

THE GLASS CEILING: INVESTIGATING THE DYNAMICS SURROUNDING THE ELECTION OF A FEMALE REGENT

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ABSTRACT

The glass ceiling faced by women leaders in politics has not been studied widely and has become a public and academic debate. Moreover, the lack of women's representation in politics in developing countries, especially Indonesia, is an intriguing topic. This paper aims to explore how a woman who becomes a regional head confronts the glass ceiling. This study used a single case study in Sragen, Indonesia. A series of interviews with the Sragen regent, vice regent, a political party figure, religious leader, and community leader was analyzed by using the Gioia method. The results indicate that the woman leader encountered the glass ceiling from the beginning of her candidacy announcement. The glass ceiling was overcome by establishing networking with a coalition partner, building public trust and demonstrating ability as a female leader. This study has implications for the need to re-interpret the suitability of gender roles, which is explained in gender role congruity theory. Further research can be conducted to explore how gender roles should be placed in an organizational context.

Keywords: Case study; Gender role; Glass ceiling; Political woman leader

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1. INTRODUCTION

“We need to move beyond the idea that women can be leaders and create the expectation that they should be leaders”
(Condoleezza Rice)

Women's participation in the workforce has been increasing over the past three decades, since the ratification of the United Nation convention in 1984. The International Labor Organization (2016) reported that the gap between men and women in South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific has narrowed since 1995. According to this report, the female participation rate in the labor force has lightly increased (from 58.0% in 1995 to 58.8% in 2015). Nevertheless, women are still under-represented in decision making and in leadership position. A more prominent phenomenon occurs in politics. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (2017) showed that women's representation in politics in the Asia-Pacific region is lower than in other regions; where women parliamentarians reach 23.6% globally, while the percentage in the Asia-Pacific region is only 18%. In particular, Indonesia was ranked 16th in the Asia-Pacific region for the involvement of women in parliament at 16% (ESCAP, 2017).

Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) acknowledged that only a number of women served as leaders at higher levels in the organization and that raises a question about why women's access to leadership roles tended to be limited. Using gender role congruity theory, Eagly and Karau (2002) explained that there was a prejudice in which men are associated with leaders whereas women are not aligned with leaders. However, such an argument has not been fully confirmed in various studies. Several studies have proved that women could serve as leaders despite perilous leadership positions when an organization faces serious problems (Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Sabharwal, 2013). Nevertheless, Glass and Cook (2016) stated that women actually used high-risk assignments to prove their leadership ability. These inconsistent findings in the previous studies indicate that gender role congruity theory has not been fully confirmed.

Previous studies have illustrated the difficulties that women confront in achieving a higher managerial position in companies (e.g. Cross and Linehan, 2006; Glass and Cook, 2016; Vianen and Fischer, 2002). The difficulties encountered by women in attempting to achieve higher levels increases as women enter politics on account of political space that has been considered a harsh environment for women and due to the fact that politics has predominantly been considered a masculine occupation (Bligh and Kohles, 2008; Wilson, 2003). Ryan, Haslam and Kulich (2010) asserted that there is still a need for research to explore gender imbalance in political leadership.

Indonesia clearly illustrates the phenomenon of limited women's involvement, particularly in politics. In the House of Representatives, 97 female legislative candidates were selected to be members of the House of Representatives for 2014-2019 (17.32%). That number decreased compared to the 2009-2014 period when there were 103 female members (18.04%) (Kompas, 2014). In addition to the low level of women's representation in parliament, women's representation at the executive level demonstrates even fewer numbers. Regional Election 2017 and 2018 show that the participation rate for women is still low, indicating women's minimum engagement in an executive position as a regional head. Women's representation in the 2017 regional election was only 7.17%; while the percentage showed an increase in the 2018 regional

election 2018, at 8.85% (BBC Indonesia, 2018). The minimum number of women in that position resulted in less opportunity for women to participate as policy-makers at the executive level.

According to Parawansa (2002), one of the causes of the lack of women's representation in politics is the patriarchal culture in Indonesia, meaning that women's opportunities to become politicians are relatively limited as a consequence of society's perception regarding the division of roles between men and women, which tends to be biased towards limiting women's roles to household affairs. Another study conducted by Rosenfield (2012) proved that Indonesian women are disadvantaged, and this may be caused by the New Order regime that was dominated by the military and did not consider women in a higher position in political and military hierarchies; and women were excluded from the decision making process in an organization. Due to such a patriarchal culture in Indonesia, the political sector is considered more suitable for men.

This study advances research on women's leadership and fills the existing gaps. Gender role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) which affirms the similarity of leader figures with men cannot explain the phenomenon of women's success in becoming leaders. In addition, previous studies have focused on unequal treatment between men and women in terms of leadership (e.g. Glass and Cook, 2016; Ryan and Haslam, 2005; Sabharwal, 2013), but have yet to review the women's process in achieving leadership positions. Thus, this study aims to explore the career barriers, which prevent a woman leader from advancing her career to a leadership position as a regional head. In Indonesia, women's political representation in regional head elections has yet to progress significantly. In 2017, there were only 10 women who succeeded in becoming regents, while 2 women became vice-regents, out of 286 candidates (General Elections Commission, 2017). The achievement decreased in comparison to the regional head elections in 2015, which resulted in 35 elected women candidates. This study was conducted in Sragen, regency located in Central Java, Indonesia. Currently, Sragen is led by a woman regent, who is well-known for her consideration for women's development through her vision, mission, and program.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Women's Leadership in Social Structural Perspective Theory*

Whether inequality between men and women exists in organizational leadership has been questioned and has become the focus of leadership studies. Yukl (2010) explained that during the 20th century, gender discrimination was supported by the old beliefs that men were more qualified than women for leadership roles. One school of thought that discusses gender differentiation in social behavior, including leadership, is social structural theory, which emphasizes that the underlying cause of gender-differentiating behavior is the different roles between men and women, following the differences in physical, environmental, and social conditions (Eagly and Wood, 1999). One of the theories that supports this school of thought is social role theory developed by Eagly (1987). Social role theory argued that the reason men and women justified gender stereotype was that they acted according to the social role for each gender (Eagly, 1987). In this case, women are identified as showing feminine behavior such as attention and concern for personal

relationships; whereas men exhibit more masculine behavior such as assertiveness and leadership qualities (Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, and Madon, 2003).

According to Eagly (1987), the fundamental proposition in social role theory is that the belief in gender roles will relate to the communal and agentic attribution. The communal characteristics which are considered emerge more from women exhibiting considerable attention towards others, such as pleasant, sympathetic, helpful, and tender attitudes (Reid, Palomares, Anderson, and Bondad-Brown, 2009; Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi, 2012). In contrast, agentic characteristics, which are considered to emerge more from men, describe assertiveness, a tendency to control, confidence, aggression, ambition, dominant attributes, coercion, independence, and acting as a leader (Reid et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012).

Further, Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed gender role congruity theory, which explained people's beliefs about the roles of men and women, as well as differences in behaviors between them and about other functions, especially in leadership. According to this theory, women leaders will confront two forms of prejudices, namely: (1) less favorable evaluation of women leaders' potency, considering leadership capabilities are more stereotypical in men; (2) less favorable evaluation of women leaders' behavior, as such behaviors are assumed less desirable for women (Eagly and Karau, 2002). The prejudices present that gender roles are placed on normative expectations, which have been instilled early in the society and have become shared beliefs as well as having manifested in various contexts of community life, and social sanctions for violations (Vogel et al., 2003).

2.2. *Women's Career Development and the Glass Ceiling*

Career development becomes more complex when considering gender, due to other factors outside work. O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) stated that women's career development is different due to the context of their lives in terms of family responsibilities that have consequences for women's career patterns, sustainability, and development.

In developing their career, women experience potential barriers. When women face invisible and hard-to-penetrate barriers because of their status instead of their skill, education, or experience, and the barriers mean the women find it difficult to develop their careers to the higher organizational level, such barriers are known as the glass ceiling (Bell, McLaughlin, and Sequiera, 2002; Goodman, Fields, and Blum, 2003). Another perspective is, when women are placed as leaders in high-risk positions, that can make them fail, such a condition is known as the glass cliff (Ellemers, Rink, Derks, and Ryan, 2012; Sabharwal, 2013). Other researchers use the term "tokenism" to describe an individual who is underrepresented or minority who experience negative treatment by being placed in a particular position in order to show that there is no discriminative treatment toward that minority (King, Hebl, George, and Matusik, 2010; Zimmer, 1988). In a further development, glass ceiling becomes a widely-studied concept since the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) admitted that the glass ceiling is the barrier to women's advancement in the workplace in the USA.

Cross and Linehan (2006) identified organizational barriers in the form of organizational policies and attitude bias, work environments that do not support and hinder women managers' ability to work effectively, as well as promotional barriers. Cross and Linehan (2006) also found another barrier that originates from oneself, referred to as the self-imposed glass ceiling, which is a

women's belief that their careers are considered successful when they also acknowledge another life outside their jobs, namely their personal life.

The self-imposed glass ceiling is the barrier that arises from inside women, which hinders them from achieving improvement (Boone, Veller, Nikolaeva, Keith, Kefgen, and Houran, 2013). Further, Boone et al. (2013) explain that self-imposed barriers in women originate from two main aspects. First, there is the problem of 'push and pull' between the family and personal life. When women gain an opportunity for promotion, they attempt to manage their career improvement with their family life. Second, there are problems with personal barriers that are faced which work against career development.

2.3. *Glass Ceiling in Politics*

The glass ceiling is not limited to the issue of women's representation on the management board of a company but also in the political arena (Ellemers et al., 2012). The political arena is considered hard for women since politics is absolutely in line with the male-oriented occupations (Wilson, 2003). Study on gender and occupational stereotypes show that the political realm is considered predominantly a masculine occupation (Bligh and Kohles, 2008). Karp and Banducci (2008) state that in general, compared to men, women are less interested and lack understanding of the political world. Such a difference may be caused by the different resources and level of psychological involvement between women and men. By gender barriers in the political sector, women who are nominated by the party and nominating themselves as public officials, particularly at national level, possess better qualifications than equivalent men (Black and Erickson, 2003).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. *Design*

This study used a qualitative approach with case study as a research method. Case study enables us to obtain an overview of the phenomenon that occurs in more detail and in depth (Siggelkow, 2007). The case reviewed in this study relates to the dynamics of the female regent's career in Sragen, a district located in Central Java, Indonesia. This female regent was elected through direct elections of regional heads. This phenomenon is interesting to study more deeply, not only because she became the first female regent in the history of Sragen, but also because she had to take a complicated route to become a female regent. For the first time, she ran as a candidate in the regional government election, yet she lost. Five years later, in the next regional government election, she re-ran and succeeded in becoming the Sragen regent.

3.2. *Sampling*

In a study that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, individuals are chosen purposively as informants, those who may provide information related to the phenomenon (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007). Informant involvement will be adequate when saturation data is reached, that is when information has been fulfilled, and additional information

has been obtained (Fusch and Ness, 2015). With this process, this study involved five informants, starting with the regent who became the key informant related to her experience as a female leader. Furthermore, other informants were chosen, namely the vice regent, a community leader, religious leader, and political figure who could provide relevant information. Sragen regent was the primary informant in the study. This female regent was 45 years old. She began her career as a female politician in the Regional House of Representatives of Sragen from the biggest faction before she nominated herself in the Sragen Regional Election. The second informant was the Sragen vice-regent, a 44-year-old male politician from one of the Islamic Parties in Sragen. Prior to his current position, he was the vice-speaker of the Regional House of Representatives of Sragen Regency. The third informant was a community leader, a 50-year-old man officiating at one of the institutions in Sragen, and he was active as the manager of one of the biggest mass organizations in Sragen. The fourth informant was a 40-year-old man. He was a religious leader in Sragen. This informant was known as one of the religious leaders who frequently presents in Muslim forums in Sragen. The fifth informant was a politician, a chairman of one of the political parties in Sragen.

3.3. *Data Collection*

Data collection was performed by using three techniques: (1) semi-structured, one-on-one interview; (2) documentation; (3) non-participant observation. The semi-structured interview was conducted using the interview protocol as a guide to the initial interview. The interview was carried out for approximately 45-60 minutes at a time and location agreed with the informant. The interview protocol was prepared by referring to several previous studies (Cross and Linehan, 2006; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; White, 1995), covering personal, family and social aspects.

Besides semi-structured interview, data collection in the form of documents was conducted through various sources, for example, data collection in the form of a public document was obtained from the Sragen Regional Government, from the official website of the local government, and from relevant news that appeared in the mass media. As for non-participant observation, the researcher observed the physical environment, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, and behavior during the observation process.

3.4. *Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness is carried out by using credibility criteria (Lincoln and Guba, 1986), which reflects upon the extent of the results of the study in accordance with actual facts and information in the field. To test trustworthiness, credibility was examined by triangulating data by using more than one data source, including a colleague, community leader, religious leader, and political figure; additionally, triangulation theory is used by using multiple perspectives to interpret data.

3.5. *Data Analysis*

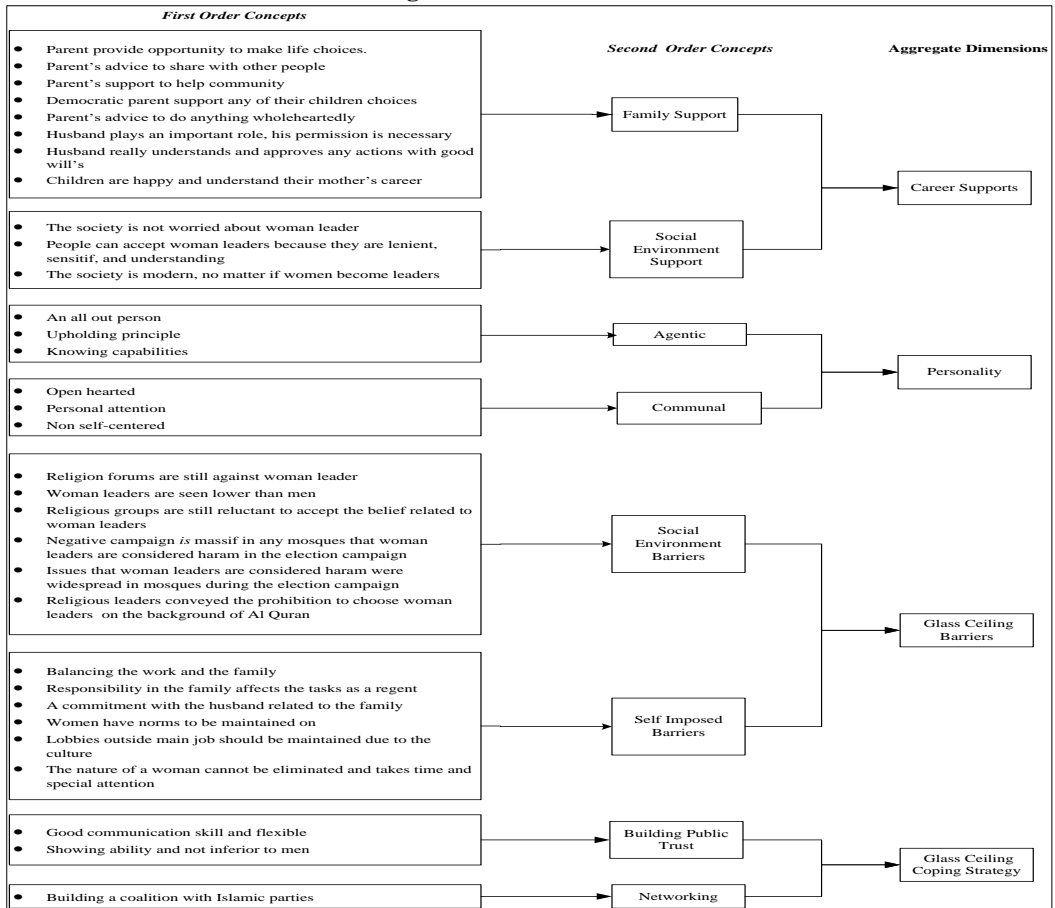
As for data analysis, the Gioia method (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2012) was used in this study, consisting of several steps: (1) first order analysis, by identifying the initial concept and grouping it into several categories, and looking for similarities and differences among categories; (2) second order analysis, connecting between categories to form a theoretical relationship that describes and explains the phenomenon under study; (3) aggregate dimension, by examining further to filter the themes that appear in the second order to be aggregate dimensions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analyzed using the Gioia method (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2012) produced a data structure as illustrated in Figure 1. Based on figure 1, data analysis was primarily carried out by identifying initial concepts grouped into first order concepts. First order concepts reflect the grouping of the informants' statements which contain similar themes. Based on the first order concept grouping, the next stage is made up of the second order concepts that determine the sub-themes and themes for each group. In the second order concepts, this study produced 8 sub-themes derived from the statements of the informants about the careers of female leaders. From the sub-themes, the theme categorization can be determined based on the similarity of the sub-themes, and it produced 4 aggregate dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Based on the data structure in Figure 1, the career dynamic of a woman leader had two different aspects, namely supports and obstacles, originating from the external and internal environments. Each environment presented both aspects of supports and barriers. The external environment supports came from the general public's view regarding women leaders; in contrast, the religious groups in the society became a barrier for women leaders. The internal environment provided support through family roles and personality characteristics; however, some personal values were believed to be a separate obstacle to their careers.

Figure 1: Data Structure



4.1. Glass Ceiling Barriers

The female regent, who leads Sragen, faced the glass ceiling when she ran for the regent position. This phenomenon confirmed what Yukongdi and Benson (2005) have described about Asian countries that women encounter various obstacles to their progress, including those from the community. In the social environment, the glass ceiling occurred in the form of gender stereotyping by religious groups in the society. A community leader stated:

“Moslem people believe that a leader must be a man ... Even in family, the leader is a man too. This was informed in the recitation, where *Kyai* (Islamic preacher) conveyed the chapter of Qur'an to clarify...” (A community leader)

It shows that people's perceptions of women leaders are shaped by the religion they hold which later causes gender stereotypes. Ellemers et al. (2012) asserted that stereotypes and beliefs against women play an important role in shaping reality when women occupy positions of power. In line

with this opinion, in the context of Indonesia, under the New Order for more than 30 years, women were defined in particular ways as citizens with gendered responsibilities, especially for carrying out tasks suited to their feminine nature (Blackburn, 1999). As highlighted by Rosenfield (2012), Indonesian women face unfavorable conditions, whether it is because the majority of traditional Muslims in Indonesian society tend to put women in domestic life rather than to acknowledge their existence in the public arena. Under this circumstance, it is difficult for Indonesian women to participate in the political realm.

In addition to gender stereotyping, gender status is also questioned and it was a major obstacle faced by the Sragen regent when running for regent. The issue of female leaders was massively exploited to inhibit and defeat the woman candidate during the regional head election. This was conveyed by the regent based on her experience:

“At that time, someone said that female leaders were not allowed. On Friday, massively some mosques of certain community organizations said that the female leaders were *haram* (forbidden)...” (Sragen Regent).

Interview with the vice regent also confirmed the issue during the campaign:

“Coincidentally, one of the issues is the problem of women ... The most prominent issue, last before the ballot (voting), leaflets were distributed in mosques about women's leadership, which according to the leaflet it is forbidden” (The vice regent)

Due to the onslaught of such an issue at the regional head election, the Sragen regent (then still a candidate) experienced defeat against her competitor. The widespread issue of women leaders confirms what Bligh and Kohles (2008) argued that, in the political realm, women's traditional political role is always faced with gender stereotype in that the political arena is considered a harsh environment for women. More specifically, Klenke (1999) explains that having gender roles present in social stratification and organizational structures that are centralized- characterized by differences in activities, ranking of status, and excessive organizational hierarchies- has an impact on the number of women leaders in politics in Asia.

In addition to barriers which come from the social environment, the personal factor can be an inhibiting factor as well; it is known as self-imposed barriers. Self-imposed barriers are obstacles that arise from women themselves, preventing them from career progression (Boone et al., 2013). Self-imposed barriers are perceived in the form of work-family conflict and certain personal values that are firmly held. Regarding work-family conflict, the regent stated:

“An obstacle faced by a woman, I have to balance between work and family. One, I was appointed, sworn to work. On the other hand, I am a wife who is bound by an oath as a wife and mother. That must be balanced, even though there is no balance...” (Sragen Regent)

In this case, the work-family conflict felt by the regent became a complex problem faced by career women, as stated by Cheung and Halpern (2010) in that working women generally spend more

time each day on household duties, compared to their male coworkers; they still have to work at home after a day of completing work in the office.

In addition to work-family conflict, specific personal values can also hinder the development of their careers, such as the norms of modesty and femininity. In this case, the regent stated:

“As a woman, I collide with my husband's permission ... I realized that no matter how high I would fly, without the blessing of my husband, huh ...(shaking her head)” (Sragen Regent)

Klenke (1999) recognizes that women's leadership in politics in Asia is influenced by socio-cultural factors that have become a part of heritage and tradition. Cultural norms regarding the nature of women, that have become hereditary traditions, form personal values that become obstacles to women, and are known as one of the self-imposed barriers in the development of women's careers (Boone et al., 2013). Baker (2003) describes the self-imposed barriers on women as the 'sticky floor' in relation to the glass ceiling, which has occurred due to individual choice instead of external barriers, where the choice is related to the problem of marriage and family.

4.2. *Coping with the Glass Ceiling*

Before finally winning the regional head election, the Sragen regent experienced a defeat in the previous regional head election. At that time, she was defeated because of gender issues which meant women leaders were attacked intensively and opposition was stated in mosques, recitations, and through leaflet distribution. She ran again five years later in the next regional head election. In this period, she was better prepared to face the issue of female leaders. The barriers to achieving a leadership position are overcome by various efforts, i.e. through career support and networking development.

The regent's external and internal environments provided support to deal with career barriers. External environmental support came from the public opinion that did not object to the presence of female leaders. A community leader conveyed:

“People can accept female figures; usually a female is tender, sensitive, understanding ...” (A community leader)

Therefore, Sragen society does not question the figure of women leaders; they will accept leaders who offer understanding, feelings, and relationship sustainability. These characteristics lead to one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions of femininity (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, 2010). Hofstede et al.'s (2010) research shows a moderate feminine score for the Asian region, where Indonesia ranks under Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea and Thailand.

In addition, career support also comes from families who play an important role in determining women's career success through the support of parents, husband and children. The following is the role of the family, as stated by the regent regarding support from parents:

“My father always gives space to his sons and daughters, in terms of life choices, just do the best...” (Sragen Regent)

In terms of support from husband and children, the regent conveyed:

“I have a very understanding husband. My husband said, if you feel that you already have a central role in the family, and now you want to take on greater responsibility, as your husband I agree, as long as it is good for you and the people”

“Children have grown up; they have all begun to understand ...”
(Sragen Regent)

This family support is in line with several studies, that reveal the role of family support in determining women's career success, decreasing the strain of women's roles, and improving family satisfaction (Nabi, 2001; Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001). The meta-analysis conducted by Ford, Heinen, and Langkamer (2007) reinforces these findings that family support and the work domain are positively related to cross-domain satisfaction in both aspects.

In addition to the external and the family environment, career supports also arise from personal characteristics. Personal characteristics, inherent in the Sragen regent, assist her in her career development, as stated:

“Everything, at all times, full of risks, I live with all my heart. I am a typical person who is not half-hearted. If I have decided, yes, I have to do it whole heartedly, to be focused...”
(Sragen Regent)

Based on the interviews, several characteristics became factors that supported the success of the Sragen regent's career, namely courage, focus, determination, and being trustworthy. Such characteristics made her stand firm when she failed in her first candidacy in the regent election. Learning about the first nomination defeat in the regional head election, in the re-nomination for the next period, from the beginning of the campaign the problem which had arisen in the first campaign was anticipated. One of the efforts made was to establish a coalition with one of the Islamic parties, as stated by a religious leader:

“In the next campaign, there was a compromise with one of the Islamic parties to handle the issue of female leaders. Also, mosques were guarded” (A religious leader)

Besides establishing a network with Islamic parties, effort was made to build public trust by demonstrating the ability of the female leader, which emphasized femininity as an advantage, through such traits as demonstrating flexible communication skills, advising on motherhood styles, and giving personal attention. This was acknowledged by the Sragen regent when she talked about trying to get closer to people through a wedding invitation:

“Woman has the advantage that the skill communication is better and more flexible ... I want to go to the kitchen ... Let me help, though only slicing 2 chillies ...but it was immediately implanted in them that the regent was very popular” (Sragen Regent)

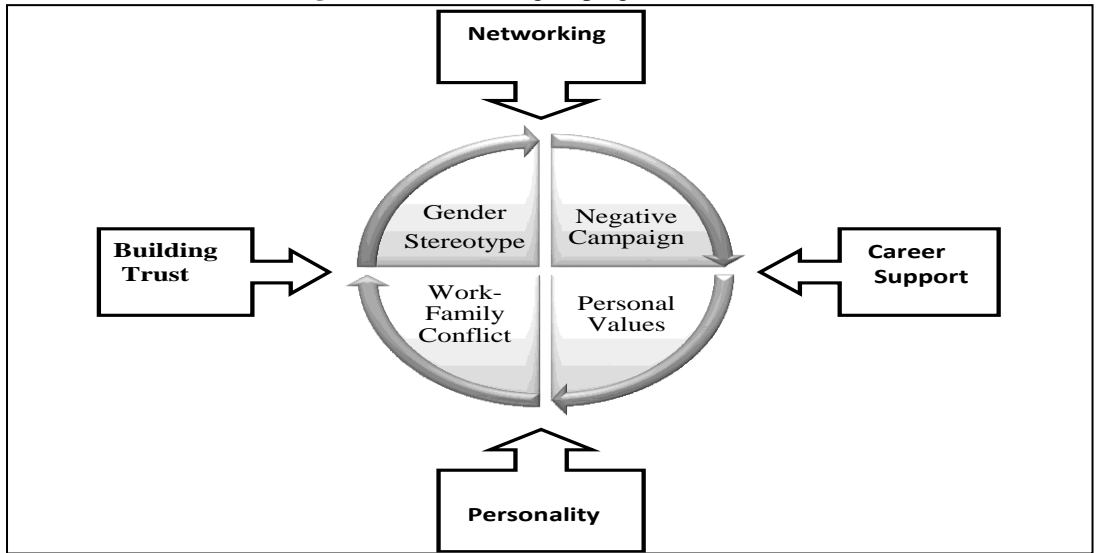
In this context, female leaders use their femininity as their superiority; as Adler (1996) points out, female leaders use positive images of their role in the family as children, sisters and mothers to

improve their position. By using these familiar roles, female leaders can connect positively and powerfully with their people. Adler (1996) explains further that the images of familiar roles as children, siblings, and mothers can negate various sexual connotations that are often associated with women and tend to harm the efficacy of women leaders.

4.3. Discussion

This study provides evidence that a woman leader has faced glass ceiling barriers in advancing her career to be a regional head. The scarcity of women at the top level, especially in politics that is considered to be a predominantly masculine occupation, limits their access to power and leadership (Eagly et al., 1992; Bligh and Kohles, 2008). The fact that a woman candidate won in the regional government election reveals that leadership is not always identified with men. It also serves as a powerful symbolic cue that 'politics is not just a man's game' (Karp and Banducci, 2008:106). This case offers empirical evidence of the lack of gender role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) in the context of the phenomenon in Sragen. The beliefs of Eagly and Karau (2002) that leadership ability tends to be stereotypically characteristic of men on account of the inherent agentic traits are not supported by this research. Agentic characteristics are identified as being assertive, confident, powerful, ambitious, and independent, and the theory suggests that all of them are identical with men (Reid et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012). Stereotypically, women are considered to have communal characteristics, namely to be pleasant, likeable, trustworthy, nurturing, and helpful (Reid et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012). However, this study proves that this woman who succeeds in becoming the head of Sragen has a combination of agentic and communal characteristics.

On the other hand, the finding reinforces previous studies (Ryan and Haslam, 2005, Sabharwal, 2013) that proved the success of women becoming leaders despite risky circumstances. This study also proves the glass ceiling in politics faced by women in trying to achieve the position of regional head. The scarcity of women at the top level, especially in politics that is considered to be a predominantly masculine occupation, limits their access to power and leadership (Bligh and Kohles, 2008). In this study, a woman leader faced the glass ceiling in the form of gender stereotyping from religious groups and the issue of female leaders during the campaign. Some religious groups in Sragen believe that women should not be leaders on account of their interpretation of religious values that do not allow women to become leaders. This finding is in line with Rosenfield's (2012) study which proved that traditional Moslem groups in Indonesian society consider women's rightful positions to be in household life. Having faced the glass ceiling, the female leader strove to overcome the obstacles faced until she became the regional head. How the efforts were implemented to overcome the glass ceiling is illustrated in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Glass Ceiling Coping Mechanism

In this study, women who are advancing as candidates for regional heads encounter the glass ceiling in attempting to achieve the position, in the form of gender stereotyping from religious groups, the issue of women leaders during the campaign period, and self-imposed barriers.

Gender stereotyping by certain groups in Sragen society confirms the findings of previous studies (Bligh and Kohles, 2008; Bruckmuller and Branscombe, 2010) that identified gender stereotyping as one of the obstacles experienced by women leaders. Also, self-imposed barriers represent a limitation faced by women leaders due to difficulties in balancing family and career (Baker, 2003; Cross and Linehan, 2006). In addition, there are certain personal values held by women that prevent them from progressing, namely the necessity to maintain the norms of modesty and femininity. This is in line with Boone et al.'s (2013) finding that self-imposed barriers which occurred in women derived from "push and pull" problems between family and personal life.

Dealing with various forms of glass ceiling, there were several efforts made through coping mechanisms. The coping mechanisms relate to two main aspects that become represent the source of the glass ceiling, namely the external and internal aspects. The first coping mechanism on external aspects was to strengthen the support of public opinion given by the Sragen community. From the results of interviews, the people of Sragen had not been concerned about female leaders; what was important for them was having a leader who was amiable, gentle, and compassionate. This phenomenon reinforces Hofstede et al.'s (2010) study which put Indonesia as a country with a moderate level of femininity, with a masculinity index of 46. In the context of Sragen, an effort to strengthen positive public opinion was carried out by getting closer to the people as was done by the Sragen regent on various occasions, both formally in the office and informally in society.

The second form of external coping mechanism relates to building public trust. To build public trust, the Sragen regent demonstrated her ability as a female leader. These efforts were realized by highlighting femininity as a superior trait of women leaders. Femininity is an advantage shown by women leaders, in line with Adler's (1996) thought that positive images of familiar roles used by women leaders can positively improve their position with the people. Another external coping mechanism was networking in the form of coalition partners with Islamic parties, which proved effective in reducing the pressure from the gender issue.

In addition to external coping mechanisms, internal efforts were also carried out through family support and by strengthening personal characteristics. These supports reinforce previous studies which have shown that family support plays an important role in women's career success (Ford et al., 2007; Nabi, 2001; Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001). In addition to family support, personal characteristics were also important factors in overcoming the glass ceiling, namely being courageous, focused, persistent, and trustworthy.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the career barriers, which prevent a woman from achieving a leadership position, based on the experience of a female regent in Sragen, a district located in Central Java, Indonesia. The results reveal glass ceilings faced by a woman leader in the form of gender stereotypes, negative campaigning about women leaders, and self-imposed barriers. The results confirm a previous study by Carli and Eagly (2001) which found that people were prejudiced against women as leaders to some extent; the prejudice manifests itself in various forms and leads to multiple effects. In this study, gender stereotypes came from religious groups in Sragen, which do not want women leaders on account of their interpretation of religious values. This finding reiterates what Adler (1993) has previously stated in her study that religious traditions contributed to the underrepresented and underutilized conditions of women in Asian countries. Another barrier, negative campaigning, also represents an obstacle experienced by women leaders. In this case, it was very widespread in almost every mosque in Sragen. This negative campaign confirms the finding of Wilson (2003) which indicated that the political area has been a harsh environment for women. Moreover, a woman leader also faced self-imposed barriers, relating to the conflict surrounding career versus marriage and children (Cross and Linehan, 2006).

The results also indicate the efforts of a female leader in overcoming glass ceilings to become the regional head. These efforts were carried out through an external mechanism by strengthening positive public opinion, building public trust, and developing networks. To strengthen public opinion and build public trust, a woman leader proves her ability as a leader and uses her femininity as an advantage by showing personal attention and a maternal style to get closer to the people. Additionally, developing networking in this study confirms what Rasdi, Garavan, and Ismail (2012) stated that networking is important in explaining career success. In addition to the external mechanism, the internal mechanism was carried out through family support and strengthening personal characteristics. Family support for a woman's career in this study is in accordance with previous studies (Ford et al., 2007; Parasuraman and Simmer, 2001).

This study has implications for both academics and practitioners. The findings yield several significant theoretical implications. First, for gender role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau,

2002), the current study has generated a new finding that a female leader possessed mixed characteristics; she integrated agentic and communal characteristics. Gender role congruity theory states that people believe there is a similarity between men who are identical with agentic characteristics and leader figures and believe that there is no similarity between women who are aligned with communal characteristics and leader figures. The current study proved that the woman who succeeded in becoming the regional head of Sragen showed a combination of agentic and communal characteristics. Second, research on the glass ceiling in politics has not been conducted widely; in particular, there is no clear answer about why women are less involved in politics than men (Karp and Banducci, 2008). This study reveals the barriers faced by women when running for regional head, which explains the limited involvement of women in politics. Third, this study also enriches the concept of the glass ceiling, especially the self-imposed barriers (Boone et al., 2013; Baker, 2003; Smith et al., 2012), namely the existence of eastern culture that affects women's mindsets which creates a barrier within the women themselves. Previous research has shown that self-imposed barriers stem from the work-family conflict, where women feel that family responsibilities are a higher priority (Boone et al., 2013). In this study, the female leader feels it is important to obtain her husband's permission when developing her career; without her husband's permission, her career success is meaningless. So far, studies of the glass ceiling have mostly been carried out in Western countries, where gender equality is better perceived (e.g. Glass and Cook, 2016; Berrey, 2014; Boone et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012). In the Asian context which has a different culture to Western countries, there is not much research on the glass ceiling (i.e. Yukongdi and Benson, 2005; Thompson, 2003; Adler, 1993). Indonesia as an Asian country with a strong patriarchal culture and as a Moslem dominated country tends to prioritize men as leaders. This condition strengthens the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. This study offers an interesting context, when the glass ceiling can be minimized in Indonesia, the largest Moslem dominated country in Asia.

For practitioners, especially on the side of public policy implications, the findings of this study can also encourage the Indonesian government to formulate the right policies, not only to encourage women's representation in terms of quotas, but also to expand opportunities for women to occupy top positions as leaders in public spaces, for example by providing leadership training for women in order to develop a gender perspective and increase leadership skills. Additionally, the results show that solutions to the glass ceiling barriers for women leaders include building public trust, developing networks, and strengthening personal characteristics. To build public trust in female leaders, exposure of successful female leaders can be a good example and inspiration for the society, so that they no longer doubt female leaders. This can be done periodically, for example on the Mother's Day or International Women's Day. Women leaders need to develop their ability to prove that they can be leaders just as well as men. The election of Megawati as a woman president in Indonesia for the first time could act as a role model for Indonesian women to reach a higher level as leaders. It could also reduce stigma while providing opportunities for women to become regional leaders in Indonesia, both as regents, governors and even presidents.

This study has some limitations which must be acknowledged. The first limitation is the use of a single case study. It describes a certain phenomenon, so it does not necessarily apply to other contexts. If other researchers have an urge for generalizability, a multiple-cases approach can be used, as stated by Creswell (2013) so that researchers can develop naturalistic generalizations

through similarities and differences among cases so that generalizations can be applied to other cases. Second, this study still focuses on the female leaders who become regional heads. Further research could be extended to women's success in politics in other roles, such as when they act as members of parliament or heads of political parties. Further studies are therefore necessary to explore how gender roles should be placed in organizational contexts, especially in terms of leadership. In addition, further research could also reveal how the self-imposed barriers occur for women and become an obstacle to their career advancement.

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