections or Directors of Divisions“*. She

underlined the fact that the current General Director at UNESCO in Paris is held by Ms. Azoulay, which is striking, considering the persisting gender gap. This real-life example illustrates that gender imbalances are being handled.

All things considered, the female advocates definitely sensed women discrimination during their first experiences when they had lower positions. It is of paramount importance to know if they observe this phenomenon also during their current position as leading female lawyers.

ii. During their current position

The six female lawyers that have been interviewed have their own office, meaning that they are great and dominant leaders in their professional lives. Since they have the power to decide who to employ and on which criteria, they can actively participate in shaping the world towards better gender equality. All of them assured that they are not currently facing any issues concerning discrimination and gender inequalities, not even with their male collaborators.

As a matter of fact, no women that has been interviewed felt that she was treated differently by men in their present position. Conspicuously, debates or arguments arise sometimes due to different opinions or personal characteristics. They observed that men tend to be more straightforward and egoistic when taking decisions. However, in order to calm down the discussion, the female lawyers certify that they are solving the argument peacefully. The interviewees claim that these discussions are not deriving from discrimination, but more from a divergent way of thinking, and or leadership style. From time to time even, a discrepancy can be identified regarding the way one addresses and advises the clients in the lawyer's office. Regardless of these divergences that are considered to be common, (given that each individual has its unique personally traits whether it be a male or a female), the results disclose that the gender gap is not considerably persisting in lawyer's offices run by women in the law industry.

Consequently, they provided information about the steps they are taking and the procedures they follow in order to guarantee a gender friendly environment in their respective offices.

As an example, it is interesting to mention the statement of Véronique Vray: *„Nevertheless, in my office, gender gap does not influence wages.“* Further: *„I have women and men employed in my lawyer’s office and their wage is based on their skillset, their knowledge and their position.“*

Subsequently, one can notice that she is willing to create a women-friendly environment, while she also aims at treating all her collaborators with the same degree of respect.

Laure Trapé stated that for her *„the most important principles are integrity and honesty.“* Down that line it is pertinent to mention her statement: *„My company strives at expanding its diverse environment.“* One can understand that her current position allows her to fully support and take an active role in settling the gender gap issue.

Furthermore, during the interview she complimented a female collaborator who is a criminal law specialist, underlining the necessity for her lawyer’s office to employ females and spread this movement, in order to achieve gender equality.

Moreover, in order to overcome gender imbalances, Jeanne Sulzer’s advice to other supervisors or high positioned leaders is to adopt an open-minded approach and value a person in the team, *“in view of the academic background and working experience, regardless of his gender.“*

Generally speaking, women support other women. Hence, it is unsurprising that female leaders promote gender equality, as well as encourage minimizing women’s challenges. Since they are leaders in these industries, they do not suffer from gender inequalities currently. However, the experiences made throughout their career are undoubtedly ensuring that they understand women discrimination. Thus, the interviews showed that women actually encourage other women, instead of staying in a competitive and conflicting mindset.

Altogether, by increasing the percentage of women in top leading positions like all the six female lawyers the author interviewed, the gender gap issue and daily phenomena that women encounter at their workplace in law industries can be reduced.

4.3.1.2 Work life balance

Within the interviews the author has been conducting there was also a work-life balance question. Female lawyers conspicuously have to balance their work life and personal life simultaneously. In fact, they have to make considerable commitments in their personal life, as well as in their professional life.

Every female lawyer had divergent answers concerning this topic, because some have children and a husband, others do not.

Nonetheless, four out of six interviewees stated that their high position in their own lawyers office facilitated maintaining a healthy and blooming family life. They not only could modify their schedule and appointments and be flexible in case they needed to bring their children to school, but were also able to delegate easily some work and cases to their collaborators.

Nonetheless, down that line it is also essential to highlight that it is not always simple and convenient equalizing both dimensions.

In fact, already during the pregnancy it can become arduous. In fact, when women work for someone else rather than in their proper company, they can massively suffer from critique or even lay offs.

One interviewee said that at one point in time she was pressured towards choosing between her career and her family life. She felt like she had to make sacrifices regarding her profession, in order to save her private life. Even some other interviewees indicated that during their career, before having their own lawyer's office, they regularly faced this challenge.

Jeanne Sulzer for instance stated that: *„Holding a job with responsibilities for a working mother is still a challenge in 2020. The career of women can be to some extent hampered when they decide to raise children at the same time.“*

Moreover, in terms of time spent at home, it can become laborious. Most of the time, their job required them to work extra hours in order to complete the myriad of tasks they were asked to handle.

Furthermore, Jeanne Sulzer admitted: *„I remember at that time I had to systematically tell my supervisor I could not take part in the meetings due to my children. I felt at that time that a career development was*

becoming problematic.“ This outlines the commitments a working mom has to make from time to time in the professional world, in order for her to look after her children and sustain her family life.

All in all, women acquiesce that it is a constant challenge to balance both dimensions of this spectrum. Despite, the majority asserted that being in a leading position encouraged a flourishing family life, even though it also brought some light drawbacks. Therefore, one can conclude that the female lawyers are in dichotomy, sometimes they will have to neglect one dimension more than the other.

5. Conclusion

The thesis demonstrated to what extent women in law industries working in leadership positions suffered from or experienced gender discrimination during their career. The main focus was on observing if they generally felt the gender gap, and especially the glass ceiling phenomenon. Since the law industry can be distinguished from the business industry, one can assert that female lawyers observe other behaviors in their industry rather than women working in immense LLC' businesses with numerous organizational levels in the business chain. The literature provided from academic journals and scientific books has been compared with the results and findings originating from interviews conducted with female lawyers. The findings obtained by the author engendered the emergence of assumptions and observations.

The major conclusion one can draw is that gender gap in the law industry in France is not as widespread as the gender gap phenomenon in France overall. As the interviews illustrated, a woman advocate can move up the hierarchical ladder by ultimately building her own company or office, exhibiting that gender gap can not directly be spotlighted. Consequently, one can note that the gender gap is not existing to the same extent in different working industries. However, statistics underscore that overall the gender imbalances can still be defined as being in the centre of attention in France overall, not solely in terms of wages, but also due to the appearance of contemporary phenomena such as „the glass ceiling“ or „the glass cliff“.

However, in this regard it is essential to mention that the theory referred to above, does not genuinely meet the interviewee's answers. Their responses have been collected by semi-structured interviews obtained by skype or by mail. Since all six female lawyers I have been interviewing work in their own lawyers office or work as strong and powerful collaborators in one office, one can admit that they are not currently suffering from gender discrimination. Nonetheless, in their past, while gaining experiences, they encountered from time to time one or two scenarios that could be reported as being active discrimination. Despite that female lawyers enunciated that it is more likely to happen in other industries and working environments, stating that friends or relatives also mentioned this discrimination.

It is apparent that comparing the theoretical framework and the female lawyer's answers, the experiences or observations made by them do not

accurately and precisely depict what one identified from statistics or articles. Notably, regarding the glass ceiling phenomenon which was not truly known by the lawyers. Assuredly, they knew the idea that derived from this concept, but the majority did not vividly and actively conceive it during their career. Nonetheless, one interviewee pointed out that once she could regard a manifest divergence between genders regarding promotions during her career, since her male colleague has been offered a promotion in contrast to her, even though they fulfilled similar tasks.

In relation to wages, the female lawyers could not provide data, due to confidential reasons. Nevertheless, one could assume that wages still vary between genders unless one creates her own company from scratch and therefore has the top leading position.

Notwithstanding, some limitations have to be exposed. Firstly, general assumptions and speculations can be wrong since the author only conducted six different interviews with females working in only three main cities in France. Therefore, it is not certainly an accurate representation of female lawyer's experiences on the whole French territory. Secondly, the author only dived into observations and experiences made in the law industry, not several other industries. This may engender a biased outcome, targeting only on a specific category of individuals. Furthermore, the numbers of interview questions are not proportional to the degree of importance and the denseness and compactness of the topic. However, it would take too long to exemplify and portray the whole theme in terms of questions.

In the meanwhile, the thesis intended on revealing the theory, as well as the reality in the most genuine way. The key findings obtained thanks to qualitative research have been cross-checked with the theory, resulting in rational explanations and a greater understanding of scientific literature. The author aimed towards sensitizing the public in order to tackle the gender gap issue, especially women discrimination at the workplace. Therefore, the author promoted the idea of overcoming the gender gap and several conflicts women need to face during their career. Additionally, the author hoped on slightly contributing faithful research on this specific industry, since little data was verily available. The primary approach to adopt in order to solve gender imbalances is to be enlightened about the issue. The more one reads about it, and gets familiar with the subject, the more likely he will actively participate in achieving greater gender equality

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview guidelines French

1. Profil de chaque participant
 - a. Parcours professionnel
 - b. Renseignements personnels
 - c. Aspirations et attentes du monde du travail

2. Pendant le parcours professionnel
 - a. Avez-vous entendu parler du concept de „glass ceiling“ (phénomène qui illustre le fait que les femmes obtiennent plus difficilement une position supérieure dans le monde du travail, contrairement aux hommes) ? Avez-vous vécu cela vous même? Si oui, dans quel contexte?

 - b. L'écart entre les sexes
 - i. Vos expériences et observations

 - ii. Avez-vous observé un changement lors des dernières années?

 - iii. Pensez-vous que l'écart entre les sexes a un impact sur les promotions et salaires? Avez-vous subi quelque forme de discrimination dans le cadre de ces enjeux?

3. Votre position actuelle
 - a. Observez-vous une discrimination contre les femmes dans le domaine juridique ? Si oui, aussi dans les positions dominantes ? Pensez-vous que ce problème diffère d'une industrie à une autre? Si oui, comment?

- b. Observez-vous quelconques enjeux dans votre position actuelle parce que vous êtes une femme?
- c. Avez-vous déjà été confronté à une affaire mettant en exergue l'écart entre sexes ?

4. Vaincre l'écart entre les sexes (entre autre l'écart salarial)

- a. Quelles actions peut - on mettre en oeuvre afin de surmonter la différence entre sexes ? Avez-vous pensé à une initiative qui, dans votre opinion, serait fructueuse en France ou mondialement ?
- b. Avez-vous essayé ou essayez-vous de changer ces différences entre sexes dans votre position actuelle ? Si oui comment?
- c. En tant qu'avocate, pensez-vous que l'égalité entre les sexes peut être atteint un jour ?