

# **Women in high positions, their experiences and policy development**

A research based upon the personal experiences of women within the water regulatory authorities which shows the merits of using qualitative data within the Dutch emancipation policy

Comparative Women's Studies in Culture and Politics

Faculty of Humanities

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## **Master thesis:**

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## Preface

This thesis has been the result of a year of hard work for my master study at Utrecht University, and my internship of approximately 10 weeks at the Dutch Women's Council in The Hague. I look back at the construction of an insightful theoretical framework which developed within the course of my master study and a practical connection through my internship.

This thesis is as a result mainly based upon the research which I have done for the Dutch Women's Council (de Nederlandse Vrouwen Raad) during the period of 02-02-09 till 16-04-09. Therefore first of all I would like to pay tribute to all the women working at the Dutch Women's Council, because they gave me the opportunity to do an evaluative research that perfectly fitted within my master study 'Comparative Women's Studies in Culture and Politics'. Especially my gratitude goes out to Lotte Wouters, project manager 'Social Participation' for the Dutch Women's Council and my internship supervisor. Partly due to her monitoring, help and suggestions I could perform my own research and contact the women who participated in the water regulatory authority elections in the year of 2008.

In this sense I also would like to thank my supervisor of Utrecht University, dr. Babs Boter, who truly helped and guided me throughout the process of evaluating and writing both my internship report and my master thesis. She gave me useful insights and helped me with the structure of this thesis.

Of course I would also like to pay tribute to all the women who have cooperated during my research with the necessary interviews, including personal appointments, by telephone and by e-mail. Without informants you do not have a research and thanks to their enthusiasm and passion for their jobs, important and useful information has come to the surface. The interviews were, without any exception, fascinating and informative conversations.

And last, but not least, I would like to thank the different organizations which helped me to gain information about the elections held in November 2008 for the water regulatory authorities and the current situation concerning the number of women within the water management boards. To gain insight in the organizational structure of the water regulatory authorities and the elections, their information was crucial.

## Contents

<b>Front page</b>	
<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. My research and methodology	4
<b>Chapter 2: Research question</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. The added value of this research	7
<b>Chapter 3; A short overview</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 4: The Dutch emancipation policy</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1. The first Emancipation Policy, 1977	9
4.2. The second Emancipation Policy, 1992	10
4.3. The current Emancipation Policy, 2008	10
4.4. Conceptualization of a key concept; Emancipation	11
<b>Chapter 5: The Dutch water regulatory authorities</b>	<b>13</b>
5.1. What does the water regulatory authority actually do?	13
5.2. Why are there so few female members? An historical approach	14
5.3. Which elements can prohibit women from entering?	15
5.3.1. Women have a different take on managing than men	16
5.3.2. The feminine advantage and disadvantage	16
5.3.3. Some critical reflections	17
5.4. Will more women change the stereotypical description?	18
<b>Chapter 6: Target figures and Tokenism</b>	<b>19</b>
6.1. The connection between target figures and the theory of tokenism	19

6.2. How do women themselves perceive their token position?	21
6.3. Critical reflections on Kanter's theory of tokenism	22
6.4. Can more women change the situation?	23
<b>Chapter 7: Network theory</b>	<b>23</b>
7.1. Social networks for women and the 'old boys' network	24
7.2. A social network as a safety net and strategy	24
7.3. A critical note; a combination is needed	25
<b>Chapter 8: The (Dutch) welfare state</b>	<b>26</b>
8.1 A short historical overview of the Dutch welfare system and the exclusion of female workers	27
8.2. The influence of the Dutch welfare state on women's lives	30
<b>Chapter 9: In comparison; the Nordic/Scandinavian model</b>	<b>32</b>
9.1. The Nordic/Scandinavian model	32
9.1.1. The first basic principle; a homogeneous population	32
9.1.2. The second principle; a 'family friendly' policy	33
9.1.3. The third principle; a system of reference	33
9.1.4. Dual character	34
9.2. Feminist critique	34
9.2.1. The first basic principle; from a homogeneous population to a divided society	34
9.2.2. Women as objects or active subjects?	35
9.3. The influence of a gendered welfare model	36
<b>Chapter 10: Conclusion</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>39</b>

## 1. Introduction

An essential part of my master study was an internship at an organization of ones own choice. For me this was the perfect opportunity to connect a theoretical framework with the actual social circumstances within Dutch society, and this link I unfortunately sometimes missed during my study. Considering the wide approach of the Dutch Women's Council and their interest in a lot of different aspects which stand in close connection to the concept of gender (ranging from ethnicity, class, religion to age) an internship at this organization lend itself perfectly for an interesting research. Recently the Dutch Women's Council finished a national campaign called "*Women in search of Water*", which focused on the water regulatory authorities and the position of women in the management boards.<sup>1</sup> By encouraging women to put themselves up for election, helping them with their personal campaign and informing Dutch society about the water regulatory authorities' responsibilities the Council tried to open up this overall male dominated governmental sector.

### *1.1. My research and methodology*

As an evaluative part of the campaign and for possible future projects on this subject, my research focused primarily on how the women who participated in the elections for the water regulatory authorities experienced the whole process of running for candidacy. Underlying questions focused more on the presumed masculine character of the sector; Did women notice any difference between male and female candidates? What kind of barriers did the women encounter during their candidacy? How do women perceive their position within this sector?

In order to find answers on these questions, the decision was made to arrange interviews with a small selection of the female candidates. To make sure that the information represented the thoughts of the women themselves, I used semi-structured interview techniques to make it look like an informal conversation. When a personal interview was not possible, there was chosen for a more structured method by sending a questionnaire to these women by e-mail.

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<sup>1</sup> For more specific information about this campaign see the website of the Dutch Women's Council; <http://www.nederlandsevroewenraad.nl> (only available in Dutch)

The research population was based upon three main categories in which the female candidates could be divided; women who were chosen as board members after the elections, women who were not chosen as board members and women who decided to give up their place of candidacy. Due to some administrative gaps not all personal details of the participating female candidates were available, which put constraints on the aim to contact my research population. Still, I managed to contact women from all the three categories. In total I held 23 interviews, which were divided into 9 personal interviews, 6 interviews by telephone and 8 questionnaires sent by e-mail. The research population was divided into 15 chosen female board members, 5 non-chosen female candidates and 3 female candidates who withdrew themselves during the preparations of the elections. The gathered information from these interviews and questionnaires were compared with each other and the main topics expressed by my informants as important for the position of women in the water regulatory authorities are used for the further exploration of women's position in high functions in general. Therefore, several theoretical elaborations in this thesis are based upon this qualitative research, including the theory of tokenism and the network theory.

In a broader view, not only women's personal experiences are important in order to get a better view on women's position in higher decision making functions. Rather, they stand in connection to greater power structures which shape Dutch society and its citizens on this topic; the welfare state and the emancipation policy. Both create a gendered discourse which, as we will see later on in this thesis, strongly influences the way women are perceived in society and on the work floor.

## **2. Research question**

The main purpose of this thesis is to show the merits of using qualitative data on women's experiences in the implementation and evaluation of emancipatory policies. Emancipation is a process which involves a lot of different aspects ranging from patriarchal rule, gendered divisions, power, agency and politics. Feminist scholarship tries to show all these different axes concerning the emancipation process, and women's experiences play an important role in this discourse. The inclusion of women's personal experiences in the form of qualitative data is not common practice as part of the official statistics on which policies are based upon. Even though

the use of this data has great political relevance, the Dutch government unfortunately does not use this information for further development of the Dutch emancipation policy. Therefore the main research question of this thesis is:

*How can the current Dutch emancipation policy be improved by using qualitative data on women's position on the work floor?*

Through my internship at the Dutch Women's Council, my interest for the Dutch emancipation policy grew. In particular the methods used by the Dutch government to increase the number of women in high positions on the work floor caught my eye. Even though emancipation is a frequently used and popular concept within Dutch society and policy, women still encounter structural barriers which can prohibit them from making a career or even entering a particular business. In case of the water regulatory authorities these barriers also exist<sup>2</sup>, but unfortunately they are often ignored. As a governmental organization the position of women and their overall inclusion should be blooming, rather the opposite is the case. It is acknowledged by the water boards that there are less women in this sector, but this is not due to the organizational structure or the closed character of this sector. Hence, there is no need for structural change or more attention for the position of women in this field. According to the Dutch Women's Council the majority of the water regulatory authorities expressed a sense of hesitation and distancing when asked for support for the campaign 'Water in search of Women'. The main reason for distancing themselves from this project was the idea that it favored women only and that it would produce a policy based on preference and advocacy.

Given that the water regulatory authorities themselves did not fully support the campaign, the next step was to find support from a higher level, the Dutch government. Rather, one of the main struggles pronounced by the Dutch Women's Council was the closed character of the Dutch government in concern of innovative and promotional projects focusing on women, such as their campaign 'Water in search of Women'. The Dutch government and the emancipation policy mainly rely on structural measures and target figures and do not take into account the underlying power structures in our society which shape the gendered divisions still present in different sectors, including the water regulatory authorities. Even though the campaign of the Dutch

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<sup>2</sup> In chapter 4 the water regulatory authorities and the possible barriers for women in this sector will be discussed more indept.

Women's Council also relied for a part on target figures, their main goal was to change the organizational structure of this sector and to break with the image of the water regulatory authority as an 'old boys' network.

In order to sustain this concept of an 'old boys' network, an academic basis had to be laid, and a qualitative research focusing on how women actually experience their position within the water management boards will provide this support. During my internship I gathered and analyzed women's experiences and formulated this into an useful report for future project by the Dutch Women's Council. The Dutch Women's Council themselves see the trajectory of this campaign as an instructive starting point for future projects and plans are made to incorporate a broader academic basis to present to the Dutch government.

### *2.1. The added value of this research*

Following this approach I came up with the topic of this thesis, because the Dutch water regulatory authorities is not the only sector where women struggle to gain a higher position. By experiencing up close how women themselves think about the gendered division present in Dutch society and how they perceive their own position in their field, the question arose if these personal experiences could be used for further development of the emancipation policy. Can the Dutch government make use of the (new) topics coming from women's experiences? Should the emancipation policy be concentrated more on the needs expressed by women themselves?

Asking such questions is of main importance within feminist research to show that women are active subjects within Dutch society, rather than passive objects as which they are still often portrayed. By including the knowledge of women themselves a more inclusive picture can be sketched, situating women as active subjects within the core of the problem. Haraway calls this 'situated knowledges, in which she argues for the inclusion of "knowledges among very different- and power-differentiated- communities" which as a result will produce "enforceable and reliable accounts of things not reducible to power moves and agonistic, high status games of rhetoric or to scientific, positivist arrogance" (Haraway, 1991, 187-188). The personal experiences of my informants in this case function as the reliable accounts which surpasses several power-differentiated communities, ranging from the water regulatory authorities, male board members, the Dutch government till policymakers.

### 3. A short overview

Following the gathered information from my informants, a connection is made between the Dutch emancipation policy and the measures taken to include women more fully within the employment sector. This connection will be explained first while clarifying the main research question of this thesis.

To make this discussion on the Dutch emancipation policy more visual, a case study is incorporated which explains the Dutch water regulatory authorities. This governmental sector, as we will see later on, shows a lot of aspects which are presumed to work as barriers for women who want to work in higher functions. Based upon the information gathered from my female informants, structural barriers as well as so called “hidden gate keeping” mechanisms will be discussed to show that the water regulatory authorities is a highly gender stratified organization. Structural barriers which women can face are the often mentioned lack of good maternity leave and child care until late working and meeting hours. “Hidden gate keeping” mechanisms focuses more upon the underlying stereotypical ideas about women and men, femininity and masculinity. To further uncover how these stereotypical ideas influence the relational sphere on the work floor, the network theory and the theory of tokenism will be discussed.

In the last part of this thesis, a comparison is made between the Dutch welfare model and the Nordic (or Scandinavian) model, which is known for its high level of participation of women in the labor force. Because the welfare systems of both countries are largely similar, the question arises whether we can learn from, or perhaps even utilize, (parts of) the model used by these Nordic<sup>3</sup> countries. By discussing the main principles of this Nordic model, I will argue that even though at first hand this model seems the answer to our problem, there are negative aspects to be found. Even though the model has been described as family friendly and beneficial to women, feminist scholarship has pointed out some negative aspects that we also need to take into consideration. Just as is the case with the Dutch welfare model, the Nordic model also stays entangled within a patriarchal discourse still present in the different Nordic countries. Even though there are pitfalls in this model, there are elements which could be useful for Dutch policy.

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<sup>3</sup> The Nordic countries (also called Scandinavian countries) include Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark.

To return to the beginning of this research, in order to show the added value of using ‘situated knowledges’ to create a more inclusive emancipation policy, it is first of all necessary to deconstruct the policy itself. Therefore, in the next paragraph the current state of gender affairs within Dutch society will be discussed. What does the emancipation policy actually entail and how did it develop over time? In connection to this aspect, the concept of emancipation and the discourse taken by the Dutch government is explained. The discourse taken by the Dutch government is of main importance for Dutch society, because it influences the conceptualization of femininity and masculinity and shapes gender relations on all the areas of peoples lives.

#### **4. The Dutch emancipation policy**

Currently, the Dutch government is working with the third ‘version’ of the emancipation policy and there is a distinct discourse noticeable which defines each policy for the situation of that time. In order to compare all three of the policies, a short explanation on each policy will be discussed next.

##### *4.1. The first emancipation policy, 1977*

The personal really became political with the first emancipation policy of 1977 that mainly concentrated on the elimination of stereotypical representations of women and men and the restrictions that it produced for women in specific. As feminist research often shows, Dutch society was (and still is) strictly divided into the public and the private. Based upon existing ideas about female and male characteristics, cultural beliefs, religion and power balances, the public sphere is historically connected to men and the private to women and this division is still at work in today’s society. In order to break down these stereotypical images, the government of that time advocated that women should catch up with their disadvantaged position in society and that men have to take more responsibility within the private sphere (Outshoorn & Keuzenkamp, 2001, p. 264-265. In; Abma & in ‘t Veld, 2001). This approach can be considered as an attempt to change Dutch society and the social division between women and men. Instead of only focusing on structural measures, the main emphasis was on the gendered division present in society.

#### *4.2. The second emancipation policy, 1992*

It is therefore a pity that the next emancipation policy took a different direction, with the new “no-nonsense cabinet of Lubbers III in 1992” that concentrated on the structural barriers alone (B. Prins, 2005; In: Snels & Halsema, 2005, p. 110). Issues such as the participation of more women in the social and political decision making and an equal division in unpaid labor were some of the main topics that was concentrated upon. Although these aims are of main importance for reaching the set goals at that time, the social, cultural, gendered and power structured aspects in this case were almost ignored. As Baukje Prins (in Snels & Halsema, 2005) evaluates, this emancipation policy was based upon the presumed principle that the emancipation of women was more or less fulfilled in Dutch society (as the [then active] minister of Social Affairs, Aart-Jan de Geus surprisingly remarked) and the main aim of this policy was reduced to the mere participation of women in the employment sector. The former aim of a cultural revolution was simply reduced towards looking at percentages. According to Prins (in Snels & Halsema, 2005) this resulted into a “complete reversal from a policy that was firstly based upon the broad aim of discovering and developing yourself as a woman, man or person towards a policy defined and restricted by focusing on structural aspects”. Even though the accent lays on the participation of women in the labor market, according to Outshoorn & Keuzenkamp (in Abma & in ‘t Veld, 2001) the problem of representation and stereotyping does get acknowledged in this emancipation policy. Unfortunately, “the elaboration is poorly constructed because they only focus on breaking through the stereotypical conceptions which legitimize power inequality in very global terms (Outshoorn & Keuzenkamp, 2001, p. 266. In; Abma & in ‘t Veld, 2001).”

#### *4.3. The current Emancipation Policy, 2008*

The current emancipation policy of the Dutch ministry of education, culture and science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, in short OCW*) is called ‘More opportunities for women’ (*‘Meer kansen voor vrouwen’*) that is applicable for the period of 2008 till 2011. In short it can be said that this latest policy is a combination of the policies that preceded it. According to the Dutch government there is a big gap between, on the one hand equal rights for women and men, and on the other hand the social reality when it comes to the position of women and men. The emancipation policy concentrates on different aspects of our society where the

participation of women has to be increased or where their position has to be improved. This ranges from increasing the participation of women in the workforce, to offering more and better chances for girls and women from ethnic minorities, from prevention of violence against women and girls to creating an international emancipation policy (Policy of 2008).

The main goal of the emancipation policy is to break through the stagnation within the emancipation process. In general it is thought that the emancipation of women is a done case within the Netherlands. The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when the claim for women's rights and position within society was a hot topic, does not exist anymore in that form. Hence, for some feminism is 'dead', 'done' or 'something of the past' (Prins, 2005. In Snels & Halsema). When the position of women in Dutch society is compared to those in other European and non-European countries, again the claim is often made that women already have the same opportunities as men. In this case, the current emancipation policy tries to knock down these common ideas when it comes to the position of women in Dutch society and states that there is still a lot that has to be done in this area. To try to break this idea surrounding the emancipation process, a break in the trend is necessary and therefore the cabinet will give a new impulse to the emancipation process on a local, provincial and municipal level that concentrates mainly on the growing participation of women in different aspects of our society, and the workforce is an important sector here (policy of 2008).

#### *4.4. Conceptualization of a key word; emancipation*

By historically situating the development of the Dutch emancipation policy, the main discourse taken by the Dutch government on the concept of emancipation clearly comes forward. To recapitulate; emancipation is brought into close connection with participation; more women in the governmental sectors will (almost) automatically result in a change in structure which will include women more easily. Within the official policy plan in 2000<sup>4</sup>, policymakers do recognize that emancipation is more than economic independence and participation on the labor market. In their words, "emancipation also adds value for citizens and to the Dutch society as a whole. Basically it is about the quality of existence for everybody. This means that all citizens should be able to trust on respect for their physical and psychological integrity and that women and men

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<sup>4</sup> The short term policy plan presented in the year 2000 functioned as a basis for a long term strategy. Therefore this plan is used to uncover the discourse taken by the Dutch government on the concept of emancipation.

have the opportunity to expand their talent within the private sphere, as well as in the public sphere (Meerjarenbeleidsplan Emancipatie, 2000, p. 5).” Next to this description the main aim of this emancipation policy should be to change the institutional and social-cultural barriers which women face within Dutch society. On the institutional level there are still policies which are based upon the principle of a one income household and do not take into account the fact that people need to combine work and family. On a social-cultural level, the masculine culture within organizations does not comply with the values of both working women and men (Meerjarenbeleidsplan Emancipatie, 2000).

Even though the emancipation policy does acknowledge other important aspects which influence the entire emancipation process, it does not elaborate or take into account more in-depth the actual influence of gender, ethnicity, religion, age and class. The definition which I would like to use for the further discussion on the Dutch emancipation policy encompasses more than just equality, participation and inclusion; Emancipation involves the process of changing constitutive elements of social relationships and relationships of power in order to uncover the reciprocal nature of gender and society. In my eyes this conceptualization includes the concept of gender and uncovers the different axes connected to it (as stated earlier this includes among other ethnicity, age, religion and class).

The inclusion of ethnicity and age are for the following case study of the Dutch water regulatory authorities important to take with us within the analysis, because women simply cannot be seen as one social category. “As Scott says, feminist history has posited “women” as a social category that preexists history and, at the same time, demonstrated that the very existence of the social category of “women” varied according to history and society (Strobel and Bingham, 2005, p. 12. In; Smith, 2005).” When looking at the Dutch water regulatory authorities, women are approached as one homogeneous category, while ethnicity and age are definitely factors which create a politics of in- and exclusion. As an example, only one of my 23 informants was a woman of color and she clearly expressed the fact that there are disproportionately less women of color within the water boards or the water regulatory authorities in general. Taking into account age as a category for analysis, several informants stated that more women of age take in a position within the water boards because they usually have more experience. Thus, factors such as ethnicity and age can also work as processes of in- and exclusion for different groups.

Throughout this thesis women are treated as one homogeneous group, but it is important to keep in mind that there are significant differences regarding ones ethnicity and age. This is also the case within the Dutch water regulatory authorities which will be discussed more elaborately next.

## **5. The Dutch water regulatory authorities**

One of the areas where attention is needed for the political position of women is in the water regulatory authorities (*waterschappen*), a governmental organization which regulates everything that concerns water management (more information on this organization later on in this essay). The Dutch water authorities traditionally is a political sector that is strongly based upon male workers, as historically there were only men who executed the management of the Dutch water systems. The representation of women in the management boards of the water authorities is as a result relatively low. Therefore, this political sector is a point of attention within the current Dutch emancipation policy and also has been material for the national campaign organized by the Dutch Women's Council (de Nederlandse Vrouwen Raad, NVR) in the year of 2008. Because the target figure of 30 percent of female board members, set by the Dutch government in the emancipation policy of 2006 till 2010, has to be reached more attention is needed for this political sector.

### *5.1. What does the water regulatory authority actually do?*

The Dutch water regulatory authority is one of the oldest existing forms of (water) management in the Dutch society. The Dutch organization *Unie van Waterschappen*, the umbrella organization of all the 26 water authorities in the Netherlands, keeps track of all cases that involve water management and informs people about the work they do<sup>5</sup>. In short, it can be said that the main task of the water authorities is to make sure that we keep our feet dry. The Netherlands is a country which lies beneath the sea level, and therefore water management is a serious case. Simple, everyday and taken for granted matters, such as clean drinking water, a highly developed sewerage system, the development and constant reconstruction of dikes and green recreation areas are all examples where the Dutch water authorities come in. These matters do not just exist and need constant management and development.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the historical background of water management and the organization *Unie van Waterschappen* see the website <http://www.uvw.nl> (also available in English)

## *5.2. Why are there so few female members? An historical approach*

The fact that there are few female board members within the Dutch water regulatory authorities can be explained from an historical viewpoint in this case. From its origin, water management is controlled by men and throughout the years this situation did not change dramatically. Therefore, the sector of water management is often discussed with terms such as a ‘male dominated organization’ or as a ‘masculine world’. As one of my informant stated in this context:

From the beginning on it has been farmers that had the leading functions in the water management and they had the idea that their work had to be done by men only. When looking at the history of the water management, it is therefore not surprising that there are no references towards female members. But when we delve deeper into this history, you do find examples of women who were working more behind the scenes in this area. When looking at the financial department, it showed that there were women active there. In case of a sudden death of the man who fulfilled the position within the water authority, his work was taken over by his wife. The man in this case was only the face of the office, while his wife actually fulfilled this position. This situation did not come to the surface earlier, because within the water management boards the basic principle was a form of co-optation. This meant that the male family members of the current manager automatically took over the position, without taking into account someone qualities for this work. Even if there was a family member with a position in the general or supervisory board, it was simply a habit that even till three or four generations later, the family members automatically got a position without having experience. This selection of members out of the familial and informal networks was one of the main reasons why the water regulatory authorities existed and kept existing out of men alone.

*(former board member of a Southern water regulatory authority, 11-03-09, The Hague).*

This informal system of co-optation and its influence on the organizational culture is difficult to change and the consequences are still noticeable in the composition of the water authorities of

today. Therefore, a lot of people still talk about the water regulatory authorities in masculine oriented terms, even though women today do not necessarily have to have negative experiences as a minority within this governmental branch. From an historical perspective the concept of patriarchy and its deep entanglement in Dutch society in this sense keeps the gendered division alive and well within this governmental sector. Feminist scholarship from the beginning on concentrated on the major influence of patriarchy on the gendered division in our society. Feminists argue that “patriarchy is an indispensable concept for an analysis of gender inequality (Walby, 1989)” and theories are therefore developed to show the connection between a lot of different axes that we encounter in our daily lives. The informal networks that women within the water regulatory authorities are confronted with is just one good example in this case. As Walby (1989) argues in her work on patriarchy, this structure also works beneath the surface while still influencing in this case the relations and structure on the work floor.

### *5.3. Which elements can prohibit women from entering the water regulatory authorities?*

By taking into account this historical note and the underlying patriarchal structure, the water regulatory authorities are important sectors as one of the governmental organizations, where the emancipation policy can help to change the current situation. In the year 2008 elections were held for forming new water management boards, and this was an excellent opportunity to raise attention to the issue of women within this sector. With a national campaign called ‘Water zoekt Vrouw’ (Women in search of Water), the Dutch Women’s Council tried to raise more attention to what the water authorities actually do and shine a light on the female candidates for this year’s elections<sup>6</sup>. Next to the structural barriers and the so called ‘gate-keeping mechanisms’ that we have to concentrate on, publicity is also of main importance when aiming at reaching certain target figures. Just as during the popularity and uprising of the feminist movement, the publicity of feminist issues within Dutch society can help to reach the goals that are set sooner. A possible explanation for the low participation of women in these firms is that they are not as often in the public eye, with less public and commercial pressure to include women. More publicity in this case will mean more knowledge, recognition and possibly pressure from society when it comes to the position of women in these governmental sectors. Writing policies alone about the necessary changes is not enough to improve the situation, as was already shown during the

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on this campaign, see the website [www.nederlandsevroutenraad.nl](http://www.nederlandsevroutenraad.nl)

preceding policies. A combination between structural measures and a change in societal structures is necessary in order to reach some of the set goals.

### *5.3.1. Women have a different take on managing than men*

As a lot of informants, and researchers as well (see for example Keuzenkamp, 1995) indicate in this case, is that the participation of inhabitants (women as well as men) is essential in decision-making and environmental policies. “The aim of environmental policies should be to improve the built environment on the grounds that it is the place where people spend their lives. In making improvements, the differences between people, regions, cultures, countries, etc. should be respected (Keuzenkamp, 1995, p. 383).” Moreover, more women should participate in a professional position when it comes to building the environment because it is not only a branch that concerns men. Valuable as this approach may be, and almost everybody in the field will agree upon it, it is seldom put into practice. It is therefore interesting to see that the women which I interviewed, concentrate on the beneficial aspects of having women in this important process of decision making in the field of the water regulatory authorities. Most informants during my qualitative research mentioned typical feminine characteristics that made them more suitable for a management function. The main difference that was focused upon was the difference between women and men when focusing on the social and civil aspects of managing:

As a member of the board it is very important that you bring in a social and civil aspect towards the system. You see that a lot of women bring this aspect into a decision making positions and this is very useful. In comparison with men, most women have a bigger social antenna for this kind of situations. Of course there are men who also incorporate these aspects, but in general women show more interest in socially motivated arguments. My impression until now is that most women are better with intergrading a new social aspect to managing, instead of simply following the existing rules without looking outside of the box.

*(former board member of a Northern water regulatory authority, 23-02-09, Amsterdam).*

### *5.3.2. The feminine advantage and disadvantage*

Most of the interviewed women expressed the same ideas when it came to the different approaches of women in managing positions. This possible different approach of women towards

management functions also caught attention within the academic world and within several years a lot has been written about this ‘feminine advantage’ or on the other side the ‘feminine disadvantage’ within management functions, or more general in leadership positions. According to some researchers<sup>7</sup> (and also women themselves) women give another twist to managing and do it differently or even better: this is also called the ‘feminine advantage’. This term, put on the map by Gary Yukl (2002), proposes that women are better in interpersonal skills and these skills are highly valuable and asked for within current organizational structures. The other side in this debate, as shown in the research by Stoker (2007) is based on stereotypical images surrounding women which makes them incompatible for management functions, the so called ‘gender disadvantage’. Whether women are perfectly capable of leading or managing, in practice they will experience a lot of disadvantages while trying to reach or maintain a managing position.

### *5.3.3. Some critical reflections*

Although the theories which focus on the ‘feminine advantage’ or on the ‘feminine disadvantage’ have supporters and opponents, both are concentrated upon stereotypical ideas of what is perceived as typical feminine characteristics or behavior. It is not my intention to support one of these theories, rather it is important here to show that the personal opinions of the interviewed women are constructed within these two theoretical explorations of feminine characteristics.

The description of the social characteristics implicit in feminine behavior by Vecchio (2002) for example keeps the stereotypical images connected to feminine behavior alive and well, even though it tries to show that women are undoubtedly capable of fulfilling a top position. As Vecchio (2002) shows us by mentioning several social researches, there are differences noticeable between male and female leadership behavior. “Men have been found to be somewhat more self-assertive, aggressive, and coarse in their manner and language than women. Females, in contrast, have been found to be more expressive of emotion and compassion (Vecchio, 2002, p. 648).” Not surprising at all, the reaction of my informants share some similarities with this

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<sup>7</sup> Especially within the field of the social sciences a lot of work has been written about both the ‘feminine advantage’ as the ‘feminine disadvantage’, both critiquing one another. For more information on the concept of ‘feminine advantage’ see the work of Vecchio (2002) “Leadership and gender advantage” or the work of Yukl (2002) “Leadership in organizations”.

description. The concept of masculinity was described with the terms aggressive, formal, fast, direct, egoistic, structural and taking a statistical approach. On the other end, femininity was characterized with the terms critical, a wait-and-see mentality, over think, discuss, open, emotional and the tendency to include other aspects. Looking at these descriptions, a clear opposition comes to the surface which reinstates the current gender stratified working environment at the water regulatory authorities (and other governmental sectors).

It is therefore important to recognize the pitfalls in such descriptions. When focusing on the ‘feminine disadvantage’, the same feminine characteristics will work against ambitious women who want to reach a top position in the business world. Masculinity and femininity in these cases are portrayed as two separate and independent dimensions, even though as feminist studies have shown over the years, they are connected to each other, shape one another and stand in close relations to other dimensions in our society such as culture, religion, ethnicity and many other<sup>8</sup>. The descriptions mentioned above are not simply given and static, rather by rethinking and analyzing them it can be changed into a more dynamic and open concept of femininity and masculinity. Stretching the established edges is of utmost importance in order to change the current masculine norm that is used in Dutch society. Good examples which show this masculine norm is research of feminist theorist Susan Sontag (1977) where the act of taking photographs is described in the same aggressive terms that are so typical for men. Or the work of Emily Martin (1991), which describes how science has constructed a biological description of conception which is based on stereotypical male and female roles in society.

#### *5.4. Will more women change the stereotypical description?*

To uncover these underlying gendered implications it is therefore of main importance to think outside of these stereotypical and biased theories. This also counts for the small number of women in high positions and the organizational structures which are mainly based on a male ideology. New approaches towards this continuing problem are needed, because a lot of theoretical explanations that base themselves on stereotypical descriptions do not explain the current situation fully.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example the famous and influential work of feminist theorist Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) on intersectionality in feminist theory.

In the extension of this critique, when looking at the possible female advantages and disadvantages as mentioned above, it is important here to take a look at the concentration that is put on enlarging the number of women within several governmental sectors. Within the Dutch emancipation policy the main solution for opening up the (governmental) organizations for women lies within their numerical presence that will lead to a feminine advantage and strengthen their position. I will argue, by using the theory of Rosabeth Moss Kanter of tokenism, that depending on numbers and statistics alone and using it as a starting point for further policies will not enhance the current situation. The use of target figures in this case can be critiqued as well as supported. The example of the Dutch water regulatory authority and the experiences of my informants concerning their own position within this sector are taken as the leading red thread throughout the further elaboration of the Dutch emancipation policy in this area.

## **6. Target figures and Tokenism**

### *6.1. The connection between the usage of target figures and the theory of tokenism within the Dutch emancipation policy*

The Dutch emancipation policy is partly based on reaching certain target figures. Especially when it comes to the position of women in the business world, it is important that there is a certain amount of women present within the organizations. An ideal situation that the Dutch government is hoping for is a 50/50 division; 50 percent is female, 50 percent male. The idea behind this approach is that both of the actors bring specific characteristics and approaches towards the organizational structure that as a consequence will produce better management. Again, male and female are seen here as two different and separate dimensions, instead of existing alongside each other. This approach leads to the concept of ‘androgyny’: an androgynous person has both masculine and feminine qualities and this combination will create a better task and person oriented approach (Vecchio, 2002). The Dutch emancipation policy comes close to this theoretical discourse that tries to merge or bring together the supposedly distinct conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity.

The basic idea behind using target figures is that when a particular percentage of female involvement is reached within an organization, the supposedly masculine environment and organizational structure will change and open up for even more positions for women. In academic terms, this idea comes close to the theory of tokenism, brought to the foreground by theorist Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) to explain the organizational structure in the context of exclusion of female workers. “What Kanter ultimately determined was that the life of women in the corporation is influenced by the proportions in which they find themselves (Gustafson, 2008, p. 2).” Again the number of women within an organization in this sense is seen as an influential factor that will have a positive influence on the gendered division on the work floor. Thus, “tokenism is likely to be found wherever a dominant group (in this case men) is under pressure to share privilege, power, or other desirable commodities with a group which is excluded (in this case then women) (Laws, 1975, p. 51)”.

This idea of exclusion in combination with group proportions is also a basic principle for the emancipation policy that focuses on the position of women in high positions. The power that comes forth out of the number of men working together results in this respect in the situation where women are seen as a separate category. As long as a separate category is represented with less than 15 percent, the idea is that they take in a token position that stands in contrast with the dominant group (Yoder, 1991). At a point where the amount of women reaches the border of 15 till 35 percent, the situation changes to a division between a minority group and a majority. Members of the minority group are seen less as a token and more as an individual. But they remain ‘different’. The critical border here lies around the percentage of 30 till 40 percent, only then a person from the minority group will actually have influence within the group<sup>9</sup>. The problem with this group dynamics is that “the token will not become assimilated into the dominant group but is destined for permanent marginality. The token will always remain a member of an underrepresented group, who is operating under the license of the dominant group (Laws, 1975, p. 51).”

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<sup>9</sup> For more information see the website <http://www.seba.nl/gvo-onderzoek.htm>

## 6.2. *How do women themselves perceive their token position?*

During my own qualitative research the concept of tokenism also came forward as an explanation for the fact that there are less women in the boards of the water regulatory authorities.

If you take a look at the theory of tokenism, you need to have a situation where women have a representation above the critical border of 40 percent in order to have some influence. The main idea behind this theory, and that I agree upon, is that as a woman within a masculine dominated environment, you get a token position appointed to you; you can be seen as ‘the virgin’, ‘the mother’ or ‘the bitch’. This act of labeling occurs because you are not seen as a normal member of the group and by putting a token position on a woman, she becomes less threatening. Around a specific point, around the 30 till 35 percent, comes the situation where a woman is seen more as a part of the team and a full member. The token position then changes from the former label of ‘the bitch’, towards a possible ‘star’ within the group. In a lot of governmental organizations therefore the aim is to reach this critical border to work towards a fuller inclusion of female members and to see what will happen with the position of these women (*former board member of a Northern water regulatory authority, 23-02-09, Amsterdam*).

This idea of social structures and positioning are not new topics within the academic world, and also within feminist discourse. The labeling and thinking in stereotypes when it comes to what is presumed to be feminine and masculine has always existed, and the influence of this tendency is what is so important to bring forward in this case. Finding out how people within a governmental organization such as the water regulatory authorities think about the position of women and men is of main importance, because these ideas shape and keep the culture within this organization alive. In this case “stereotypes are the cognitive precursors of prejudice and discrimination. They function as powerful shortcuts when people assess others, affects how people behave towards others, and they entail, more often than not, detrimental outcomes for people who are the targets of stereotypes (Mast, 2005, p. 919)”.

At first hand I was surprised that, when asked about potential differences between how women and men assess each other or behave towards one and another, my informants could not come up with some actual examples where they encountered negative differences or situations where they felt that were labeled as ‘the mother’ or ‘the bitch’. Kanter’s theory of tokenism at first hand seems logical, because one almost automatically assumes that women who are in a minority position, whether this is on the work floor or at another public area, are also treated and approached as such and thus a difference should be noticeable. The opposite happens to be the case, where women mostly feel a full member of the group, instead of a social outcast. A possible explanation for this aspect is that the theory of tokenism failed to touch upon other axes that play a role within the organizational structures.

### *6.3. Critical reflections on Kanter’s theory of tokenism*

The theory of Kanter therefore has received a lot of critical reflections<sup>10</sup>, and in my opinion one of the most usable critiques comes from Yoder (1991) who points to the presumable gender neutrality of tokenism. Kanter’s theory of tokenism, which identified numbers as the primary cause of the negative effects, in Yoder’s eyes does not reflect the complexities of gender discrimination in the workplace. Number balancing, the main approach taken in by Kanter as well as by the Dutch government within the current emancipation policy, is not the solution. Tokenism theory has been very influential in later research on the position of women in the workplace, but it is important to emphasize that the theory of Kanter is also situated in a particular discourse based on presupposed notions of women’s inferiority. “Kanter, as well as later researchers, examined only female workers (gender status) in occupations that were stereotypically defined as masculine (i.e. gender inappropriate for women) (Yoder, 1991, p. 180).” And as Gustafson continues on this notion, “... what Kanter regarded as the result of numbers has as its basic, root cause sexism. The negative treatment of women here could be stemming from notions of their social inferiority and not from their scarcity (Gustafson, 2008, p. 4).”

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<sup>10</sup> The main critiques can be found in the work of Yoder (1991) and Gustafson (2008) mentioned in this thesis, but also see other work of for example Yoder (1994) “Looking Beyond Numbers: The Effects of Gender Status, Job Prestige, and Occupational Gender-Typing on Tokenism Processes”, or Laws (1977) “The psychology of tokenism: An analysis”.

To support the claim that is made above, it is important to look beyond the available official statistics and numbers and use them with caution before making huge claims on gendered divisions within organizational structures. Even though in my opinion there is a sense of truth within the theory of tokenism, it is important to see it in combination with other factors that influence the current position and perception of women in the workplace.

#### *6.4. Can more women change the situation?*

Even though the discourse set by theorists such as Kanter is highly criticized, the idea that the presence of women within an organization will change the structure is also known and discussed within feminist research. When women have finally succeeded in reaching a position at the top, they have the power to change the system. “You can speak about the responsibilities of those who succeeded and who are now in positions where they can indeed regularize tenure procedures, enhance women’s access to fellowship, and make the organization a “more decent, more open, more ethical institution.” (Waldijk, 2006, p. 173-174).” But it is a bit overenthusiastic and idealist to think that this is enough to change the governmental organizational structure for women themselves, others and in general. But as a first step in changing, in my opinion, it can have an influence on other aspects that shape the current gendered division noticeable in a lot of organizations. In line with this argument a change within the organization structures is also dependent on the social networks that are in place at the work floor. Especially when looking at the branches where there are more men than women, the main idea is that it is harder for women to enter and get a stable position in this sector. Once there, it is important to keep this position and here a broad social network can help. In the following paragraph this social network theory will be discussed more fully.

### **7. Network theory**

In combination with the foregoing theory of tokenism, the importance of group dynamics and the relationships in the workplace is also discussed with the so called (social) network theory. This theoretical approach emerged as a key technique in modern sociology to explain social networks and the complex sets of relationships between members of social systems. This theory has been adopted by other branches, including feminist discourse.

### *7.1. Social networks for women and the 'old boys' network*

When talking about social networks and its importance for women, the connection is often made with the so called 'old boys' network or a masculine oriented structure. First of all, having a social network is of main importance to break through the so-called 'glass-ceiling'<sup>11</sup>. Social connections and networks of men represent their long working tradition, their social visibility and their old friendship which they build up during their education and career. Several researches<sup>12</sup> agree that a professional network, friendships and acquaintances are extremely important for the course of someone's career. This is especially true for women, because traditionally and historically seen they do not have these kinds of networks as long as their male colleagues (Kibbelaar, 2005, p. 200). Women are usually brought into connection with the familial network and therefore "one explanation for the fact that there are more women in senior positions in small businesses is because the latter are more often family businesses. The female family members are better positioned in the company network and so are more readily appointed to management positions (Keuzenkamp, 2001, p.30)."

### *7.2. A social network as a safety net and strategy*

Most of my informants during my research mentioned the importance of having a big social network as a way for women to achieve a higher position and also as a method for maintaining it. When taking into account that a lot of recruiting for new personnel takes place within the informal sphere, having a big social network can come in handy. Some women for example experienced that their male colleagues were chosen easier because they recruited from their own personal and informal networks or because there was the tendency to make decisions behind closed doors (in Dutch this is often described as 'achterkamertjes politiek'). For some it was frustrating to see how their male candidates were preferred just because of this existing masculine network, instead of giving priority to actual qualities. This is of course a dangerous statement to make here, because there are a lot more aspects that can play an important role in this decision making. Blaming it all on the existence of a so called 'old boys' network is a bit

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of the glass-ceiling refers to the structural barriers that a lot of women face when trying to reach a higher position within a certain organization.

<sup>12</sup> For example see the work of Kibbelaar (2005) used in this thesis, or Stoker (2007), Verhoeven, Jansen & Tazelaar (2000) (all researches are only available in Dutch)

essentialist, but it is also not the case that this factor then should be ignored completely. According to women who work in these businesses themselves, the existence of this network does play a crucial role in the continuing struggle that women often face when trying to reach a higher position.

This does not mean that they only have negative experiences when it comes to the relationships between them and their male colleagues. Actually, when asked about their personal experiences about the relationship between women and men within the board system of the water regulatory authorities few negative stories came to the surface, just as was the case with the foregoing discussion on the tokenism theory. The collaboration between women and men often does not influence their possibilities at work, rather it is the bigger picture of the organizational structure and the importance that is laid on the social networks, that can work against women.

### *7.3. A critical note; a combination is needed*

What is surprisingly here, as a side comment, is that once women have reached a higher position, the idea raises that one woman is enough and other female colleagues are seen as rivals. The perception that the ‘old boys’ network and the macho culture is the main and only enemy for women who want to achieve a top position is hereby invalidated, which also means that theories building on these structures are less valuable. The personal experiences of women who work in the described masculine organizational structures is therefore of main importance to question and problematize these ‘stereotypical’ descriptions and produce more accurate and full descriptions of the current status of the work environment for women in the governmental sector. Basing myself on the notion that the inclusion of women’s personal perspectives and experiences will lead to a fuller and better understanding of the world surrounding us and “to stand in a critical and reflexive relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination (Haraway, 1991).” Combining these experiences with the already existing theories on social networks and tokenism will put us in a critical and reflexive position that will as a consequence influence the way we look and perceive the current emancipation policy in Dutch society.

Of course, the structural measures taken by the Dutch government are of great importance for change, but as argued before, Dutch society is a gendered society, which means that the current situation is more entangled than just on the structural level. The symbolical level also plays an important part that structurally divides society in two camps. This might come across as extreme, but as I will show in the following paragraph, next to all these structural aspects and measures that the Dutch government is focusing upon, the bigger picture is also of importance to take with us when looking at the emancipation policy. With this I mean the welfare state and its implications for the position of women in our society. Feminist work on welfare systems and so called gendered social policy regimes show the important connection between the social organization of public and private life through social policy and how this is influenced by the definition of welfare. As Shaver in this case states, “social policy and welfare is indeed centrally concerned with conflicting demands on the working mother and the likelihood that without a male partner she will be poor. Social policy also contributes to shaping the understanding of herself and her identity, as a social actor and citizen (Shaver, 2002, p. 205).”

## **8. The (Dutch) welfare state**

For this discussion on the position of women in high positions and the Dutch emancipation policy, one therefore cannot consider the (political) debates about the welfare system as something separate. “Women’s historians have shown convincingly that work–family arrangements are determined by socio-economic relations that go beyond the idealism and fairness of people in positions of power (Waaldijk, 2006, p. 173).” The welfare system is an important factor that shapes the emancipation policies and more specifically the position of women and men within the society.

Looking at the historical background, “according to the liberal notion of how society should be organized, a separation between public and private is one of the most important building blocks to assure freedom for its citizens (Prins, 2005; In: Snels & Halsema, 2005, p. 108).” This interpretation of the necessary separation between public is private was (and still is) put into question with the most famous feminist words ‘the personal is political’<sup>13</sup>. “For feminists, this

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<sup>13</sup> see for examples the work of Baukje Prins, 2005; or the more influential and historical work of Judith Butler, 1990; and Betty Friedan, 1963 that laid down the basic feminist thought for these famous words.

liberal approach sees the family as a structure of personal and intimate relations that are based on the values of care and love, instead of on the economic value, political power or social status that shape the public sphere (Prins, 2005; In: Snels & Halsema, 2005, p. 108).”

Even though a lot of research has been, and still is, done on the welfare system and the impact it has on society and its citizens, new feminist scholarship has only recently started to show interest in this topic in comparison to other academic areas. Still, the interest in this topic is growing and the neglect of gender and women within the dominant discourse on welfare is heavily contested nowadays by feminist scholars. Linda Gordon (1990) in my opinion sums up the main obstacle that surrounds the conceptualization of the welfare state from the beginning on until now, by stating that “if the state were a family, it would be assumed that welfare is a woman’s affair. In fact, in the actual, non-family state, women constitute most of the recipients and providers of ‘welfare’ (Gordon, 1990, p.9).” This simple observation can be seen in a broader daylight when placed within the existing dominant discourse on gender and the welfare state. Socially and academically, the welfare state is described in masculine terms which, when taking Gordon’s statement into account, is strange because women are definitely implicit in this societal structure.

### *8.1 A short historical overview of the Dutch welfare system and the exclusion of female workers*

From an historical perspective, distinctions were noticeable within the (Dutch) welfare system between men from women through laws which focused on their specific position within society<sup>14</sup>. “Laws concerning men were mostly based upon working issues and the public sphere, while laws for women were concentrated mainly on the domestic sphere. From the beginning on, provisions for women were included within the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch welfare state, but these were based upon the idea that women primarily remained within the private sphere (Nelson, 1990).”

As Van der Klein (2003) shows us, “financial aid and pensions were awarded to women not in their capacity as caregivers, but to replace the support male breadwinners had provided for their children. Reformers hoped that this form of aid would encourage women to remain at home as

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<sup>14</sup> For more material on this distinction implicit in welfare systems, see the influential work of Barbara Nelson (1990) “*The origins of the two-channel welfare state; Workmen’s compensation and Mother’s aid*” (In: Gordon, L. 1990, *Women, the State and Welfare*”, p. 123-152) which influenced a lot of later researches on the gendered welfare state.

caregivers rather opting for paid work outside of the home (Van der Klein, 2003, p. 11).” Thus, even though the welfare system was set up to keep women at home, the provided financial aid was insufficient. As a result women were forced to step outside of the domestic sphere to search for paid work. With this trend, that resulted from the at first hand gendered structure of the Dutch 19<sup>th</sup> century welfare system, women entering the work force were structurally left out of the regulations. Overall, most of the women had jobs within the domestic sphere and this sector was not covered within the welfare regulations at that time.

Even though the welfare system did include women as workers (paid and unpaid), the system was predominantly based upon the male breadwinner ideology that viewed women as dependent on their husbands (Waaldijk, 2006). The regulations that were developed to support women, as discussed above, remained within this discourse of gendered assumptions regarding the roles and behavior of men and women within our society. Connecting this more specifically to the discourse on work, “the crucial relationship becomes that between paid work, unpaid work and welfare. This set of relationships is also gendered, because while it is possible to argue that the gendered division in paid work has substantially diminished because a greater number of women have entered the labor market, other evidence suggests that the division of unpaid work has changed only little (Lewis, 1997, p. 162).” Women still remain the ones responsible for most of the unpaid work, and even though this is widely known in Dutch society, the welfare system does not yet succeed in incorporating this knowledge to change the situation. Grever and Waaldijk (2004) argue that the historical construction of women’s labor is an important factor in this discussion. “Women embraced productive labor as a legitimate claim to their citizenship. However, the concept of women’s labor had acquired negative connotations. By the 1890s, it had become widely associated with low wages, poor working conditions, immorality, unemployed men, and neglected children. The use of the term “women’s labor” was a conscious political intervention (Grever and Waaldijk, 2004, p.14).” The historical development of the concept of women’s labor can not be neglected when talking about the welfare system, the supposed dependency of women and emancipation. Just the same as that the work-family arrangements for women within the Netherlands are continuously under debate, this should also count for the conceptualization of women’s labor. These social constructions of work, labor, women’s labor, public and private have enormous consequences for women and their ability to combine work

and family. To name some; “No substantial system of child care has developed and the ideology of motherly duties is still rampant: the majority of Dutch men and women think that it is bad for children to go to day care in the first four years of their life (Waalwijk, 2006, p. 174).”

This is partly due to the fact that most interpretations of the welfare system do not use gender as a category of analysis, but they simply include women’s particular welfare situation as described above. Gottfried & O’Reilly correctly state concerning this fact, that “the dominant approaches to the welfare systems pay less attention to the negotiation of gender as embodied in industrial relation institutions and employment relations (Gottfried & O’Reilly, 2002, p.2).” In my opinion, this explains the current gendered nature of the Dutch welfare system, which dedicates a paragraph specifically on women’s situation with the idea that this is enough to include women and solve the problem concerning the gendered division within society. As feminist research shows, the inclusion of women within the policies in this context is not enough to change the historically and culturally embedded ‘ignorance’ of the welfare system towards women and gender. As mentioned earlier, this ignorance is caused by the *two-ways welfare state* as Nelson (1990) so nicely calls it, by making a clear distinction between women and men through separate laws for each party. “One source of this differential treatment is our gender system, including norms that women, especially mothers, should be primarily domestic and supported by men (Nelson, 1990, in: Gordon, 1990, p.11).” This main idea, the economic dependency of women on men, is what, according to most feminist scholars, keeps the welfare policies intact over all these years<sup>15</sup>. The main effect for women in top positions, in this case management functions, is that it is difficult for them to combine their work with their private life and the tasks that awaits them there. Some of my informants clearly stated that for men it is easier to combine a management function with other work positions, because they have less responsibilities in their private life and remain the main bread winner in their family circle. For women, the fact that they work double or even triple jobs, this does not mean a direct change in the relationship and divisions of work at home. And in a bigger picture, for the gendered division within Dutch society concerning work and the family.

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<sup>15</sup> For examples on this argument, see the work of Gordon (1990), Nelson (1990), Fraser (1990), Gottfried & O’Reilly (2002), Brush (2002), Shaver (2002) or Lewis (1997) .

## *8.2. The influence of the Dutch welfare state on women's lives*

A large part of the women that I have interviewed for my research also brought forward a sense of these gendered welfare regulations that construct a society that separates women from men. Especially the laws surrounding the private sphere, and the lack of it within the public sphere was an issue that caused some disappointing reactions. Take, for example, the hot debated issues of maternity leave and childcare. Within the Dutch water regulatory authority these regulations are not implemented as a basic right for employees who have a family with young children. As one informant stated;

When I started to work for the water regulatory authority in my municipality, there were no clear regulations concerning maternity leave. Considering the fact that I had two more children during my career at the water governance, this is something that I changed myself. This branch is often described in terms of a masculine dominated world, and from an historical perspective it has been dominated by men, and thus the regulations were also based upon this group. It was not the intention of this branch to exclude women, rather it as just the way it developed historically and now is gradually changing.

*(Re-elected board member of a Southern water regulatory authority, 03-03-09, Delft)*

The gendered welfare system in this case is not seen as a determining aspect of the current situation noticeable within the Dutch water regulation authority, rather the historical development is mentioned as the principle cause. Of course this argument is grounded, as I have already included this aspect in this thesis. But the bigger picture is neglected in my opinion, because the social policy which should include maternity leave are organized through the welfare system within a society. The same is the case for child care, which according to another informant lacks in development compared to other Western countries;

First of all women are often not prepared to work long weeks of 60-80 hours, and this is the actual standard for a top position. For women their family and social contacts are of main importance and in comparison with men they really try to

combine work and family and manage to find a balance between these two areas in their lives. In order to find this balance, child support is an important factor that can make it easier for women. In the Netherlands the child support is still not organized good enough to support these women in high positions, and this is a pity.

*(Chosen but withdrawn board member of a Southern water regulatory authority, 19-03-09, The Hague)*

The personal experiences expressed by these two women put the emphasis on the social policy regulations, that are implicitly connected to the Dutch welfare system. As I explained in the foregoing exploration of the welfare system, it is based upon an ordering principle that structures the relations among women and men. This great influence and interconnectedness between gender, the welfare state and emancipation policy is an important aspect that I want to bring across in the light of my argument for a fuller and more dense exploration of the current emancipation policy.

In the light of this approach, I will therefore in the next chapter make a comparison between the Dutch welfare state and the Nordic welfare model. The added value of this comparison is that it shows a different approach towards the process of emancipation. A comparative research towards the possible similarities and differences between both cases might uncover new insights towards reaching a more inclusive emancipation policy. As I have shown in the preceding paragraphs, not only qualitative data is important for further development of the emancipation policy. Also the building block of this policy has to develop further, thus meaning the welfare system. Within the Nordic welfare model the economic possibilities for women was advocated through multiple measures which will be explored in the next paragraph. The result was that “more women than ever before entered the labor market. From the age of 20 until retirement between 72 to 80 percent of women are employed in the labor markets of the five countries (Women’s International Network News, 1996).”

## **9. In comparison; the Nordic/Scandinavian model**

The welfare state model of the Nordic countries can be said to be unique when it comes to the high participation of women in the labor force and can also be described as a family friendly policy. Why is this model so successful when it comes to the participation of women and which elements can be used in order to 'improve' the Dutch emancipation policy? Although these questions are not new<sup>16</sup>, in this context it is important to ask them again. By applying a comparative study to the problem of emancipation in Dutch society, new insights can be created and former hidden elements can come to the surface.

### *9.1. The Nordic/Scandinavian model*

As stated earlier, the so called Scandinavian or Nordic welfare model is usually named and credited as a model that boosts the participation of women on the labor market and generates gender equality. Even though, as Cox (1994) argues, the different welfare systems look alike because of the fact that policy initiators borrowed ideas from programs developed in other nations, there are differences between them. To continue with Cox's argument, he believes that these remaining differences between the welfare systems stem from the political preferences within a society and the structure of state organizations. Which aspects make the Nordic model so special and successful when it comes to the issue of emancipation?

#### *9.1.1. The first basic principle; a homogeneous population*

First let us start with the main characteristics that can explain the reason why the Nordic welfare system is 'a perfect model' for the inclusion of women. In comparison with the Dutch society, the Scandinavian countries mainly consist of "a small and homogeneous population, with a lack of racial, ethnic, and religious divisions, which has allowed the state to focus on the creation of a social welfare system which provides a high degree of social and economic equality (Lucas, 1990, p. 43)." The corner stone for this model thus is based on homogeneity, which in this sense is seen as better and less stigmatizing. This social composition allows for a welfare model that can guarantee "an extensive state support system that provides a basic standard of living for everyone (Lucas, 1990, p. 43)". If we are dealing with a more complex situation, where many

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<sup>16</sup> See for example the work of Greve (2007), Siim (1987) and Gupta (2008) which concentrate on the characteristics of the Nordic/Scandinavian welfare model.

different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds are put together (in this case the Netherlands fits into this picture), a guaranteed model that provides such a high degree of social and economic equality is more difficult.

### *9.1.2. The second principle; a 'family friendly' policy*

Following this first basic principle, the social services provided to the citizens are more providing and supporting. In the case of the Nordic welfare system, “a high level of material security is provided by the state in the form of a broad array of social benefits including: socialized medical care, free education up through the Ph.D. level, loans for young couples to buy a first home, subsidized child support, twelve weeks of paid prenatal maternity leave, and generous benefits to those unemployed (Lucas, 1990, p. 44).” What is interesting here is the so called ‘family friendly’ character of this model (Greve, 2007), which is often seen as one of the most important and distinctive features when looking at the inclusion and high level of participation of women in these societies. This family friendly character according to Greve (2007), and other researchers concentrating on the Nordic model, is distinctive to other welfare models “in the sense that the public sector has been actively involved in the delivery of day care for children. Also, there is a high level compared to other welfare states of economic support for families with children (Greve, 2007, p.45).” This stands in close connection to the description of the Nordic model as a service welfare state. This again refers to the high level of social care and health care services provided by the public sector.

### *9.1.3. The third principle; a system of preference*

As stated before, the Scandinavian model shows a high percentage of women in the electoral politics. According to a research of Rule and Shugart (1990) this inclusion of women is due to the system of a preference vote. “The Scandinavian countries, with their highly developed preference voting rules, had the highest percentages of female representatives among the twenty-three nations (Rule and Shugart, 1990, p.7, In; Bystydzienski, J.M., 1995, p. 24).” The basic principle of the preference vote is that once the candidate lists are established, women can gain a higher position on the list by accumulating as much preference votes as possible. In this way they can reach the important top three places on the list and make more chance for being elected.

Several of my informants also mentioned the preference vote as an important tool for female candidates for getting elected. The Scandinavian countries, according to the research of Bystydzienski (1995) have incorporated this system so successfully simply because “adding women to party lists broadens the general appeal of the party candidates (Rule, 1987, In; Bystydzienski, 1995, p. 23)” and women have made use of this development. In connection to the fact that it was also mentioned by my informants, the aspect of a preference vote is an element that can be used better for future Dutch election periods.

#### *9.1.4. Dual character*

The above mentioned characteristics are often mentioned by researches as the aspects that give the Nordic model such an unique basis that includes women. In conclusion and as a bridge to the next part that focuses on the feminist perspective on the Nordic welfare model, I want to agree with Siim (1987) who points to the dualistic character of the Nordic model and shows us a less positive aspect where “in different ways the state has helped to produce and reproduce the sexual division of labor and male domination (Siim, 1987, p. 256).” Thus, according to Siim’s research there are the positive aspects of the Nordic welfare system, as discussed above, but more importantly, there are also negative aspects to be found which reproduce the sexual division instead of actually reforming it. Therefore, in the next part, more on this feminist critique will be discussed so that a more nuanced picture can be sketched.

### *9.2. Feminist critique*

Feminist scholarship on types of welfare state regimes has pointed out the enormous (negative) consequences they have for women and their ability to combine work and care. Even though the model has been described as family friendly and beneficial to women, feminist scholarship has pointed out some negative aspects that we also need to take into consideration. Just as is the case with the Dutch welfare model, as I will explain next, the Nordic model also stays entangled within a patriarchal discourse still present in the different Nordic countries.

#### *9.2.1. The first basic principle; from a homogeneous population to a divided society*

Continuing with the outline of the preceding paragraph the first point concerning the universal character makes the Nordic model according to Waaldijk (2006) less applicable for other

countries. Because the policy is based upon a strong social cohesion, Waaldijk argues that “a return to this form of Scandinavian welfare system may be good for women who are full citizens, but it may also be harmful to those who are not (Waaldijk, 2006, p. 174).” This will mean that the social support offered by this welfare model is only accessible for citizens who stand on the top of the economic pyramid, which eventually will contribute to social and economic exclusion. When delving deeper into this statement, research by Kildal and Kuhnle (2005) shows that there are actually very few universal benefits which are given to all families or citizens. Even though this policy is based upon an universal take on providing social services, the basic principle remains that within a society “people are attributed social rights by virtue of membership in a community (Kildal and Kuhnle, 2005, p. 14).” Just as is the case with the Dutch welfare state as any other welfare model, in my opinion this basic organizational structure is inherent in every welfare system and inequality will always remain an issue. The Nordic model is based upon specific social demographics, which means that this model is not applicable for the Netherlands. The social composition of Dutch society is very different from the Nordic countries, which will consequently mean that people considered as non-citizens (allochtoneous people) are excluded from the beneficial aspects of the social services provided by the state.

### *9.2.2. Women as objects or active subjects?*

The second presupposed advantage of the Nordic model, the so called ‘family friendly’ and ‘women friendly’ character, is also questionable. Following Siim’s argumentation a double relationship is noticeable between women and the Nordic welfare state. On the one hand the unique social services have worked beneficial for women and helped them to gain a better and more stable position within society. But more importantly, on the other hand “women have primarily been objects in the development of the modern welfare states and have not been able to determine their interests as social and political agents (Siim, 1987, p. 256).” Some critics<sup>17</sup> will even go as far as stating that within the Nordic welfare model women have become subjected to a new kind of male domination in the public sphere. In my opinion, this removal of women’s agency is incorrect and extreme, because when talking about women it is important to see them as [in the light of] active subjects instead of passive citizens within the whole process. Although

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<sup>17</sup> See for example the work of Borchorst, A. & Siim, B. (1984), Brown, C. (1979), Hernes, H. (1983) which all concentrate on the patriarchal character of the Nordic model.

women lacked the formal political power to shape the welfare state according to their vision, they nonetheless played a significant role. A perfect example is the informal organization of discussion groups which during the second wave of the feminist movement developed into politically oriented demonstrations and gatherings. In this light, the Nordic welfare model succeeded to be so successful concerning the inclusion of women. “The effectiveness of women's political agency depends on their being able to gain access to the institutions of power that shape welfare policies (Annesley, 2007).”

### *9.3. The influence of a gendered welfare model*

Still, according to radical feminist thought as voiced by Gordon (1999) and Siim (1987) gender relations have usually been absent from the theoretical model of the nation state and welfare. Access for women to the institutions of power remains limited. “The state structure for example is coupled with egalitarianism which controls women and determines the nature of their status and inequality (Lucas, 1999, p. 44).” Moreover, the lack of gender analysis as mentioned above “obscures the labor market sex segregation (Gordon, 1990, p.11)” which makes it difficult for women to get jobs, or in this case a higher position within the organizational structures. The welfare system and social policy together shape the understanding of women and men’s identity, as a social actor and citizen, and flows all the way down into for example the different working environments. The Dutch welfare state and the Nordic welfare model both cope with this process of exclusion which limits women to enter the important decision making functions. Opening up these institutions and incorporating issues which are important for women in my eyes is necessary to make change happen for women’s position in Dutch society.

## **10. Conclusion**

By deconstructing the dominant discourse on emancipation taken by the Dutch government and connecting qualitative data to this topic, I have shown that there are ‘undiscovered’ aspects to the process of emancipation. The Dutch emancipation policy mainly concentrates on reaching target figures, which are seen as the perfect indicators for measuring the participation of women on the labor market. Rather, more underlying aspects shape the current outcomes of the Dutch emancipation policy. By incorporating the issue of the gendered character of the welfare state

and the restricted concept of emancipation used in Dutch society I have show that there are fields left to be explored more closely. Over time, the Dutch welfare system has incorporated a gendered system of laws which as a result reproduces the social relations of male domination. The limited definition of emancipation used by the Dutch government affirms this statement by mainly concentrating on participation and reaching target figures, while not using gender, ethnicity and age as dominant categories for further analysis.

Complementing this important theoretical basis, the personal experiences of those women who daily work within a male dominated environment give us insight into the possible structural and 'hidden gate-keeping' barriers on the labor market. Relying on my informants, the topics of tokenism and network theory came to the surface as important factors that can prohibit women from entering a business or from reaching a higher position within a company. Also the stereotypical ideas surrounding femininity and masculinity was a topic of discussion, because unconsciously these ideas shape the working environment and create the process of in- and exclusion. Because the water regulatory authorities in this case historically have been a male dominated sector, women have been largely excluded from it. Consequently, the organizational culture is a highly gendered one based on a masculine norm. Even though the Dutch government is convinced that more women will lead to a change in the organizational structure of a company, the above mentioned aspects do not change in accordance with this approach. The theory of tokenism also relied on target figures, but as several critics have shown us this theory does not take gender as a category of analysis which makes it an unreliable approach.

This comparison brings forward the main pitfall within the Dutch emancipation policy; the lack of a gender analysis on the governmental sectors. Therefore in my opinion, qualitative research towards the actual situation on the work floor for women is essential to develop a policy of inclusion. Although the emancipation policy does try to combine the structural measures with the so called gate-keeping mechanisms, that influence and shape the current discourse taken by organizations, the main emphasis remains to be based upon the male breadwinner ideology or as feminists tried to show us on a patriarchal structured society. The same is the case with the Nordic welfare model, which even though applauded for its positive effects on the emancipation and political inclusion of women, still remains based upon the same patriarchal structure. Above all, the Nordic model as I have shown is based upon a homogenous society, where differences

among citizens are minimal, while in the Netherlands such a model would only lead to social exclusion of citizens who are perceived as outsiders (often these are immigrants or allochthoneous people). Thus, even though the Nordic model comes forward as a successful welfare model, underneath the surface the same problems concerning a male dominated societal structure arises, and also for these countries qualitative research which focuses on women's experiences can improve the measures taken by the government.

All the elements mentioned in this thesis, from a gendered welfare state till the male dominated organizational culture, in my opinion have to be taken up as defining structures for women's position within Dutch society. Taken the fact that important aspects such as women's networks and the influence of tokenism on the work floor come from women's personal experiences, the use of qualitative data should be an important research tool for the Dutch government. Incorporating these new topics will, as I have shown, create a more inclusive approach towards the question how to increase women's participation within Dutch society. Participation is a key word within the discourse on emancipation taken by the Dutch government, and even though I will not go as far as stating that this is incorrect, I have argued that a wider approach is more beneficial. This case study, which focuses on women in high positions, with the example of the Dutch water regulatory authority, shows that in order to make sure a social change happens, a lot of research still has to be done that focuses on the stereotypical and gendered ideas. These ideas are intricate to the Dutch welfare system, the emancipation policy and the societal organization of Dutch society and all influence the gendered discourse still noticeable within the structures of a lot of organizations. These are all big topics, and looking at the amount of feminist work and their concentration on the experience of women themselves, a lot of crucial information and possibly strategies can be extracted from using qualitative data.

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