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Performing Masculinity and Governing as a Woman: Margaret Thatcher and The Glass Ceiling

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Abstract   When we look at political history, it is possible and even regular to see many male leaders who have made a name for themselves and have left permanent traces. However, in British politics, which has a very conservative profile and strict rules, it is not an ordinary event for a woman to be in the parliament, then the party chairman, and finally the prime minister, considering the England of the 1970s. Thatcher appeared on the stage of history in England's most depressing years and made radical and courageous decisions. Thatcher, as one of the most famous examples of a woman who has reached the upper echelons, may have experienced the glass ceiling or how she overcame invisible barriers. Based on this question, in this study, Thatcher's career was examined within the glass ceiling concept framework. With the information collected from Thatcher's discourses, autobiography and biographies, thematic analysis was performed from qualitative analysis methods and three themes were reached. Eventually, three main themes shaped Thatcher's leadership experience. These are the dissonance between gender and leadership, strategic masculinity in leadership and thatcher and feminity. Despite Thatcher's strong political position, her indifference to the women's movement is noted in the literature. In this study, Thatcher's indifference was examined around the glass ceiling concept.

Performing Masculinity and Governing as a Woman: Margaret Thatcher and The Glass Ceiling

"Your home is something better to do."

It's where you go when you're not."

Margaret Thatcher, the first female prime minister of England, known as the Iron Lady, revealed the codes of her inner world with this statement. According to society's general acceptance, the home is the central place of authority and responsibility for women. For her, it has become a place to go when there is nothing good to do, a place that has no meaning, and time is wasted. However, Thatcher experienced major crises and betrayals in male-dominated British politics during her eleven-year term as prime minister. She survived with a dominant and harsh management approach until the opposition within the party forced her to resign. At this point, it is essential to ask a wide variety of questions, considering Thatcher's character and political career. How did she achieve a position she did not even believe in, in England that had conservative and strict rules ?

Her career started as a greengrocer's girl and ended as Britain's first female prime minister. Could she break the glass ceiling discussed for many years in social science? If she can overcome this glass ceiling, how could it be? Putting these aside, did she dominate British politics simply as an authoritarian mother? How was she betrayed and forced to resign at the end of the process, despite overcoming all the obstacles and glass ceilings in male-dominated British politics? Asking and ultimately answering these questions will provide a multidisciplinary benefit.

The main purpose of this study is to examine Thatcher's experiences throughout her leadership career and to reveal how she overcame the glass ceiling. The research question of this study was as follows: "Did Thatcher experience the glass ceiling, and if so, how did she experience it?"

To answer this question, the data collected from Thatcher's discourses, autobiography and biographies were analyzed by thematic analysis method and how Thatcher's glass ceiling experience was shaped was revealed with three themes.

While Thatcher saw women and leadership as contradictory situations at the beginning of her political career, she strategically displayed masculine character traits in order to establish herself in the society after she became the leader of the Conservative Party. However, this strategy caused Thatcher to support the gender-based prejudices of the masculine world and to produce negative discourses on women.

The Originality of the Study

Margaret Thatcher stands out as a significant figure in world political history in many respects. This study focuses on Thatcher's remarkable yet almost unexplored aspect. As is well known, the literature includes the concept of the glass ceiling syndrome, which refers to the invisible barriers that women frequently encounter in their professional lives. How did Thatcher, as a woman, manage to break through this glass ceiling and become the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, one of the world's most powerful countries? This study is centered precisely on this question. It examines whether Thatcher experienced the glass ceiling and, if so, how she managed to overcome this barrier and rise to the top.

While discussing this issue, the study draws upon the ideas presented in Pierre Bourdieu's Masculine Domination and Erving Goffman's The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, aiming to demonstrate how Thatcher constructed her character and how she dealt with the dominant masculine order and, consequently, the glass ceiling. Analyzing Thatcher's arduous struggle from a previously unexamined perspective and illustrating the survival strategies of women in male-dominated environments constitute the study's contribution to the literature.

In conducting the analyses related to the article's subject, thematic analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods, was employed. During the thematic analysis, three different data sets were utilized: Thatcher's own statements, speeches, and interviews; her autobiography; and the biographies written about her.

Literature Review

The life of Margaret Thatcher

Greengrocer's Girl: Iron Lady Thatcher

Margaret Hilda Roberts (post-marital Thatcher), who left her mark on Britain's political history, was born on October 13, 1925, in Grantham. Margaret, a greengrocer girl, gained her first life experiences and views in this grocery store. Her family, especially her father, who had a methodist view of religion, also influenced Margaret in this direction. The basic principles of Methodism (discipline, thrift, diligence, will) were embedded in her character. Indeed, she expressed her family's affiliation with Methodism by saying, "Our lives revolved around Methodism" (Özdikmen & Kartin, 2021: 51). Her sensitivity to religion was also reflected in her human relations, which affected her feelings and decisions about whether to love people. For example, she stated that one of the main reasons for liking Jimmy Carter, the then U.S. President, was that he was a devout Christian (Thatcher, 1993/1994: 56).

A new chapter opened in Margaret's life when she came to Oxford for university and started to study Chemistry. During her school days, she participated in her studies, political events, and Methodist sermons (Özdikmen & Kartın 2021: 52). Margaret, contrary to the general norms of the period, entered the male-dominated life of England as a woman who wanted to be in every aspect of life and enjoyed it. The phrase "I like to be in the center of events" is proof of this (BBC News Turkish, 2021). In her later years of university, she entered the Conservative Association and even became the association's president (Özdikmen & Kartın 2021: 52). Despite her young age, she tried to succeed in politics after university but was unsuccessful in her early years.

During this first candidacy experience, Margaret met Dennis Thatcher, her long-term companion whom she would love passionately, and they married in 1951. Ms. Thatcher has an actual emotional attachment and gratitude to her husband. This fact is obvious between the lines of her memories.

Thatcher and the Prime Ministership

Certain areas of life in a society like England have strict rules. For example, in British politics, even the fact that a woman can achieve a high position, let alone the prime ministership, has been described as a dream. The characterization of this situation as an illusion was accepted by the men at the center of politics and by the women themselves. During a media interview in the early stages of her career, Thatcher stated that she did not believe there would be a female prime minister in England but would not see it alive. A few years after reciting these words, she left her mark on England's deep-rooted history and became the first

female prime minister, making dreams come true. In the aforementioned period, many negative discourses were used against Thatcher in the media. Thatcher could not view the feminist movement as a cause worthy of support, as the overwhelming majority of feminist activism in the 1970s and 1980s was situated within left-wing ideology. Moreover, most women involved in political mobilization at the time were engaged in socialist organizations. For a staunch conservative with a firmly right-wing worldview like Thatcher, it was not possible to endorse a movement so deeply characterized by these ideological foundations (Conway, 2025).

Although such discriminatory statements about Thatcher were not used at the time, the profile of British political life shows that Thatcher was a political and social outsider (Evans, 1997: 42). However, when she was prime minister, it was seen that he seriously impacted the spread of neoliberal policies worldwide, and she completely changed the U.K. in many other areas. In the 1980s, conservatism led to a reduction in the rights of women and minorities. In this sense, Thatcher herself was directly responsible for this decline (Wooten, 2018, s. 339). It must be stated that a narrow-minded person who does not understand state affairs could not achieve any of these goals. Despite all these obstacles and prejudices, Thatcher became the party chairman and then the British prime minister. However, England of that period was in the position of a country that faced serious economic, political, and social depressions. Despite all these difficulties, Thatcher made radical decisions during her prime ministership, changed her country from top to bottom, and made it a playmaker country, not passive but active at both the regional and international levels. Life became unbearable when looking at economic data, unemployment, and welfare. While it has become a mystery that Thatcher will be re-elected at the end of her first term of power, the Falklands War has been the breaking point of British foreign policy and Thatcher's political career. At the time, she faced opposition from within her government regarding the Falklands War. Despite the criticism directed at Thatcher that the system could not bear the burden of war due to Britain's existing economic problems, the prime minister decided with a nationalist attitude—perhaps a mother who wanted to protect her home—irrespective of these, and the victorious end of the war brought her a definite victory in her second election. During an interview about the Falklands War, Thatcher stated that she would still make the same decision if she were responsible for such a war (Berlinski, 2008: 77). She has wanted to achieve England since coming to power, which occurs in the historical and political scene without being dependent or integrated with any field. Therefore the Federated Europe was adamantly opposed to it. During her premiership, she opposed the concept of a Europe in which the House of Representatives of the European Parliament would be the legislative body of the Commission, and the Council of Ministers would also be a state. She even included the self-identified expression in the House of Commons speech: "No! No! No!" (Thatcher, 1993/1994: 547). Although she had access to numerous public and political platforms, she never used this power or these opportunities for women or for the feminist movement.

Thatcher has been a staunch supporter of traditional gender views and the family as the foundation of society. In her interviews, she often talked about motherhood and housewifery and expressed her ideas on the priorities in this regard (Morrison, 2010: 126). Thatcher was pleased with this image of a mother and a housewife. She has successfully communicated that she is a housewife who does the grocery shopping and knows the prices (Berlinski, 2008: 52). She attached so much importance to the image of this housewife that she always took care to use the stereotypical expression "As every housewife knows" when talking about the priorities of the state budget or free-market ideologies. Undoubtedly, this attitude has also found a response in society. Even then, a documentary called Number 10 Downing Street: A Uniave Film History 1986 was shot. Here, Prime Minister Thatcher is also included, and although she is a prime minister, the role of the housewife in her official residence and women's domestic labor are highlighted.

This mother image is also evident between the lines of her memories. In the first days of his office, he had dinner with his team at the prime minister's residence due to the day's workload. Later, Thatcher added that no food was ordered outside during her prime ministership (Thatcher, 1993/1994: 20). Because besides being the prime minister, she also took on the role of a housewife who cooks her meals in her home. Undoubtedly, this attitude is that she comes from a religious family with strict rules.

It should be stated that Margaret Thatcher's mental world has prominent lines like her style in politics. For her, the line between being a winner or a loser is sharp and of great importance. While looking at the portraits of British elders on the wall during a dinner at an official residence, the ex-French President Thatcher thought this situation was the same as when she looked at the portrait of Napoleon on her trip to Paris. However, immediately after, she stated that these two events had a clear difference and wrote the following lines: "Napoleon had lost" (Thatcher, 1993/1994: 19).

The Glass Ceiling Effect

What is the Glass Ceiling Effect and Does It Exist?

After the sexual revolution in the 1960s, more women started to be included in their working life, and their visibility in the business world increased exponentially with each passing day. However, the increase in the proportion of women in managerial and leadership positions has not been this high. The report published by Catalyst for companies in the Fortune 500 ranking reported that almost half of the employees are women, but only 6,4% work in CEO positions (Historical Women CEOs of the Fortune Lists: 1972-2022 (List), n.d.). As it can be understood from here, even if women are involved in business life, they do not have the same chances as men to advance in their careers.

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission defines the glass ceiling as "artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities" (The Environmental Scan Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital, n.d.). In addition to this broad definition, the glass ceiling effect emerges as a social phenomenon discussed by senior management and women.

In the academic literature, the glass ceiling concept is defined by Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) as "a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women from moving up in the management hierarchy." Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman (2001) defined the glass ceiling as "a gender or racial disadvantage that is stronger at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels." They have established certain criteria to clarify the concept.

Cotter and colleges (2001) listed four glass ceiling effects to better understand this phenomenon criterion. According to the first criterion, glass ceiling barriers cannot be explained by other work-related characteristics of the employee and are based on gender or ethnic origins. The second criterion mentions that adverse outcomes arising from gender or ethnic differences are felt more at high career levels than at low levels. The third criterion concerns the perception of the chance of advancement to higher levels. It represents the perception of the disadvantaged group (for example, women) as having a lower chance of improvement and acting accordingly relative to the group that is not disadvantaged in terms of gender or ethnicity (e.g., men). In the last criterion, the authors say that glass ceiling barriers arise from gender or ethnic differences, increasing daily in a career.

While studies to define the glass ceiling effect continue, there is a debate in the literature about whether such an effect exists. This debate continues not only among academics but also in society. For example, as a result of interviews with 13 women working in a Fortune 500 company, Leffel (2002) found that women

do not accept the existence of the glass ceiling effect and base their success on their remarkable efforts. In addition, Bihagen and Ohls (2006) claimed no glass ceiling effect after ten years of longitudinal studies. According to them, men spend more time and invest in their careers, while women prefer their children over their careers. The authors are skeptical of the glass ceiling effect, claiming that women who work as hard as men can be in the same positions.

Social role theory and gender stereotypes

According to the social role theory, individuals learn certain behaviors and characteristics about their gender in society and perform the roles required by their gender in their lives. These continue to be transferred from generation to generation (Connell, 1998). Individuals adopt the roles or behavioral patterns they create in their minds for their business life. For example, in the Bem (1974) gender role scale, we can see that the characteristics associated with leadership are included in the masculine features. While authoritarian, logical, friendly, romantic, self-confident, not afraid to take risks, and acting like a leader are masculine characteristics, understanding, compassionate, shy, emotional, sensitive, and submissive features are feminine characteristics.

Isaac, Kaatz and Carnes (2012) mentioned some barriers that they think might prevent female leaders from success through effective behaviors and social role theory. According to the authors, similar active behavior patterns in masculine character traits are more associated with success in society. However, when women exhibit these active behaviors, they are perceived as more hostile and unlikabler than men, even if they are considered competent for leadership. In society, men's success is associated with their competence, while women's success is attributed to luck. Similarly, men's performance tends to be better evaluated. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be more humble in their performance evaluations. Finally, women's parenting roles are considered an obstacle to their success. These general assumptions in the society can be summarized as obstacles to the acceptance of women as leaders.

Bourdier explains the power of gender stereotypes in society and how these stereotypes are shared by women in his book Masculine Domination. According to Bourdier, male domination is so powerful in the society we live in that both women and men perceive it as a natural and inevitable situation. From childhood onwards, the discourse of a male-dominated society deeply influences individuals' behaviors, bodies, and even the way they perceive themselves. The values of male domination are reproduced every day by all social institutions and individuals. Thus, the idea that women cannot be managers, that leaders are men, and that men's power in the public sphere is a reality accepted without question by all individuals in society becomes a reality (Bourdier, 2023/1998, 11-31).

In Bourdieu's words, how can a female leader or leader candidate be successful in a society under male domination? We can seek the answer to this question both in the empirical findings of studies conducted in the literature and in Goffman's work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life."

In this book, Goffman explains the relationship between the individual and social institutions by comparing it to a theater stage. The author mentions two main areas in this interaction. The citrin is the superficial and controlled image that people present to the outside world. The back region is the area where the process of preparing this image occurs and where more real and natural behaviors are exhibited. Although society generally sees the self as dependent on the physical presence of the individual, the self is actually formed because of the individual's performances. A person develops certain strategies to control how others perceive him or her. While in front of the stage (the vitrin) one tries to present a strong and

consistent character, behind the scenes (the back region) preparations for this performance are made and real emotions emerge. In other words, individuals' behaviors and discourses are showcased and may not be accidental. In the backstage area, individuals determine and rehearse how they will perform in the outside world for various purposes (e.g., the desire for social acceptance) (Goffman, 2014/1959: 222- 237).

Another way for a woman to succeed as a leader under male domination may be to deny the existence of the glass ceiling. For example, Wrigley (2002) found that due to the focus group and interview studies conducted with 27 female employees, women approached the existence of the glass ceiling effect with suspicion. According to the author, one reason for rejection may be coping. In the same study, Wrigley claimed that women with a liberal worldview might be more likely to reject. Liberal views, which see success because of individual effort, attribute women's failures to less effort. As a result, women are evaluated with this preacceptance in performance evaluations and are more unsuccessful than men (Issac et al., 2012).

Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi (2012a) gathered women's views on the glass ceiling effect in their scales under four headings. They classified the attitudes and thoughts of women toward the glass ceiling phenomenon—denial, resilience, acceptance, and resignation. Denial describes rejecting the glass ceiling, claiming that women and men face the same problems in their career journeys. Resilience expresses the view that women can overcome the glass ceiling barriers. Acceptance tells about their withdrawal from business life by accepting the existence of the glass ceiling effect.

On the other hand, Resignation states that women face more obstacles and negative consequences than men while advancing their careers. Smith, Caputi, and Crittenden (2012b) found that denial has the most vital positive relationship with personal success, while resignation has the most vital negative relationship. To put it differently, women who believe they face similar challenges to men feel more successful, while women who think they face more obstacles than men feel more unsuccessful.

In the studies mentioned above, the relationship between the reluctance of women who have come to senior management to accept glass ceiling barriers is striking. By rejecting the existence of the glass ceiling, these women may have escaped the barriers of their minds and advanced in their careers without being caught in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Another possible explanation is the attribution theory (Kelley& Michela, 1980). While women who think that they will face more obstacles in business life (i.e., those who react with resignation) attribute their failures to the glass ceiling effect or other environmental factors such as luck, women who claim that they do not have glass ceiling barriers (i.e., the denial group) can gain confidence and become more successful by attributing their success to their efforts.

Methodology of the Study

This study employs a thematic analysis approach from qualitative research methods to examine the leadership style of Margaret Thatcher, particularly her adoption of a masculine leadership persona and her experience with the glass ceiling phenomenon. The research is qualitative and aims to identify recurring themes in Thatcher's rhetoric and public discourse that illustrate her strategic distancing from traditional female leadership traits.

Research Design

The study follows a thematic analysis framework, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. Thematic analysis allows for the systematic extraction of underlying themes in Thatcher's speeches and writings that reflect her leadership approach and gendered

strategies. This method is particularly useful for exploring how language and discourse construct leadership identity and reinforce or challenge existing gender norms.

Data Collection

Using three different types of data sources in thematic analysis is a method used to increase the validity and reliability of the analysis. The primary data for this research consists of the following:

Interviews and Speeches: To access Thatcher's statements in her interviews, the archive compiled by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation at https://www.margaretthatcher.org" was used. In addition, Thatcher's past interviews were also accessed from the BBC's website https://www.bbc.com/turkce" archive.

Autobiography: Thatcher M. (1994). *Demir Lady'nin Anıları - Margaret Thatcher - Başbakanlık Yılları.* (Şen G., Trans.) İstanbul: Sabah Kitapları (Original work published 1993).

Biography: The biographical sources included in the study are given below:

-Özdikmen, T., & Kartın, C. (2021). Britanya'nın Demir Leydisi: Margaret Thatcher'ın 1983'e Kadar Yaşamı. *Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 1*, 49-61.

-Morrison, K. (2010). There's No Place Like Home: Margaret Thatcher at Number 10 Downing Street. L. Hadley, & E. Ho *In Thatcher & After Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture* (115-136). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Evans, E. J. (1997). *Thatcher and Thatcherism*. London-New York: Routledge.

-Cannadine, D. (2017). *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy* New York: Oxford University Press.

-Berlinski, C. (2008). *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Matters* New York: Basic Books.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006: 87) six-step framework:

1. *Familiarization with Data:* A thorough reading of Thatcher's speeches, interviews, and autobiographical accounts to identify key gendered language and leadership themes.
2. *Generating Initial Codes:* Text segments were coded based on recurring patterns related to gendered leadership, power dynamics, and strategic masculine positioning.
3. *Searching for Themes:* The codes were grouped into overarching themes reflecting Thatcher's approach to leadership and her response to gender expectations.
4. *Reviewing Themes*: The identified themes were refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research objectives.
5. *Defining and Naming Themes*: Themes were categorized under broader concepts such as *strategic masculinity in leadership*, *dissonance between gender and leadership and* thatcher *and femininity*
6. *Producing the Report:* The final themes were synthesized into a structured narrative, illustrating how Thatcher's discourse shaped her leadership identity.

Results

Table 1 shows excerpts from the texts included in the study and their codes. Based on these codes, three themes were formed. These themes are strategic masculinity in leadership, the dissonance between gender and leadership, and thatcher and femininity. Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 show the codes of these themes.

Table 1

Quotes and codes

Quote	Code	Source
"If you want, you can return." The lady will not return!"	**Unwavering leadership stance**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105485
"I like to be in the center of events."	**Desire for influence and control**	https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/04/130408_thatcher_vecizleri
"It's not a case of having particular interests because I'm a woman MP. I take a broad view, which is that I represent the whole constituency, both men and women."	**Universal representation over gender-based politics**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101042
"She always wears black or gray. She concentrates on simple dresses and neat shoes and buys four to six hats a year. "With a new hat, no-one notices what dress you are wearing." "	**Pragmatism in personal presentation**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100946
"We should not delude ourselves by thinking that equal pay for women necessarily means equal opportunities." There is still a great deal of work to be done to enable women to have the jobs that their qualifications would warrant."	**Skepticism toward simplistic gender equality measures**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101714
"It is important that an increasing number of women become qualified and trained." A large proportion of the women in jobs—and there are 9 million them—are in the comparatively unskilled sector."	**Advocacy for skill development in women**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101714
"Mrs. Thatcher was concerned about the plight of the deserted wife and young family. Also divorce by consent, which might influence young people in not taking their vows at the altar as seriously as before."	**Conservatism in Family Values and Marriage**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101704
"Women are tired of being patronized and condescended to. If our homes and our families remain central to us and our concerns, they are no longer our horizon."	**Rejecting the traditional limitations on women**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103725
"We celebrate those measures which made this nation a true democracy—which involved men and women as equal human beings in the destiny of Britain."	**Commitment to democratic gender equality**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103725
"If you know what you want to do, if you know it is going to be quite difficult, if you know that other people will take different views and try to get their way, then you have got to be firm."	**Resilience in political decision-making**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105826
"Most of us are housewives—perhaps the most worthwhile occupation in the world—and we are perturbed as to the kind of future offered for our children."	**Valuing domestic work as essential to society**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100836
"We cast our votes, sit on councils and other bodies, doing our share to overcome social ills. In these days of State assistance, let us not forget the tremendous number of children still looked after by voluntary effort, without any assistance at all from the State. May that responsibility and enterprise never die out in this country."	**Emphasis on self-reliance and volunteerism**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100836
"I've got a housekeeper but I still do the cooking myself ... rush in, peel the vegetables, put the roast in ... all before I take off my hat."	**Balancing career with domestic responsibilities**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101465
"One has to think about one's appearance, but it's difficult with so little time." I make time for the hairdresser ... I feel depressed when I look awful."	**Acknowledgment of the pressure to maintain appearance**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101465

| Quote	Code	Source
Margaret Thatcher, the person at the center of the research, expressed her opinion on the subject by saying, *"I think it is extremely difficult for a woman to reach the top,"* in her interview with the Evening Standard in 1974	**It is difficult for women to be leaders**	(Cannadine 2017: 13).
A new chapter opened in Margaret's life when she came to Oxford for university and started to study Chemistry. During her school days, she participated in her studies, political events, and Methodist sermons.	**Self-confident, active student life, and proactive actions**	(Özdikmen & Kartın 2021: 52).
For example, a journalist said of her in 1978, *"She's still the lady of Finchley. Her view of the world is sadly narrow. She sees the working class as lazy, deceitful, vile, and bloody. "She does not understand state affairs"*	**Lack of acceptance of her leadership because she is a woman**	(Evans, 1997: 43).
This and many similar prejudiced expressions were used for Thatcher in the abovementioned period. Although there were no as many discriminatory statements about Thatcher then, Thatcher was a political and social outsider when looking at the profile of British political life	**Negative public reactions to Thatcher**	(Evans, 1997: 42).
Even when Thatcher was a candidate for the party chairmanship, she did not have a prime minister in mind. Her aim was only to revive the Conservative Party and the healing of the wounds of the 1974 defeat. When she went to President Heath's office to announce her candidacy for party chairman, Heath didn't look at her and said, *"You're going to lose, have a good day"*	**Glass ceiling experience**	(Berlinski, 2008: 28)
After her mother's death, Carol, her daughter, told The Independent newspaper that her mother always put her in the background, not being loved, but never graduated in terms of adoption in her mother's eyes.	**The girl child is less valued**	(Somerville, 2020, November; 20).
Thatcher has been a staunch supporter of traditional gender views and the family as the foundation of society. In her interviews, she often talked about motherhood and housewifery and expressed her ideas on the priorities in this regard.	**Valuing domestic work as essential to society**	(Morrison, 2010: 126).
Apart from Thatcher's prime ministership, research was conducted on how her gender affected the Conservative movement. This documentary and the book accompanying it reveals that despite Thatcher's position as prime minister and her historical position, she is also a housewife with some middle-class sensibilities.	**The importance of her historical role and her transformative power**	(Morrison, 2010: 126-128).
Margaret also showed character during her school years, which was suitable for the Iron Lady of the coming years. Her childhood friend told him, *"She always stood out. Because the other girls didn't know what they were doing or where they were going. But she knew."*	**Determined, stubborn, and self-confident personality**	(Cannadine, 2017: 1).
Even when Thatcher was a candidate for the party chairmanship, she did not have a prime minister in mind. Her aim was only to revive the Conservative Party and the healing of the wounds of the 1974 defeat. When she went to President Heath's office to announce her candidacy for party chairman, Heath didn't look at her and said, *"You're going to lose, have a good day"*	**Not considering herself worth the prime ministership**	(Berlinski, 2008: 28)
"There have been many reports about the limited opportunities available to women, and the right hon. The member for Newton (Mr. Frederick Lee) spoke of how few women continued to be qualified to	**Opposition to positive discrimination against women**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101714

Quote	Code	Source
science. This was a subject mentioned in the Dainton Report. One of the reasons why few women go on to a science course at a university, or another form of science course, according to paragraph 41 of that Report, is the apparently limited career prospects lying beyond qualification. We should not delude ourselves by thinking that equal pay for women, or even increasing pay for women if it does not come to equal take-home pay, necessarily means equal opportunities. "There is still a great deal of work to be done in that respect to enable women to have the jobs that their qualifications would warrant."		
"I couldn't have been prime minister for eleven years without Dennis." My husband, who has a strong personality, always had clear ideas about what to do and not to do. He was a resource for smart suggestions and accurate comments."	**Difficulty expressing love**	(Thatcher, 1993/1994: 17)
"So you have got these problems, you can't duck them, but there are many many women who have the opportunities and who do not use them, or who are too easily contented with *the job that they are doing and do not* necessarily *make the effort to climb the tree. Sometimes it's thought to be unfeminine to do that—it isn't at all, you know."*	**Seeing women as less ambitious**	https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105514

Thema 1: Dissonance between Gender and Leadership

The codes in the first theme consist of quotations about Thatcher's encounters with the glass ceiling, public reactions to her presidency, her belief that she could be a woman prime minister and the place of women in society. This theme includes both Thatcher's thoughts on women's leadership skills and her representation of Thatcher as a woman leader in the media. In addition, Thatcher's glass ceiling experiences were also included in the data obtained from biographical sources. The focus of this theme is on the identification of leadership with men and the reactions of Thatcher and those around her regarding a woman leader. In this theme, Thatcher's thoughts about not imagining that she could be a woman prime minister of the UK before she became prime minister, finding women less ambitious and preserving traditional gender roles were also included. These thoughts of Thatcher actually point to the incompatibility between womanhood and leadership.

Figure 1

Dissonance between Gender and Leadership Theme
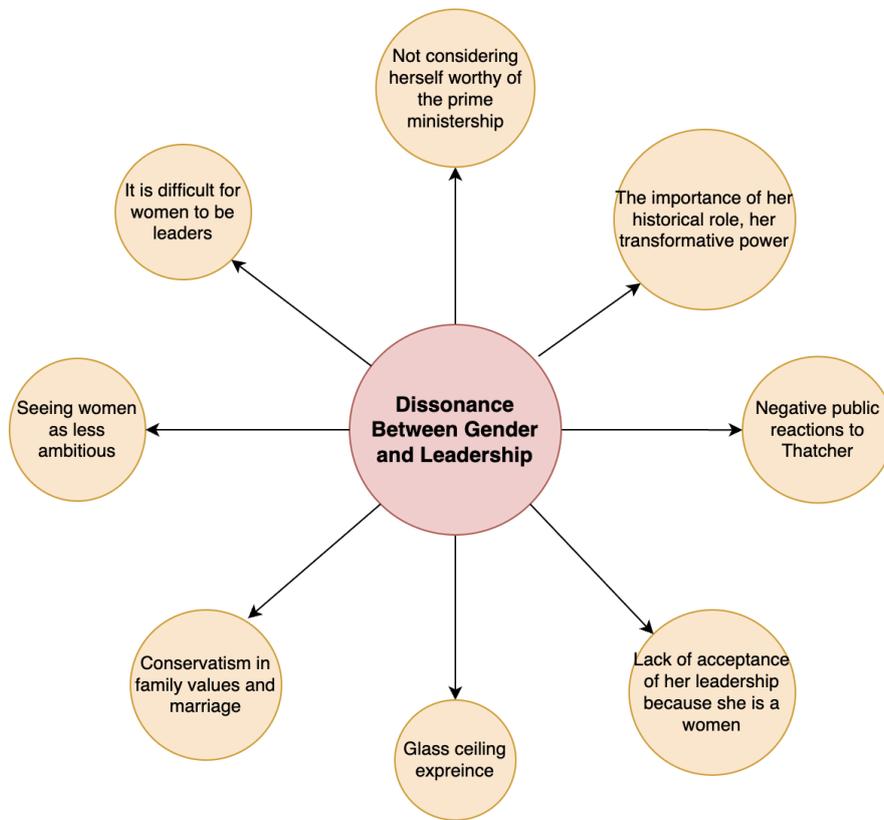
Thema 2: Strategic Masculinity in Leadership

Most of the codes in this theme come from the quotes showing that Thatcher had character traits associated with leadership. Throughout her political career, Thatcher both discoursed and acted in a way to show that she was decisive, confident, self-confident, self-assured, unemotional, hardworking and proactive. It has been mentioned above that these personality traits are associated with masculinity and leadership. The focus of our study is not to investigate Thatcher's personality traits suitable for leadership, but to reveal her relationship with the glass ceiling phenomenon. For this reason, these personality traits were evaluated around the glass ceiling experience. Looking at women in world history, Thatcher is a woman who could break through the glass ceiling and establish herself as a successful leader in society. While doing all this, could she have constructed these personality traits by herself in order to make herself accept and to break the glass ceiling? This is the main question that the first theme tries to answer with this question.

Figure 2

Strategic Masculinity in the Leadership Theme
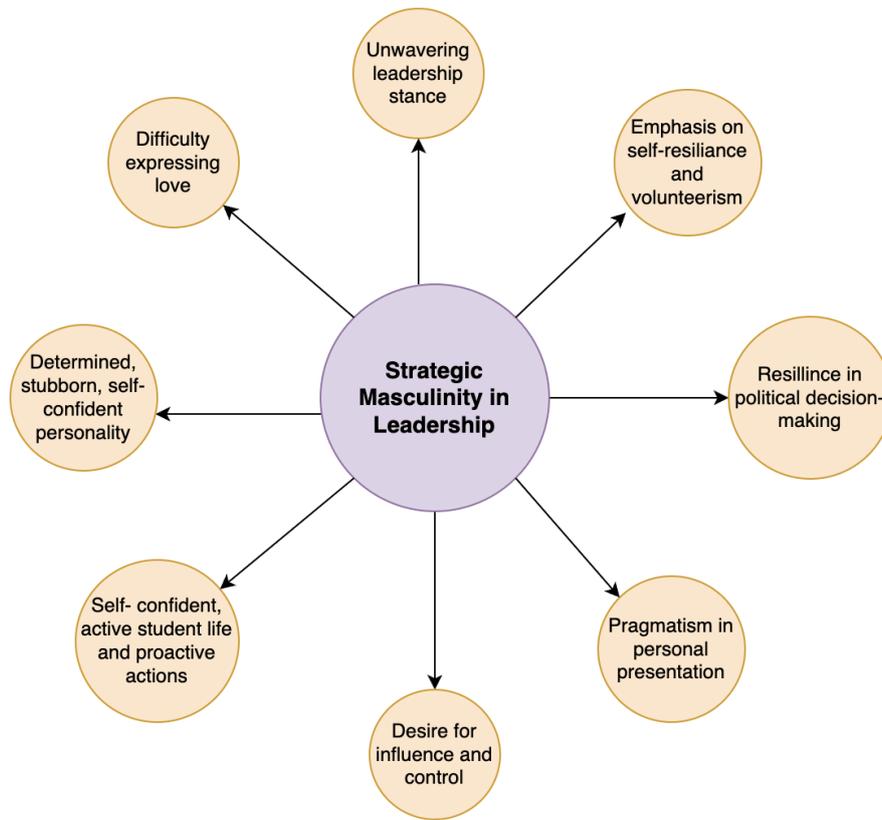
Thema 3: Thatcher and Feminity

In the second theme, Thatcher's thoughts on women's leadership qualities were included. In this theme, Thatcher's thoughts on women in general, her discourses on the women's movement/women's liberation and her attitudes toward gender roles were included. Thatcher addressed housewives in many of her speeches and defined herself as a housewife. In addition, Thatcher attaches great importance to the role of women in the family and believes that this role should not be neglected for the sake of career or education. The codes in this theme show how Thatcher sees herself as a woman, how she perceives other women and her attitudes toward women's roles in social life.

Figure 3
Thatcher and the Feminity Theme
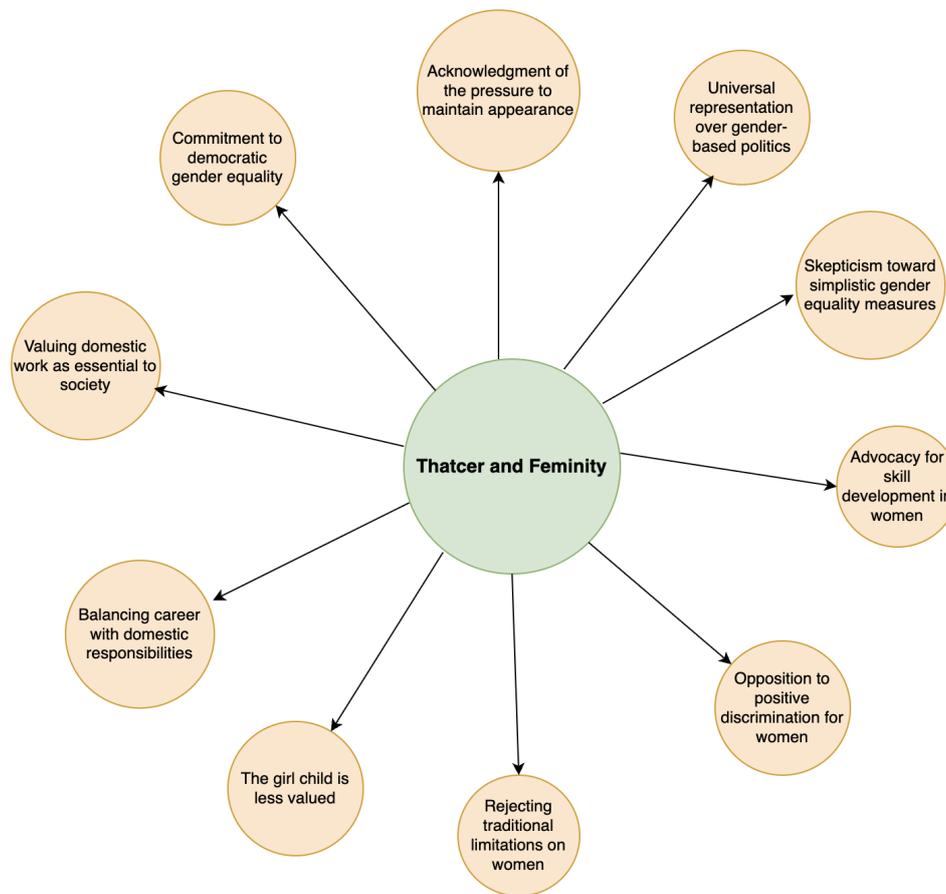
Discussion

The three themes identified through thematic analysis chronologically explain Thatcher's leadership experience. The first theme, "Dissonance Between Gender and Leadership," consists of codes reflecting both society's and Thatcher's attitudes toward female leaders. This theme particularly highlights the negative reactions Thatcher faced as a woman at the beginning of her political career. The theme titled "Strategic Masculinity in Leadership" focuses on the attitude Thatcher adopted during her leadership journey. The third theme, "Thatcher and Femininity," sheds light on the attitudes that she developed, and perhaps reinforced, toward other women because of her chosen strategic masculinity. In summary, the first theme helps us understand the beginning of her political career, the second theme the construction of her career, and the third theme the results of that career construction within the framework of the glass ceiling concept.

Thema 1: Dissonance between Gender and Leadership

This theme focuses on the challenges Thatcher faced in her leadership journey due to her gender. Both Thatcher and the society in which she lived agreed that leaders were men who possessed masculine character traits and that a female leader would be perceived as inappropriate and unsuccessful. In the early stages of her career, Thatcher emphasized the difficulties a woman might encounter in reaching the top. At the same time, she also harbored aspirations of becoming the prime minister. The question of how

Thatcher managed to attain leadership positions she herself had never imagined, despite societal prejudices, has attracted the attention of several researchers, who have provided various explanations for this phenomenon. Ryan and Haslam (2005) listed the glass cliffs in Thatcher's career as follows: They say that when she became the chairman of the conservative party, the party went through one of its weakest periods, student riots were a serious problem when she was the minister of education, and when she finally became the British prime minister, the country was in a serious social and economic depression. Such a picture can be interpreted as that women's leadership results in failures or that women are brought to leadership in possible times of crisis and difficult moments. Throughout her career, Thatcher faced situations where she was much more likely to fail by being allowed to lead in times of crisis. However, despite this disadvantaged situation, she made her mark in history by being a woman and opening the doors of radical transformations.

Another explanation was provided by Beckwith (2015). As stated above, party leader Heath and even Thatcher thought he could not become the party chairman. However, according to Beckwith (2015), the crisis in the party, the suspicion of Heath's presidency, and the absence of male candidates in the party who could rival Heath enabled Thatcher to win. The author says that although Thatcher has sufficient qualifications as a woman, she might not have won if not for these conditions.

Although Thatcher assumed these roles as circumstances allowed, she continued to be perceived as unlikable by society. Negative discourses on her gender frequently appeared in the media. However, despite all these challenges, Thatcher's success and transformative power have been recorded in history. The strategies she employed to establish herself as a female leader in society are discussed in the second theme.

Thema 2: Strategic Masculinity in Leadership

One of the identified themes, strategic masculinity, represents a behavioral pattern that Thatcher particularly employed on her path to breaking the glass ceiling and ascending to the top. Bourdieu stated that the social order is shaped by masculine domination, functioning like a machine (Bourdieu, 2023/1998: 22). Indeed, Thatcher adopted a character strategy that aligned with this prevailing order, positioning herself within the framework of masculine domination and visibly acting in accordance with it.

It is evident that Thatcher, in her effort to break the glass ceiling, submitted to the masculine domination upon which the social order's gender division is constructed. Since the password required to break through the invisible glass ceiling for women was determined by masculine domination, Thatcher followed a strategic roadmap. Although this situation created a double bind for Thatcher—putting her at risk of both losing her feminine attributes and being perceived as lacking the necessary qualities for the top—she ultimately leaned toward adopting a masculine typology, even at the cost of abandoning feminine traits.

However, Thatcher's adoption of this approach appears to have been a necessary strategy for gaining acceptance in the society in which she lived.

Thatcher may have aimed to have herself accepted as a leader in the society by exhibiting these personality traits. With this theme, we suggest that Thatcher also utilized Goffman's (2014/1959: 222-237) "impression management techniques" and that the leadership personality traits she presented to the outside world were part of her pre-performed and determined performances. Thatcher's motivations for doing so are related to the glass ceiling. How possible would it have been for her to become the President of the United Kingdom if she had not presented pre-performed personality traits that would make her a strong leader in the society? In fact, Thatcher uses masculinity to overcome the glass ceiling by consciously displaying masculine leadership traits in the outside world.

As a woman, although Thatcher possessed the managerial skills required for leadership at the level of prime minister, this was not entirely sufficient for her to gain acceptance. In such a situation, the process compelled Thatcher to make various adjustments to her character and appearance. Bourdieu also emphasizes that for a woman to attain a position imbued with masculinity, she must alter her tone of voice, adopt a more masculine appearance in terms of physical presentation, and make her self-confidence and aggressive demeanor more visible (Bourdieu, 2023/1998: 83).

An area where we can observe this is Thatcher's appearance and clothes. Conway (2016) says that Thatcher used the change in her clothes to indicate her political views and power. As mentioned above, it can be said that she may have developed rigid gender stereotypes in England in the 1950s, where she spent her youth, and within her family's methodist view of religion. She preferred traditional and feminine clothes in his younger years but chose more masculine clothes and haircuts during his time as prime minister. Conway claims that Thatcher wanted to show identification to show her political views and gain power, and she used her clothes to indicate this identity.

This deepening and persistent strategic masculinity made Thatcher's feminist opposition more pronounced. In fact, this opposition manifested itself not as a direct stance but by ignoring the feminist movement (also influenced by the feminist movement's formation through leftist ideology). Thatcher's attitude and discourse against femininity, on the other hand, were expressed through different codes in the third theme.

Thema 3: Thatcher and Feminity

The public sphere has been constructed upon a masculine structure and has been assigned a masculine identity. At this point, it should be noted that the public sphere, imbued with a masculine identity, is not a natural habitat where feminine individuals are easily accepted. As has been observed many times in advertisements and cartoons, women have traditionally been associated with the home (Bourdieu, 2023/1998: 76). Thatcher, to a large extent, supported the continuation of gender roles shaped by masculine domination. While she expressed support for women's access to education and participation in the workforce, particularly in gatherings where women were present, she simultaneously opposed positive discrimination. Even in these statements, she emphasized that if women wanted to be part of their professional life, they needed to be more ambitious, while also ensuring that their domestic responsibilities were not neglected.

As mentioned earlier in the text, Thatcher's view on homes, which represent the center of the feminine private sphere, reflects a highly masculine perspective. At the beginning of her political career, Thatcher adopted strategic masculinity as a means of gaining acceptance in society. However, over time, she internalized this role to such an extent that her masculine discourse became evident in her negative remarks about women. While she held such views about other women, for Thatcher, home was a place one went when there was nothing better to do. This clearly demonstrates that Thatcher identified herself with the masculine-dominated public sphere outside the home. In her perception, the home—a space traditionally associated with women—represented a form of exile. In other words, while she defined the home as the rightful place for other women, she positioned herself within the public sphere.

Thatcher frequently associated this distinction with her personal ambition and success, distinguishing herself from other women.

Another noteworthy point in this theme is Thatcher's avoidance of gender-specific discourse. When confronted with such questions, she preferred to frame her responses in terms of national citizenship rather

than gender. Campbell (2015) states that, despite her transformative power, Thatcher, as the first female Prime Minister of England, also had the potential to ignite the women's movement.

From Thatcher's statements and her emphasis on personal success, it can be inferred that she approached the existence of the glass ceiling with skepticism. Perhaps Thatcher's ability to break the glass ceiling was closely linked to her rejection of its existence.

There are studies in the literature that support this argument. According to Smith, Caputi, and Crittenden (2012b), women who deny the existence of the glass ceiling tend to be more successful in their professional careers. Similarly, Kelley and Michela (1980) argue that by rejecting the glass ceiling, women overcome the mental barriers imposed upon them and prevent the self-fulfilling prophecy from taking effect.

Conclusion

The research question of this study was as follows: "Did Thatcher experience the glass ceiling, and if so, how did she experience it?" Throughout the study, thematic analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods, was employed based on information obtained from written sources (such as speeches, interviews, autobiographies, and biographies) regarding Thatcher's experiences. This section presents how we found answers to our research question because of these evaluations.

Margaret Hilda Thatcher, who began her life journey as the daughter of a greengrocer, overcame significant struggles and formidable obstacles to become the United Kingdom's first female prime minister. If a woman attaining a high-level executive position in a male-dominated and conservative society signifies breaking the glass ceiling, it must be explicitly stated that Thatcher successfully broke the glass ceiling. Based on this assumption, the second question of this study, following the first, was: If Thatcher was able to break the glass ceiling, how did she achieve this, and how did she experience it? The thematic analysis used in the study and the examined sources provided answers to this second question.

The first of the three identified themes, "Strategic Masculinity," appears to have been almost a necessity for Thatcher in her process of overcoming the glass ceiling. As Bourdieu stated, in a public domain dominated by masculine domination, Thatcher had no choice but to play by the rules of the game. Consequently, the masculine decisiveness she displayed in her character and behavior, the dominance in her rhetoric, and her pragmatism were all outward manifestations of strategic masculinity. To overcome the glass ceiling that she faced, Thatcher adopted a strategic stance in an arena governed by masculine domination.

The first theme examined was "Dissonance Between Gender and Leadership," which emerged as Thatcher's experience of the glass ceiling as a woman. Within this theme, it is evident that Thatcher externalized her reactions through her femininity. Her lack of belief in women's ability to become leaders, her initial perception of herself as unworthy of the prime ministership, and the way her environment (the media, other politicians) viewed her as inadequate and unfit for the position all illustrate, as reflected in the theme's title, the incompatibility between her gender and leadership.

Finally, the third theme identified in the thematic analysis was "Thatcher and Femininity." Within this theme, Thatcher's views on "other women" became prominent. It must be noted that while Thatcher strategically adopted masculinity in her approach to breaking the glass ceiling, she also deeply internalized it and developed negative judgments and assumptions about her own gender. Her opposition to positive discrimination against women, her gender-based differentiation in valuing her children, and her belief that her success was a result of struggle—thus using it as a model for other women serve as examples of this phenomenon.

Thatcher's harsh, aggressive, and overtly masculine leadership performance differs markedly from that of contemporary women leaders. As illustrated in the cases of Clinton and Merkel, the modern model of female political leadership relies on a calmer, more balanced, and emotionally controlled communicative style. Therefore, Thatcher's conflict-intensive approach, which established authority through severity, is not aligned with current leadership tendencies. Although Giorgia Meloni can be partially compared to Thatcher due to the energy and strong tone of her rhetoric, the level of aggressiveness and the political performance style she exhibits are not as sharp or pronounced as Thatcher's. Therefore, Thatcher and her political character should be regarded as a singular and exceptional case among women leaders.

The theoretical framework of these themes derived from the study is based on the theories of Bourdieu and Goffman. Throughout the study, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of masculine domination and Erving Goffman's theory of the presentation of self are not only juxtaposed but also functionally integrated, enabling an explanation of both the structural and interactional dimensions of the glass ceiling phenomenon. Bourdieu's approach elucidates how gender hierarchies become internalized within individuals' patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior through habitus, as well as how these structures are historically reproduced. In this context, Thatcher's strategic masculinity adopted during her ascent to leadership is analyzed as a necessity for an individual to transform oneself according to societal norms in order to gain acceptance in male-dominated arenas.

Goffman's theory of the presentation of the self explains how this transformation is performed in everyday life, particularly on the public and political stage. Thatcher's public leadership persona is a representation constructed through vocal tone, clothing style, discursive strategies, and symbolic gestures, performed in front-stage interactions. Here, Goffman serves to demonstrate how the structural pressures identified by Bourdieu are reproduced at an individual level and how normative gender roles are legitimized through social interactions.

When these two theories work together, it becomes possible to understand in a multidimensional way how Thatcher, in overcoming the glass ceiling, dealt not only with external structural barriers but also reshaped gender codes within her own habitus and reproduced these codes through performances on the social stage. Thus, the multi-theoretical approach not only provides theoretical diversity but also highlights how gendered leadership intersects with both micro-level representational strategies and macro-level cultural structures. This integration strengthens the theoretical coherence of the study and clearly reveals the multilayered nature of the glass ceiling.

The original contribution of this study to the literature lies not only in questioning whether Margaret Thatcher was able to break the glass ceiling, but also in revealing in detail the mechanisms through which gender norms were reproduced throughout this process. Thatcher's adoption of a leadership style referred to as strategic masculinity and her active use of traditional masculine traits such as authoritarianism, emotional distance, competitiveness, and power-oriented discourse served to reinforce existing gender norms. Furthermore, by embracing discourses that positioned women outside the public sphere and focused on domestic roles—and by placing these roles at the center of her political rhetoric—Thatcher reinforced the perception that femininity is incompatible with public leadership. Thus, this study provides significant theoretical depth to the literature by demonstrating that, in their efforts to gain acceptance, female leaders both internalize and reproduce gender norms. Theoretically, it offers a conceptual expansion to the literature by revealing that the glass ceiling phenomenon is nourished not only by external barriers but also by internalized gender norms. From a practical perspective, the findings of the study lay the groundwork

for strategies aimed at raising awareness of internalized norms in the design of gender equality policies and in the processes through which women ascend to leadership positions. In this way, it provides concrete data for the development of awareness and education programs at both the social and institutional levels, making it possible to enhance the effectiveness of gender equality practices.

In this context, it must be emphasized that rather than contributing to the visibility of women in politics, Thatcher transformed her own identity. To eliminate the effects of the glass ceiling, it is necessary to raise awareness not only among men but also among women. This study has once again demonstrated that prejudices regarding women's incompetence in leadership are also reproduced by women themselves. It can be argued that increasing awareness among women, particularly those in senior management positions, about how the glass ceiling is reconstructed in the mind will contribute to breaking glass ceilings in society.

Finally, the study demonstrates that Thatcher overcame the glass ceiling through the construction of personal authority, a deliberate distancing from womanhood, and a distinctly masculine leadership performance; however, she did not translate this achievement into a broader advancement of gender equality.

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