

Proceedings of the
6th International Conference on
Gender Research

A Conference hosted by
Ulster University Magee Campus
Derry - Londonderry, Northern Ireland
20 - 21 April 2023



Edited by
Professor Sandra Moffett, Dr Shirley Barrett
and Dr Andrea Reid

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Proceedings of the

**6th International Conference on
Gender Research**

ICGR 2023

hosted by

**Ulster University Magee Campus
Londonderry, Northern Ireland**

20-21 April 2023

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ICGR Preface

These proceedings represent the work of contributors to the 6th International Conference on Gender Research (ICGR 2023), hosted by Ulster University Magee Campus, Derry - Londonderry, Northern Ireland on 20-21 April 2023. The Conference Chair is Professor Sandra Moffett, and the Programme Co-Chair Dr Shirley Barrett are from Ulster University, Magee Campus, Northern Ireland and the second Co-Chair, Dr. Andrea Reid is from Ulster University, Belfast Campus, Northern Ireland

ICGR is a well-established event on the academic research calendar and now in its 6th year the key aim remains the opportunity for participants to share ideas and meet the people who hold them. The scope of papers will ensure an interesting two days. The subjects covered illustrate the wide range of topics that fall into this important and ever-growing area of research.

The opening keynote presentation is given by Professor Maura McAdam, from Dublin City University, Ireland, on the topic of *Permission Granted: A Manifesto for Female-Centric Entrepreneurship*. The second day of the conference will open with an address by Darren McKinstry, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, who will talk about *Gender Equality in Northern Ireland: Context, Priorities and Opportunities*.

With an initial submission of 105 abstracts, after the double blind, peer review process there are 33 Academic research papers, 3 PhD research papers, 2 Masters Research papers and 3 work-in-progress papers published in these Conference Proceedings. These papers represent research from Austria, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Morocco, Netherlands, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States of America.

We hope you enjoy the conference.

Prof Sandra Moffett
Ulster University
Northern Ireland
April 2023

ICGR Conference Committee

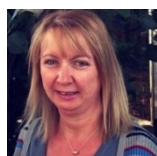
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Biographies

Conference and Programme Chairs



Professor Sandra Moffett is a Professor in Business Analytics and Head of the Ulster University Business School, Ulster University, Magee Campus. Sandra is a core research-active member staff, her expertise knowledge management and business intelligence contributes to her being one of the UK leading authors, with over 100 high quality, international research publications. She has received a number of research awards and citations for her work. Sandra has over £6m external research funding enabling her to undertake extensive research on technological implementation and process improvement initiatives (based on data analytics) within Irish and UK companies.

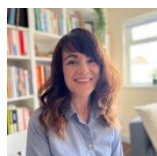


Dr Andrea Reid is Programme Director MSc Marketing/Senior Lecturer Business Communication in the Ulster University Business School. She holds a PhD from Queens University Belfast in Customer Relationship Management (CRM). Her research area of expertise includes Customer Relationship Management, Data Management and Entrepreneurial Marketing Education. Andrea's research has been presented at International Conferences and published in journals such as the European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Information Management and the International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management. Professional experience includes lead researcher/consultant in a number of Consultancy and Knowledge Transfer Projects with industry partners in various sectors with specific focus on CRM implementation. Andrea has been awarded an Ulster University distinguished teaching award in January 2019 for Distinguished Education Excellence in Professional Practice Innovation.



Dr Shirley Barrett is an experienced academic in higher education, and is currently the Associate Head of Department of the Ulster University Business School at Magee. She has acted as Course Director at both undergraduate level and postgraduate level, and has significant experience in leading the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes of study and university-wide initiatives at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Shirley has a keen interest in gender issues and has conducted research into female entrepreneurship in the accounting profession, and also in female graduate employability.

Keynote Speaker

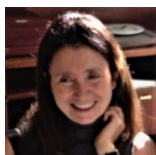


Prof Maura McAdam is renowned internationally for her pioneering work in the area of gender equality and women's entrepreneurship, as a result of her exploration of the influence of gender and diversity upon entrepreneurial behaviour spanning more than 20 years. She has extensive experience of building and leading international research teams and of enabling and participating successfully in both regional and international entrepreneurial ecosystems, because of well-established research networks in the UK, Ireland, EU, New Zealand, US and the Middle East. Prof McAdam has made serious and lasting theoretical and methodological contributions to the area of women's entrepreneurship, with her research has been published in FT Top 50 US journals and other top-rated US and UK journals across a range of theoretical disciplines. Additionally, she has authored the books *Female Entrepreneurship* (2013) and *Women's Entrepreneurship* (2022). For the last two consecutive years, Prof McAdam has been ranked amongst the top 2% of scientists in the world for research impact for her research on women's entrepreneurship. She is an invited Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a selected member of the Royal Irish Academy Social Sciences Committee. In 2019, she received an Irish Women's Award and in 2022 she was a Women Mean Business finalist in the Empowering Women Category. Known by many aspiring women entrepreneurs, Prof McAdam is an engaged thought leader and regular media commentator on women's entrepreneurship.



Darren McKinstry oversees a directorate developing policy priorities and recommendations designed to tackle key inequalities. He works to engage Government and stakeholders to raise awareness, build advocacy and secure policy and legislative change to advance equality. This currently includes work with Government to advance a range of social and equality strategies, and wider related strategies, including for example on childcare. Darren is a member of the EQUINET (European Network of Equality Bodies) policy formation working group and sits on a range of advisory panels such as the Northern Ireland Skills Strategy Diversity and Equality Group. He was previously a member of the Northern Ireland Census Advisory Group; and has led strands of the Commission's work such as an EU funded project to strengthen the capacity of the Equality bodies in other jurisdictions. He has a background in research and evaluation, and prior to joining the Commission was a Research Fellow at the Queen's University of Belfast specialising in employment, unemployment and targeting social need. He holds a Diploma in Advanced Management Practice; an M.Sc. in Geographic Information Systems; and a B.Sc. in Geography.

Mini Track Chairs



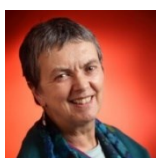
Tindara Addabbo is a full Professor in Economic Policy at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. Her current main research areas include wage discrimination by gender, well-being, gender budgeting, gender gap in education, gender equity firm's certification. She is the coordinator of Leading Towards Sustainable Gender Equality Plans in research institutions – (H2020-SwafS-2019 – 873072). <http://personale.unimore.it/rubrica/curriculum/addabbo>



Ewert Aukes is Assistant Professor in the field of energy transition governance with a focus on frames, discourses, and identities at the dept. Governance and Technology for Sustainability (CSTM), University of Twente (NL). His tasks involve research and teaching. He has worked in EU H2020 projects in the fields of the local energy transition, forest ecosystem services governance innovations and science diplomacy.



Claudia Canali is Associate Professor in Information Engineering at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. Her research interests focus on cloud/fog computing systems and gender equality in ICT. She is responsible for her university in the Horizon 2020 Project EQUAL-IST Gender Equality Plans for Information Sciences and Technology Research Institutions and for the 'Ragazze Digitali' Summer Camp project (www.ragazzedigitali.it). <https://personale.unimore.it/Rubrica/Dettaglio/clcanali>



Joy Clancy is Professor Emeritus of Energy and Gender, University of Twente, The Netherlands. Joy's research has focused, for more than 30 years, on the social dimension of energy systems in which gender has been an important factor addressed in this research. Although she initially focused on the Global South, her area of interest now includes the Global North, particularly in relation to energy poverty.



Dr Serene Dalati is director of Equality and Sustainability center and head of management department at the faculty of Business administration, at Arab International University, Syria (<https://www.aiu.edu.sy/>). Serene obtained a PhD in Leadership, Organizational Culture and Job satisfaction in 2008 which was preceded by British Chevening scholarship to study for an MBA in Banking and Finance from University of Wales, Bangor in 2002. She teaches for areas in Organizational Behavior, Leadership, Culture and Job satisfaction. Serene has also established experience in Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education and developed a project application with acronym FREE which has a scope of Female Resilience and Empowerment in Higher Education in the South Mediterranean Region.



embodiment.

Emília Fernandes is an Assistant Professor in the School of Economics and Management of the University of Minho, Portugal, lecturing at undergraduate and post-graduate levels in courses of Management, Human Resources Management. Her publications have been in research areas related to gender discourses and identities, practices of resistance, entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises, and professional



Regina Leite is an Assistant Professor in Organizational Behaviour and HRM in the Department of Management of the School of Economics and Management at the University of Minho. Former coordinator of the master course in Human Resource Management. Research interests: Work and non-work spheres, privacy in the workplace, sexual and moral harassment, and gender issues

Biographies of Contributing Authors

Salwa Aligod is a PhD in economics and management. She is currently a professor at Euromed Business School of the University Euromed of Fez, Morocco. Her research interests are in the areas of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial ecosystems and processes. She explores different problematics in this field of research through a gendered perspective and is thus concerned with gender studies.

Giulia Arena is a Post-Doc researcher at the University of Genoa and her research project about Gender equality policies in universities is situated at the intersection of law, sociology, and feminism. She got her PhD from the same university and she's currently in the team for the Gender Budget and Gender Equality Plan. Drafting the UniGe gender budgets she fell in love with data feminism. Her main research topics are gender in prison, gender public policies, gender mainstreaming, gender inequalities in academia and the connections between reproductive and productive work.

Mrs. **Aysegul Bakir** is a PhD student at Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey. Her main research subjects are violence and gender.

Barbara Barreiros PhD candidate in Public Law (Law School of University of Minho), Researcher at NORTE-01-0145-FEDER-000063, "Smart Cities and Law, E.Governance and Rights: : Contributing to the definition and implementation of a Global Strategy for Smart Cities". Member of the editorial board of Law Magazines. Master degree in Local Government Law – Law School of University of Minho. Postgraduate in European Studies (Law Faculty of University of Coimbra). Postgraduate in European, international and diplomatic affairs (Law and Political Science at University of Auvergne).

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Kristýna Binková is an assistant professor of the Faculty of Military Leadership, University of Defence and head of the Group of Management at the Department of Resources Management. She received her PhD from University of Defence in 2018. Her main research areas are human resources management, career management and soft managerial skills.

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Claire Brown (FHEA) is a Senior Lecturer and Course Leader at Teesside University. Claire sits on the Editorial Board for two journals, chairs the TU Social Work Research Network, vice chairs TU's Gender Focus Group, is a member of the Research and Innovation and Ethics Subcommittees, JSWEC Research Subcommittee and several international EDI groups.

Teresa Carvalho is an Associate professor with agregação (Habilitation) at the University of Aveiro, Portugal. She is the Vice-dean of the Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences, the Director of the PhD program in Public Policies and Director of CIPES Aveiro

Annabelle Clawson is an MPhil student in Multi-disciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Cambridge, UK. She received her BS in Mathematics from Brigham Young University in 2021. Her main research areas are women's religious history in the western US and feminist approaches to theology.

Dr. Julia DeVoy, MBA Oxford, MTS Harvard, PhD Boston College, is Dean of Undergraduates at Boston College, LSEHD and Director of Experience, Reflection & Action (ERA) First-Year Program. She designed and launched Boston College's 'Design for ImpACt' initiative. DeVoy focuses on environmental and health justice concerns -especially as related to gender.

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Francesco Faenza is a PhD Candidate in Labour, Development and Innovation, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia - Marco Biagi Foundation. His research interests include gender equality in ICT and gamification. He has taught coding and robotics since 2016 in primary and secondary school. Teacher from 2016 to 2019 at Digital Girls Summer Camp.

Emilia Fernandes is an Assistant Professor at the School of Economics and Management of the University of Minho, Portugal, lecturing at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Management programs. Her publications have been in research areas related to gender and identities, diversity management, work practices of resistance, entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises, and sport and corporate governance.

Marianna Ferraz Teixeira is a Brazilian lawyer, whose main research involves cooperative law, consumer law and gender issues. She received her MBA in Management of Credit Unions from University of São Paulo and her master's degree in in Management and Corporate Legal Regime of the Social Economy from Polytechnic Institute of Porto.

Anna Góral - organisational and management researcher, PhD, Assistant Professor at the Institute of Culture, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. Much of her ongoing work focuses on the community building and governance, communities' self-

organisation and networking. She is also interested in diversity management and in particular studying female leadership in feminised organisations.

Brescia Sofia Guerrero-Ochoa is a student of the Administration and International Business career at the Universidad Privada del Norte (UPN) in Lima, Peru. She has experience working in the administrative area for companies in the international logistic sector. Specialized in international market research and issues related to gender equity in business.

Sigrún Gunnarsdóttir is professor at the University of Iceland, School of Business. She holds a PhD from London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Sigrún has worked within health care services and government. Her area of research includes leadership and wellbeing at work with emphasis on health promoting servant leadership.

Sarina Gursch holds a master's in industrial mathematics. She currently works as a Ph.D. student at the Institute of Software Technology at Graz University of Technology. The topic of her doctoral thesis is gender equality in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. FFG project Code'n'Stitch, EU Project Gender STI, and the annual Girls Coding Week enrich her knowledge in this field.

Amber E. Holland, MA, is a PhD candidate in the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, United States. Her teaching and research are in the areas of interpersonal and health communication. Specifically, she focuses on mental health, relational adversities, and resilience.

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Rihab Khalid is a Research Fellow at Lucy Cavendish College and Director of Studies in Architecture at Clare College at the University of Cambridge. She is an interdisciplinary researcher working on the socio-technical intersections of gender, energy infrastructure and space use. She is committed to problem-driven research to improve energy efficiency and sufficiency to meet climate change targets.

Ms Danai Kyrkou (ViLabs) is a political scientist, working on EU-funded projects on impact assessment and dissemination, and exploitation management. She is the communication manager of CALIPER, working on the policy recommendations for inclusive GEPs.

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Mojdeh Mardani is currently a Senior Lecturer in Electronics, the Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Lead, and the Teaching & Learning Lead at the Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology, UK. Her Ph.D.

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Carmen-Pilar Martí-Ballester is an associate professor in the Business Department at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Her research focuses on analysing the financial and social performance of pension and mutual funds and examining the investor behaviour in the pension and mutual funds industry. Her research papers have been published in several top journals.

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The Gender gap in Morocco's Entrepreneurial Process: Towards a Typology of Female Entrepreneurs

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Abstract: The gender gap in entrepreneurship persists across the globe. Although many governments are making significant efforts to change the landscape, there is still much work to close this gap, especially in developing countries. Morocco, a Muslim and patriarchal society, does not escape this reality. It has one of the lowest rates of gender equality in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurial gender gap in Morocco is alarming since it is manifested throughout the entrepreneurial process (from the intention to action), and female TEA has been far below male TEA for many years now (GEM, 2021). By analyzing the paths of Moroccan entrepreneurs, this paper proposes exploring the characteristics of the entrepreneurial process from a gendered perspective. Through semi-structured interviews among nineteen entrepreneurs, this study explores the entrepreneurial process in its complexity and diversity of contexts. The aim is to deeply understand how female and male entrepreneurs live their entrepreneurial adventures in a patriarchal and Islamic context. The results show that the entrepreneur's gender is not the relevant factor to analyze gender gap in entrepreneurship but rather context which justifies the emergence of new typology of female entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Gender gap, Entrepreneurial process, Women's entrepreneurship, Morocco

1. Introduction

The gender gap in entrepreneurship persists, and even if many governments are making significant efforts to change the landscape, there is still much to be done to bridge this gap, especially in developing countries. Morocco, a Muslim and patriarchal society, does not escape this reality. It has one of the lowest rates of gender equality in entrepreneurship despite the significant efforts made by the government, the private sector, and civil society to promote female entrepreneurship. The number of women entrepreneurs stands at around 10 to 12 per cent of the total number of entrepreneurs and is mainly concentrated in large cities like Rabat and Casablanca (ILO, 2016). The growth of their businesses is minimal, with a generally low turnover. The entrepreneurial gender gap in Morocco is alarming since it is manifested throughout the entrepreneurial process (from the intention to action), and female TEA has been far below male TEA for many years now (GEM, 2021). By analyzing the paths of Moroccan entrepreneurs, this paper proposes exploring the characteristics of the entrepreneurial process from a gendered perspective. More concretely, the aim is to answer the following question: How do female and male entrepreneurs experience entrepreneurship in the country-specific context of Morocco?

A series of studies in the literature on gender and entrepreneurship specifically focus on female entrepreneurship rather than considering male and female entrepreneurs from a comparative lens and fail to offer solutions to the continued marginalization of women in entrepreneurship (Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). Researchers who include female and male entrepreneurs in their sample sometimes use inappropriate or sexist measures that constantly emphasize women's subordinate role (Ahl, 2006). Moreover, 94 per cent of the articles in the field are empirical studies lacking a rigorous theoretical framework (Greene, Hart, Gatewood, Brush, & Carter, 2003), and the majority are based on a quantitative approach (Hlady-Rispal & Jouison-Laffitte, 2014; Mullen, Budeva, & Doney, 2009; Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007). Accordingly, recent research has called for new research avenues (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter, & Welter, 2012), including through the mobilization of feminist approaches (Henry, Foss, & Ahl, 2016) as well as for the use of inductive methods of qualitative analysis that would provide a better understanding of entrepreneurship as a gendered activity (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

In order to address this research gap, we invest in an innovative theoretical framework based on feminist theories, which aim to understand the implications and effects of gender on various phenomena (in this case, entrepreneurship), and our results are framed based on the entrepreneurial process model developed by Tounés (2003). The challenge here is to reach into the social world of our research subjects and understand their world through their eyes. Entrepreneurial situations are not only complex, but they are also unique. They are a function of a particular set of circumstances and individuals meeting at a particular time (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2013) making it necessary to invest in research practices that take this diversity into account.

Through semi-structured interviews among nineteen entrepreneurs, this study aims to explore the entrepreneurial process in its complexity and diversity of contexts in order to deeply understand how female and male entrepreneurs live their entrepreneurial adventures in a patriarchal and Islamic context and to judge whether their experience differ. The entrepreneurial phenomenon will thus be understood in its natural context from the point of view of the actors whom we consider best placed to bring to life the theoretical background presented below and provide elements of response to the research question.

2. Theoretical Background

The gender gap in entrepreneurship has been widely documented in the literature but does not address the entrepreneurial process as a whole (Melo, Silva, & Tatiane Nunes Viana de Almeida, 2019).

Previous research highlights that women naturally perceive themselves in a less favorable light than men (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007). Additionally, due to their distrust, women have an intense fear of failure and are less likely to know or associate with an entrepreneur, which prevents them from perceiving and identifying business opportunities. These concerns reduce women's propensity to start a business (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007). In terms of predictors of entrepreneurial intention, professional autonomy would be the most motivating trait for women. Indeed, starting a business would balance work and family demands. However, many women negatively perceive the skills and abilities required to start up their own business as they consider it more a male activity. Women find few entrepreneurial role models. This situation challenges their sense of self-efficacy and, therefore, their entrepreneurial intention (Camelo-Ordaz, Diáñez-González, & Ruiz-Navarro, 2016).

In the advanced phases of the entrepreneurial process, including the entrepreneurial decision and act, the gender gap is manifested in institutional barriers to education, work experience, networks, and access to capital. Those obstacles usually fall within the structure of patriarchal societies (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017). Women also tend to have fewer years of experience and are less likely to have a college degree than their male counterparts (Coleman, 2007). They also lack management experience, which is essential for starting and growing a business (Fairlie & Robb, 2009).

From a "gendered" perspective of entrepreneurship, women invest more than men in health and education and less in industry and construction (Bernard, Moign, & Nicolai, 2013). As a result, their small businesses generate profits slower than male-owned businesses (Badia, Brunet, & Kertudo, 2013). In addition, Women consider family support, particularly their spouse's support, as a lever of action, allowing simultaneous management of family and entrepreneurial life (Badia et al., 2013). On the other hand, because of pregnancy, the arrival of a newborn, or any other family commitment, a woman may postpone creating her business or renounce her project completely. She may also pursue the entrepreneurial act according to her husband's professional plans or abandon it altogether (Diani and Aligod, 2019).

Much of the work on gender and entrepreneurship considers biological sex a non-productive way and fails to offer solutions to the persistent marginalization of women in entrepreneurship (Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015). In addition, other research sometimes uses inappropriate or gendered measures by including gender comparative studies in which the subordinate role of women is consistently emphasized (Ahl, 2006). Moreover, few studies have attempted to compare women's entrepreneurial experiences in order to assess the diversity of women's entrepreneurship.

3. Methodology

This work echo calls for the mobilization of qualitative analysis methods that would allow a better understanding of entrepreneurship as a gendered activity (Jennings & Brush, 2013). The case method mobilized lends itself efficiently to the analysis of entrepreneurial processes insofar as it aims to grasp the functioning of a system, deals with contemporary phenomena not dissociated from their context and mobilizes several sources of data (Yin, 2009). Indeed, understanding the entrepreneurial process in the Moroccan context implies approaching entrepreneurial actors to explore their entrepreneurial experience in great detail. Qualitative approaches allow us to analyze words and expressions, which presupposes a sense of evidence, proximity, and a great capacity for empathy (Allard-Poesi & Perret, 2014). The operationalization of our research strategy is based on the multiple case method and was initiated by purposeful sampling. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews among nineteen entrepreneurs conducted from November 2019 to May 2020.

The participants come from four country regions (Fez-Meknes, Rabat-Kenitra, Settat-Casablanca, Marrakech-Safi), operate in rural and urban areas, and present very varied profiles.

The variety of profiles, geographical contexts, sectors of activity was deliberately sought-after to capture different manifestations of gender in the entrepreneurial processes (Table 1). The sample size was not set randomly or for statistical representativeness but rather according to theoretical saturation. Before undertaking the thematic content analysis used in this study, the recorded interviews were transcribed over 130 pages and coded via Excel.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Entrepreneur	Name	Sex	Age	Marital status	Education	Number of children	Business activity	Entrepreneurship Type
E.I	Fatema	Female	49	Marnedus	GCSEs	4	Couture	Necessity
E.2	Souad	Female	42	Marned	GCSEs	3	Cooking and pastry	Necessity
E.3	Kaoutar	Female	25	Single	Masters	0	Textile	Necessity
E.4	Imane	Female	36	Divorced	Masters	0	Audit & Consulting	Opportunity
E.5	Sanae	Female	34	Marned	Masters	2	Floral Decoration	Opportunity
E.6	Fatimzhr a	Female	40	Marned	Bachelors	4	Lavout Work	Opportunity
E.7	Chaimae	Female	28	Single	Masters	0	Coworking Space	Opportunity
E.8	Btissam	Female	33	Single	Masters	0	Consulting & Training	Opportunity
E.9	Niama	Female	26	Marned	Masters	2	Business Incubator	Opportunity
E.10	Yahya	Male	21	Single	Tishsced	0	events planner	Necessity
E.II	Achraf	Male	28	Single	Bachelor's	0	Sales event	Necessity
E.12	Soufiane	Male	31	Single	PhD	0	Insurance	Opportunity
E.13	Mohamed	Male	33	Marned	PhD	2	Accounting and auditing	Opportunity
E.14	Fatima Zahra	Female	28	Single	Bachelors	0	Haute Couture	Necessity
E.15	Asmae	Female	30	Marned	Bachelor's	1	Fashion design	Necessity
E.16	Samia	Female	29	Marned	Masters	1	events planner	Necessity
E.17	Khната	Female	27	Single	PhD	0	Coworking Space	Necessity
E.18	Fayçal	Male	27	Single	Masters	0	Film Production	Necessity
E.19	Rachid	Male	25	Sinzle	Masters	0	Bio Cosmetics	Necessity

4. Findings

The study sheds light on the role of gender and its impact on the entrepreneurial process as perceived and experienced by female and male Moroccan entrepreneurs. In this study, gender was a minor theme because respondents briefly mentioned and discussed their experiences from a gendered perspective. However, when asked about gender implications on their entrepreneurial journey, respondents had differing opinions, highlighting the complexity and nuances of gender roles in a patriarchal society. Its impact on the

entrepreneurial experience varied between the male and female sample and within the female sample. The following section highlights the emergent typologies of entrepreneurs from a gendered perspective in Morocco (Figure 1).

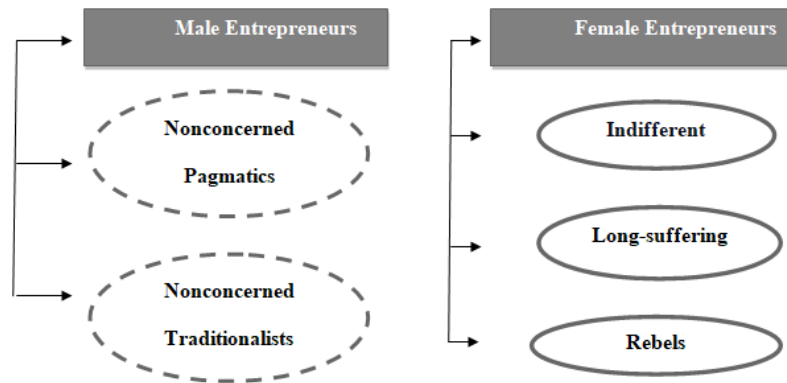


Figure 1: Gender gap Perceptions and Typologies of Entrepreneurs

Gender gap as perceived by male entrepreneurs

None of the male entrepreneurs referred to their sex or cited their gender as a concern in the entrepreneurial process. They all fall into the category that we refer to in the following as "The Unconcerned." Indeed, the male entrepreneurs spoke freely about issues that mattered, the opportunities, and the obstacles they encountered in the entrepreneurial process, but gender was hardly considered. The fact that male entrepreneurs did not mention gender or its role in their entrepreneurial experience is further evidence of Bristor and Fischer's (1993) argument that men tended to be treated as the "self" while women were treated as the "other." Therefore, if men are the norm in entrepreneurship and the usual way of running a business is based on them (Baker, Aldrich, & Nina, 1997), it is expected that they will not discuss their experiences in the context of their gender, as being a male entrepreneur is not a problem but rather represents the typical pattern of business. However, when asked about the gender gap in entrepreneurship and the specificities of women's entrepreneurship, the responses revealed two subcategories:

Nonconcerned pragmatics: acknowledge that being a woman entrepreneur in Morocco is not always evident. Nevertheless, they attest to women's tremendous success and ability to excel through their incredible sense of precision and qualifications, especially in the service industry.

Testimonies:

"I encouraged my sister to pursue a Master's degree, and we plan to collaborate in the future. In the field, I think a team of girls would be my biggest rival" (E.11).

"Gender inequality is not a problem, especially in service; on the contrary, being female can only bring you benefits" (E.12).

"We live in a patriarchal society. It is still not very common to see women as business owners, even though most of women entrepreneurs are more efficient in their work than men" (E.18).

"Moroccans struggle to accept women's work, but when it comes to entrepreneurship, and in hindsight, I see that women are more capable, more rigorous and more responsible than men" (E.19).

Nonconcerned traditionalists: These entrepreneurs have trouble accepting a woman entrepreneur, as they believe entrepreneurship is traditionally a man's domain.

Testimonials:

"Event management is difficult for women" (E.10).

"Honestly, I do not see women as entrepreneurs, since our Moroccan culture... well; it is not an easy task for her" (E.13).

Gender gap as experienced by female entrepreneurs

Following the pattern that entrepreneurship is a gendered phenomenon, with women being seen as the "other" (Bristor & Fischer, 1993), then we would expect gender to play a central role in women entrepreneurs'

perception of their entrepreneurial experience. Indeed, overcoming their role as "other" and being welcomed into a male-centered mode of operation would be challenging. However, in this research, women entrepreneurs' perception of gender roles emerged as a minor theme. They rarely mentioned or interpreted their entrepreneurial experiences in terms of gender. Furthermore, the pattern emerged that the influence of gender varied according to the type of entrepreneurship undertaken (opportunity vs. necessity), the entrepreneur's age, and marital status and globally the context(s) in which entrepreneurship takes place.

Indeed, the women entrepreneurs interviewed in this research do not constitute a homogeneous group, and their perception of the impact of gender on their entrepreneurial experience differs. However, this heterogeneity is often overlooked in research on female entrepreneurship. Thus, in further analysis of research findings, three types of entrepreneurs emerged to assist in comprehending how Moroccan female entrepreneurs experience the gender gap and the strategies they adopt when confronted with challenging situations. These female entrepreneurs can be grouped into three distinct groups, the "indifferent," the "suffering," and the "rebellious."

The "indifferent": this typology includes female entrepreneurs who project gender neutrality and find this debate outdated. They are generally opportunity entrepreneurs with a higher degree and are highly experienced.

After analyzing the data, it became apparent that Ibtissam (E.4), Sanae (E.5), Fatimzhra (E.6), Chaimae (E.7), Imane (E.8), and Samia (E.16) fall into the "Indifferent" category. These women do not perceive their gender as having an impact on their entrepreneurial experience. They live their entrepreneurial adventure regardless of their gender. They project gender neutrality so that they are considered first as businesswomen and then as women. They, therefore, seek to relegate the identity of the "female" entrepreneur and focus instead on their business. The confidence exuded by these women, the fact that some of them categorically refuse to compare themselves to a male entrepreneur and even find it an outdated debate, led us to seek to understand why these women were in this particular category and why gender did not emerge as an issue for them.

We examined their demographics to determine if any recurring patterns emerged among the women entrepreneurs. It is interesting that these entrepreneurs have advanced degrees and are highly experienced. They all worked for several years before becoming entrepreneurs. Furthermore, except for Samia (E.16), all these women (E.4, E.5, E.6, E.7, E.8) are opportunity entrepreneurs. Indeed, they are considered in society as "experts" in their field and then as "women entrepreneurs". In conclusion, these women are less likely to view their gender as a problem as they can be insulated from the potential influence of gender on their entrepreneurial process.

Testimonials:

"I am a woman, and I had just given birth, yet I was smart from the start, thanks to my network, I was able to work on big projects, and I never encountered discrimination" (E.6).

"Honestly, I have never felt discriminated against, and I make no difference between a woman or a man when it comes to entrepreneurship because it is a personal question and challenge" (E.8).

"I do not see any obstacles because I am a woman, I have not experienced that, I do not even compare myself with a man who launches his business" (E.7).

Seeing a woman on the construction site surprised male collaborators at first, but when they took a closer look at my resume, and after the first training, they realized it is not a matter of gender but rather experience" (E.4).

The "long-suffering": At the opposite extreme, this group includes female necessity entrepreneurs, young singles working in traditional sectors who have faced discrimination and harassment during their entrepreneurial experience.

Although gender discrimination in entrepreneurship did not emerge as a significant issue in this research, Kaoutar (E.3) has suffered and continues to suffer from harassment and discrimination as a woman entrepreneur. Necessity entrepreneur, single, young, and working in the textile sector, she cannot be safe from the sinful intentions of the suppliers and other men she meets. Niama (E.9) finds it challenging to impose her choices and always feels restricted and controlled in her actions by her husband, who is at the same time her partner. These two women entrepreneurs raised the issue of gender and discussed its impact. They gave examples of gender discrimination inherent in describing their lives and entrepreneurial experience. Kaoutar (E.3), for example, had to ask her father to escort her more than once to handle supplier's issues.

Testimonies:

In Morocco, women are always underestimated and mistreated. This situation prevents many girls from becoming entrepreneurs... Yes, there is a difference [between female and male entrepreneurship]; when you go to a supplier accompanied by your father or a man in general, he will respect you more than when you go alone... I have experienced this many times. When I give my number to the supplier to get information about the arrivals, he calls to hit on me. He talks to me on Whatsapp to ask me if I want to get married. He tells me you are young, what do you have to do with entrepreneurship (E.3).

Moroccans do not believe in women as entrepreneurs. They always catch their feminine side... certain things are reserved to men, it is the Moroccan mentality... especially since I am associated with my husband, and there is another problem. He tells me no, that is a man's business, that is a woman's business... he is the one who takes decisions as he always told me it is your emotions, it is your hormones, you are not objective (E.9)

The "Rebels": This last group of women entrepreneurs has adopted a more activist and rebellious position regarding gender issues.

Rebels testify (E.1, E.2, E.14, E.15, E.17) that being a female entrepreneur is not easy in a patriarchal society, but they never give up. They raised problems they encountered in their entrepreneurial adventure due to their gender and pointed out that being female impacts their role as entrepreneurs. However, these women do not stand idly by but instead employ strategies to manage this negative impact and achieve their goals with minimal damage. These coping and sometimes fighting strategies can be divided into two varieties:

- Using guile
- Asserting themselves and becoming "more resilient."

Being married and homemakers, Fatema (E.1) and Souad (E.2) have used cunning in the face of their spouses' refusal. In order to carry out their entrepreneurial activity, they first started to do it in secrecy and then were able to prove to their husbands that it was advantageous for the well-being of the family as a whole. With much more confidence and character, Fatima Zahra (E.14), Asmae (E.15), and Khnata (E.17) were able to assert themselves and face the discrimination they encountered throughout their entrepreneurial process.

"I think you have to assert yourself" (E.17)

"They do not take you seriously [suppliers], but with time this image has changed, now when I go to the market, everyone calls me Fatima Zahra the 'Maalma' I have imposed myself in this market" (E.14).

"My husband was against it, but I did impose myself with time. I used to train at home during his working hours" (E.1).

"At the very beginning, my husband was against working outside my home, so I trained the women at home" (E.2).

"My husband was against it at first, but I am stubborn as a mule, and I love the challenge. I just do what I want, and I managed to convince him" (E.15).

5. Conclusion and Research Contributions

This paper analyzes the experiences of nineteen entrepreneurs in order to identify the specificities of the entrepreneurial process and verify whether their experience differs according to the entrepreneurs' gender in the Moroccan context. The analysis contributes to the emergence of new typologies of entrepreneurs.

The problem of gender, masculinity, and femininity in Morocco is a cultural and social fact. Moreover, the idea of a difference in nature between men and women is complemented increasingly by a movement that gives men a dominant position and relegates women to a position of dependence. The differences in roles, positions, and relationships observed between male and female entrepreneurs are relative and determined by the socio-cultural environment, giving rise to discrimination. However, evolving and specific to the context, these discriminations and traditional mentalities tend to be significantly reduced. The emergence of three different categories of women entrepreneurs, in terms of their attitudes towards gender and, consequently, how they deal with gender issues, has implications for feminist theory and, in particular, the principles of liberal and social feminism.

It should be reminded at this point that social feminist theory suggests that due to differences in early and ongoing socialization, women and men are inherently different. Previous studies on entrepreneurship that have compared men and women based on social traits and values tend to this approach. On the other hand, liberal feminist theory suggests that women are disfavored relative to men due to overt discrimination and systemic factors that deprive them of vital resources such as education and work experience. Indeed, in this research, the gender gap in entrepreneurship leans more toward social theory. This concern stems from a patriarchal mentality and culture, which compels discrimination. Furthermore, women in our sample did not assimilate any discrimination in access to finance, education, or network caused by their gender.

While liberal and social feminist theories help identify and understand the gender gap between men and women entrepreneurs, these perspectives do not extend to explaining differences among women entrepreneurs. The three categories of women entrepreneurs developed in this work limit the explanatory power of both theories. Thus, by considering differences among women entrepreneurs, new light is shed on the gender gap in entrepreneurship.

The implications of this research are diverse. This work explores the relationship between gender and the entrepreneurial process from a comprehensive perspective on the theoretical level. It also makes a new contribution to understanding gender in entrepreneurship in the specific context of Morocco.

Methodologically, this work echoes calls for the mobilization of qualitative methods of analysis, which aim to better understand "entrepreneurship as a gendered activity" (Jennings & Brush, 2013, p. 671). At the managerial level, the research has allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences of male and female entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial process they go through to create their businesses in the Moroccan context.

6. Limitations and Further Research

This research work has several limitations. Here are three that seem to us the most salient. First, as the only data collection method, interviews did not allow triangulation with other methods. Such triangulation would have increased the data quality and made the discussion of the results richer. Second, by seeking diversity in the sample, we neglected to ensure a more equilibrated representation of the age and gender of respondents. In addition, the sample was limited in size (nineteen), which does not allow for the collection of rich material that could provide a more in-depth description of the phenomenon (Stevenson, 2000). New concepts, such as entrepreneurial typologies, have emerged through data analysis. Nevertheless, we are aware that, given the exploratory nature of the research and the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs, the typology may not explain all the experiences of women entrepreneurs in different contexts. However, this typology represents a valuable starting point upon which other research can be built.

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“Gender Equality in the Role of Independent Directors: Is it linked to Sustainability?”

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Abstract: The growing interest in social, environmental, and ethical aspects of business has underscored the need for a change of course from the typically male composition of Boards of Directors (BoD). Too often, in the past, management and board positions were delegated to men, not only based on competence, but also because of cultural biases and “male traditions”. Falling behind on this issue, and particularly with reference to gender equality related to the concepts of sustainability and ethics, would certainly mean missing new opportunities in value creation for companies. In this sometimes precarious, yet steadily increasing scenario, the important figure of the Independent Director (ID) and his gender, is too often overlooked. This figure, in fact, works concretely in the interest of the company and shareholders, overseeing and guiding the company itself in the right direction. Due to his non-executive role in the board, the ID, as opposed to the internal members of the BoD, enjoys an autonomous point of view. The purpose of this paper, in a nutshell, is to examine this important profile from a gender perspective in order to observe the statistics with respect to the number, effectiveness, and performance of the female gender in this role. In addition to the phenomenon of detecting the performance of the IDs, the issue has also gained ethical importance, for example, in the same sustainable “good governance” strategies that have arisen in the past fifteen years. For this reason, in our view, the presence or absence of female IDs must necessarily also be read in terms of its impact on sustainability, as its cue for encouragement and outreach. The study concludes with a factual discussion of the empirical analysis conducted on a sample of thirteen banks in the Italian scenario, with reference to the present and the gender of the IDs. Through this statistical study, it was possible to draw a clear picture in support of the literature examined for the relationship between sustainable practices and female IDs, creating also a link between the theory analyzed and the practice identified in this field of research.

Keywords: Gender equality, Independent directors, Sustainability, Boards of Directors, Ethics

1. Introduction

Gender diversity among independent directors is a key element in corporate governance (CG), as it provides companies the opportunity to express themselves to the best of their ability, as well as an opportunity to create greater value for the benefit of all stakeholders. Focusing on sustainability and ethics, this study explores the role of women directors in increasing board independence and effectiveness. Indeed, the ability of women to influence BoD decision-making increases as the number of independent directors grows, and especially, on boards where they are most present. In addition, there is evidence that boards with more women on them have higher levels of disclosure, greater oversight of management reporting, higher earnings, and better board evaluation and development programs. Our findings suggest that women are sending a positive message to the public audience, especially about ethical corporate behavior. Companies that embrace this important dimension consequently report improved financial performance as a direct result of gender diversity on the board and the implementation of concepts expressed by the world of sustainability. Indeed, companies that value board independence and effectiveness, as well as those that operate in challenging environments, have been found to have more female directors, as a result of what has already been stated. Although we are faced with all these benefits, demonstrated and supported by the studies reviewed in this research, gender parity within the BoD is a status that is still only partially present, despite growing rapidly. Our study also indicates that gender diversity is a central issue in reference to the figure of independent directors, and therefore needs to be incentivized and supported with the right means and resources.

2. Literature review

The BoD plays a key role in the composition of corporate governance. This organ is responsible for guiding and authorizing the company's strategic decisions, including certainly complex transactions such as mergers, acquisitions, alliances, hiring and firing of executives. These strategies directly affect the financial performance of the company, and for this reason, internal control is needed with respect to the decisions made by the board, a role carried out by the independent directors (Terjesen et al., 2016). For this reason, a large proportion of directors should be independent (Ringe, 2013). It is worth noting that some research shows that the positive impact on corporate performance, generated by the presence of independent directors, can be increased by female directors. Indeed, women would be flexible, collaborative, and able to handle difficult situations

(Terjesen, 2016). According to Terjesen, 2016, it is precisely because of these characteristics that they are more likely to take active roles on their boards, participating assiduously in meetings, asking questions, discussing issues, supporting participatory leadership, and maintaining higher ethical standards. The appointment of women to boards is gaining relevance, in part, as a result of the focus on sustainability and ethics issues that has been growing rapidly in recent years in the global context. The literature reviewed shows that the presence of independent directors, specifically women, varies by country, sector, and type of company, but nevertheless, their proportion is certainly constantly increasing. Although BoDs are still male-dominated, the number of women in fact has increased significantly over the past two decades, thanks in part to national laws that included mandatory quotas for their recruitment to the BoD (Arduini, 2022). Corporate governance, thanks to the growing momentum and focus on sustainability and ethics, is now perceived as a good strategy that leads to the long-term sustenance of the business (Kishore, 2017). In this scenario, most regulations have focused heavily on the role of independent directors in promoting effective and responsible CG. Although the board of directors, as the central decision-making authority in companies, plays a key role in promoting CG, the role of independent directors in this regard has become more critical. According to Mehta & Coomar (2016), independent directors are expected to perform their duties holistically and have a vision for maximizing the long-term benefits of the company, while certainly considering the welfare of employees, stakeholder expectations, and the progress of company. The effectiveness of the role depends on various other factors in addition to integrity and competence. According to Kishore (2017), in fact, independent directors can certainly bring external wisdom and judgment to improve the quality of decision-making on corporate boards, but only if they are empowered to perform their functions effectively, and if above all, they move in an environment that incentivizes them.

3. Independent Directors and Gender Equality

Independent directors are an important part of the modern corporate system as they provide a means of protection from controlling shareholder opportunism (Bebchuk et al., 2017). Within the BoD, they are also responsible for monitoring governance and mitigating agency problems (Jiang et al., 2016). Independent directors, in addition to the roles and duties already mentioned, certainly have an impact on aspects of CG, with reference to their ethical decisions and contributions (Giráldez et al., 2014). Indeed, these individuals not only provide the monitoring, advice, services, and access to resources needed by the company, but they also provide for another important dimension of business success, namely ethics. Board independence serves as a signal of ethical governance, which in turn directly and consequentially increases the value of the firm itself (Huang et al., 2008). In the study conducted by Giráldez et al. (2014), the characteristics of the composition of the board of directors - particularly the number of independent directors - were found to have a significant influence on value while also constituting an element that should certainly be taken into account by present and future investors. As advocates of independence, independent directors should be the most important members of the board in order to enforce ethical obligations which, in a long-term view, help to generate value. In this context, independent directors certainly provide an impetus for increasing the commitment of the rest of the BoD members, by leading by example in enforcing good governance and refraining from behavior that could harm the interests of shareholders, as well as stakeholders in general. Moreover, the ethical leadership of independent directors can influence the entire company. Indeed, employees too, by being inspired by the directors' behavior, can play a critical role in creating an ethical climate throughout the entire organization (Huang et al., 2008).

There is a large and growing body of research examining how board composition affects corporate performance, in relation to the influence of independent directors and the percentage of women on the board (Terjesen et al., 2009). In the literature reviewed, we found three main theories suggesting that greater gender diversity contributes to BoD effectiveness and better performance: agency theory, resource dependency theory, and gender role theory (Terjesen et al. 2009). In terms of agency theory, Francoeur et al. (2008) note that female gender often brings new perspectives to the solution of complex problems, as a direct result of the fact that it helps correct informational biases in strategy formulation, as well as certainly in solving problems of various kinds. In support of this theory, it has been reported that female board members tend to play a more active role on boards than their male counterparts, are also more likely to ask questions, discuss, demonstrate leadership, engage in collaborative work, and generally demand higher ethical standards from the organization (Virtanen, 2012; Bilimoria & Wheeler, 2000; Ingley & Van der Walt, 2005; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). In addition, the resource dependency theory constitutes a benefit perspective in terms of leadership. Women advisors, according to this theory, bring unique and certainly valuable, resources and relationships to the board, which would not only be provided by an exclusive male presence. In terms of networks, research has shown that, compared to male managers, women tend to have more diverse and inclusive networks (Ibarra, 1993). Women, therefore, have a

better understanding of specific markets and consumers than men. This diversity of perspectives can increase overall creativity and innovation in problem solving (Arfken et al., 2004). In conclusion, the gender role theory outlined by Eagly (1987), suggests that a person's gender determines his or her behavior and effectiveness in terms of communication, tactics, and influence. It suggests that, for example, women are expected to have statistically other characteristics, such as empathy and kindness, while men are expected to play assertive and aggressive roles. For example, as mentioned several times in the article, flexibility, which enhances the ability to deal with ambiguous and difficult situations, is another gender role associated with women.

Thus, there is a positive correlation between gender diversity on the board and corporate performance. According to Terjesen et al. (2016), an adequate proportion of women on the board could improve public disclosure as well as lead to better performance outcomes. The positive impact of female directors on corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting could also be tested, showing that CSR disclosure improves if the presence of independent female directors on the board increases (Poucheta-Martinez et al., 2019). On the same topic, further research, referring to the Chinese market, shows that women and independent directors play a moderating role on the bidirectional association between CSR and earnings management (Sial et al., 2019).

4. Focus on Sustainability and Ethics

In the scenario described above, an attempt is made to show how sustainability and ethics can be a support with respect to the figure of independent directors, especially when it comes to women. Sustainability, as well as certainly ethics, can really help in this regard since it is both cause and consequence of gender equality. Indeed, on the one hand, attention to sustainability implies the search for more ethical solutions, while on the other hand, practicing more ethical solutions would mean at the same time thinking in more sustainable terms. The topic of sustainable development is complex and is now at an unprecedented stage of development and use, as it involves concepts and dynamics that focus on value creation rather than profit, on long-term rather than short-term perspectives, and on stakeholder satisfaction rather than exclusively shareholder satisfaction (Fiandrino et al., 2019). According to this approach, a company that pays attention to sustainability and ethical issues is certainly capable of creating a more efficient information transmission system, as well as feeding it in a more efficient manner. This system will be able to self-regulate and self-control by gaining efficiency in the most diverse aspects of CG, thanks certainly also to the work of the independent directors, who would then be asked to evaluate it constantly and effectively. Knowledge is a key element in a company's resilience and transformation; this is the reason why the focus on knowledge management (KM) is so important. Certainly, by implementing this factor, it is possible to create a system that can bring forth and share knowledge as a means to maximize different opportunities, but also to make them usable in a different context for both the individual and the entire team. Increasing knowledge often means consolidating and making work practices efficient, gaining a competitive advantage, but even more so, in a dynamic context such as the one in which companies live, creating an innovative culture and environment. The benefit associated with this effort is directly related to the process, and results in better structured decision making, increased productivity and a more informed and direct relationship with customers (Curando, 2006).

In this way, the KM system, fueled by sustainability and ethics, would certainly favor the voting system within the BoD, as well as more informed oversight by independent directors. Connected to this, voting behavior is a complex issue for these figures, as it is both important in terms of its impact on their careers, the integrity of the board itself, and the performance of the company (Jiang et al, 2016). On the other hand, the heterogeneous composition of the BoD, which can overcome gender and/or other types of barriers against any type of minority, would mitigate the risk of amplifying and endorsing narrow views and logics, creating a more collaborative work environment (Virtanen, 2012). A wider range of perspectives, in fact, would be able to increase the firm's ability to cope with complex problems and stalemates, thus overcoming the problems mentioned above (Arfken et al., 2004). However, it should be noted how the mere presence of independent directors, in the BoD of a company, is certainly not enough (Gupta et al., 2012). According to studies by Gupta et al. (2012), there would be significant evidence worldwide of corporate failures, as well as in less severe cases of poor performance, even with an adequate number of experienced independent directors on the board. Based on the above, it is therefore safe to say that the pivotal element would not be their mere presence, but rather the value they add to the board process that will ensure effective CG. The high presence of women on the board, for example, would be able to improve key aspects such as, for example, public disclosure and the resulting increase in performance benefits (Terjesen et al., 2016).

In this scenario, ESG indicators can help find useful information and translate it into practical and strategic scenarios (Durand et al., 2019). So, at the end, the issues of KM, sustainability, and ethics converge toward the

same goal and therefore their connection cannot be ignored. In this logic of new adaptive culture, it allows companies not only to change internally but, more importantly, to elastically modify their strategies and tactics in response to the external environment, ensuring adequate profitability and creating the conditions for future growth. The world is changing and with it the logic of many internal and external business practices. Indeed, stakeholders and society at large are demanding that companies rethink their business in a more ethical and sustainable way in response to the social changes taking place (Bogers et al., 2020).

5. Empirical Analysis

The methodological research was structured into a detailed study of the bank sector that, at the Italian level, is now expressing greater attention to sustainability issues. To compose this ranking, we relied on a document attached to "Newsweek" (30/09/2022) that collects the top 175 global banks, in an extension of 33 countries, which on the basis of their CSR report were included in the "World's Most Socially Responsible Banks." Out of these 175, as mentioned, we considered thirteen Italian ones. These banks, in fact, pay special attention to sustainability and ethics issues, thanks to the use of ESG parameters and according to a holistic approach that has truly integrated sustainability and ethics into corporate strategy. This sample, therefore, gathers the best-performing banks analyzed on two metric aspects:

- Objective data extrapolated from a family of thirty KPIs in the different ESG categories;
- ESG reputation of the bank as expressed by consumers.

Only after defining the target sample, in order to bring an empirical analysis to support our study, we studied parameters such as: the number of BoD members, the number of independent directors, and the gender of the latter category to draw our reflections and interpretive lines.

From the graph (Figure 1), it can be seen that the number of independent directors (in the year 2022), with reference to the companies examined, are a significant number compared to the number of total directors in the same sample of companies. The percentage of independent directors, compared to the total number of BoD members in the sample of thirteen banks analyzed, is a significant 69,18%. Regardless of gender, therefore, this figure allows us to effectively demonstrate to what extent companies that work and invest in sustainability and ethics translate their efforts into the office of independent director, thereby seeking to increase the independence and effectiveness of the entire board.

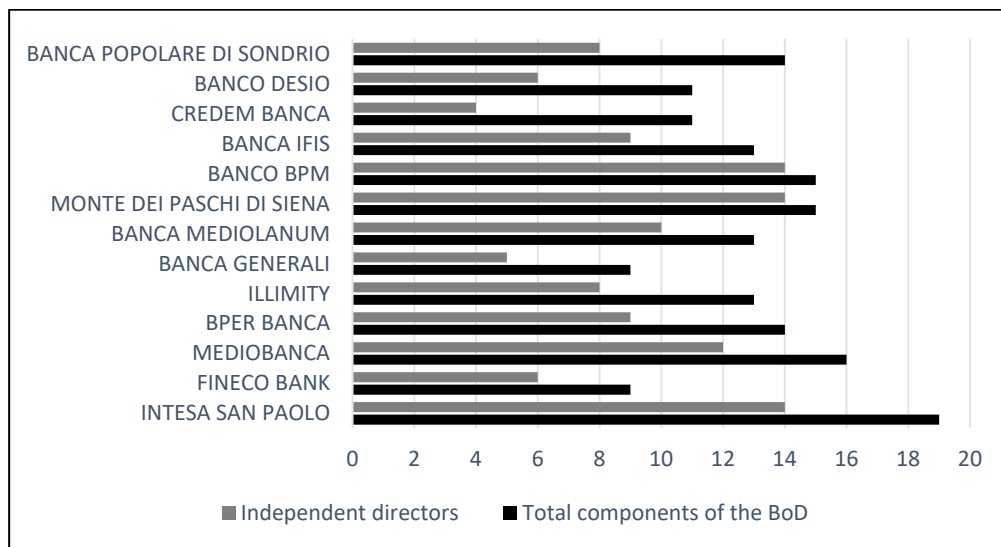


Figure 1: Graph

Referring to the histogram (Figure 2), on the other hand, it is possible to note that the same sample of banks surveyed, in addition to the presence of independent directors, certainly pays special attention to balancing the presence of the female gender with respect to the male gender in this category. Based on the numbers presented, in fact, the average presence of women as a percentage of the total number of independent directors is 51%, reaching peaks of up to 78% for the most virtuous companies.

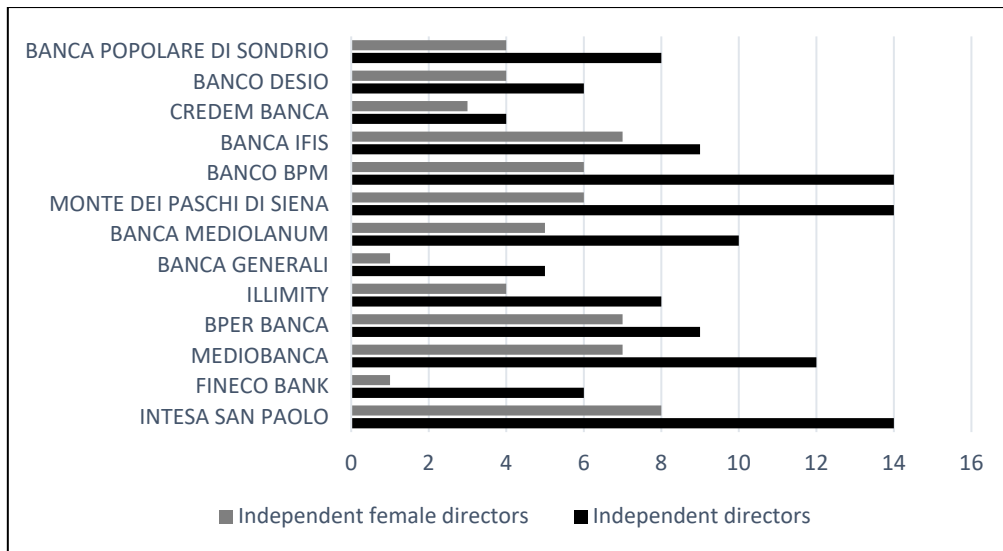


Figure 2: Histogram

These thirteen banks were analyzed under four key pillars related to ESG (Figure 3):

- Green Initiatives;
- Employee Wellness Initiatives;
- Territory;
- Financial Education.

Name	Green Initiatives	Employee wellness initiatives	Territory	Financial Education
BANCA POPOLARE DI SONDRIO	Medium	Medium	High	High
BANCO DESIO	Medium	Medium	High	High
CREDEM BANCA	Low	High	Medium	High
BANCA IFIS	Medium	High	High	High
BANCO BPM	Medium	High	High	High
MONTE DEI PASCHI DI SIENA	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
BANCA MEDIOLANUM	Low	Medium	Medium	High
BANCA GENERALI	Medium	Medium	High	High
ILLIMITY	Medium	Medium	High	High
BPER BANCA	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
MEDIOBANCA	Medium	Medium	High	High
FINECO BANK	Low	Medium	Medium	High
INTESA SAN PAOLO	Medium	Medium	High	High

Figure 3: Thirteen Banks Analyzed Under Four key Pillars Related to ESG

Companies espousing this important theme it could report a direct improvement in financial performance, that we considered in part to the gender diversity promoted in the board of directors, as well as certainly to the implementation of the concepts expressed by the world of sustainability. From the study conducted on the non-financial reporting (year 2021) of the individual companies within the sample, it was clear that this focus on the concepts of sustainability and ethics then finds practical expression in corporate strategies and policies.

It's worth to point out that no banks in the sample scored the "high" level in "Green Initiatives" since, despite the many projects in which some of them have participated (as, for instance the "Net-Zero Banking Alliance" project), it's still hard for all the banks to evaluate the environmental and climatic risks of debtor customers. The results we found are very encouraging as clear evidence, with supporting numbers, of the efforts and work carried out on each pillar that can be found in these reports. The three rating categories: low, medium and high express our assessment of what was stated. It should be pointed out that lower values are found in the presence of data that are sometimes not absent but still far from achieving above-average results.

As is evident in the final analysis, there is a direct and very close correlation between companies that are attentive to sustainable and ethical issues, particularly also through ESG metrics, and the presence on the Board

of Directors of independent female directors. The lack, or complete absence, of discrimination would undoubtedly play a major role in the effective creation of value for the company for the benefit of all stakeholders.

6. Conclusions

The current study contributes to the debate opened in the literature on the role of women in key CG positions. The paper specifically sets out to explore the issue with respect to the presence of the female gender, not only on the BoD, but also among the independent directors of the same structure. In this scenario, the study we conducted evidences a clear correlation between the presence of women on the BoD and specific benefits related to greater efficiency of the work of independent directors in general. This would be due to the evidence that in companies, where the connection between sustainability and ethics is more present, gender diversity is instead more present and less discriminating, with a payoff in terms of significant value creation. In fact, in our view, the real significant value is created only if these policies are integrated at the level, not only of strategy, but of the corporate culture. Only when linked to strategy and culture, before ethics and sustainability, gender diversity can be in fact a truly meaningful element of value creation. Our own empirical analysis offers numerical and statistical corroboration of this claim. Starting from Figure 3, in fact, it is possible to see to what extent the Italian banks, most active in ethical and sustainable aspects, have a real desire to integrate ESG objectives into their strategies. The result found is, in our opinion, of an above-average level.

In this context, however, there would exist negative aspects, still present in reference to the figures of independent directors regardless of their gender, for which the sole focus on sustainability and ethics would not be sufficient. In fact, we are talking about structural and sometimes common problems across multiple companies that emerged during our study, and which could be taken care of in a later and more in-depth study in the same topic. For example, according to Bebchuk et al. (2017), the current system of executive appointment significantly undermines the ability of independent directors to effectively perform their oversight role. A key element of this theory is the fact that the appointment and retention of independent directors are usually influenced by controlling shareholders. As a result, this category of directors has an incentive to pander to the wishes of controlling shareholders or, at the very least, little incentive to protect public investors. As reported by Mehta & Coomar (2016), although the role of an independent director is most often synonymous with watchdog, it is important instead for an independent director to add value to the company's overall performance in addition to examining and questioning the performance of executive directors. The role of the independent director, therefore, is glorified as a whistle-blower so they have the freedom to challenge or question anything in the right way. Another aspect certainly not to be overlooked notes that independent directors with multiple directorships distribute their efforts unequally, as a direct consequence related to the prestige relative to individual directorships (Huang et al., 2018). As expressed by Huang et al. (2018), directors with multiple directorships in fact spend more time, as well as more effort, on their most prestigious boards as a direct consequence of personal gain. Along these lines, in contrast, companies with a higher percentage of devoted independent directors would have better corporate performance. Finally, a significant portion of the analyzed studies assert that independent directors alone cannot be held accountable for total board oversight failures. According to Arduini's (2022) studies, in CG, in addition to having to ensure a large percentage of independent directors on boards, the company should be able to designate another important figure: the lead independent director (LID). Whatever leadership model is adopted, in fact, the presence of independent directors and, in particular, a LID, is necessary or strongly recommended, since in the case of duality with the CEO, the LID can limit the CEO's own entrenchment and create opportunities for confrontation between him and the independent directors.

As expressed, this research has numerous limitations but certainly as many insights for future studies. The results reported certainly cannot be generalized, just as the empirical analysis presented should be compared with a broader statistical study. A subsequent cue, in fact, could certainly be formed on a larger sample of companies divided according to geographic areas. Indeed, we are sure that this research is a good starting point for developing the theme of connecting gender diversity, sustainability, and ethics with reference to the figures of independent directors. In fact, a more in-depth study would make it possible to delineate how the policy implications and applications really affect managers and directors, not only by the study of numbers and/or documents, but also by other investigation methods, such as the interviews. In this logic, according to our opinion, future work should set out to explore the issue of the presence of the female gender, not only in reference to the link between sustainability and ethics, but also, in reference to the strategic choices of managers and directors as a straightforward element of connection with corporate culture.

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Gender Narratives in Academia: How Gender is Constructed Through Gender Policies in Italian Universities

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Abstract: This proposal aims to explore gender equality measures in the academic context, which is undergoing changes such as the recent introduction of the Gender Equality Plan requirement and the broadening of equality, diversity and inclusion topics, both in research and in the actions practically proposed. Assuming that gender is continuously made and 'unmade' through gender policies (Acker, 1990), the key question is what kind of gender narrative is proposed by these measures, often attributed to the framework of gender mainstreaming (O'Hagan and Klatzer, 2018). This paper aims to discuss and problematise this assumption from a theoretical and critical perspective, with the use of the methodology known as Critical Frame Analysis that originates in the field of public policy (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010). The use of Critical Frame Analysis applied to the main policy documents on gender measures and objectives at the Italian national level leads to a theoretical proposal on the reclassification of academic gender frameworks.

Keywords: Gender equality in academia, Equality, Diversity and inclusion, Gender mainstreaming, Gender policies, Gender equality plans

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims

That there is a gender issue in academia, especially in teaching and researching careers, has long been known: in Italy, female full professors are only 11%, compared to 25% male full professors (SheFigures, 2021). The ratio is slightly higher than the European average, placing Italian universities in the midst of a problem that affects all European countries, with hardly any exceptions.

The different interpretations of this problem have led to various attempts to solve it (e.g. with the European Commission's "fixing the woman" to "fixing the institution" strategies), which then resulted in a European corpus that translates so-called "gender mainstreaming" into practice through a series of more or less binding rules (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2012). In this paper, the focus will mainly be on gender policies expressed through the adoption of documents such as gender budgets, gender equality plans and so on.

Assuming that gender is continuously done and "undone" also through policy documents (Acker, 1990), the main question is what kind of narrative is proposed by these measures, which, as stated before, are often traced back to the framework of gender mainstreaming (O'Hagan and Klatzer, 2018).

This paper aims to discuss and problematise this assumption from a theoretical and critical perspective, making use of the methodology known as Critical Frame Analysis that comes from the study of public policy (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010), applied to the evolving Italian legislation and practices about gender equality in the academic context. What do these specific measures tell us about the vision of gender equality? How do they portray the woman targeted by those measures, what are her problems, her obstacles? This type of questions, starting from the emblematic question "What's the problem?" by Bacchi and Eveline (see methodological section below), made it possible to analyse some of the main documents for gender equality in the context of Italian universities.

1.2 Background

Indeed, the analysis of the literature (O'Connor et al., 2015) has made it possible to reconstruct the main explanations given to the issue of the so-called *leaking pipeline*, a complex and multifactorial phenomenon in which individual, relational, organisational, systemic, institutional and cultural factors are intertwined.

Most scholars agree in identifying three main levels (Contarello et al., 2008) into which these factors can be divided: the micro level, which involves individual factors such as individual people's preferences, gender-appropriate behaviours and economic theories on the benefit–cost ratio in the gendered division of labour; the meso level, which encompasses relational factors such as gender micro-policies and homosociality, along with organisational factors such as the rules on recruitment and male gatekeeping; and finally the macro level in which there are systemic, institutional and cultural factors such as national legislation, beliefs about gender roles and so on.

The leaking pipeline isn't the only gendered phenomenon in academia: the current university is also characterised by the phenomena of horizontal segregation (in particular along the axis defined as the care-technical divide, see Barone, 2011) and the importance given to the topic of mobility and excellence (Brink and Benschop, 2012; Bozzon et al., 2019; Raffini, 2017) in an increasingly international academic arena. These changes have also been interpreted together resulting in the concept of the neoliberal university (Riegraf and Weber, 2017), while in the Italian context more emphasis has been placed on the precariousness that characterises the life experience of the young researchers, especially the female ones (Ferri and Murgia, 2017; Picardi, 2020). Certain dimensions of marginalisation are gradually being studied and help to broaden and enrich the research on gender in the academia, for instance by taking into account other intersectional factors such as disability and race (Navarro, 2017).

1.3 Leaky Pipeline and Gender Mainstreaming in Italy

As stated above, gender equality within the university context is a complex issue that is also rooted in the theories that have organised work within public bodies in the recent decades: universities have in fact been profoundly changed by the new management of public administrations that originated in the 1990s with the New Public Management movement. In addition to that, in Italy, Law n. 240/2010, the so-called Gelmini reform, profoundly changed the career and recruitment of the teaching and researching staff, introducing the new figure of researchers on fixed-term contracts and abolishing open-ended contracts for researchers; in general, it shaped recruitment on the basis of principles of competition and competence. Subsequently, the 2008 financial crisis and the period of austerity policies that have followed have in turn changed the way universities can continue to operate, especially with regard to spending limits and the recruitment of academics.

In this context the new EU strategy for gender equality, gender mainstreaming, has now been introduced, drawing on the 1995 Beijing Conference.

The main application of gender mainstreaming in Italian universities has taken the form of the introduction of specific bodies dedicated to gender equality and countering discrimination in the workplace. These equality committees since 2011 have been obliged to draft an Annual Plan of Positive Actions dedicated to improving gender imbalances and occupational well-being in general, but despite this regulatory provision the results have not been incisive, partly due to the limited power these bodies hold in the overall framework of an institution.

Furthermore, since 2008 Italian universities have been subjected to austerity measures lasting more than a decade, which had severely limited the possibility of hiring new staff and making career advancements (Viesti, 2022). In this sense, while on the one hand there was a growing emphasis on gender equality, with the creation of an organisational and normative system aimed at implementing gender mainstreaming, on the other hand, the resources potentially aimed towards changing the composition of university recruitment were severely limited.

However, the two most important changes that have been introduced in Italian universities are recent: using soft law and peer pressure tools, in 2019 the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) approved the Guidelines for adopting university gender budgets, giving a great impulse to the adoption of this type of documents in Italian universities (Oppi et al., 2021), so much so that as of April 2022 40 Italian universities have already adopted a gender budget and another 7 are about to publish it (data presented by the CRUI Gender Working Group). However, most Italian gender budgets consist of a context statistical analysis and do not contain a financial analysis of the university budget.

The other relevant news is the decision by the European Commission to include the possession of a Gender Equality Plan as an eligibility requirement for research institutions wishing to apply for Horizon Europe funding (Bencivenga et al., 2017): in this case the European Commission specifically asked to include five main areas (work-life balance and organizational culture; gender balance in leadership and decision making; gender equality in recruitment and career progression; integration of the sex/gender dimension into research and teaching content and measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment) and for each category the research institution must shape specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based (SMART) actions.

At the moment, many Italian universities have therefore approved three separate documents in the area of gender mainstreaming: the Annual Positive Action Plan, the Gender Equality Plan and the Gender Budget.

Those universities that have taken this application to a more advanced level are beginning to approve one single document, which is able to incorporate the different instances.

2. Methodology

Considering the national context, in which gender mainstreaming has been operating in a concrete manner for more than ten years, the two main research questions concerned, on the one hand, which characteristics of gender mainstreaming can be tracked down in the reception of gender mainstreaming in Italian universities and, on the other hand, which specific gender narratives result from this implementation.

The main issue here concerns what kind of gender narratives these kinds of documents produce, in the perspective of gender being done and "undone" (Acker, 1990) continuously also through policy documents such as gender budgeting and gender equality plans. All these changes concur to define gendered universities, in which gender is constructed through gendered practices that reproduce and pass on specific gender roles (Poggio, 2010). Policies are part of this process in which gender is done and undone (again Acker, 1990, but also Connell, 2006). Policy documents on gender do not simply acknowledge a situation, but help to co-create it; in fact, they define what is inequality, what is equality, and a hierarchy among the various possible situations, as well as among desirable outcomes. They are performative documents.

Faced with this framework, it was possible to apply the Critical Frame Analysis (CFA) methodology, which starts from the consideration that policy documents are capable of discursively constructing policy problems (Garforth and Kerr, 2009; Bacchi and Eveline, 2010). In particular, the theoretical assumptions on which Critical Frame Analysis is based rest on the consideration of the anticipatory ability of textual problem statements to call up answers (Garforth and Kerr, 2009), together with the retrospective ability of documents to construct a selective history of their origins (Garforth and Kerr, 2009). In addition to these aspects, Bacchi emphasised how Critical Frame Analysis is particularly useful in detecting the disappearance of what has not been problematised (Bacchi and Eveline, 2010) within political discourse.

The application of this methodology to the research questions that were analysed earlier makes it possible to focus not so significantly on the usefulness or effectiveness of the documents that are gradually implemented, but on the narratives and political boundaries of the 'women in academia' problem.

3. Results

The aim of the research was therefore to be able to identify some significant features within the current discourse about gender mainstreaming in the academia and to be able to trace policy frameworks within this particular field.

The documents considered for the application of the Critical Frame Analysis were the national legislation on the functioning of equality bodies within universities and on Annual Positive Action Plans; the Guidelines for Gender Balance and the Vademecum for the elaboration of the Gender Equality Plan in Italian Universities, both issued by the National Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI); and finally the documents that were adopted within the University of Genoa in response to these impulses: the Positive Action Plan, the Gender Budget and the Gender Equality Plan.

3.1 Gender Mainstreaming in Italian Universities

Some initial considerations can be drawn in order to answer the first research question on the characteristics of gender mainstreaming in Italian universities: first of all, as the international literature points out, also in Italy it is possible to witness a transversal competence of gender mainstreaming that seems to be particularly strong in the sphere of research institutions. Unlike other types of companies or public bodies, in fact, the documents mentioned affect all university components (students, professors, researchers and staff) and the three so-called 'missions' of the university (teaching, research and the economic and social exploitation of knowledge).

Secondly, there is the use of soft legislative instruments (Lombardo and Meier, 2008), which is represented by the above-mentioned Guidelines, which in themselves have no binding value, but use peer pressure between universities and the linking of reward funding to equality objectives to increase the dissemination of gender policy documents.

Another issue highlighted in the literature is also found in the Italian application of gender mainstreaming and that is the risk of further intersectional inequalities (Walby, 2005). The document, among those mentioned,

that appears to be most capable of responding to intersectional inequalities is in fact the Positive Action Plan, which concerns the well-being of workers in the broadest sense and not only aspects of gender equality. However, it is also the document that has been weakened the most in recent years, not least in the face of the emerging Gender Equality Plan and Gender Budget.

3.2 A Classification Proposal of Gender Equality Policy Frameworks in Academia

Regarding the application of Critical Frame Analysis to documents concerning gender mainstreaming, the attempt has already been made by both Walby (2005) and Verloo (2016), and both propose a tripartition of the possible meanings that gender equity assumes in the context of public policies.

In Walby's model, the frameworks identified are sameness, difference and transformation, taking more account of the final objective of the policy; in Verloo's model, the three frameworks are equal treatment, specific equality policies and gender mainstreaming, giving more attention to the instrument used, also from a normative point of view.

However, a classification of university gender policies has not yet been proposed, which is what this working hypothesis aims to do. In particular, a four-part reclassification of the frameworks that provide the information base for gender equality policies is suggested here: gender mainstreaming, work-life balance, capabilities and neoliberal approaches.

The gender mainstreaming framework implies a strong focus on the institution's accountability, which, following the requirements of the European Union, will have to carefully consider each choice from the perspective of its effects on gender equality: for Verloo, this is also the framework of transformative change (Verloo, 2016). It is a framework in which the institution is proactive towards institutional change (following an approach that the European Commission has also called 'fixing the institution'): the specific measures taken as a result are those that most directly involve the university's governing bodies, which bear the responsibility for institutional change.

The literature on gender in academia has focused on the 'new' gender mainstreaming strategy from two perspectives: some scholars have linked it to the concept of neoliberalism (Bacchi, 2010), while others have rejected this interpretation (Walby, 2011). Here, the starting point is drawn from Walby's interpretation: neoliberalism and gender mainstreaming are still distinct frameworks, because they are considered to answer the question "What's the problem?" - which summarises Critical Frame Analysis - in different ways. In the case of gender mainstreaming, this question can be answered by identifying the problem in the institution, through the inclusion of care work in policies, and through paying attention to the gender bias that policy makers unintentionally convey in "neutral" policies.

On the other hand, the second framework identified, neo-liberalism, answers the question "what's the problem?" by identifying the problem in the lack of personal skills or of the right attitude in women. In this case, the focus is on individual responsibility: it is no longer the institution that has to change, but the woman ('fixing the woman'), who, thanks to the measures provided by equality policies, can succeed in closing the gap that was the cause of *her* disadvantage. The concept of empowerment is strongly emphasised along with the full responsibility of the individual for his or her own successes or failures. Consequently, there is a denial of systematic elements of inequality and there is no attempt to re-discuss the male model, only the need to close the 'gap' with that model. Furthermore, there is a preference for the defamilisation of care work through the promotion of the idea of the a-gendered worker who outsources family management and childcare to the private market. Measures deriving from this approach seek to bridge a gap that is no longer institutional, but individual: mentoring and coaching programmes, for example, together with work-life balance tools that "free" the academic woman from the burden of care work, thus making her more competitive on the (male) market.

The third framework considered has been referred to as work-life balance or 'specific equality policies' (Verloo, 2016), it considers motherhood as the main obstacle to women's careers and it focuses on proposing and implementing positive actions that mainly concern motherhood and care work. This framework echoes the traditional gender policies of the 1970s and 1980s, when the tools to achieve gender equality consisted mainly in maternity leaves, measures to protect women's work and other instruments to enable them to fulfil the role of both worker and mother.

However, sociological research has shown that the early stages of women's academic careers are characterized by feelings of insecurity and that the pursuit of a career is seen as impossible to reconcile with

motherhood (Murgia and Poggio, 2019), but at the same time, it does not seem that care work is such a major obstacle in academic careers. The risk is that if parenting is seen as the only obstacle to women's academic careers, it totally obscures the effect of structural, institutional and organizational problems.

Finally, the capability approach has also been examined, from which important policy tools have also been derived in academia, namely gender budgets for well-being (Addabbo, Lanzi, Picchio, 2010). This framework was developed by the Center for Public Policy Analysis at the University of Modena (Addabbo, Lanzi, and Picchio, 2010) and is inspired by the theories of Sen and Nussbaum, with a focus on the well-being of the individual and the creation of a list of capabilities in a participatory way, together with the target group. It is the only framework in which individual well-being is explicitly taken into consideration and there is attention to the subjective and qualitative dimensions of well-being in gender equality.

4. Discussion and Further Research

In conclusion, it seems that it is possible to draw a connection between the causes of the leaking pipeline highlighted by the research and literature on the topic (see O'Connor et al., 2015) and the frameworks identified by applying Critical Frame Analysis to the main documents for gender equality in Italian universities. In particular, the framework defined as "gender mainstreaming" identifies the problem in institutional factors, along with the capabilities framework, although the latter with less emphasis on institution accountability. Individual factors, on the other hand, are the answer to the question "what's the problem?" for the neoliberal and work-life balance frameworks.

As the Critical Frame Analysis rightly points out, the discursive assessment of a problem, including the potential contributing factors, demonstrates the anticipatory ability to call up answers. In this context, frameworks focusing on individual explanations of the leaking pipeline (along with other gendered issues in academia) tend to suggest remedies that target individual-level factors. In this sense, with the application of the CFA methodology it is also feasible to do a backward analysis of the policy documents involved: if the solutions, measures or actions proposed in the documents are aimed at individual improvement, then the issue being addressed is likely an individual-level problem. This aspect in particular calls for further conceptualization of the research.

In fact, the paper also aims to offer a critical overview of different possible frameworks, in order to unmask those academic policies that present themselves as neutral on the one hand (e.g., focusing on the concept of merit and productivity) or as pro-equality on the other, but in reality, they continue to reproduce a neoliberal model of academia, while at the same time continuing to celebrate fatigue as a paradigm of success (Arena, 2022). Another reflection is also due following Bacchi and Eveline's lesson on what remains unproblematicized: in the context of Italian universities, heavily affected by the reforms mentioned earlier and chronically plagued by a lack of resources, it is surprising that the documents on gender equality analysed here hardly ever mention the issue of precariousness, which has also become an existential figure for young researchers (Raffini, 2017).

These reflections open up new spaces for research on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion aspects in universities: in particular, on the role that equity committees have in this process that is intended to be one of institutional change, avoiding the risk of technocratisation (Daly, 2005).

The linkage between the research fields that have traditionally been associated with gender equality studies in academia for years and the current academic policies being enforced now, as exemplified by the Horizon Europe EDIRE project, presents a compelling point of interest, as this paper has attempted to demonstrate. The transformative potential that resides in the alliance of different components of the academy could be a pivotal junction to achieve a real implementation of gender mainstreaming, just as in the case of government gender budgets this alliance was identified in the velvet triangle that supported, for example, the successful Australian experience (Woodward, 2004).

In the academic context, the velvet triangle can be reformed by exploiting the surfacing of gender expertise and its transfusion into policy. In this regard, it would be crucial to investigate the processes that lead to the materialisation of the documents analysed here, with a focus on governance and the distribution of power (Drew and Canavan, 2020).

More than a year after the introduction of the Gender Equality Plan requirement, it is necessary to ask whether it is possible to create not only gender policies, but feminist gender policies. I believe that two aspects above all need to be considered: how the situated knowledge of women (Haraway, 1988), especially feminist

academics, can filter into these technicalised documents; and how a democratisation of these policies can lead to a broadening and deepening of the meaning of 'gender equality' that we perform and share and transmit every day in our universities.

To further research on this topic, however, it is necessary to identify more clearly which elements belong to gender mainstreaming and which to other frameworks, such as those proposed in this article.

Furthermore, a further step is needed in defining what inclusion really is, by broadening these gender policies to a view that can take into account the intersectional aspects of discrimination.

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Socio-Technical Energy Systems: Configurations That Work Better for Some

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Abstract: The political character of the energy transition requires a fine-grained perspective on the power games occurring to bring it about. There are approaches specifically geared towards calling out the identity-based inequalities in such social processes termed as grand challenges, and then there are those specialised in studying the role of technology in the energy system and how actors in that system interact with these technologies. Feminist social scientists have highlighted the entanglements of intersectionality with technology in general and energy more specifically. At the same time, the literature on Science and Technology Studies (STS) emphasizes a social dimension, e.g., how technology is co-constructed by societal actors or how large technical systems structure our daily lives. Of relevance for feminist social scientists, STS approaches are well-positioned to analyse how technology creates, re-enacts, or mirrors power asymmetries. STS approaches understand technologies as socio-technical systems that inadvertently incorporate societal realities in production and consumption which allows an analysis of the covert seats of power in socio-technical systems. Similarly, energy systems have been a popular research object in STS due to their large-scale, often high-tech character, especially when considering modern energy technologies. Regardless of the common scope of intersectionality and STS regarding power asymmetries, there is still significant room for “hybridization” of these approaches. Although the energy domain has seen efforts being made with the development of notions such as energy poverty, energy justice, or energy democracy, the hybridization effort with STS has not been taken further significantly. This paper, we contributes to the hybridization of the STS and intersectionality lenses.

Keywords: Gender, Energy, STS, Power, Users

1. Introduction

The energy transition towards a low-carbon society is one of the grand societal challenges the world is facing. It is an economic and political process involving the production and use of new forms of knowledge and technology by different groups in different social contexts. However, we will show that such grand challenges are at the same time normative processes with asymmetries of power in the design of energy technologies and their use, especially visible in the meanings ascribed to gender roles. We use the term ‘energy technology’ as an encompassing term to describe an artifact that provides an energy service, such as a stove which cooks food and, in some cases, provides space heating, or as a technology which generates a useful energy source such as electricity. Technology can be viewed from a gendered perspective on the energy transition that justifies a more fine-grained conceptual treatment.

Putting literatures from science and technology studies (STS) as well as feminist sociology to the test, we intend to elaborate the entanglements of energy technologies with intersectionality. A review of STS theories describes links between justice theories, and relevant STS theories (Sovacool and Hess, 2017). While theories such as the Social Construction of Technology (see section 2.1) are seen as ‘descriptive-explanatory’, social justice have a normative outlook: they aim to identify inequalities/problems and improve empirical reality (at least more than those theories characterised as descriptive-explanatory). Furthermore, the goals of these theories, generally, also differ. Whereas social justice theories aim to critique and guide transformation, descriptive-explanatory theories are more interested in describing to understand and search for patterns. We concur with Sovacool and Hess (2017) about the different characteristics of justice theories versus other STS-related theories. STS theories are more observant of empirical realities, attempt to understand how they come about and which factors are at play; critical, justice and feminist theories are much more action-oriented. Although the energy domain has seen efforts being made with the development of notions such as energy poverty, energy justice, or energy democracy (Bouzarovski et al, 2021, Jenkins et al, 2016, Szulecki and Overland, 2020), integration with STS has not been taken further significantly. Hence, there are opportunities for further “hybridization” of these perspectives (Hess and Sovacool, 2020).

As a gender and energy researcher and an environmental STS researcher, we see merit in mapping the meeting points between our particular approaches, thereby promoting interdisciplinary learning and deeper understanding of the complex problem at hand. This paper can be understood as a work in progress towards

an integrated, gendered STS perspective on the energy transition. This reflective piece of conceptual thinking based on purposefully selected, existing literature might initiate empirical work at a later stage. Thus, the questions guiding our thinking are “How do feminist sociological theories and STS theories relate to each other, and what is their combined potential to inform a more fine-grained perspective on the energy transition?”

2. STS, Energy, and Intersectionality

2.1 Science and Technology Studies

Science & Technology Studies (STS) treat ‘technology’ and highly technological domains such as the energy domain as a core empirical phenomenon. For example, the energy system has figured in studies relating to the material and social infrastructures of the technologies constituting the system, (see for example Hughes, 1983). This interest in the socio-technical nature of technology has resulted in a multi-dimensional understanding of the notion of ‘technology’. In this paper we adhere to a definition of technology as a “configuration that works” (Rip and Kemp, 1998). This definition sees technology as a configuration of physical resources, knowledge and people, which Rip and Kemp (1998) classify as hardware, software, orgware, and socioware. For example, photovoltaics panels installed on a rooftop can be seen as a system of hardware. However, rooftop photovoltaics do not simply work autonomously: at some point human beings are involved who need knowledge and skills of differing types and degrees. For example, a user needs the skills to operate the involved transformers, displays, etc. (software). Technicians require the skills to assemble the panels and material infrastructure (software). Training systems need to be set up for these technicians (orgware). All of this occurs within a legal and cultural framework in a specific societal context, e.g., the energy transition (socioware). These four ‘-wares’ are not only elements constituting what a technology ‘is’ but are also systemically related: each ‘-ware’ shapes the other three to some extent.

This definition of technology opens up avenues for the study of social influences in all processes involved with technology and falls within the perspective of the ‘social construction of technology’ (SCOT) (Bijker et al, 2012). Technological development has often been depicted as a linear, deterministic process, however, SCOT contends that it is actually a ‘messy’ process that involves interpretative flexibility at each stage within a development process. When developing a technological artifact, ‘social groups’ or actors engage in a meaning-making struggle over what constitutes ‘the problem’ and which technological artifact constitutes a ‘solution’ to that problem (Pinch and Bijker, 2012). At a certain point, the interpretive struggle over the meaning of a technological artifact leads to a stabilised form and ‘accepted facts’ emerge (Becker, 2017). Viewing technology development in this way reveals the fact that there are choices to be made along the way. Which choice is made at each junction, specifically, is the result of an interaction between involved actors, their meanings, and wider contexts. These interactions are not necessarily between equals. Although SCOT speaks of the ‘social groups’ involved in the construction of technology, Pinch and Bijker (2012) are neither too explicit about how the struggles over meaning between actors play out, nor how technologies constrain its users. This original overview of SCOT also omits to differentiate between actors. Such studies can be found in the STS field of ‘Technology in use’. One of the findings in this field – and an outcome of the struggle over technology development between different actors – is the fact that technologies become ‘scripted’ by their developers. Scripting is a common notion in the field of design, denoting a designer’s process to ‘fit’ an artifact-to-be to the envisioned user. According to Van Oost (2003) a gender script can be defined as “the representations an artifact’s designers have or construct of gender relations and gender identities – representations that they then inscribe into the materiality of that artifact”.

Van Oost (2003) applies this notion of gender scripting to the imaginative example of electric shavers. She shows that shavers intended for male usage assumed a higher technological competence than those designed for females; a link that has re-emerged in recent studies of renewable or smart energy technologies (Breukers, 2022). As literature on the in- and exclusion of women from the design and use of technology has shown (Oudshoorn et al, 2016), it matters who is involved in the scripting processes. Consistently, STS scholars have developed methods such as ‘Constructive Technology Assessment’/‘Constructive Innovation Assessment’ that prescribe an explicitly stronger involvement of all relevant stakeholders – both usual suspects and ones not often thought of – in the development of technology and innovation (Aukes et al, 2022).

2.2 Energy

The energy transition is a complex socio-technical problem based around an energy system which consists of a number of chains starting with a particular resource (e.g. coal, oil, sun, wind, biomass), which is extracted,

converted, transported, further refined to a form suitable for distribution to a consumer who will use the energy to provide a range of desired applications or services (e.g. light, cooking, transport, music). However, viewing the energy system from an STS perspective we see that the system consists not only of resources, hardware and equipment and the knowledge to use them, but also of actors (e.g. people acting individually or within social groups, such as firms or other organizations) with their own interests, values and behaviour, and institutions with societal and technical norms, regulations, or standards of good practice (Geels, 2004). In other words, there are multiple social actors with multiple perspectives and decision-making paths, which, in turn, are dependent on situation and context to determine the nature of the transition. There are actors on the supply side (e.g. policy makers, industrial strategists, regulators, technology developers, and investors) and on the demand side (e.g. users). Decisions about the form of the energy transition will result from the interaction between actors in processes of adjustments, modifications and negotiations which, in turn, depends on their awareness, attitudes, risk perception and behaviour. However, these interactions are not always between equals since social groups can have different enabling, mediating, and aggregating functions which affect other actors in meaningful ways.

Despite these very clear social dimensions to the energy transition, social scientists have been slow to engage with the energy system. An obvious intervention that social scientists could make relates to the characteristics of actors, and the social groups they represent, in the energy transition asking questions about whether the equality in participation and benefits; for example, in terms of energy services enjoyed, participation in any employment/income-generating opportunities, and capacity to influence the form of the energy transition. Most of the research to date tends to focus on women as a homogeneous group, with little differentiation across other social categories.

The initial interest from a social science perspective focused on the Global South; in response to the lack of attention to 'the fuelwood crisis' at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) which was defined as a woman's problem since they were considered to be the primary gatherers of a fuel increasingly in short supply. The resulting research has tended to focus on documenting what has been done to improve women's access to household energy sources particularly in the Global South, and making the case that there is a gender perspective in the energy sector particularly in the Global North. In terms of benefiting from employment/income-generating opportunities, the emphasis in the Global South has been on women's empowerment as small-scale entrepreneurs either using energy to run a business or selling energy technologies. The nature of this empowerment is undefined and unmeasured. In the Global North, attention has focused on increasing women's participation in the commercial energy sector including identifying why more women do not study STEM subjects. There is little attention to the values and norms of actors in energy sector institutions. There has been some gender analysis of energy policies which to date, globally, appear to be gender blind – neglecting gender-based differences in perception, socialization and values, assuming that women and men have the same values, experiences and aspirations towards energy production and use.

2.3 Intersectionality

Feminist and social scientist researchers have long argued that gender is not a binary condition but that individuals are differentiated by a range of social and economic characteristics. In the 1990s, black feminist researchers in the US argued that there is an interconnectedness and interdependence between social categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and other social identities or positions which shape social experiences (Valentine, 2007) or are affected by economic or political projects (Yuval-Davis, 2016). In response to this point about social categories, the concept of 'intersectionality' was introduced to highlight the different experiences by social categories of the same phenomena and policies (Valentine, 2007).

Intersectionality use has evolved. First, as a lens to focus on how different social categories interact in a specific context (e.g. gender, class and race in employment), without prioritising one facet or category of social difference, that influence outcomes (Yuval-Davis, 2016). It is used to analyse social stratification revealing positions that are marginal in some ways but dominant in others, for example migrant men or white women. Intersectionality provides an understanding of how invisible power relations shape inequality. Researchers in the Global South have warned against a simplistic assumption of homogeneity in the way identity operates in communities: collective identity in some cultures is stronger than individual identity (Hirtenfelder, 2015). Other researchers have warned about an overreliance of a rather Eurocentric definition of gender which draws on a particular biological construction that presupposes sexual dimorphism and heterosexuality (Lugones, 2016). In some cultures, gender is not constructed around anatomical distinctions (Walsh, 2016).

Second, as theory and methodology: how intersectionality has been developed, adopted, and adapted within different disciplines; application within policy implementation, particularly in the more technical sectors, has helped point to the need for data collection and analysis methods which reflect differentiation. Projects promoting energy access in the Global South have been criticised for the use of undifferentiated terms such as “people,” “community,” or “consumers” (Cecelski, 2004). However, concerns have been raised about a lack of clear definition of the concept which then creates uncertainty about the categories to use and where to draw the boundaries (Davis, 2008).

Third, to interrogate political interventions through an intersectional lens. Social movements of the Global South have used this approach to raise awareness about how colonialism installed institutions rooted in a patriarchal system in the mould of the coloniser negating the legitimacy of alternative visions (Lugones, 2016). This helps draw attention to the nature of institutions intended to ensure delivery of services to groups who have been identified as excluded. It acts as a warning not to underestimate the power relations which have shaped the differentiation which results in exclusion (Hospes and Clancy, 2011). It also prompts us to examine the diversity of the people who work in those institutions and their understanding of the lived experiences of those who are identified as excluded. On the other hand, groups or individuals who are targeted for inclusion may reject, for their own reasons, inclusion. While practical measures can be taken to reduce the impacts of exclusion, it is not a given that the causes and institutional mechanisms of social exclusion are addressed (Kabeer, 2000).

3. Meeting Points

In this section we discuss three points at which thinking about intersectionality/gender, energy, and STS meet, describing the role of social constructs, power, users, and scale as central elements. Where appropriate, we point out similarities and opportunities for further elaboration.

3.1 Social Constructs

Social constructs play a prominent role in the previously described STS field known as the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). It helped challenge the notion that the technology design process is open-ended resulting in different designs depending on the social context. The design of technology can be considered as a social process in which groups negotiate about the form of an artifact to a point at which some of the groups are satisfied that the artifact meets their requirements after which no further changes to the artifact’s hardware take place. Within the SCOT literature, attention has focused on which social groups are involved (or not) in the design process. A social group in respect of technological design of a specific artifact’s hardware is delineated by members sharing the same set of meanings in relation to that artifact. Several questions then arise in respect of these groups, beyond their social characteristics, including which groups should be included or excluded in relation to a particular artefact. In terms of the excluded, on what terms are they excluded and who defines these terms? Structural factors, such as a lack of organisation by actors who would identify as part of a social group, can also act as a barrier to participation (Klein and Kleinman, 2002).

The manner in which a design process is organised has also been an item of interest including the nature of interaction both between and within groups. The interaction is governed by “rules of play” which can be formal or informal, explicit or implicit (Klein and Kleinman, 2002). These rules can give some actors advantages over other actors since the rules influence resource distribution which in turn influences capacities and enables opportunities for some actors and creates constraints for others. These rules reflect asymmetries of power found in all social contexts. Exclusion from the design process results in an inability to influence the incorporation of a group’s cultural meaning into an artifact which in turn may mean that group rejects the artifact. Cultural meaning is part of a cognitive framework that group members share about an artifact. Such a framework tacitly or explicitly shapes the reaction to an artefact. This issue is illustrated by the decade-long substantial efforts to promote the switch from wood fuels for cooking to cleaner fuels in the Global South. In a study of household wood fuel use in rural South Africa, women were found to be reluctant to give up the wood pile outside of their houses, since the size of the pile was culturally taken as a measure of their capabilities as a “good mother” (Matinga, 2010).

Researchers have examined how gender roles influencing technology design. For example, historical studies revealed how the gendered social norms about what was appropriate behaviour for women and men shaped the design of the early bicycles in 19th-century United Kingdom (Klein and Kleinman, 2002). Kline and Pinch (1996) showed how women were excluded from the design process of automobiles since this was considered the realm of the technical experts who were all men. Little appears to have changed. A recent review of the

transport planning system in Sweden found that decisions in respect of transport policies tend to be taken by men with a background in engineering (Kronsell et al, 2016).

3.2 Power of Words and Acts

Power has always been a central phenomenon in STS literature. The role of power in the production of energy (technology) can be divided into (a) the way we talk about energy and related technologies, and (b) the way energy and its technologies come about. The 'words'-side of power relates to the notion of 'discourses' which "ritualise[...] power into a truth regime" (Sovacool and Hess, 2017). This indicates that among social groups certain truths have been established that categorise empirical reality in a certain way resulting in them having more or less rigidly entrenched ways of talking about (a) technology, (b) energy, (c) roles of its members and outsiders, etc. That notion also corroborates the idea that those truths are actually 'accepted facts', generated through negotiations and debates within the group. However, discourses provide a more or less stable speech structure in which its elements are put into dependent relationships with each other. That means that technologies, actors, and processes all obtain a certain normative connotation. Changing these relationships is hard. Hence, how these discourses and, by extension, the knowledge enshrined in them, come about in everyday life, scientific life, and political life, must be objects of study. The definitions of technology and their social construction above provide useful heuristics to uncover these discourses.

Several 'acts' of power can be distinguished. These include 'power over' and 'power to' (Haugaard, 2010). The former relates to the relational ability of some actors to influence the words and acts of others. This is a structural characteristic that occurs within social groups. Some (kinds of) individuals have the implicit or explicit ability to determine how others behave. They may do so by virtue of their role of 'discourse leader' (e.g. politicians wielding social media), by hierarchical rules (e.g. hierarchical superiors in a company), or in elected capacities (e.g. elected politicians in legislative functions). The latter 'power to' describes the agential capacities of individuals or organisations of acting according to their volition. Such capacity exists either because structures provide individuals with this room to manoeuvre (e.g. anything that is within the bounds of existing laws), because individuals or organisations act in spite of existing rules frameworks (e.g. laws, norms, values), or because they have self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. The feminist movement calls these latter features 'power within'. The movement also recognises 'power with' which means organising with other people or groups who share a common purpose (Clancy, 2003).

The fact that design processes can define 'power over' and 'power to' makes for the necessity to involve users in many more phases of technology development. As Lindsay (2003) asserts that "users are [also] designed along with the technology", it becomes crucial to involve them – or rather potential users for the early stages – along the whole life history of a technological artifact. The overlap between the notions of 'power' and 'users' is, thus, quite apparent.

3.3 Users

Users of technology can be analysed from two perspectives, by identifying who they are and how they interact with technology. Identifying users can be on the basis of socio-economic categories, such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexual identify, economic class. Recognising that users are not a homogeneous group has implications for their routes of (non-)adoption of technologies. Users will make decisions about which technology to adopt at a particular moment in time, for which Cowan introduced the notion of the 'consumption junction' (Cowan, 2012). Cowan's intervention was to encourage social scientists who were interested in a network analysis of technology to shift their focus from the scientists and engineers who designed the technology to its users. Researchers who took a gender perspective to analyse users, established another change in the perception of the nature of users: from passive recipients, particularly women, to active participants (Trescott, 1979).

A differentiation of users brings to light their different positions towards influencing which problems are prioritised for development of a technological solution, the form of that technology and their capacity to adopt it. In other words, power relations enter the picture. Feminist sociologists introduced a categorisation of users based on their capacity to influence the design process. End-users, who can be individuals or groups, are at the end of the chain who are affected by new technology although they may not be the direct operator. Within end-users there are those referred to as 'lay end users' or 'implicated actors' (Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2003) who are excluded from the development process by being silenced, ignored or made invisible by those with power within the process. Within households, there are competing demands over resources including decisions about whether to acquire a particular technology. The power to decide does not always reside with

the person who will be the direct user of the technology. For example, in the case of domestic stoves it can be a man, based on cultural norms and practice, who will decide on purchasing the equipment even though he probably does not use the stove.

4. Conclusion

What are the 'take homes' produced by bringing together STS and gender/intersectionality in the energy transition? For one, there is a need for more empirical evidence regarding the energy transition from the gender perspective to assist in policy formulation. Second, STS draws attention to the design process of an artifact, including which groups are involved and excluded in the process and the role of struggles over meaning in them. The exclusion of women as a group from the design process is not a common focus in the energy transition and could be an explanatory factor in the uptake or not of stoves in the Global South. However, women are not a homogeneous group and adopting intersectionality as a group descriptor could benefit STS analysis. Third, early research into the history of technology design for the Global North has shown how existing gender norms have played a role in the design of artifacts which can be summarised as men designing for (idealised) women. This is another area for further investigation in the energy transition in the Global South. Fourth, the notion of meaning assigned to an artifact is an aspect to be further explored in terms of energy technologies, particularly when the artifact is designed in a cultural context which differs from the one where it will be used. The designer will ascribe to a set of gendered/socially-constructed set of norms particularly in respect of behaviour.

Research in engendering the energy transition has tended to look at the user in relation to adoption and use of an artifact or on the gender awareness of energy policy. However, STS draws attention to the structures within which problems are prioritised into policies which are then translated into processes. Within these structures groups interact and power operates in asymmetric ways. Klein and Kleinmann (2002) make an important point that the social world is made up of historically established structures which can be difficult for new groups to penetrate and influence processes. Here intersectionality could be better used within STS, to understand which groups dominate and decide using social 'variables', such as race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, that were formerly often positioned as 'explanators' on their own or in smaller subsets. Acknowledging the complexity of individual identity from a sociological perspective can nuance the image of societal struggles over knowledge, technology, and even everyday life in general. While, a more fine-grained perspective on the nature and role of technology should prompt gender and intersectionality researchers to generate empirical evidence of social tensions.

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The Cultural Closet: Masculinity Tested by Sexuality in Turkey

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the experiences of Muslim Turkish men who hide their romantic relationships from their families. The study was carried out according to the phenomenological design and through semi-structured interviews. Participants were Turkish male university students aged between 18-33 years. The data was analyzed involving an inductive system of categories and codes. Four themes emerged from the analysis: Family attitudes towards romantic relationships, reasons for hiding sexual experiences from family, consequences of the prohibition of premarital sex, and indirect sources of information about sexuality. According to the findings, families' pressure and control practices related to gender norms lead men to hide their romantic relationships and sexual experiences from their families. Families' prohibitive attitudes towards premarital sexuality result in Turkish men lacking family guidance in sexuality education. These attitudes have adverse effects on individuals' mental health and romantic relationships. Socially, there are risks such as hasty and early marriages.

Keywords: Cultural closet, Gender, Men, Romantic relationships, Masculinity

1. Introduction

Romantic relationships and sexuality are essential elements of masculinity. The critical study of men and masculinities has emerged as a field of academic inquiry and policy concern (Connell, 2005). Concurrently, research on the critical study of premarital sex and romantic relationship, too, has emerged as a distinctive field of research, as opposed to traditional, quantitative sex research focusing on sexual dysfunctions (Dowsett, 2015). It is essential to recognize that studying sex, sexuality, and sexual health raises important methodological issues. Likewise, studying men and masculinities raises methodological concerns about the methods used (Hearn, 2013; Pini and Pease, 2013). However, there is a bit of methodological reflection on studying sex, sexuality, masculinity, and men's health, especially in Turkey.

Although many changes have occurred as part of Turkey's modernization, cultural and traditional views of sexuality seem resistant to some of these influences (Hatipoglu-Sumer, 2013). In most parts of Turkey, sexuality is not yet accepted as a natural and healthy human function (Cicek et al., 2022; Evcili and Golbasi, 2017). Premarital sexual intercourse is prohibited by the religion of Islam (Fauk et al., 2021; Khalajabadi-Farahani et al., 2018), which is prevalent in the country. Although studies show that the attitudes to the sexuality of men and women are different (Boratav and Cavdar, 2012), some studies show that men avoid premarital sexual experiences (Adhikari and Tamang, 2009; Mohtasham et al., 2009). For many men, premarital sex is affected by their level of religiosity and conservative approach to virginity in marriage (Adhikari and Tamang, 2009; Ghaffari et al., 2016). More religious people experience older ages of first sexual intercourse (Kuperberg, 2019). The fact that the Abrahamic religions encourage suppression of sexuality plays a role in this (Leeming, 2003). This incentive to suppress sexuality leads people to experience their sexuality secretly from their families and society (Khera and Ahluwalia, 2021).

The closet metaphor, used by the LGBTQ community in the past, refers to same-sex attraction and that others do not know about the current relationship. It arose from the need to protect itself from harm, such as stigma or hostility (Ponse, 1976). On the other hand, the metaphor of the cultural closet refers to the fact that a person in a romantic relationship with someone keeps it secret from his family for reasons such as parental disapproval (Khera and Ahluwalia, 2021). For boys from conservative Muslim families in Turkey, the cultural closet may apply to sexuality in romantic relationships before marriage.

There are two-way expectations from men about romantic relationships in Turkey. On the one hand, he is expected to prove with his behavior and lifestyle that he can be with a woman; also, he is heterosexual and can be sexually competent. On the other hand, a Muslim man is expected to stay away from women before getting married (Duyan and Duyan, 2005). While men are encouraged to have intercourse, they may also be subject to strict rules regarding their premarital relationships. It is estimated that this paradox may cause adverse effects on the well-being of the individual. In this respect, the romantic relationship experiences of Muslim men living in Turkey are curious. Although there are studies on women's romantic relationship experiences in the literature, the field of "masculinity" is relatively new in Turkey. There are not enough publications and studies on

masculinity. In this respect, this study is focused on dealing with masculinity experiences in the context of sexuality.

This study aims to explore the nature of the experiences of Muslim Turkish men who hide their romantic relationships from their families. For this purpose;

- What do men who hide their romantic relationships from their families experience individually and relationally?
- What are the effects of conservative Turkish families on men's experiences of romantic relationships and sexuality?

answers to these questions are sought.

2. Methodology

In order to explore the nature of Turkish men's experiences of romantic relationships before marriage and to obtain in-depth information on the subject, a phenomenological research design was used.

Creswell (2020) states that some criteria can be defined in phenomenological research to select participants when many individuals are experiencing the same phenomenon. Therefore, the study participants were determined by the purposive sampling method. The inclusion criteria were a) being over 18 years of age, b) being single c) identifying their family's faith as Islam. The study participants were 15 male university students aged between 18 and 33 ($M=25.86$; $SD=4.95$). The education levels of the participants ranged between bachelor's degree and doctorate. Three of the participants live with their families; 12 live separately from their families. 13 participants expressed the conservatism level of their families as five and above on a scale of 1-10. Although there were no criteria in this regard, since the sexual orientation of all participants was heterosexual, the statements in the interviews and analyzes proceeded in this direction. The parents of most of the participants had arranged marriages. Six participants had romantic relationships.

The data collection tool consists of two parts. The first part includes categorical and open-ended questions to collect demographic information about the participants. The second part includes open-ended questions that allow participants to describe their experiences of romantic relationships before marriage and the attitudes of their families. In order to protect confidentiality in the data collection tool, real names were not taken from the participants. During the preparation of the data collection tool, the opinions of three experts, including an expert working in the field of qualitative research and two academicians with publications in the field of gender and masculinity studies, were obtained. In line with the feedback given by the experts, the questions were made more understandable and appropriate for the subject. After the questionnaire form was prepared, a pilot interview was conducted with a participant, the questions were revised, and the interview form was finalized. The final version of the form consisting of 15 questions was used in individual interviews with the participants. In the final version of the form, the participants were asked questions such as "- How does your family approach romantic relationships? -How do you view sharing relationship or sexual issues with family members?" In addition to 15 questions, the participants were asked probing questions during the interview due to the nature of semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2018).

First, the form, including the ethical approval and informed consent form obtained from Hacettepe University Ethics Commission for the study, was delivered to the potential participants via online channels (social media, WhatsApp, etc.). Due to the topic's sensitive nature, individual interviews were preferred for data collection. Participants were asked whether they requested a male interviewer in the study form. Before the interview, they were informed that they could terminate the interview if they felt discomfort. The interviews were conducted between October 27, 2022, and November 16, 2022. The in-depth interviews lasted 40-95 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were given the opportunity to review and correct transcriptions from the data analysis to fulfill participant control requirements (Bailey, 2007). Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously until data saturation was completed (Patton, 2018). After the interviewer completed the coding after each interview, the other researcher independently coded, and the codes were compared. The opinions of 2 experts conducting qualitative research were obtained for the codes and themes reached. A researcher's diary was kept during the data collection process. The diary includes notes on events that may have affected the researcher's mood or reactions during the interviews and comments on the process (Creswell, 2020).

3. Findings

As a result of the analysis, four themes emerged. Family attitudes towards romantic relationships, indirect sources of information about sexuality, reasons for hiding sexual experiences from the family and consequences of the prohibition of sex before marriage. Tables 1–4 outline the four themes and representative quotes.

Family Attitudes towards Romantic Relationships: The attitudes of the family towards romantic relationships and sexuality are pretty different. Participants generally stated that their families were oppressive and controlling regarding romantic relationships and sexuality. Some of these pressures are based on moral reasons. For example, premarital sex is considered shameful, and men are generally expected not to be intimate with any woman (even if they are relatives). In addition, some participants are also told that premarital sex is haram from a religious point of view. In this respect, participants from conservative Muslim families reported more pressure and control. Premarital sex is also easily stigmatized, and men fear this stigmatization. Stigmatization is often based on protective sexism; for example, three participants reported that their parents would say, "Is it okay if another man does this to your sister." Here, there is a perception that women need to be protected and that sexuality "defiles the honor" of women. According to this perception, a woman who has had sex before marriage is a "bad girl," and the man who makes her experience this is guilty. In this respect, participants stated that the fear of being blamed controls their sexuality. Some families also warned the participants about pregnancy outside marriage. In addition, the participants' families do not see men having sex as part of a healthy sex life but as a situation that prevents them from their education and leads them astray. In addition, sex is also seen as proof of a man's heterosexuality; in this respect, it is tacitly approved. However, it is undesirable before marriage or not discussed within the family. One participant stated that even if his family did not object to him having sex, he never talked about it and did not want to be seen as approving.

Table 1: Family Attitudes Towards Romantic Relationships

The premarital sexual experiences of the participants are controlled through stigma and pressure. Rules about sexuality are conveyed through implicit messages.	"My father expects that sexuality should be experienced only in halal relationships, only in marriage. So he doesn't mind me going out with my girlfriend. However, if I invite my girlfriend home and we have coffee, my father might have prejudices against her" "I was slapped by my father once because he saw me walking around with a girl. She was a normal friend of mine from middle school, we were walking arm in arm and my father felt angry" "If a girl becomes pregnant, his boyfriend excluded by everyone. He is not invited to meetings, coffee, even he can not employ anywhere. He falls into a lower segment"

Indirect Sources of Information about Sexuality: Participants attributed their families' uneasiness about their romantic relationships to "families' fear of premarital sexuality." Participants' statements show that premarital sex is also a taboo for men in Turkey. However, unlike women, men are not asked to have sexual intercourse only with the women they will marry. Generally, male sexuality is tolerated in Turkey; for example, a man may have his first sexual experience with a sex worker. However, as soon as a man becomes an adult, he is expected to find and marry a partner suitable for the family and have sexual intercourse with this person after marriage. Men learn about sexuality indirectly (e.g., by observing how their families or people around them treat others), through direct family discourse, through the internet, and from their friends. It was stated that sexuality and porn are prevalent topics of conversation among men's male friends.

Table 2: Indirect Sources of Information About Sexuality

Participants reported that they have learned about sexuality by observing how their families or people around them behave towards others and through the internet and from their friends.	"I talk about it with my girlfriends, I mean with my normal friends, we exchange information about sexuality from time to time, but it is difficult to get information from my family about this. It is difficult to get information that will take me to a further point. On the contrary, they would have the image that I'm doing wrong about me" "I think I got information by observing, social learning for that this subject should be kept confidential, because she concealed her sexual relationship with my father" It was a very secret adolescence period, finding answers to puberty-related questions was something you talk to your friends and stuff, but I've never talked to my family. Well, you know, like topics that shouldn't go into much. After that, when I started to experience it, it became a subject that I interpreted a little more myself.

Reasons for Hiding Sexual Experiences from the Family: The most common answer given by the participants as to why they hide their romantic relationship is that they do not yet have economic independence. Participant statements show that families control male sexuality through economic dependence. Participants also said that by hiding from their families, they expanded their range of action and acted comfortably. Some participants stated that if they told their families that they had a girlfriend, they would be pressured to marry her. Participants were especially afraid of getting into conflict with their families. Some participants said they would violate their boundaries if their families knew they had a girlfriend. They do not provide information to intervene and prevent boundary violations, such as asking questions frequently and telling them what to do. In Turkey, parents' controlling and interfering with their children may not be considered boundary violations. On the contrary, not controlling the child may be seen as an indifferent parental attitude.

Table 3. Reasons for Hiding Sexual Experiences From the Family

Participants hide their romantic relationships and sexual experiences in order to prevent border violations that they may be exposed to by their families and society.	"...a romantic relationship may normally end in two or three years, but this mobbing would seat me at the marriage table in about six or seven months"
	"If I lived in a village, of course I would have submitted to those pressures. But there are economic reasons why I don't give in to the pressures right now"
	"I try not to talk or text too much on the phone with my girlfriend at home because when my mom hears, she's a lot more questioning"

Consequences of the Prohibition of Sex Before Marriage: Participants who had a romantic relationship struggled with hiding it from their families. For example, they experience behavioral burdens such as hiding the fact that they have a girlfriend, speaking self-censorship when communicating with their girlfriends in front of their families, lying about where they go, hiding their girlfriend's belongings at home after she comes home, and collecting hair strands. They fear that if caught, they will be kicked out of the house, stigmatized, negatively evaluated, subjected to verbal violence, and married to partners they do not know well enough. They are also terrified of their partners getting pregnant. Because if this is revealed, they will be socially stigmatized. They experience guilt, shame, and worthlessness because of their sexual intercourse. They experience boredom and stress due to hiding it. Some participants also expressed that they felt regret. It was also observed that the participants experienced cognitive conflict due to keeping secrets and tried to reduce it. Many of the participants felt under pressure due to "sinning." They also experience gender role conflict intensely.

On the one hand, they have ideas that sexuality should be experienced freely and oppose traditional norms. Besides, they also strive to fulfill societal expectations. It was also observed that some participants adopted their families' ideas as they were and had problems regarding separation and individuation. According to the participants, keeping secrets also prevents them from having sincere and uncensored communication with their families.

Participant statements regarding the consequences of families' prohibition of premarital sex show the prevalence of early marriage. Men tend to hasty marriage in order to have a legitimate sex life; their families may force them to marry relatives; they avoid having sex with their partners; they experience indecision in choosing a partner (e.g., they distance themselves from a woman who is open to premarital sex); and their interactions with their partners are restricted. In addition, they expect their partners to behave following gender roles, which may pressure them to be suitable spouses for their families. Two participants stated that the prohibition of premarital sex could also result in honor killings.

Table 4: Consequences of the Prohibition of Sex Before Marriage

The prohibition of premarital sex leads to negative consequences in terms of individual, romantic relational and social aspects.	"When I was at university, for example, when I did something with my partner, for example, when I got little close, when I kissed her... then when I went to my room in the dorm, I feel guilty about it, so I was praying or something"
	"Whenever I like someone, questions come to my mind. Okay, adorable girl, beautiful girl...But I am worried about... if my family will submit our relationship? Will our families get along? I have to think about marriage while getting closer to a relationship"
	"My family mostly want me to marry their acquaintances and they mostly want it to be relative, they have also had pressure in the past, they have had discourses and pressures about me marrying my cousins"

4. Discussion

The study's findings show that the view on the sexuality of men from more conservative families is based on two grounds. The first one is to see sexuality as a total prohibition and to accept it because they consider premarital sex to be religiously forbidden. The second is to see sexuality as forbidden before marriage unless the intention is to marry the person with whom they have sexual intercourse. These people choose romantic partners who conform to the wishes of their families and see romantic relationships as stepping stones to marriage and a process of getting to know each other. Men from less conservative families, on the other hand, see sexuality as an essential element in romantic relationships. These participants consider sexuality as a way of interaction and intimacy within a romantic relationship. Therefore, they state that prohibitions on sexuality before marriage restrict romantic relationships. The participants' families have a "sin" and "shame" understanding of all issues related to sexuality. Therefore, they do not provide sexual education to their children. Men learn about sexuality by observing their families' attitudes towards others, talking to their friends, or through the internet. Families see their children's romantic partners as obstacles and corrupters to their children's education. They worry about the possibility of pregnancy and the possibility of the girlfriend's family hearing about it. With these thoughts in mind, they use religious teachings as a tool of domination. Boys also hide their romantic relationships from their families for reasons such as living their romantic relationships more comfortably, preventing interference in romantic relationships and partners, finding the family's guidance on sexuality and relationships inadequate, and fearing reactions and violence from the family. Family attitudes toward sexuality affect men's burden, negative emotions such as fear, guilt, shame, tension, and negative emotions and their choice of romantic partners. Early marriage, demand for consanguineous marriage, honor killings, and perpetuation of gender roles were considered social consequences of the sexuality taboo in families.

Although Turkish families and all areas of society have experienced and overcome Westernization and modernization since the beginning of the Republic, the members of this society are still influenced by radical religious concepts of Islam (Acevedo, Ellison, and Yilmaz, 2015). In Turkey, sex is taboo, and premarital sexual relations are still harmful. Marriage is the only way to a generally correct manner of having sexual relations (Sakalli, 2002). In particular, Turkish culture-oriented with Islamic values points clearly to gender differences (Öngen, 2007). As mentioned earlier, women's premarital sexuality can be seen as a loss of dignity. However, premarital physical intimacy is a dilemma for both the female and the male partner. His social position in the code of honor and shame encourages him to have a less risky and burdensome approach to sexuality. The male is concerned that the cultural imperative of virginity is relevant to his sisters and cousins, not to his lover. Accordingly, he is acting upon his sexual desires when he is with his lover and upon the socially accepted cultural imperative when he is with his related females (Ghanim, 2015). Restriction of men's sexuality may be related to ambivalent sexism. One dimension of ambivalent sexism is that men can approach women with sexual aggression at any time (Ayan, 2016). This issue may explain the family's control and supervision of male sexuality.

Family is the institution where the initial sexual information arises and is formed. It is known that Turkish society has a traditional and conservative structure regarding sexual education and that talking about sexuality is considered shameful and sinful and thus forbidden. Given the effect of religion on individuals' attitudes toward sex before marriage, it is possible to say that traditional and religious Turkish families have conservative attitudes toward premarital sex regardless of generational gaps. Several studies indicate that traditional gender roles continue to impact attitudes toward premarital sexuality (Harbaugh and Lindsey, 2015; Hu and Li, 2019; Sakalli-Ugurlu and Glick, 2013). Traditional gender roles in many cultures majorly affect liberal sexual relations. However, tradition is not only the predictor of attitudes toward sexual relations; religion also affects the attitudes (Karaman et al., 2022). Sexuality in Islam is not limited to procreation, unlike in most other monotheistic religions. Islam distinguishes sexuality between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' sexuality dependent on marital status (Smerecnik et al., 2010). This issue is supported by previous studies that found that religion is an essential factor that negatively influences attitudes toward premarital sex (Cochran et al., 2004; Jung, 2016). First, sex before marriage or any sexual activities outside marriage is strictly prohibited, regardless of whether with a girlfriend/boyfriend. Sex outside marriage is considered fornication (Zina) (Bello, 2011). Sexuality within marriage is permitted and is accepted socially, legally, and religiously by society; sexuality outside marriage is prohibited and socially unacceptable. Sexuality is thus not only subject to moral laws but also has implications for people's social, economic, and public standing of citizens (Smerecnik et al., 2010).

This study shows that boys only try to conform to the expectations of their families in terms of experiencing sexuality with their future spouses. The findings of this study are consistent with the finding that adolescents in Turkey view their sexual partners as future spouses (Dagdeviren et al., 2008). Although the male participants accepted their families' prohibitions on premarital sex, the situation changed when their partner became their

wife. Here, sexual desires and the wife's sexual chastity and fidelity are combined for the husband's benefit. The participating men did not seem bothered by their paradoxical position regarding the cultural dichotomy between sister and lover. They did not seem to seriously question the contradictory and discriminatory prevailing cultural system affecting their lives and romantic relationships. However, men are overly blamed and condemned for merely responding to their natural sexual impulses. Cultural imperatives complicate the nature of the love bond by condemning premarital love and sex.

5. Conclusion

The participants of the present study come from conservative families of the Islamic religion. Therefore, the results do not claim to be generalizable to how all Turkish men are influenced by gender. However, the research reveals how Turkish men from conservative families are influenced by gender and religious teachings in their romantic relationships and sex before marriage. Accordingly, men are prohibited from having sexual relations before marriage, especially with their romantic partners. In addition, religious and traditional rules often determine relationships between men and women, and families do not communicate openly and comfortably with their children about sexuality.

On the contrary, their direct or indirect statements cause them to perceive threats such as stigmatization, exclusion, and psychological violence. In the face of their parents' prohibitions, men make an effort to hide their romantic relationships and sexuality from their immediate environment in order to give themselves room for maneuver. This situation causes both themselves and their partners to feel anxious, stressed, and stuck in their romantic relationships. One of the significant contributions of the study to the literature is that it shows that patriarchal and taboo structures in society negatively affect and oppress women and men. Restriction of premarital sexuality may lead to early marriages or marriages without knowing the partner well enough and thus to marital problems.

The findings of this study show that male participants are limited in terms of sexual information sources. It was observed that this led to a situation where sexual conversations played a leading role in male socialization. Teenagers and adult boys who can receive the information they need in neither their families nor systemic and organized education try to obtain such information through informal means. This effort can result in obtaining harmful, incorrect, or incomplete information and thus having negative experiences. Among these negative experiences, grave examples such as early sexual experiences, addiction to pornography, misogyny, unwanted pregnancies, early marriages, deliveries and abortions in unhealthy and unsafe environments, sexual function disorders, and maternal and infant mortality can be mentioned (Zeren and Gursoy, 2018).

6. Limitations and Future Research

Despite making essential contributions to the literature on male sexuality in the context of gender, the study has some limitations. First, the study's participants are limited to undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students. However, they do not represent those who have not completed post-secondary education and who are likely to have more difficulties in terms of sexual experiences. Second, this was a cross-sectional study, and data were collected simultaneously. Third, the retrospective study may have introduced recall bias due to the memory factor. In addition, due to the nature of the phenomenological design, the study was conducted with individuals who directly experienced the event/phenomenon. A longitudinal study with parents and their children who experienced the process is recommended in future research.

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Motivation of Men and Women to Join the Armed Forces

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Abstract: The armed forces are traditionally the domain of men, however, in recent decades this trend has changed slightly - there has also been an interest from the women's side in entering the field of the national defence. The article is based on the practice of the Czech Armed Forces, where the representation of women has been relatively stable for many years - around 13%. The purpose of the article was to find out how significantly selected factors reflecting the specifics of the military profession motivate young men and women to join the army, and on the contrary, discourage them from doing so. The aim was then to identify whether there are differences between motivational aspects of men and women. The data was obtained in the form of a semi-structured questionnaire, which was completed by 179 respondents – the first-year military students of the University of Defence, the only military institution of higher education of the Czech Armed Forces. No statistically significant difference was found between the motivation of men and women based on their perception of financial evaluation, employee benefits and position of the Czech Armed Forces in society. However, for several factors notable differences were recorded. Participation in foreign military missions, working with military technology, working in the field, interest in history and interest in warfare play more important role in motivation to join the army for male soldiers than for female soldiers, while women are proven to be motivated by interpersonal relations more than men. Moreover, in relation to aspects causing demotivation from joining the army, female soldiers tend to be discouraged by risk of injury, risk of loss of life, possibility of being sent to a foreign military operation and fear of bullying much more than male soldiers.

Keywords: Motivation, Army, Military, Czech Armed Forces, Female soldier, Male soldier

1. Introduction

The army is a stereotypically masculine organization including aspects traditionally attributed to men – strength, combativeness, courage, work in the field with weapons etc. However, this organization transforms in the context of culture and time. Before 1970's, more than one-third of women in the forces served as nurses or in other health-related positions. Since 1973, the percentage of military positions open to women has increased and in the 21st century, more than 90% of military occupations are now available for/to women (Nathan et al., 2016).

The number of women in the armed forces is increasing in the world's major armies, although relatively slowly. The barriers to women's entry into the military are weakening. Numerous organizations (UN, NATO etc.) have stated in their official documents (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action) that the inclusion of women in all the spheres of society is essential for attaining peace and economic and social development (Rokvić, Stanarević, 2016). The mentioned platform was also adopted by the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic (Defence ministry action plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security, 2015).

The Czech Armed Forces (CAF) have been professional since 2005 (Pernica, 2007). Currently, the size of the MoD is a total of 35 127 employees, of which 27 000 are soldiers (2021). Although the representation of women is slowly increasing, the representation of women in the CAF is currently 13.7%. Only 2 women (5%) of the CAF are in the position of general and 9 women (3%) in the rank of colonel (Quantitative gender analysis MoD, 2022). It confirms the gender concepts that prove women are usually not a part of top management of organizations (Bourdieu, 2001). One of the reasons is the fact that women aim their choice of study towards a profession that is characterized by regular working hours, which is less time-consuming and does not require excessive physical fitness or work in the field (Hřebíček, 2006).

Formally, the situation in the armed forces within the framework of achieving gender equality is gradually improving, and is being reflected by the armies of NATO member states. However, the question remains how the higher engagement of women in the armed forces manifests itself in practice. One of the key questions that can stand at the beginning of knowledge about the role of women in the military is the investigation of the motivation of women (and men) to join the armed forces.

The aim of the research is to find out how significantly selected factors reflecting the specifics of the military profession:

- motivate men and women to join the Czech Armed Forces.
- discourage men and women from joining the Czech Armed Forces.

The research question of the paper can be formulated as follows:

Are there any differences between the motivational aspects of men and women to join the Czech Armed Forces?

2. Theoretical Background

Motivation can be defined in different ways and refers to the forces either within or external to a person that arouse enthusiasm and persistence to pursue a certain course of action (Daft et al., 2010). The motivational tools can be categorized, e.g. to job evaluation, social conditions, material conditions and job characteristics (Blažek, 2011).

A person's decision to join the military is complex and is commonly motivated by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Ginexi et al., 1994). Pliske et al. (1986) define six distinct motivational factors of recruits of the US Army - self-improvement, economic advancement, military service, time out, travel and money for education (confirmed by Gade and Elig 1986).

The conclusions of the Bulgarian study (2018) involving a total of 348 military personnel show that the main factors for choosing the military career are the opportunity for an early retirement, the salary, certainty and predictability at the workplace, opportunities for improvement and a career development. The further factors are appropriate working time, obtaining free education and opportunities to work with weapons and military equipment. Patriotic motives are also important, as well as the opportunity for teamwork and participation in foreign missions. Then the social status of the military profession and the benefits arising from it are also indicated as notable/important (Grigorov, Spirdonov 2018).

The data of other interviews with new recruits revealed the following motivational aspects to join the army - historical interest, self-improvement, job/skill training, money for education, floundering and time out (Ginexi et al., 1994). Another study shows that young people join the military for material reasons, but also for value-oriented reasons (duty to country, self-discipline etc.) (Eighmey, 2006). Similar findings were confirmed by Woodruff, Keltly and Segal (2006) - intrinsic values such as patriotism and desire to serve play a key role in the decision-making process to join the armed forces. For 52 American and 11 Bulgarian servicemen, the most important factors for choosing a military career were participation in missions and an opportunity to serve their country, then career opportunities, opportunities to work with weapons and military equipment, free education, teamwork and work in an international environment (Grigorov, 2020).

Let us now move on to the results of the survey, which focused on examining of women in the military. Females are less likely to serve in combat and they are more likely to have never been deployed away from their permanent duty station (Nathan et al., 2016). A similar conclusion is declared in the Czech Republic environment - there are positions in the army that are still forbidden to women (for example in special units). The reason is an extremely demanding deployment and hard training (Hřebíček, 2016). Women cannot fully perform some military activities due to morphological and functional differences (e.g. they achieve 60-85% of men's values in speed endurance or strength performances, but their agility performance is 106% of men's) (Havlíčková, 2003). The frequency of injuries because of reconnaissance training in the American and British armies is twice as high for women as for men (Suchý, 2006). On the other side, numerous surveys have confirmed that the presence of women improves the effectiveness of armed forces, especially in the field of peacekeeping missions and in terms of civil-military cooperation. There is an increasing evidence that non-combat missions are best served by a better gender mix (Groothedde, Stephanie, 2013, cited by Rokvić, Stanarević, 2016).

As for the motivation of female members of the army, the key conclusions of the previous research are as follows. In the interviews with 18 military respondents, it was found that women joined the military for financial stability, job training, education, and employment opportunities (Mankowski, 2015). The first research, included among other areas, the motivation of women to join the Czech professional army, was carried out in 2006. The conclusions were as follows - women were more often influenced by assumed social security (salary, health care, social security). An important reason for joining the army was the fact that their partners worked in the military. For men, this reason is secondary. For them, instead of social guarantees, the essential motivation is to do something for the security of their country, and more often than women, they wanted to be soldiers since childhood (Hřebíček, 2006). Another survey showed that for women, economic

benefits dominate for entering as well as for continuing to stay in the service. Furthermore, self-realization plays an important role too, as well as the possibility of the career growth (Ďurechová, 2012).

There have not been done many surveys of the motivation to join the armed forces, based on the gender structure. All in all, the aforementioned surveys show that women are motivated to join the military especially by economic benefits, self-development aspects, job security, the career growth, but also by the fact that they have a partner in the army. A certain gender-based division of labour in the military is still evident, where women mainly perform administrative positions.

3. Data and Methods

With regard to the aim, the research was set in a quantitative paradigm. The questionnaire survey appears to be the most effective data collection technique for this purpose. Data collection was carried out in October 2022. The questionnaire survey was processed using a self-constructed technique. The target population consisted of the first-year military students of the Faculty of Military Leadership (FML) of the University of Defence (UoD), the only military institution of higher education of the Czech Armed Forces (CAF). The validity of the questionnaire was verified in a pre-survey conducted among selected military students of the UoD during June 2022.

The questionnaires were distributed in a printed form. The respondents were motivated to complete the questionnaire by the personal presence of the researchers. It was therefore possible to ask for additional information if necessary, and it ensured a return rate of 100%. The results are thus representative of the population of the first-year military students of FML, UoD.

179 respondents - 21 % women and 79 % men - were interviewed. 97 % of the respondents were 19 - 22 years old, 3 % of them were older. 93% of the respondents had never been a member of the CAF before, 7% were graduates of Military High School.

The importance of motives for the career choice was measured by a 28-item closed-ended battery of motivational factors with responses on the Likert scale of insignificant, rather insignificant, rather significant and very significant. These factors were created based on content analysis of resources related to motivation both in general and in military environment, on the results of brainstorming session with five soldiers and 35 UoD students and the results of the "Motivation to join the CAF" study of The General Staff of the CAF, which interviewed 2 229 recruits in 2018.

These factors can be classified in 5 groups:

1. financial evaluation (salary, retirement allowance, a cultural and social needs fund, housing/food allowance);
2. employee benefits (preventive rehabilitation, medical care, discounts on certain products, company kindergartens);
3. work itself (sports activities, participation in missions, working with weapons / military technology, working in the field, the career growth, adventurous activities, emphasis on physical readiness, interpersonal relations, security of employment, order and discipline);
4. position of the army in society (service to the country, representation of the Czech Republic, meaningfulness and usefulness of military service for society, a current security situation in the world);
5. personal interests (family tradition, compliance with army values, interest in history, interest in warfare).

A second battery of following 10 demotivational factors was created to analyse what, on the contrary, discouraged the respondents from joining the CAF: the necessity of subjecting oneself to discipline, risk of injury, risk of loss of life, the possibility of being sent to a mission, the necessity to maintain physical condition, wearing a uniform, fear of bullying, restriction of certain rights and enlistment for 10 or more years. The questionnaire enabled the respondents to indicate the level of significance of these demotivational factors using a modified Likert scale: very discouraging, slightly discouraging, not discouraging fundamentally, not discouraging at all.

Research Ethics: The purpose and aim of the research, handling of the completed questionnaires, including full assurance of anonymity, were explained in detail to all the research participants prior to data collection.

To find out the differences between men and women in their motivational aspects for joining the CAF, the data from the questionnaire survey were analysed using contingency tables and performing chi-square tests of independence with the use of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 22. The procedure of the chi-square tests of independence included six steps: formulation of null hypothesis (H_0 = there is no statistical difference between men and women) and alternative hypothesis (H_A = there is a statistical difference between men and women), selection of a level of significance α , calculation of the chi square statistic (χ^2), calculation of the degrees of freedom (df), selection of the critical chi-square value, comparison of the chi square statistic χ^2 to the critical chi-square value and acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis.

4. Results

Based on the quantification of the Likert scale for the category of motivational factors, the overall order of significance of the factors for all respondents were determined (see the numbers in brackets beside each motivational factor in Table 1 – Table 5). Tables 1 – 5 also show the relative frequencies of responses of all the respondents, separately of women and men and results of the chi-square test. For the purposes of maintaining the simplicity of the tables, the four scales were merged in two - insignificant and significant factors.

Table 1: Motivational Factors – Financial Evaluation

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2 p
Salary (15.)				
Insignificant	6%	21%	22%	0.129
Significant	94%	76%	78%	0,937
Retirement allowance (16.)				
Insignificant	25%	24%	26%	2.359
Significant	75%	76%	74%	0.307
Cultural and social needs fund (23.)				
Insignificant	59%	50%	62%	4.021
Significant	41%	50%	38%	0.134
Housing allowance (19.)				
Insignificant	46%	40%	47%	0.802
Significant	54%	60%	53%	0.670
Food allowance (20.)				
Insignificant	45%	45%	44%	0.394
Significant	55%	55%	56%	0.821

The factors of financial evaluation have an average importance for the respondents. In the overall ranking of significance, they range between the fifteenth and the twentieth place. For all the factors from the financial evaluation category, the null hypotheses are not rejected. No statistically significant difference was found between the motivation of men and women based on these factors.

Table 2: Motivational Factors – Employee Benefits

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2 p
Preventive rehabilitation (25.)				
Insignificant	69%	63%	71%	1.067
Significant	31%	37%	29%	0.587
Medical care (24.)				
Insignificant	65%	60%	66%	0.392
Significant	35%	40%	34%	0.822

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2 p
Discounts on products (26.)				
Insignificant	31%	75%	77%	3.988
Significant	69%	35%	23%	0.136
Company kindergartens (28.)				
Insignificant	89%	86%	89%	3.381
Significant	11%	14%	11%	0.184

The employee benefits are the least important category for the motivational purpose. For all the factors from the employee benefits category, the null hypotheses were not rejected. No statistically significant difference was found between the motivation of men and women based on these factors.

Table 3: Motivational Factors – Work Itself

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2 p
Sport activities during working hours (8.)				
Insignificant	11%	13%	10%	2.017
Significant	89%	87%	90%	0.365
Participation in missions (14.)				
Insignificant	30%	47%	25%	11.751
Significant	70%	53%	75%	0.003**
Working with weapons (11.)				
Insignificant	21%	19%	21%	4.976
Significant	79%	81%	79%	0.083
Working with military technology (10.)				
Insignificant	23%	37%	19%	9.749
Significant	77%	63%	81%	0.008**
Working in the field (5.)				
Insignificant	18%	32%	15%	9.589
Significant	82%	68%	85%	0.008**
Career growth (1.)				
Insignificant	4%	0%	5%	1.968
Significant	96%	100%	95%	0.374
Adventurous activities (2.)				
Insignificant	6%	3%	7%	0.941
Significant	94%	97%	93%	0.625
Physical readiness (4.)				
Insignificant	8%	5%	9%	0.705
Significant	92%	95%	91%	0.703
Interpersonal relations (6.)				
Insignificant	15%	3%	18%	9.073
Significant	85%	97%	82%	0.011*
Security of employment (3.)				

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2_p
Insignificant	9%	3%	10%	2.892 (2)
Significant	91%	97%	90%	0.236
Order and discipline (17.)				
Insignificant	30%	24%	31%	1.621
Significant	70%	76%	69%	0.445

* Groups are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

** Groups are significantly different ($p < 0.01$)

The aspects resulting from the very characteristics of the military profession belong to the most important motives for joining the army. For four factors from this category, the null hypotheses were rejected. There is a statistically significant difference between the motivation of men and women based on their perception of participation in missions, working with military technology, working in the field and interpersonal relations (social and team atmosphere). Participation in missions, working with military technology and in the field play a more significant role in motivation to join the army for male soldiers while female soldiers are proven to be motivated by interpersonal relations more than male soldiers.

Table 4: Motivational Factors – the Position of The Army in Society

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2_p
Service to the country/patriotism (9.)				
Insignificant	20%	26%	19%	2.194
Significant	80%	74%	81%	0.334
Representation of the Czech Republic (13.)				
Insignificant	20%	22%	19%	2.423
Significant	80%	78%	81%	0.298
Meaningfulness/usefulness of the military service (7.)				
Insignificant	17%	16%	17%	0.846
Significant	83%	84%	83%	0.655
Current security situation in the world (22.)				
Insignificant	56%	55%	56%	7.449
Significant	44%	45%	44%	0.059

The factors from the position of the army in society category are somewhat fragmented. For example, the meaningfulness and usefulness of the military service for society is highly motivating for the respondents while the current security situation in the world is not as much. For all the factors from this category, the null hypotheses were not rejected. No significant difference was found between the motivation of men and women based on these factors.

Table 5: Motivational Factors – Personal Interests

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2_p
Family tradition (27.)				
Insignificant	80%	82%	80%	0.347
Significant	20%	18%	20%	0.841
Compliance with army values (18.)				

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2 p
Insignificant	35%	34%	36%	0.652
Significant	65%	66%	64%	0.722
Interest in history (21.)				
Insignificant	51%	76%	44%	15.099
Significant	49%	24%	56%	0.020*
Interest in warfare (12.)				
Insignificant	21%	26%	19%	8.822
Significant	79%	74%	81%	0.012*

* Groups are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

** Groups are significantly different ($p < 0.01$)

The factors from the personal interest category have the average to below average importance for the respondents. For two factors the null hypotheses were rejected - the statistically significant difference between the men and women is revealed in the area of the interest in history and warfare. Women are not motivated by the interest in history and warfare as significantly as men.

In a similar way of quantifying, the Likert scale as in the case of motivational factors, demotivational factors can also be ranked from the most to the least discouraging (see the numbers in brackets after each demotivating factor in table 6 for total / women / men). Table 6 also shows the relative frequencies of responses of all the respondents, separately of women and men and results of the chi-square test. For the purposes of maintaining the simplicity of the tables, the four scales were merged in two – discouraging and not discouraging factors.

Table 6: Demotivational Factors

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2 p
Necessity of discipline (5.)				
Discouraging	13%	13%	13%	0.05
Not discouraging	87%	87%	87%	0.975
Risk of injury (4.)				
Discouraging	20%	30%	81%	7.353
Not discouraging	80%	70%	19%	0.025*
Risk of loss of life (3.)				
Discouraging	32%	46%	28%	7.908
Not discouraging	68%	54%	72%	0.019*
Possibility of being sent to a mission (7.)				
Discouraging	13%	13%	13%	10.456
Not discouraging	87%	87%	87%	0.005**
Necessity to maintain physical condition (9.)				
Discouraging	8%	11%	8%	4.715
Not discouraging	92%	89%	92%	0.095
Necessity of wearing a uniform (8.)				
Discouraging	3%	8%	2%	3.122

Factor (overall order of significance)	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2 p
Not discouraging	97%	92%	98%	0.210
Fear of bullying (6.)				
Discouraging	13%	21%	10%	7.25
Not discouraging	87%	79%	90%	0.027*
Restriction of certain rights (2.)				
Discouraging	42%	37%	44%	3.41 (2)
Not discouraging	58%	63%	56%	0.182
Enlistment for 10 or more years (1.)				
Discouraging	49%	53%	48%	5.332
Not discouraging	51%	47%	52%	0.070

* Groups are significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

** Groups are significantly different ($p < 0.01$)

Enlistment for 10 or more years was a factor that appeared to be the most discouraging from joining the army. On the contrary, the necessity to improve and maintain physical condition proved to be the least problematic. For four demotivating factors, the null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative hypotheses were accepted. In relation to the aspects causing potential demotivation from joining the army there is a statistically significant difference between the men's and women's perception of the risk of injury, the risk of loss of life, the possibility of being sent to a mission and fear of bullying. Women are proven to be discouraged by these factors more than men.

5. Discussion

Financial motivators of armed forces were found to be moderately important and no differences were revealed between men and women. This conclusion is consistent with some previous research (Pliske et al., 1986; Grigorov and Spiridonov, 2018 or Eighmey, 2006), in which the economic aspects were rated as important compared to other motivators. On the other hand, other studies focusing on gender differences revealed high importance of the economic aspect for women when considering joining armed forces. Mankovski (2015) or Ďurechová (2012) argued that it is the most important aspect for women.

The employee benefits are perceived by the UoD students (both women and men) as the least important category for motivation. A similar conclusion follows from a similarly focused research – benefits are not usually mentioned as essential for deciding about a military career. Only Grigorov and Spiridonov (2018) declare that the benefits arising from the military career were also indicated as important.

The work itself (the very characteristics of the military profession) was evaluated as the most important motive for joining the army. The most important factors are career growth, adventurous activities, security of employment and physical readiness. These conclusions are similar to the findings of Grigorov and Spiridonov (2018) and Grigorov (2020). Certain gender differences are found in our research, namely participation in missions, working with military technology and in the field, which were more important for male soldiers. Female soldiers are proven to be motivated in a higher rate by interpersonal relations.

As for the motivation related to the position of the army in society, the most important factors are connected with the meaningfulness and usefulness of the military service, other aspects are not so important – especially the current security situation (the conflict between Ukraine and Russia). Regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, students largely add that this situation did not negatively affect their decision. On the contrary, it strengthened their determination to join the army. This finding corresponds with the survey of Ben-Dor (2008) that suggests motivation to serve in wartime is higher than in peacetime.

The factors from the personal interest category (family tradition, interest in warfare or history, compliance with military values) are of the average importance for the respondents. For instance, Grigorov and Spiridonov (2020) mention the interest in weapons and military equipments as one of the motivational aspects, historical interest is mentioned by Ginexi et al. (1994). Among the students of the UoD, the gender differences were

shown in the case of the interest in history and warfare. Women are not motivated by these factors as much as men.

As for the demotivational aspects, the most important seems to be the enlistment for 10 or more years, followed by the necessity of limiting some rights. The necessity of good physical condition is not perceived as a problem. Women significantly more often declare the risk of injury and loss of life as a demotivational factor. For men, this factor also plays a role, but statistically significantly less than for women. This conclusion corresponds with/to the study by Nathan et al. (2016), which confirms notably lower representation of women in combat positions, which is also evident in the CAF (Hřebíček, 2016).

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research conducted with 179 first-year military students of the University of Defence, the main conclusions can be drawn, and the stated research question thereby answered. The importance of motives for the military career choice was measured on selected motivational factors reflecting the specifics of the military profession - financial evaluation, employee benefits, work itself, position of the army in society and personal interests.

The work itself category was the most important for the respondent (mainly the career growth, adventurous and adrenaline activities, security of employment or physical readiness), while the employee benefits category was the least relevant/important. The enlistment for 10 or more years, restriction of certain rights and the risk of loss of life belonged, on the contrary, to the factors causing discouragement from joining the CAF.

For several factors from two motivational categories (work itself and personal interests) and for several factors linked to the discouragement from joining the army significant differences between the perception of men and women were noted. Participation in missions, working with military technology or in the field, interest in history and warfare play a more essential role in motivation to join the army for men than for women, while female soldiers are proven to be motivated by interpersonal relations. Moreover, in relation to the aspects causing demotivation from joining the army, women were found to be discouraged by the risk of injury, the risk of loss of life, the possibility of being sent to a mission and fear of bullying much more than men.

The conclusions of the research are valid only for the given sample and are intended to be further verified with the help of quantitative and qualitative research. It would be for example interesting to investigate differences between motivational factors of men and women entering the UoD and recruits joining the CAF directly (to military units), compare results obtained from the research in the military with other security forces (such as the fire department and police department personnel), make an international military comparison or continue a longitudinal study of this research sample to find out how the motivational factors change over time.

All volunteer forces, like any other employer, are looking for their own positions and competitive advantage in the labour market. Therefore, it is important for the MoD to learn about and ascertain the motives for joining the CAF.

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Examining Barriers to Entry: Disparate Gender Representation in Cybersecurity Within Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract: Globally, women are underrepresented in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), this underrepresentation is even more prevalent, as fewer women pursue STEM careers in SSA when compared to the global norm. Cybersecurity is a critical subsection of STEM; one that is widely accepted as a field with enormous growth potential, yet only a small proportion of these jobs belong to women. Despite attempts to narrow the gender gap in cybersecurity, persistent factors still contribute to this disparity. Within this field, developing countries struggle with the same issues that impact their more developed counterparts. Issues that impact both SSA and the global participation of women in cyber-security include lacking representation and awareness as well as retention problems. Further, issues such as harassment, gender bias and the idea that cybersecurity is a “man’s world” are also contributing factors. A slew of other factors is also at play in SSA; this includes issues of low school attendance by girls, restricted educational opportunities, and other systemic challenges. Girls and women are less likely to complete lower and secondary education, which has a ripple effect – fewer women reach higher education in SSA when compared to global trends. Generally, higher or tertiary education is necessary to join the cybersecurity workforce. Research exploring the challenges women in SSA face when trying to enter the cybersecurity field is limited. This paper presents an overview of the most persistent challenges faced in SSA and globally. It highlights the current skill shortage in the cybersecurity field that is exasperated by global challenges, including issues unique to the region. Educational pathways available to girls and women are explored, as well as the issues leading to widespread skill shortages within SSA. Programs striving to increase the participation of women in cybersecurity are discussed. Lastly, some suggestions to remediate this pervasive issue are also provided.

Keywords: Women in STEM, Cybersecurity, Representation, Minorities, Gender equality, Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Introduction

Though women¹ are underrepresented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields globally, sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is lagging even worse behind (Dube, 2015). Numerous factors contribute to this issue; this includes educational issues (school attendance, educational opportunities), issues faced when entering the workplace (inclusivity issues in recruitment, delayed career advancement) and finally systemic issues (gender bias and discrimination). School-attendance statistics indicate that young girls are being left behind, and limited educational pathways and programmes further exasperate the pervasive, systemic challenges (UNESCO, 2021).

The worldwide disparity in gender representation is alarming, as STEM fields are often referred to as jobs of the future (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Yet, a substantial portion of the population is still struggling to break through the barriers to entry. Cybersecurity roles require candidates with specialised skill sets, of which STEM backgrounds are a quintessential element. Within SSA, school-attendance is much lower than in other regions, with a knock-on effect resulting in fewer individuals being educated in STEM-related fields. Subsequently, fewer cybersecurity professionals are being produced. The International Information System Security Certification Consortium (ISC²) published that women in the global cybersecurity workforce remains at only 25% (ISC2, 2021). Considering the reduced number of cybersecurity professionals trained in SSA, compounded with a global underrepresentation of women in the field, women in Africa are left in a particularly unfortunate situation.

It is imperative to highlight the critical issues of low rates of female participation in the field of cybersecurity. To understand how this disparate situation has arisen, it is important to determine which factors are at play globally, as well as within the context of the African continent. In this paper, the pertinent factors perpetuating the gender gap in cybersecurity are discussed. Figure 1 illustrates the factors specific to SSA, as well as global factors, that lead to fewer women in cybersecurity.

¹ Gender theory has attempted to make important developments toward being more inclusive, rather than perpetuating the male/female binary. While this study acknowledges these important advancements in gender theory, differing gender expressions have not been considered within this study, due to a lack of reliable data regarding these topics.

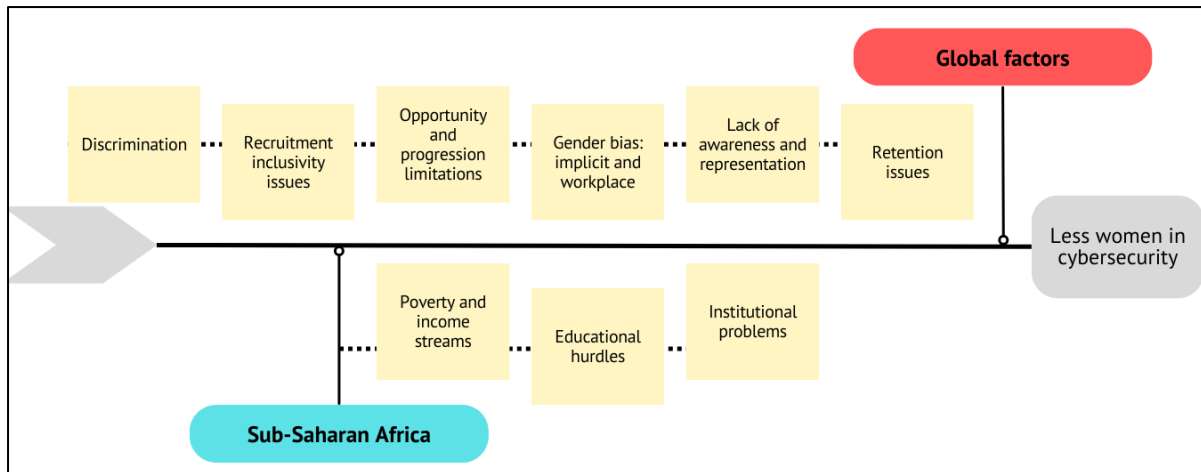


Figure 1: Leading Factors Contributing to low Rates of Women Entering Cybersecurity Domain

Section 2 examines the factors affecting the global cybersecurity gender gap, as summarised within the above figure. In Section 3, the factors exasperating the issue within SSA are considered. Finally, Section 4 provides some recommendations to help combat disparate gender representation.

2. Global Cybersecurity Landscape

While the cybersecurity threat landscape continues to grow at a rapid rate, the participation of women in cybersecurity has not increased accordingly. At a global level, several factors influence the slow introduction and retention of women within cybersecurity fields.

2.1 Discrimination

In the workplace, unfavourable attitudes toward women can create a toxic working environment. The fields of IT and cybersecurity can be affected by cultures hostile to women (Poster, 2018). Examples of this discriminatory behaviour are rife at cybersecurity conferences. While staying up to date regarding new security threats is imperative to a cybersecurity professional, these conferences do not present a safe space for women. Dominated by male attendees, women can be outnumbered 100 to 1 in attendance. Blackhat and Defcon are held in Las Vegas annually; it has been reported that some female attendees have experienced demeaning and objectifying interactions and have even been asked if they were secretaries or sex workers. Some have even indicated that they were sexually harassed at these events (Poster, 2018). This type of behaviour demonstrates the recurring attitude that women do not have the aptitude to operate in the cybersecurity domain; they were assumed to form part of the supporting staff. Furthermore, Poster shows that more than half of the women in cybersecurity around the world (51%) indicated that they have experienced gender discrimination, compared with 15% of male respondents. From unwarranted advances to name-calling, women are facing discrimination in many cybersecurity spaces.

2.2 Inclusivity Issues in Recruitment Practices

Most careers in cybersecurity start off in various other sectors, with skills being learned on the job (Frost & Sullivan, 2017). However, many hiring managers and HR still view individuals with backgrounds in computer science, engineering, and other STEM fields as the most qualified cybersecurity candidates, often ignoring those with degrees in other areas (Maiget, 2022). This is concerning, as more men have degrees in STEM fields relating to computer science and engineering than women (Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2010). Skills gained in other sectors can help broaden cybersecurity teams and can also aid decision-making, risk-management, or analytics. Current recruitment practices hinder the inclusion of women due to insistence on existing experience in the field (Tarun, 2019). Job listings and hiring practices need to be cognisant of avoiding gendered terminology; Tarun presents studies that have found that almost twice as many male-gendered terms were found within job advertisements related to cybersecurity job openings.

2.3 Issues in Opportunity and Progression

Women may not enjoy the same access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as their male counterparts. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) reports that, globally, 48% of women are using the Internet, as compared to 58% of men (ITU, 2019). In some areas around the world, the gender gap is almost

nullified with regions like Europe and the Soviet Union making great strides to close this gap. However, in Asia, the Middle East and particularly Africa, the gender gap has grown between 2013 and 2019 (Brown & Pytlak, 2020). Numerous factors play a role in influencing the ability of women to gain access to ICT, a crucial building-block in eventually joining cybersecurity fields. This may include geographical location, race, educational background, financial status, culture, and ethnicity. This shines a spotlight on the disparity and discrimination that women face in gaining meaningful access to critical resources for upliftment into the ICT field. Women may also face challenges in finding mentors for professional advancement (Bagchi-Sen, Rao, Upadhyaya, & Chai, 2010). Researchers Bagchi-Sen *et al.* highlight other factors such as work-family conflict, social expectations for women and early career barriers; These barriers include a lack of effective training, hindering their ability for career advancement.

Once women are employed within cybersecurity fields, they often face progression and retention issues. Women can be paid up to 21% less than men for comparable work (Fearn, 2020). Women may also struggle to advance or obtain training, essential in cybersecurity fields. Women may face more challenges in obtaining the advertised positions and later for career advancement due to various stereotypes and inclusivity practices.

2.4 Gender Bias: Implicit and Workplace

Cybersecurity firms are often perceived as “An Old Boys Club.” Toxic working environments often impact women the most, where biases can result in prejudices against different demographics. Implicit and workplace bias is prevalent – women are often unfairly judged to be less competent than their male counterparts. Women also tend to be seen as less likeable as they are performing a “masculine job,” some studies have found (Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2010).

Women in STEM are most likely to encounter gender disparities at work. Study respondents have indicated that discrimination they have experienced includes being treated as incompetent, experiencing repeated, small slights at work, and receiving less support from senior leaders, compared to their male counterparts (Funk & Parker, 2018).

Within the workplace, performance support bias is often encountered. Employers, managers, and colleagues may provide support and resources more freely to men instead of women. Performance review and reward biases, even in merit-based evaluations, are often skewed in favour of men over women. The entire cycle of job application can be riddled with biases; from job descriptions, interview questions, and the attitudes of hiring managers. Microaggressions, such as being talked over in the workplace, affect women disproportionately (Reiners, 2022)

For working mothers, inequalities are even worse. The outbreak of COVID-19 exasperated the global cybersecurity skills challenge. Women’s ability to continue working in cybersecurity fields at previous rates was affected at a time where the cybersecurity industry cannot afford to lose any more members, male and female alike (Budge J. , 2022). Working mothers are also much more likely to encounter pregnancy discrimination and unfair stereotyping (Reiners, 2022). Reiners further indicates that workplace gender bias can be reduced in several ways, such as enforcing or reviewing anti-discrimination and bias policies, identifying bias in recruiting practices and implementing regular gender bias training.

2.5 Awareness and Representation

To encourage the participation of women in cybersecurity, sectors should collaborate to raise representation and awareness. Primary school teachers and parents are amongst the most fundamental influencers in girl’s interest in technology and cybersecurity. A study by CompTIA found that, while 27% of middle-school girls in the US may have considered careers in technology, this dropped to 18% by high-school (CompTIA, 2016). They found that 69% of girls who do not consider careers in technology attribute this to not knowing what these jobs involve. 53% indicated that further information and awareness would encourage them to pursue technology-related careers. Awareness, early exposure, and education are fundamental to increasing girls’ confidence and interest in technology. Remediation could include supporting cybersecurity education in primary schools, offering internships during higher education and pairing women that have just started out in the field with mentors (Lingelbach, 2018).

Within cybersecurity firms, women are unequally represented in corresponding roles. A study found that in the US, 14% of Fortune 500 companies had female Chief Information Security Officers (CISO) in 2020. Lacking representation of women in the cybersecurity space can negatively impact the cybersecurity industry. Differing viewpoints and perspectives from women, who are commonly underrepresented, are critical in addressing

cyber-risks (Kshetri & Chhetri, 2022). Getting younger girls interested in technology by using inclusive methods may address issues of lacking awareness and representation in the long run. This is further discussed in Section 4.

2.6 Retention

The retention rate of women in cybersecurity is significantly lower than that of men. The study by Willis-Ford found that perceived barriers to the retention of women in cybersecurity roles include lacking mentorship, perceived hostile working environments and impostor phenomenon issue (Willis-Ford, 2018).

A study by Hill *et al.* investigating retention issues found that women who left STEM-related jobs cited family-related reasons more than men. Further, women in STEM are more likely to have a partner in STEM-related fields; if this partner is a man, their career will often be given priority (Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2015). The worldwide cybersecurity skills shortage remains and is further exasperated by the global COVID pandemic. Cybersecurity also faced a hidden epidemic impacting women's ability to continue working at pre-pandemic level, as many took on a disproportionate number of childcare responsibilities (Budge J., 2022). Since lockdown was imposed in many nations, women were now faced with simultaneously managing work requirements and childcare duties.

Women have reported to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. For example, one in four women reported job losses due to a lack of childcare, which was double the rate of male job losses (Maiget, 2022). For women with, or without childcare responsibilities, retention rates must be improved. Issues concerning environments that are perceived as hostile to women must also be addressed.

3. The Sub-Saharan African Cybersecurity Landscape

Severe skill shortage, particularly in STEM, is a challenge to achieving sustainable and comprehensive economic growth in Africa (Kayode, 2018). In SSA, a gender imbalance across all educational levels has been documented. Contrary to countries with relatively higher levels of income, women are less likely to pursue higher education in countries with lower levels of income. The highest gender disparities are found in low-income countries (Huyer, 2015).

3.1 Poverty and Income Streams

The only region in the world that has had a recent increase in the percentage of children-out-of-school, is SSA; between the years 2018 and 2020, the figure rose from 35.9% to 36.6% (Brixi & Rawlings, 2022). Leading factors contributing to lower school attendance is twofold – long travelling distances to school, as well as insecurity in terms of getting to school. While urban areas have the largest concentration of schools, rural areas do not have enough schools to serve all the students fairly and with ease. In certain political climates, parents have indicated that they are unwilling to send girls to school if it is too large a distance from home, as they fear for their safety; worries include the dangers of kidnapping, rape, molestation, and other forms of abuse.

Further, SSA is home to the largest population of poor individuals in the world, which has proven to decrease the number of children attending school. Studies have indicated that poverty weighs more on girls than on boys, where net school attendance has the greatest disparity among poorer households; If all children in a family cannot be sent to school due to economic restraints, boys will most likely be given precedence over girls (Ombati & Ombati, 2012).

3.2 Education in SSA

Largely because of poverty within SSA, education in SSA is one of the most prevalent hurdles to joining the cybersecurity workforce. Most cybersecurity occupations require a higher-level education, such as a diploma, bachelors equivalent or postgraduate degree; about 88% of cybersecurity job postings require a bachelor's degree (or higher) as well as at least 3 years of job experience (Markow, Bittle, & Liu, 2019). SSA is lagging compared to the rest of the world in the completion of primary school, let alone obtaining higher education (Bennell, 2021).

While women outnumber men in university enrolment in some SSA countries, they are less likely to major in STEM at tertiary levels (Hammond, Matulevich, Beegle, & Kumaraswamy). Other countries in SSA have low rates of postsecondary educational attainment for men and women alike, with women being even less likely to be enrolled in university programmes.

In terms of educational attainment, it was found within the Gender Gap Report that SSA ranks the lowest globally; the region has an average gender gap of 0.689 between men and women when regarding the education attainment subindex (World Economic Forum, 2022). This subindex describes the gap between women's and men's access to education. It factors in the ratios of women to men within primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level education. A score of 1 indicates gender parity, and 0 complete disparity. SSA ranks sixth out of the eight global regions on the gender gap scale. This regards factors such as economic participation, health, political empowerment, and educational attainment. SSA suffers from these gender gaps in many ways, particularly with gender gaps in the workforce posing a significant and emerging crisis (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Further, the number of people enrolling in tertiary education in SSA is much lower, compared with the global average, as seen in Figure 2. Only 8,2% of women in SSA enrolled in tertiary education; note that this figure does not indicate if the schooling was completed. This is a distressingly low enrolment rate, compared with the global average excluding SSA. Lacking education for both men and women in SSA is a leading factor to lower participation rates in cyber security careers.



Figure 2: Gross tertiary School Enrolment, SSA and Globally (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022)

Within SSA, women are less likely than men to study STEM- or information security-related programmes, as illustrated in Figure 3.

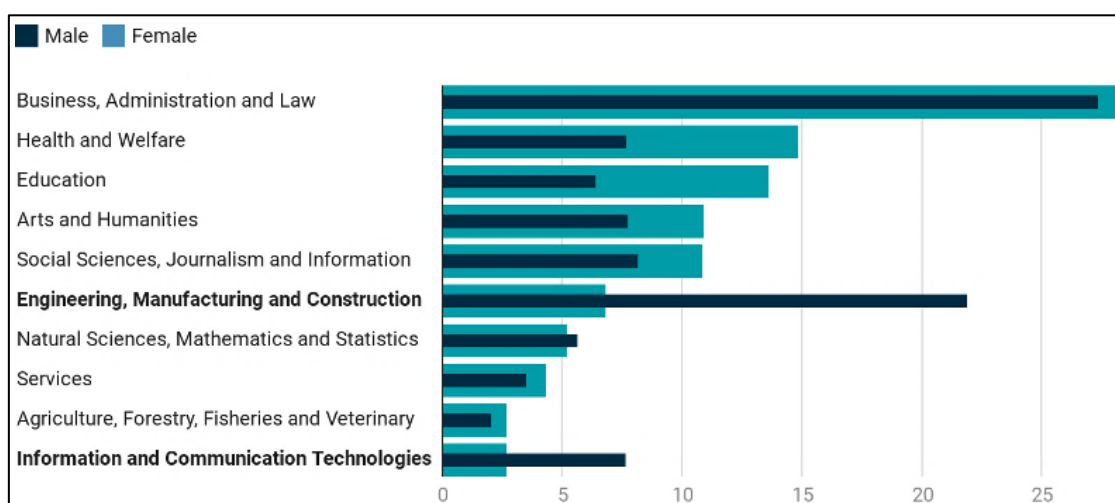


Figure 3: Student Enrolment per Career Program (%) (Santos & Rubiano-Matulevich, 2019)

The disparate representation of women in STEM programmes has been linked to lacking information regarding the possible opportunities to be found within the field. Biased gender norms, often starting during childhood and other psychosocial factors explain these dynamics further (Santos & Rubiano-Matulevich, 2019).

3.3 Institutional Problems

Educational gender inequality in SSA can also be linked to patrilineal systems, where property is passed on by the male lineage within a family; these systems are common in some areas of SSA and are likely to produce gender discrimination in favour of boys (Baten, de Haas, Elisabeth, & Meier zu Selhausen, 2021).

Regarding some traditional and religious practices within SSA, early marriage and teenage pregnancy can also negatively impact the progression of females within the workplace. Early marriage practices, whilst illegal, are still a barrier to educational attainment because of possible early engagement in parental duties. Teenage pregnancies significantly contribute to high-school drop-out rates. Many schools in SSA allow the expulsion of pregnant girls, at the expense of their education (Ombati & Ombati, 2012). Adolescent pregnancy is persistently high in SSA, linked to various sociocultural, environmental, and economic factors within the region; young girls are disadvantaged because of this (Yakubu & Salisu, 2018).

If women manage to enter the workforce in SSA, various issues are yet again at play. Institutional power relations within the region are often underpinned by patriarchal, capitalist, and neo-colonial values (Liani, Nyamongo, Pulford, & Tolhurst, 2021). Participants within the study by Liani *et al.* indicated various institutional problems faced by many women within SSA. This includes

- Research and educational funding uncertainties, coupled to race and gender,
- Insufficient social resources and a lack of mentor opportunities,
- Inflexibility of work culture and policies,
- Pressure and negative stereotypes or attitudes at work toward “career women”,
- Gender bias at the workplace, particularly for younger women who are “likely to go on maternity leave”, making them “useless” to the organisation,
- Sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation and insufficient awareness of harassment policies at work.

Considering the slew of factors women in SSA face to enter a STEM workforce, it is unsurprising how few women are participating within the cybersecurity workforce.

4. Closing the gap

To address the scarcity of women in cybersecurity, various groups must address the lack of opportunities afforded to women. Critical stakeholders, such as government, industry and academia must implement strategies to address the myriad issues deterring women from entering this workplace (Burrell & Nobles, 2018).

While global perspectives and recommendations to close the gender workforce gap certainly apply within the SSA-context, further steps may be required to address the gender disparity. Within SSA, the most prominent hurdle that must be overcome is increasing female participation in higher education. A sizeable challenge remains in accessing equitable, quality education for adolescent girls. Further policymaking and interaction with various stakeholders must continue to attempt to close the educational attainment gap (UNESCO, 2022).

A leaky pipeline of women in cybersecurity has been discussed; women are not well-enough retained in cybersecurity environments. Various considerations can be made to retain or recruit a more diverse workplace. To improve and encourage female workforce participation within cybersecurity, the ISC² Cybersecurity Workforce Study has indicated that the top investments to address for women are (ISC2, 2021):

- Invest in training,
- Providing more flexible working conditions,
- Invest in certifications,
- Invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives,
- Hire for attitude and aptitude and train for technical skills,
- Provide well-defined career paths,
- Encourage women and minorities to pursue STEM degrees in college,
- Establish organisation diversity goals,
- Establish mentorship programs,

- Address promotion gaps if they exist within an institution.

All these initiatives can help promote women pursuing cybersecurity careers and thus contribute to the global cybersecurity workforce. Because of the family responsibilities that many women undertake, another key initiative would be the provision of flexible working conditions. The ISC² Cybersecurity Workforce Study also shows that such a provision would help to diversify cybersecurity (ISC2, 2021). Flexible working conditions would afford women the opportunity to organise scheduling, work times and environment to still handle family responsibilities, if necessary. Strict onsite requirements with set hours disempower both men and women to be able to tackle family-related matters. Recent studies have found that women, much more than men, must adjust their careers for family-related matters and experience significant career interruptions as a result (Schaeffer, 2022).

Further, numerous initiatives to provide mentoring and training of young, female cybersecurity talent can help address this shortage. Many universities, non-profit organisations and professional bodies have initiatives to foster mentor and mentee relationships. Within SSA, “Women in Cyber” is an initiative targeting women residing in East Africa, offering training and assistance. These initiatives can address issues of lacking role models, as well as provide women with critical skills needed to enter the cybersecurity workforce.

It is essential that cybersecurity becomes more receptive welcoming women. A key contributing factor is the usage of real-world applications and exposure to industry. One of the solutions in this domain could be learning factories. To support investment in training, learning factories can provide much-needed skill improvements. Learning factories can be run by organisations to provide learning activities, real-world applications, information sharing and skills development. It affords graduates, workers, and new employees the opportunity to be exposed to key activities that will support their career growth and development. A learning factory can assist with action- and practice-based learning to strengthen the learner’s ability to apply themselves within a practical environment.

Other techniques that should be adopted to help recognize the efforts of women include (Poster, 2018) (Maigret, 2022):

- *Acknowledge the contributions of women.* The list of women contributing to STEM is much longer than the public may believe. Raising awareness of the invaluable contributions women have made to STEM and cybersecurity is crucial to promoting the participation of women in cyber. Contributions are often overlooked and under-appreciated (Austin, 2022). For example, during the Second World War, it was not public knowledge that around 10,000 women carried out message decryption. Furthermore, there have been various female scientists like Hedy Lamarr and Elizabeth Smith Friedman, who invented encryption methodologies that were applied in various military equipment at the time.
- *Recognize diverse expertise.* Both men and women can bring diverse skillsets to a team. Diverse teams with differing viewpoints tend to be more creative and resilient.
- *Encourage young women to pursue STEM-related degrees and careers from an early age.* Parents and teachers must encourage young girls to consider these fields, as there are ample opportunities within the ever-expanding STEM disciplines.
- *Create mentorship programs at various levels.* These can be introduced as early as primary school to provide successful models for girls; and can be implemented at any level of development, even for junior professionals.
- *Dismantle bias in hiring practices and train all employees equally.* Workplaces should not just afford these opportunities to executives; all employees should feel involved, valued, and respected.
- *Prioritise creating and supporting leadership positions for more women.* Active leadership promotion for women so that women can also gain experience concerning project and management responsibilities.

5. Conclusion

The pervasive and systemic challenges faced by women in SSA and within a global context have brought about a gender-asymmetric workplace within the cybersecurity field. While women in SSA face the same barriers to entry, some unique experiences further exasperate their situation. Issues of gender bias, discriminatory recruitment practices and delays in opportunity and progression influence gender representation in cybersecurity negatively. Additionally, within SSA, widespread poverty, a lack of educational pathways and other institutional problems further disadvantage women’s participation in STEM fields. Techniques to close this

gender gap have been outlined; however, without active support from various stakeholders, this gap may persist. Holistic programs must be developed to help balance the gender disparity in cybersecurity, both in SSA and globally.

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Non-Binary Parents and Carers: Naming the Specific Detriment Faced

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Abstract: This empirical qualitative study reports a subset of findings derived from a wider narrative inquiry conducted in the UK. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with six participants: four who self-define as non-binary or neutrois and have lived experience of adoption, fostering or birth parenting and two social workers with experience assessing and supporting non-binary carers. Purposive followed by snowball sampling sought to include participants with a range of identities from this hard to access sample. A thematic analysis was employed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages and utilising an analysis framework integrating elements of cisgenderism, stigma theory and Foucauldian analysis of discourse and power. Findings showed three key themes emerged: 1). Barriers for non-binary carers, 2) Prejudice in adoption and fostering matching processes, 3). Intersectional disadvantage. Cisgenderism was found to affect non-binary carers at micro, meso and macro levels, ranging from the interactions people had with individual family members, friends and professionals, to organisational policies, procedures and responses, to overarching ways in which wider cisgenderist ideas have infused and influenced society. The stigma attached to non-binary identities is unearthed and unpacked to contribute to a developing conversation aiming to promote inclusion of non-binary identities within social and family life. The key finding of this study that non-binary people do experience specific detriment when trying to start or grow their families adds to a burgeoning conversation on the wider specific detriment that non-binary identity faces within contemporary society. This paper speaks to the ways in which cisgenderism can subtly and pervasively influence a devaluing of identities that sit outside of entrenched binary gender norms. The findings of this exploratory study are as such relevant not only to professionals and academics working with non-binary carers, but more widely to gender theorists and sociologists across the globe.

Keywords: Non-binary, Trans, Parent, carer, Adoption, Fostering

1. Introduction and Literature Review

For decades, the academy has considered the gendering processes of socialisation, and norms associated with it, however, this has mostly been in relation to a binary understanding of gender. This entrenched binary understanding has arguably resulted in the silencing of people who identify outside of it or who defy its boundaries (Pershai, 2006). While the past two decades have produced a solid research base on the experiences of lesbian and gay carers (e.g., Hicks, 2000; Hall, 2010; Golombok et al. 2014; Wood, 2016), trans and non-binary voices have routinely been silenced or subsumed within wider research into lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ+) communities (Biblarz and Savci, 2010; Rogers, 2017).

Non-binary people have attracted interest within mainstream media over recent years; however, such interest has not necessarily been productive in working towards the inclusion and acceptance of non-binary people. Rather, the media has tended to situate non-binary people as 'other' to a normative conception of binary gender it is assumed the wider public represent (Sue, 2010). Stigma power is deployed via hidden forces (e.g., unconscious bias) that suppress gender diverse identities (Link and Phelan, 2014). Increased focus on trans issues and rights within the media can serve to offer a platform for silenced voices to speak, however, such voices can be positioned as deviant, and can have the effect of separating rather than bringing together trans and feminist communities (Hines, 2018, 2019, 2020). Stonewall's (2017) 'Vision for change' for trans people argues for changes to be made to ensure that service provision is offered in an inclusive way.

Valentine (2016) highlights a lack of research examining the experiences of non-binary people as a distinct group, as well as a pressing need to address the Ministry of Justice's claim that no specific detriment to non-binary people exists that could warrant a review of legislation. Indeed, there is an amassing body of research evidencing that specific detriment does exist for non-binary people within the UK (Matsuno and Budge, 2017; Valentine, 2016). Matsuno and Budge (2017)'s literature review found that non-binary people experience higher levels of depression, anxiety and suicidality than binary trans people. Non-binary people were found to experience exclusion from services as non-binary identities were not understood or represented (Valentine, 2016).

This paper addresses the sparsity of research exploring how UK children's social work engages with non-binary gender identities (Hudson-Sharp, 2018; Brown and Rogers, 2020) and begins to plug a gap in the research base focusing on the specific needs of non-binary people (Valentine, 2016). It builds upon previous research exploring trans and non-binary people's experiences of adoption and fostering (Goldberg et al., 2019; 2020; Brown, 2021), practitioner experiences of trans parents (Hafford-Lechfield et al., 2021) and trans people's parenting desires

(Tasker and Gato, 2020) to explore the children and family context, focusing specifically on non-binary families interested in adoption and fostering. In doing so, this paper uses novel, empirical data to underpin a sociological analysis of minority genders. Although data utilised is drawn from a wider narrative inquiry on trans people's experiences of adoption and fostering, the subset of data included is relevant to those working within a variety of child and family contexts. The findings detailed are of broader relevance as they speak to the development and understanding of non-binary gender identity that informs numerous assessments and support planning processes for young people and their families.

For the purpose of identifying themes within participant narratives, 'trans' is used as an umbrella term including a range of identities that describe people whose assigned gender at birth does not align with their own experience of gender (Bachman and Gooch, 2018). Recent research suggests that the use of 'non-binary' as an umbrella option for identities who do not fit a man/woman binary categorical distinction has largely been accepted by the communities it represents (Chetkovich, 2019; Elias and Colvin, 2019). As such, this term is used within this paper readers make sense of the narratives of non-binary people included within this study (Valentine, 2016; Matsuno and Budge, 2017). However, this paper also strives to avoid a homogenisation or delimitation of the terms 'trans' or 'non-binary', Instead highlighting the importance of autonomy and self-identification (Pearce, 2018).

2. Methods

Participants were recruited via purposive followed by snowballing sampling methods to include a range of identities. Fliers were sent via email to community groups and centres, social media and research network advertisement. People were eligible to take part if they were resident in the United Kingdom, over twenty-one years, and had adopted/fostered, applied/planned to apply to adopt or foster or supported trans carers. Six participants were included, representing a variety of genders, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, living across urban and rural areas (see Table 1 and 2). Targeted recruitment was undertaken to try and recruit participants from BAME backgrounds however, diversity within the study was limited in this respect. The sample was skewed towards a high level of education. Other identifying information has been removed to protect the participant confidentiality and anonymity. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Sheffield's ethics committee, full, informed consent was obtained from each participant and their right to withdraw was explained.

Table 1: Interviewee Characteristics: Non-Binary-Identified Participants

	Pseudonym	Gender identity	Age at interview	Interview date and type	Other personal characteristics
1	Celyn	Non-binary	27	17.07.18 In person	Bisexual, queer, single. White Welsh, lives in north of England. Adopter with 5-year-old child in placement for less than a year who is dual heritage, gender questioning and has experienced prior abuse that triggers child to parent violence.
2	Jamie	Non-binary, Trans/trans masculine	25	12.01.19 In person	Prospective adopter. Pansexual. Married to cis man. White American, lives in London. Has an invisible disability. Undertaking PhD full-time.
3	Ash	Neutrois	27	14.01.19 In person	Prospective adopter. White British, from low-income household. Lives in Manchester. Pansexual. Married to woman with trans history.

	Pseudonym	Gender identity	Age at interview	Interview date and type	Other personal characteristics
					Disabled, has PA 27 hours/week. Birth son 5 years old, lives with them and has contact with father.
4	Toby	Non-binary transman.	25	20.0120-29.02.20 Email	Prospective foster carer. White British, lives in South East England. Works full-time, degree education. Pansexual, monogamous, currently single. Brought up in religious Christian household on council estate.

Table 2: Interviewee Characteristics: Social Workers

	Pseudonym	Professional role	Age	Date interviewed	Profile
1	Melanie	Adoption social worker	30-40	17.07.18 In person	BAME, British, cisgender, social worker. Adoption 1-year, experience supporting non-binary carers, previous child protection work 2 years.
2	Amy	Senior practitioner	30-40	17.07.18 In person	White British, heterosexual, cisgender, social worker. Worked in adoption since 2009 (local authority), moved to voluntary adoption agency in 2015. Experience assessing and supporting lesbian, gay, single, non-binary carers of different ethnicities.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed verbatim and analysed by the author. An inductive thematic analysis was employed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage method, ensuring analytical rigour by engaging in a process of continual evaluation and comparison of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Analysis utilised a framework integrating elements of cisgenderism, stigma theory and Foucauldian discourses of power to make sense of participant narratives using an understanding of gender normativity and associated discrimination (Goffman, 1963; Foucault, 1979; Ansara and Hegerty, 2014).

3. Integrated Findings and Discussion

3.1 Theme 1: Barriers for Non-Binary Carers

Non-binary participants believed numerous barriers existed that would prevent them from starting or growing their family via adoption or fostering. For example, Jamie believed being this could cause such significant detriment that they may need to try and hide their identity to be approved as an adopter:

I was really concerned about, like, being a queer family... if we were a cis gay couple, I'd be like, it's pretty mainstream now, I think we're fine, you know. But... am I gona have to pretend to be [cis woman]... like, could I even do that? Are we gona have to pretend to be a straight couple? (Jamie, non-binary prospective adopter)

Using Bradford and Syed's (2019) framework, participants could be said to at times resist and at times concede both with a master narrative of cisnormativity and an alternative narrative of transformativity. As in Bradford and Syed's (2019) research, this study found that within some spaces participants did not aim to pass, and a queer presentation was embraced. However, when considering presenting themselves publicly in a context in which they could be disadvantaged by being non-binary (e.g., adoption assessment), participants worried that they would need to concede to cisnormativity in order to be successful. Jamie reported a need to perform a cis identity in public to avoid the social sanctions placed upon non-binary people (Butler, 1990).

Other participants asserted that they would not hide their non-binary identity, however, there remained a reluctance to offer it openly:

I don't think I would deny it. But I wouldn't be the first to bring it up... (Ash, neurois prospective adopter)

Valentine (2016) similarly found that non-binary people did not feel comfortable sharing their gender identities with services (except for specific LGBTQ+ services), expressing little confidence that health and social care services would respect their identities. Indeed, Valentine's (2016) study corroborates the modernity of this issue with their findings that in using services within the last 5 years 67% of non-binary people had been misgendered by accident, 33% on purpose and 49% felt like they were educating professionals.

Belief was that the further a person's gender expression sat from established binary gender norms, the more difficulty they would have in adopting:

Can you imagine someone has a sort of more queered presentation?... They would have a tougher time than me...I think they'd really struggle. (Celyn, non-binary adopter)

Indeed, direct comparison was drawn whereby it was felt that being a non-binary as opposed to trans person with a binary identity would present markedly increased difficulty for those being assessed as adopters:

You can be in Annie's position and get away with it... Because she's binary. And so, she can just say 'I am a woman', and not have to qualify it. And people will accept that. (Ash, neurois prospective adopter)

Social workers hold a substantial amount of power in relation to the approval of adoptive families because it is their interpretation of a range of interactions that directs decisions (Noordegraaf, Van Nijnatten and Elbers, 2008). The powerful influences of gender normativity can mean that the public performativity of gender is different to that of the personal (Rogers and Ahmed, 2017). Processes of normative social categorisation can result in individuals portraying identities considered by a majority to be more typical, to either feel a sense of belonging or to give the agent a form of political power. In the context of adoption and fostering, the form of power that may be needed by an agent is that of control over their personal information.

The result of gender normative views being embedded within society and social work practice is that non-binary identities are stigmatised, spoiled and subjugated by prevailing discourses of power directing the majority to view them as being socially undesirable (Goffman, 1963; Foucault, 1979; Ansara and Hegerty, 2014).

I never thought it would be as difficult... when we went to panel and they got approved, I actually felt so confident about Charlie. I just thought, they're amazing... 'they're gona get snapped up'... It didn't happen... it was nearly a year...once we got into family finding it was almost like we were back in time, when, when, er, LGB, you know, lesbian and gay adopters were seen as n-, as just, as not good as heterosexual. (Amy, social worker)

These quotes indicate that the hierarchy of gender and sexualities (Serano, 2016, Messerschmidt et al., 2018) has shifted within adoption and fostering practice. Where gay and lesbian adopters and carers were previously regarded as viable carers alongside a prioritisation of heterosexual couples as the ideal (Hicks, 2000; Hall, 2010; Wood, 2016), trans adopters/carers are now placed at the bottom of the hierarchy (Brown, 2021). Further, the present study's findings suggest that people with non-binary gender identities could face an even greater disadvantage than binary trans identities. Participants believed they will need to conceal a lack of gender normativity to prevent discrimination at the micro level from individual social workers and meso level where non-binary gender identity could prevent them gaining approval as carers from an adoption or fostering organisation. Macro level societal negative perception of non-binary people is additionally indicated as social work perceptions of the ideal family are derived from societal perceptions of this ideal.

3.2 Theme 2: Prejudice in Adoption and Fostering Matching Processes

The social workers interviewed reported both overt and covert gender discrimination in processes of matching non-binary carers to adoptive and foster children:

I don't think that people were like, overtly prejudiced...they would say well how do, how would they respond, how would they explain their transgender status to a child? A child might get confused... how would a child er, cope with bullying? (Amy, social worker)

Indeed, social workers have a dilemma as whether to make decisions based on theoretical grounds assumed to be in a child's best interests, or to be guided by moral ideals about how to best raise a child that have been transmitted culturally (LeVine, 2004). Here, social workers were presuming that a child with a non-binary parent

would be bullied and that a child placed with cis parents would not experience bullying. However, a recent review of bullying suggests that its reasons are complex, encompassing individual and contextual factors such as the school environment and whether families encourage their children to problem solve using violence (Jung, 2018).

Social workers reported examples of overt transphobia being expressed by other social workers. Amy relayed a comment made by a social worker at a potential placing authority after a meeting with a non-binary adopter:

'I just think, they're confused about their gender, their identity'. (Amy, social worker)

Denying the validity of a non-binary carer's identity demonstrates the transphobia that exists in contemporary society (Bachman and Gooch, 2018), and is transmuted via discourses into social work practice (Foucault, 1979). Within a normative ideological construction of gender, cisgender identities are positioned as natural, fixed and indisputable, with non-binary identities placed as unnatural, deviant or other (Enke, 2012). Reports indeed indicated that being non-binary was something that social workers were unfamiliar with, and thus regarded as problematic:

I think the non-binary aspect of trans confused people [social workers considering a match with an approved non-binary adopter] even more if I'm honest... it was a bit feeling it's unknown, we've got nothing to base it against. (Melanie, social worker)

Gender identities, expression and related terminology that sit outside of dominant gender norms (Ansara and Hegerty, 2014) were met with anxiety and confusion from adoption and fostering social work professionals. Indeed, previous research has found that many child and family social workers had not taken part in gender diversity training and the knowledge found across practitioners varied, with only pockets of gender awareness (Hudson-Sharp, 2018). This lack of knowledge could result in a potential match not being explored:

So, you'd go to a profiling event and people would have conversations with Alex, and Alex looks female... and those conversations would be really positive... we'd have conversations afterwards and share stuff, and then it would just go quiet... they would say 'that's not a problem' [referring to Alex being non-binary], and then you wouldn't hear anything. (Melanie, social worker)

However, this example may demonstrate an issue that goes beyond lack of confidence; it could evidence covert discrimination (Ely, 1995). Social workers are influenced by gender-normative discourse that places cis adopters and carers as the only valid categories of parent, closing off conversations regarding non-normative options (Foucault, 1979; Pearce, 2018). Challenging decisions that social workers, carers or adopters feel to be discriminatory but have no explicit, recorded proof of would be incredibly difficult. To make a case that the Equality Act 2010 or Gender Recognition Act 2004 has been contravened, evidence must be presented to a tribunal or court. However, where gender is not overtly stated by workers as a reason for not selecting a trans person as a suitable match for a child, it cannot be identified as a discriminatory decision nor formally challenged as such.

Some outright discrimination and some... trying to hide behind other things... agencies would come up with lots of different reasons, none of which really made sense... That was easier than to say, 'we're struggling with this' (Melanie, social worker)

Melanie's quote suggests that social workers verbalised another reason (than gender) to justify not exploring a match between a child and a non-binary carer, making cisgenderist views. Between them, Melanie and Amy reported having interactions with a large proportion of the local authorities spanning the UK, via online and in-person linking and matching methods. As such, their comments offer a transferable insight into the overt and prevalence of covert discrimination within adoption and fostering organisations across the UK. Although overt discrimination can be challenged under legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, covert discrimination can be more pervasive and problematic to address (Ely, 1995).

Misgendering, a form of pathologizing (Shelton, 2015), was another form of gender based discrimination found to be prevalent within social services:

It must be so difficult for them, you know, they constantly...they get misgendered... all the time. (Amy, social worker)

Participants believed discrimination due to being non-binary was occurring, but it was difficult to isolate the process by which negative responses were due to carers being non-binary and not some other characteristic in order to lodge a complaint:

... my experience of family-finding was that it was just a 'no' or a 'we're not starting a discussion'. And there was never really any opportunity to try and talk about Alex. (Melanie, social worker)

Social workers used their own agency to attempt to shield adopters from examples of direct transphobia:

There were some things where I, I wanted to talk to Charlie [a prospective adopter who identifies as non-binary] about the, the sort of prejudice and discrimination, but also didn't want them to realise how sometimes, how difficult it was... because it just seemed too, too, too much. (Amy, social worker)

Many of the impacts, such as minority stigma stress, mental illness and isolation, are known to be experienced by people following exposure to discrimination (Riggs and Treharne, 2016). It would indeed be the role of a social worker to advocate for an adopter and challenge discrimination based their trans status (using the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and Equality Act 2010). However, the protection they claim to afford social work service users (Fish, 2012) has been shown by this study's findings to be insufficient for adoption and fostering work with non-binary people.

3.3 Theme 3: Intersectional Disadvantage

Participants who were non-binary and had intersectional experiences of also being disabled or experiencing mental illness believed that they would experience pronounced specific detriment in their aim to become parents/carers. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) argues that there is potential for greater threat to a person's wellbeing where they experience discrimination in relation to multiple dimensions of their identity:

There is a 'you can adopt whether you're...' and there's a list of identities, but there's never anything disability specific... [Ash read about] the first person in the UK to adopt as a solo parent who required full-time [personal assistant] care... And they really struggled with questions about their capability and about whether it would be someone else doing all the parenting? Just in the assumption that he couldn't possibly parent (Ash, neurois prospective adopter)

Clarke and O'Dell (2013) explore the ways in which discourse on disability has placed disabled parents as being dependent on and looked after by their children. This positioning of disabled parents has been critiqued as marginalising disabled parents, however, the legacy of the discourse remains (Foucault, 1979). A social model of disability would offer an alternative analysis of Ash as being prohibited from fully taking part in the family life they choose because of barriers that society constructs (Shakespeare, 2017). Indeed, as Ash's identity lies at intersections of gender, sexuality, health and disability, they experience a complex web of societal disadvantage (Korn, 2020).

Within an adoption or fostering assessment, the stability of an applicant's mental health is assessed (Beasley, 2020):

Parts of the assessment that address mental health would be difficult for me to talk about. I have been to the doctors a few times and I have phrased it as "Low Mood" and played it down a lot due to fear that my poor mental health will go on my medical record and be held against me in the assessment process. I got the impression from a meeting I went to about this for X Fostering and Adoption that they aren't very forgiving when it comes to mental health, so if you have experienced any kind of depression, self-harm or suicidal thoughts in your past this is held against you. (Toby, non-binary prospective foster carer)

For trans and non-binary people, mental illness and self-harm are common due to the discrimination that they encounter within society (LGBT Foundation, 2017; Bachman and Gooch, 2018). As such, to expect a prospective adopter or carer not to have encountered these issues is a hidden form of discrimination. Much like a need to hide gender identity then, non-binary people may feel a need to minimise their experience of mental illness to be approved as an adopter or foster carer.

The current adoption and fostering assessment guidance lack consideration of the differing experiences that non-binary people have as it relates to a gender-normative majority (Beasley, 2020). Indeed, Barksy (2020) argues that assessment methods are outdated as they have been designed based upon the assumptions that being cisgender and heterosexual are the prevailing and preferred forms of gender and sexuality. Instead, he offers a modified and more inclusive genogram model for social workers to use. However, while this is helpful in recording different familial and support networks, it does not account for the minority stress and resultant mental health experiences that trans people have (Riggs and Treharne, 2016). The integration of a structural understanding of the impact of stigma could reframe mental illness in trans people as an expected and normal human reaction to the extreme emotional pressure discrimination exerts.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found evidence of covertly operating cisgenderism that disadvantages non-binary people in adoption and fostering social work in the UK. Whether hidden or unconscious, covert discrimination can be more pervasive (Ely, 1995) and there exists no direction in the relevant legislation (Equality Act 2010 and Gender Recognition Act 2004) regarding how hidden discrimination or unconscious bias in relation to trans and non-binary people can be addressed.

Barriers for non-binary carers varied in nature, with some participants describing cisgenderism at micro levels relating to individual worker perspectives or their own internalised views. Others reported barriers that resulted from meso level cisgenderism extant within teams or institutions, where cisheteronormative assumptions had infiltrated organisational policies, procedures and responses. Macro level cisgenderism, while inherently more difficult to pinpoint, is arguably evident where cisgenderist views appear to have infused wider societal processes. Embedded cisgenderist views within society filter down to organisations and individuals and can be problematic for non-binary people who do not fit within the established gender stereotypes.

Participants expressed beliefs and recounted experiences that suggested there is a specific detriment experienced by non-binary people, whereby normative trans identities are privileged and 'more queered' or non-binary identities subjugated. This finding offers support to Bradford and Syed's (2019) argument that those with transnormative presentations are more likely to feel included within social life. Those who 'pass' are seen as acceptable parental figures as they maintain societal binary gender structures. Whereas those whose identities transgress gender norms present a threat to social order. There appears to be a specific stigma attached to identities that do not align with entrenched binary gender norms of male and female, meaning non-binary people experience specific detriment when starting or growing their families.

Adoption and fostering services may be mirroring trends in mainstream media, whereby increased rights and support are given to some trans communities while other communities remain marginalised. Gatekeeping that occurred within adoption and fostering services is an example of stigma power (Link and Phelan, 2014). Stigma acts as both a productive and constitutive force that enables power to function, dictating who is regarded a suitable adopter/care and who is not. This research supports prior findings in relation to sexual minority adopters/carers, whereby a similar process of gatekeeping that restricted gay and lesbian adopters/carers (Hall, 2010; Hicks, 2000) is now restricting trans and non-binary applicants. Further, the findings together implicate that adoption and fostering services could be sites that demonstrate a notable impact of stigma power.

This study adds to a growing body of research suggesting that non-binary people in the UK do experience specific detriment (Matsuno and Budge, 2017; Valentine, 2016). It contributes to the literature by adding a novel perspective that directly accesses the experiences of non-binary people in relation to adoption and fostering in the UK. The results of this exploratory study can be applied to a range of family contexts and have direct application for professionals seeking to understand the detriment faced by non-binary families. It is however highlighted that future research is needed to explicate the complexity of the social processes that causes the specific detriment experienced by non-binary carers, as well as an international exploration of this issue. Findings highlight how embedded gender norms, particularly cisgenderist discourses, influence how people can understand and express their gender identities within society. Identities that sit outside of the accepted gender norms of the time are limited, marginalised, devalued and invalidated. The resultant effect is that non-binary people experience multiple challenges as they try and navigate their lives in a society that is organised around binary gender identities.

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An Evaluation Tool for Extracurricular Activities to Reduce the Gender gap in Computer Science

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Abstract: In the last few years, workforce with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) competencies has proved to be crucial for countries' innovative capacity and global competitiveness. Yet women are vastly underrepresented in STEM and, in particular, in ICT and computer science fields, both among workers and degree holders: this gap hinders the possibility for ICT employment to be strengthened and for women to take advantage of career opportunities, thus perpetuating gender inequalities in these disciplines. To counteract these effects and attract girls towards ICT-related fields of study and careers, several initiatives have been organised all around the world, such as summer camps and dedicated extracurricular activities. However, these initiatives are usually not supported by proper evaluation tools allowing researchers and practitioners to understand the actual benefits of the carried-out activities on girls' competencies and future attitudes. In this paper, we propose an evaluation tool for extracurricular activities aimed at reducing the gender gap in ICT. The proposed tool aims at capturing both a quantitative and a qualitative evaluation, including an Implicit Association Test (IAT) along with a more traditional questionnaire consisting of thematic sections designed to analyse various aspects of the activities' impact on girls. The tool has been applied in the context of two summer camps related to national and international projects aimed at attracting girls towards computer science and STEM disciplines: the 'Digital Girls' project, organised since 2014 by the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia in collaboration with other universities and local institutions, and the "STEM for Future" Erasmus+ project. Based on the results obtained by the summer camp case studies, we discuss some critical elements that can hinder the efficacy of the evaluation tool, giving suggestions to overcome these potential issues.

Keywords: Gender gap, ICT education, Evaluation tool, Extracurricular activities, Implicit Association Test

1. Introduction

Recent statistics about European and worldwide conditions indicate that women's presence in computer science professions and related university programs has not significantly improved in the last decade, and women still are severely under-represented in these fields (Eurostat Statistics, 2017-2019). Both literature and real data show that gender differences with respect to interests, sense of belonging, self-confidence and engagement towards STEM and computer science are already in place at an early age (Spieler et al., 2020). Reaching a complete understanding of the reasons for this gender gap is a complex task, but (at least some of) the main motivations appear to be related to social and cultural related issues, such as gender stereotypes in the computer science field (Master, 2021). Stereotypes, in general, influence people and produce misrepresentations: computer science is typically associated with the masculine role, but stereotype misconceptions may also regard physical appearance, personality type and digital ability projected onto young females, negatively influencing their academic decisions and career choices (Berg, 2018).

The European Commission suggests that the gender gap should be addressed by a set of policies that include breaking gender stereotypes by means of awareness-raising campaigns and concrete actions (European Commission, 2018), such as earlier interventions in students' life, including extracurricular activities and training (Davaki, 2018). In the last years, many public and private institutions have undertaken similar actions with the goal of attracting girls towards computer science through activities such as summer camps and dedicated laboratories where the participants are exposed to hands-on experiences about coding and or doing projects. However, these activities typically lack a proper assessment regarding the resulting impacts and effects on the participants. Indeed, the main focus of such programmes is usually more on the implementation of computer science activities and team-based projects rather than on a comprehensive and specifically designed evaluation of the obtained results.

In this paper, we propose an evaluation tool for measuring important aspects related to the impact of extracurricular activities and participants' backgrounds, attitudes and intentions for future choices about studies or careers. The proposed tool includes both qualitative and quantitative measuring methods. Moreover, it leverages the opportunity to evaluate implicit biases that may deeply affect future girls' choices through the Implicit Assessment Test (IAT) method (Schnabel et al., 2008). The evaluation tool has been applied to two extracurricular activities carried out by the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia in the context of national

and international projects. Specifically, we test the tool during the activities of the 'Digital Girls' project (Faenza et al., 2021-2021b) and of the Erasmus+ project "STEM for Future"¹.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the context of the proposal, highlighting the need for a structured tool for an exhaustive evaluation of the extracurricular activities' impacts. Section 3 describes the structure of the proposed evaluation tool, with references to the literature motivating the choices of the tool's main elements. Section 4 presents the case studies to which the tool was applied, presenting a discussion on the main observed critical elements and suggestions to overcome them. Section 5 concludes the paper with some final remarks.

2. Literature Review

As stated in (Faenza et al., 2021), many initiatives aimed at reducing the gender gap in the ICT-related field have been carried out in the last decade. Still, these initiatives are usually not supported by proper evaluation tools allowing researchers and practitioners to investigate the eventual benefit of the camp initiatives on participants' competencies and future choices. The main aim of surveys submitted after the extracurricular activities is usually to evaluate the participants' satisfaction. On the other hand, we claim that a structured, specifically designed survey solution is necessary to investigate other meaningful aspects and the real impacts of the camps.

To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that proposed an evaluation tool that can be directly reused or easily adapted for the extracurricular activities considered in our study. Similarly, no studies provide directions or guidelines for designing and developing such a tool. In some cases, the used survey structure and methodology are provided as an appendix. An example is the case of (Danoff M., 2017), which provides the methodology used to assess gender barriers towards Computer Science at Harvard. However, the study focuses on college students and the survey is tailored to the Harvard faculty context. In other cases, the study's main aim is to give suggestions and guidelines for STEM summer camps without providing adequate information about the assessment phase (Davis et al., 2013; Mohr-Schroeder et al., 2014). Our study aims to fill this gap by describing the structure of the proposed evaluation tool and the methodology followed to design it.

Some studies focus on the analysis of gender gaps in ICT and the identification of the main factors that impact on girls' choices in terms of future studies and careers. The survey in (Spieler et al., 2020) included analyses of 28 peer-reviewed articles on that topic highlighting in particular how different factors can impact the decision to choose a degree course in ICT. They also investigate the self-perception of participants about their capabilities in ICT and the similarities and dissimilarities between their identity and the perceived identity of a ICT expert (Lewis, Anderson & Yasuhara, 2011). Moreover, correlations between video games playing and attitude toward ICT are also studied: (Davies et al., 2014) shows a correlation between students who do not play video games and students who describe their computer skills as poor or do not spend much time on technological devices. Finally, teachers' and parents' influence on participants' aspirations is analysed in (Wong & Kemp, 2018). We took into account these results to design our tool, as described in the next section.

3. Research Methodology

In this section, we describe the research methodology that led us to propose the evaluation tool for summer camp initiatives focused on computer science education. The first phase of the methodology includes a literature review, whose results are used as the basis for the tool design.

The purpose of the literature review is to validate and improve the questionnaire design phase. In our case, we focused on studies related to summer camp initiatives on computer science themes whose main participants were female. We found an in-depth study investigating the gender stereotypes in ICT, negative impressions experienced during ICT classes and influences that may prevent girls' interest in this field (Spieler et al., 2020). The study revisioned 28 peer-reviewed articles on the themes and was very helpful in orienting our choice of how to improve the survey design. As a result, we decided to include questions about family support and the ability to identify themselves with ICT professionals, besides videogames experience. Another result of this phase was the decision to include focus groups and an Implicit Association Test (IAT from here forward). The IAT test has recently been widely used to assess mental associations (e.g., associations with race, gender, and more) and to predict judgement and behaviour (Greenwald et al., 2009). In particular, other researchers have considered the tool a valid instrument to measure the implicit association of STEM-related and non-STEM-related words

¹ <https://www.ifo.it/servizi/enti-scuole-e-internazionale/progetti-internazionali/stem-for-future/>

with female and male names (Farrell et al., 2017; Smeding et al., 2012). To summarise, compared to previous editions' surveys, two classes of improvements were introduced: *technical* and *conceptual* improvements.

Concerning technical improvements, we introduce the possibility of tracing the response evolution. Since our surveys were submitted before and after the camp, some questions were repeated to trace eventual changes in the girls' perceptions. To this aim, we connect answers given by the same participant before and after the camp. Moreover, we wanted to connect some background data collected at the moment of the camp enrolment. The solution was to assign each participant a code to use during the questionnaire submission and then completely anonymise answers during the analysis phase. This allowed us, after the camp, to join answers from the same person and remove the code for anonymization.

Another technical advancement was the adoption of a structured survey system. In the early years of the initiative, tools like Google Forms were mainly employed; however, the solution needed more advanced features like, for example, branching and skip logic for questions, templates, invitations and reminders by email and session-based survey. These needs have led in recent years to the adoption of LimeSurvey, an open-source online survey tool that can also be installed on-premises.

With respect to conceptual improvement, the more innovative choice was to include an IAT test. The main principle behind the IAT test is that self-exploration is subject to introspective limits. The test measures the differential association of 2 target concepts with an attribute: the two concepts appear in a 2-choice task (e.g., flower vs insect names) and the attributes in a 2nd task (e.g., pleasant vs unpleasant words for an evaluation attribute). When instructions oblige highly associated categories (e.g., flower + pleasant) to share a response key, performance is faster than when less associated categories (e.g., insect + pleasant) share a key. This performance difference implicitly measures the different associations of the two concepts with the attribute (Greenwald et al., 1998). As stated by the Harvard online platform Project Implicit (<https://implicit.harvard.edu>), the IAT measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy). The participant is asked to categorise terms displayed at the screen's centre as quickly as possible. On the left and right of the screen, two or more categories in opposition to each other are shown (Figure 1). The main idea is that categorising a term is more straightforward when closely related categories are displayed on the same side of the screen.

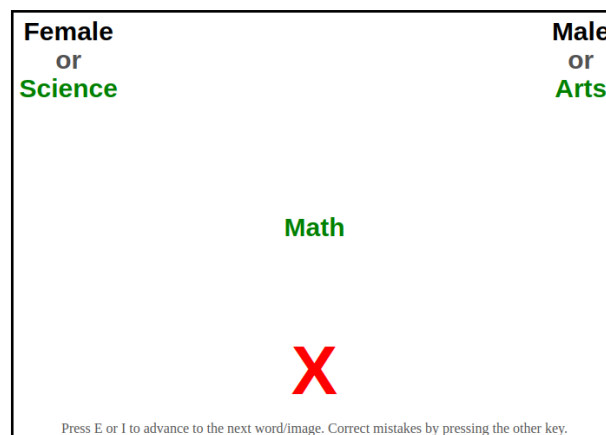


Figure 1: Screen of an IAT Test Being Employed

Including the IAT test led to the less obvious matter of choosing an instrument to operate online. The LimeSurvey tool used in previous years did not allow the inclusion or the development of an IAT test. Hence, our choice was to migrate to a more complex platform, Qualtrics. The availability of an open repository, IATGEN (Carpenter et al., 2019), to develop an IAT test integrable inside Qualtrics' surveys led to this choice. IATGEN is an open-source tool written in R that can generate an IAT test as a survey element composed of HTML and Javascript; it also offers a suite of data analysis tools for processing the resulting data.

Another conceptual improvement concerns the choice to exploit focus groups with the final aim of selecting the most appropriate questions and validate our hypothesised survey structure. Focus groups, indeed, help investigate matters that are difficult to investigate throughout a survey. For example, it is possible to investigate if widespread descriptive stereotypes about women (Heilman, 2001) influence participants' perceptions about their studies and career opportunities. Focus groups are usually held with a group of four to six people and require the presence of an expert researcher, able to properly moderate and lead the discussion.

4. Proposed Evaluation Tool

In this section, we describe the proposed evaluation tool, specifically designed to evaluate the impact of extracurricular computer science camps on female participants. The evaluation tool comprises a series of focus groups and an online questionnaire, which includes two main parts: an initial IAT test and the main survey. The main survey includes questions that can be categorised into five main categories: background information, computer science perception, future choices, gender stereotypes and camp satisfaction.

4.1 Focus Groups

As planned, we decided to employ focus groups to validate our main survey section. We opened a call with participants from the previous editions of the 'Digital Girls' camp and selected 15 of them, of which five decided to continue their studies in ICT curricula. Moreover, we selected five girls from the ICT course who had no opportunities to participate in any ICT camp initiative during high school. We created four sessions with five participants to maximise the effectiveness of the focus groups. For logistic reasons, three sessions were held using a Web meeting platform. The expert researcher who led the focus groups explained that video conferences were the most appropriate way to conduct focus groups during the pandemic.

Finally, we defined the stimuli to be used during each session. They consisted of four main questions and phrases, each with two to three sub-stimuli to be deeper elaborated in case of stalled conversation. Moreover, stimuli were slightly different for those who did not attend any ICT camp initiative before they chose to enrol in an ICT degree. Specifically:

- let us reflect on the moment in which you chose to enrol in ['Digital Girl' summer camp | Computer Science degree]
- explain what your drives were
- describe what you expected to find
- describe what you found
- what was your idea about the "ICT world" prior to this moment
- explain how this idea formed
- describe your experience with the "ICT world" prior
- describe if and how enrolling to [camp | degree] changed your idea
- (if camp participant) describe if and how attending the camp modified your future choice
- (if ICT degree student) describe your possible future work and your ambition in the field
- identify four keywords to describe your experience with the ICT world until today

Focus group results typically require a long time to be analysed and a specialised researcher's expertise. However, a few notes from the live sessions have helped us find new essential aspects to investigate. For example, during sessions, the presence of a parent passionate about anything related to computer science or electronics was noticed for almost all students attending ICT courses. Hence, we decided to include a couple of questions in the survey to investigate if the presence of such a figure could lead to a higher probability of considering ICT as a possible field of study.

4.2 IAT

As previously stated, we decided to include an IAT test in our surveys. The preparation stage of an IAT test requires selecting two categories of opposing concepts; then, words strongly related to each concept must be selected. In our case, we selected as target categories the couples "Science"- "Arts" and "Male"- "Female". The idea was to test if there is a positive correlation between them, hence less time for categorising words when the "Male" and the "Science" categories are on the same side of the screen. The objective was to employ the test before and after the camp to understand if camp activities could lead to a change in implicit associations. More in detail, the chosen categories with stimuli were:

- Science: Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Statistics, Computer Science, Engineering, Mechanics, Electronics
- Arts: Art, History, Philosophy, Literature, Music, Theater, Language
- Male: Male, Man, He, Husband, Father, Uncle, Grandfather
- Female: Female, Woman, She, Wife, Mother, Aunt, Grandmother

An essential part of a successful IAT test is to use the mother language of the participants. In fact, for the use in the StemForFuture Erasmus+ project, a phase of translation in the mother tongue of each country participating in the initiative was undertaken.

Since each IAT test requires more or less 10 minutes to be completed, it was not possible to test more implicit associations, for example, an association between male/female and career/family; hence we chose to investigate other aspects using multiple-choice questions and free text answers.

4.3 Survey Structure

The final result consisted of two surveys, one submitted at the beginning and one at the end of the camp activities. Some questions were repeated both before and after the camp in order to grasp the eventual change in the knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of participants after the experience. A list of question categories is presented in the rest of this section in order to better understand the proposed survey structure.

4.3.1 Personal background

The first category of questions is related to participants' background; since obviously there is no need to ask again at the end of the camp for the same, these pieces of information can also be collected at the moment of participant enrolment, provided that anonymity must be guaranteed. Questions of this category regard general information such as nationality, attending school address, place of birth and age but also more specific information:

- parents' employment;
- if and how parents are involved in or passionate about CS or electronics;
- if the participant regularly plays video games and which one in particular.

It is part of the personal background, questions about the eventuality they have already coded before, and more in-depth questions about their experience with coding.

4.3.2 Computer science perception

As a consequence of what we learned from the literature review (section 3.2), we decided to include questions in order to understand participants' beliefs about ICT professionals before and after the camp. In particular, we asked them to choose a few adjectives to describe an ICT professional and then a few adjectives to describe themselves, with the aim of comparing the result before and after the camp and analysing how those descriptions evolve. Also, before the camp, we asked what their idea was about the "ICT world" and how much they knew about it, while after the camp, we asked if their perception of the same has changed and, if so, how.

4.3.3 Future choice

An essential section of our surveys is dedicated to participants' future choices. It is repeated before and after the camp initiative to understand better if the camp impacted participants' ideas. We ask participants whether they are willing to continue studying or to look for a job and which will be their field of study or occupation. Then, in the final survey, we ask if their idea has changed and why; in the initial survey, we ask them if they talked about the possible choices with parents or teachers and, eventually, what their opinion is.

4.3.4 Gender stereotypes

An entire section is dedicated to gender stereotypes; here, the aim is to understand if the participant believes or not if being a woman or having a family could pose an obstacle for the future choice or for having a career in ICT and non-ICT fields. Also, these questions were submitted before and after the camp since, over the years, we noticed that a major awareness about stereotypes in the study and work field has arisen.

4.3.5 Camp satisfaction

A final section submitted only at the after-camp survey analyses camp satisfaction in terms of general satisfaction and specific likings of single aspects of the camp, like activities employed, teamwork, teachers and more. Furthermore, we ask participants to highlight the best and worst part of the experience and to suggest possible improvements.

5. Case Study

The proposed evaluation tool has been applied in the context of two extracurricular activities dedicated to STEM disciplines. The first one is the project 'Digital Girls', an initiative dedicated to female students of third and fourth-grade high schools to attract girls towards ICT and computer science. The evaluation tool has been applied to evaluate the impact on almost 200 girls aged 16-18 during the 2022 edition of the Digital Girls summer camps, which were carried out in six cities in the Emilia Romagna region.

The second case study for the application of the evaluation tool is the STEM for Future Erasmus+ project, which aims to develop increased knowledge and culture about STEM disciplines and professional opportunities among students of high schools. The project activities include designing and organising four national summer camps in the partners' countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain and Estonia) in 2022 and one international camp in 2023. Among the project, an objective is developing an assessment methodology that recognises knowledge and skills acquired through the camp activities and measuring the impact on participants. The evaluation tool has been applied in the context of the 2022 national summer camps on almost 80 students aged 16-18.

5.1 Critical Observations

During the survey submission phase, a critical element is the compilation time, the global time needed to answer questions and the IAT test. A too-long survey tends to tire the participants: we noticed that the accuracy and the exhaustiveness of the answers given to the last questions of the survey dramatically dropped. Also, in some cases, free-text answers were utterly absent or substituted by hyphens, commas and points. This could be a consequence of the excessive survey duration or possibly of a failure to make participants understand the importance of their answers for research purposes. Using software tools to detect inconsistent and invalid answers could be extremely useful in these cases. Moreover, limiting free-text questions or placing the same at the start of the survey could lead to better results.

Another observation comes from the IAT test's presence: including it at the beginning of the survey extended the compilation time by about 10 minutes, thus leading to quite long global compilation times. A possible solution to this problem could be submitting the IAT test at a different moment. For example, at the end of the first day of activities or at the beginning of the second day. Indeed, while for most questions of the initial survey, it is essential to avoid any potential influence given by the information received during the camp activities, the time needed to measure a change in an implicit association is much longer. Hence, there is no urge to submit it at the very beginning of the camp.

Another important lesson we learned is the importance of testing the survey with a group of people having characteristics similar to the target population. In our case, we tested the surveys with 20 girls aged 16-18. Even if we had experts designing the survey and refining the final questions, some had to be corrected to be adjusted to the target because they resulted as unclear or ambiguous. For example, we submitted a question asking teachers' opinions about students' future study choices. Some students observed that they never discussed their choices with teachers, so we changed the question to include that as a possibility.

Finally, even if the collected data were anonymised, we could connect answers from the same person to the initial and final surveys.

5.2 Example of Results

For space reasons, we do not present here all the results obtained through the proposed evaluation tool. However, we describe an example of analysis that shows the need to connect the answers provided before and after the camp. Specifically, we show the results from the Digital Girls camp about the future study choices of the participants. Several questions were included in the survey to this aim. In particular, we asked participants, '*Do you plan to keep studying?*' and, in case of a positive answer, in which possible fields. In the analysis phase, we grouped participants' answers to create a dummy variable answering the direct question '*Do you plan to continue your studies in the ICT field?*', hereafter referred to as the *target question*.

The previously cited 'Digital Girls' camp took place in six different cities of the Emilia-Romagna region in Italy. For the scope of this simple analysis, we will consider answers from two cities. Figure 2 shows the answers to the target question for the two cities, named *City A* and *City B*. In the left part of the figure, we see the *target question* number and percentage of answers before the camp, while in the right part the answers after the camp.

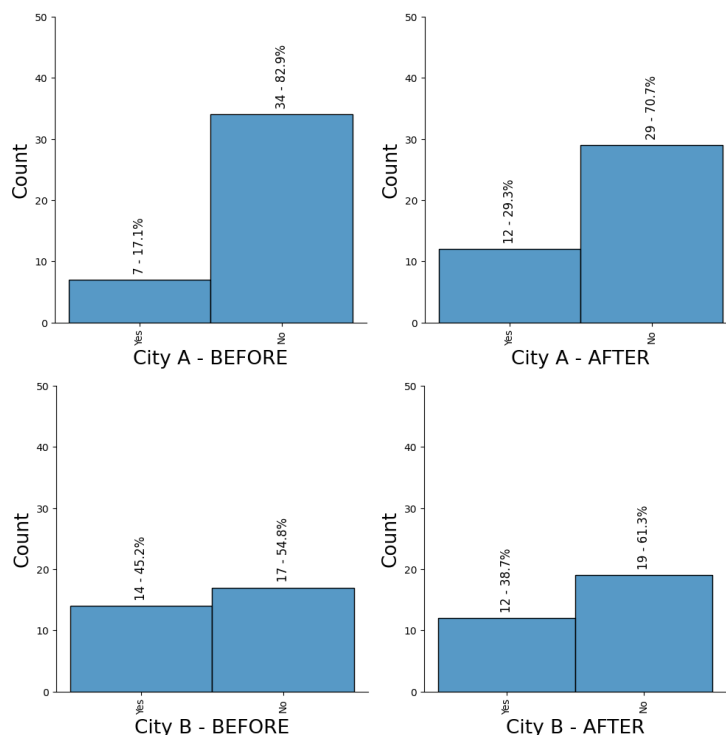


Figure 2: Results to Target Question Before and After the Camp For City A and City B

Analysing *City A* results, we see that five participants changed their answers from 'No' to 'Yes', and, given the camp's aim, this is a positive result since it means that 5 participants decided to include ICT fields in their possibilities for future studies. Instead, *City B* has an apparently negative result since 2 participants changed their answers from 'Yes' to 'No'.

In the absence of a connection between answers before and after camp, the only conclusion from this analysis is that *City B*'s performance is much worse than *city A*'s. Nevertheless, we can perform an in-depth comparison of the participants' opinions thanks to the connection between before and after results. In particular, we divided after camp answers into two groups: participants who answered 'No' and participants who answered 'Yes' to the *target question* before the camp.

Figure 3 shows the in-depth results for *City A* and *City B*. In the left part, Figure 3 shows results after the camp for *City A* and *City B* (as in Figure 2). In the middle part of the figure, the two graphs exhibit the answers of participants who chose 'No' before the camp. On the right side, the answers of those who chose 'Yes' before the camp are displayed.

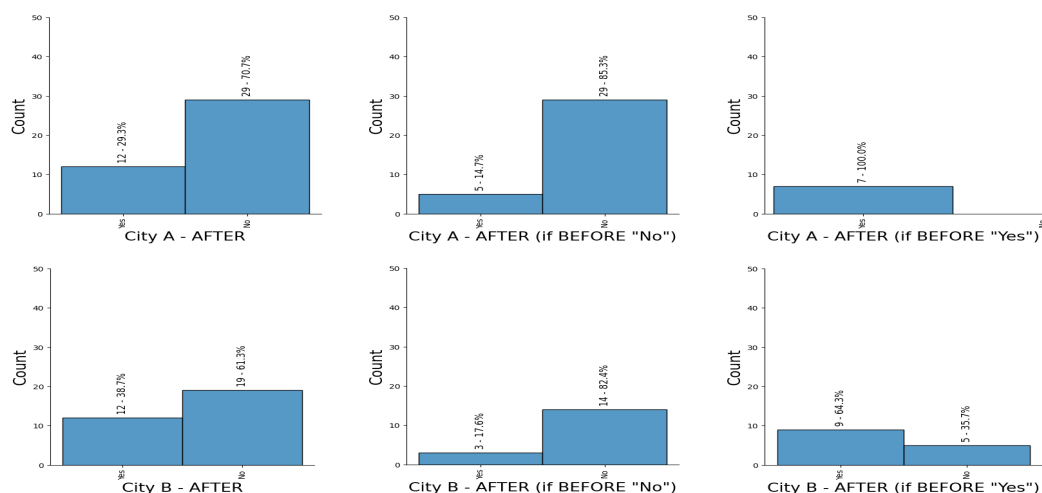


Figure 3: Results to Target Question Before and After With

This analysis confirms that in *City A* 5 participants changed their minds from 'No' to 'Yes'. Moreover, in *City A*, all the participants who answered 'Yes' before camp confirmed their choice. In the case of *City B*, 3 participants changed their minds and chose ICT after the camp. Interestingly, the percentage of participants changing their minds is almost the same (14.7% *City A*, 17.6% *City B*). However, in the case of *City B*, 5 participants who previously were interested in continuing their study in ICT said 'No' to the question after camp. To better understand the motivations behind the changes, we investigated the free-text answers given by the respondents. For example, the question 'If you changed your mind, please explain why' shows answers like 'I thought that ICT was only for geeky people' or 'ICT is more fun than I thought' among those who changed their choice positively. In particular, in the case of negative change, the free-text question shows answers like 'I understood that I do not like ICT' and 'Before, I only used ICT as a passive user and I thought it was something different'. It is worth noting that this should be considered a positive result in terms of study orientation. In fact, 8 participants of *City B's* camp now have a better idea of what to study in the future, eventually avoiding a dropout during academic studies.

This is just an example of possible meaningful insights that may be extracted by a well-designed evaluation tool.

6. Conclusions and Future Works

In this paper, we proposed an evaluation tool for measuring the impact of extracurricular activities aimed at attracting girls towards ICT fields. This work represents the initial step of a research line where the first proposal of the evaluation tool is described in terms of structure and design choices. The tool was tested in the context of two case studies, that are two summer camps belonging to a national and an international project carried out during the summer of 2022. To summarise, the main contributions of the paper are: the description of the research methodology that led to the design of the evaluation tool; the description of the evaluation tool structure that can be followed as a high-level guideline for replication in other camps; identification and discussion about some critical elements emerged by the evaluation tool application, along with suggestions to overcome these issues.

In future work, we plan to further improve the tool to obtain a complete instrument that can be released, along with guidelines, and easily adapted to be used in the evaluation of extracurricular activities to reduce the gender gap in ICT and STEM. First of all, we aim to experiment with a version of the questionnaires where the questions appear in a randomised order. In our survey, the questions, as stated, were grouped by category, so testing the usual survey and a randomised version could create an interesting A/B testing situation to verify possible accuracy improvements. Another future plan is to exploit the use of focus groups with participants after they answer the evaluation tool questions in order to capture their perception of potential critical elements that may be improved.

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‘Men are From Mars, and Women are From Venus’? Doctoral Students’ Perspectives on Doctoral Education

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Abstract: Gender influences the lives of doctoral students, shaping both their doctoral experience and their views on doctoral education. Following this argument, the purpose of this paper is to investigate gender differences in students’ perspectives of what doctoral education entails. The emphasis is on how and to what extent male and female students’ perspectives differ in reflecting changes in doctoral education’s concept, which appears to be shifting from traditional to instrumental. A study was conducted to determine how Portuguese doctoral students perceive doctoral education in terms of its structuring dimensions. The study’s findings, gathered through 11 focus groups interviews with 31 doctoral students from three Portuguese public universities, five scientific fields and evenly distributed by gender, suggested that a hybrid concept of doctoral education is valued, combining elements of its traditional concept and an instrumental concept. This hybridity, and even a propensity toward a more instrumental perspective, appeared to be particularly prevalent among female doctoral students. The paper advances some explanatory hypotheses for these trends while highlighting clues for future research.

Keywords: Doctoral Education, Student perceptions, Gender differences

1. Introduction

The emergence of the ‘modern University’ in the nineteenth century brought the institutionalisation of what is usually known as the ‘traditional’ doctorate. The doctorate was entirely focused on the development of original research, tendentially based on the understanding of phenomena within a given scientific field, and the primordial relationship between ‘apprentice and master’ (i.e., doctoral student and supervisor), constituting a ‘gateway’ to an academic career (Amaral and Carvalho, 2020; Deem, 2020). This concept remained relatively unchanged, particularly in Europe, until about two to three decades ago, when a combination of factors began to induce significant changes in doctoral education, including how it is perceived and conceptualised (Cardoso et al., 2020, 2022a, 2022c). The assumption of doctoral education as a strategic resource for the knowledge society/economy stands out among these factors. Doctoral education emerges as a means for countries to increase their capacity for innovation, research, and knowledge production to strengthen their competitive position in the knowledge society/economy. Doctoral education has evolved from a purely academic issue to one of interest and intervention at the supranational, national, and even institutional levels, with the goal of aligning it with the fulfilment of new political, economic, and social expectations (Kehm, 2020; Nerad, 2014). As a result, not only in quantitative terms, but also in substantive terms, doctoral education has changed, resulting in the assumption of new objectives and configurations, indicating the emergence of new concepts about what it is (or should be). Indeed, different concepts of doctoral education coexist today, represented on a *continuum* by the previously stated traditional concept at one extreme and an instrumental concept at the other (Cardoso et al., 2022a). This instrumental concept is associated with a shorter (in length), more diverse (in terms of typologies), regulated, structured, internationalised, trans- or multidisciplinary, practice-driven, applied research, and collaborative doctoral education, where results assume more ‘pragmatic’ alternatives to the doctoral thesis, and supervision and training are intended to provide competencies that allow for professional development and integration outside academia. The coexistence of these concepts is clear at the level of the dimensions that structure doctoral education (see Cardoso et al., 2022a): foundations (or bases, more theory or more practice driven); objectives (more basic or more applied research); methods/rationality (more disciplinary or more multidisciplinary); expertise (more individual or more collaborative); organisation (minor/absent or major doctorates’ structuring, diversification, and internationalisation); and process (minor/absent or major changes and regulation in access and recruitment, supervision, results, duration and completion, competencies, and employability).

Given this, it is important to understand how its ‘recipients’, i.e., doctoral students perceive doctoral education in relation to the transformations that shape its structuring dimensions and, ultimately, its concept. It is also critical to know whether students’ perspectives are generalisable or susceptible to differences motivated by

factors like gender. Indeed, gender influences doctoral students' lives, shaping both their doctoral experience and their perspectives on doctoral education itself (Brown & Watson, 2010).

1.1 Gender Differences in Doctoral Education Experience and Perspectives

Despite increasing gender equity in doctoral attendance and completion, the literature indicates that doctoral female candidates' expectations, participation in, and experience with doctoral education can differ significantly from that of male candidates. Several factors are at play here, ranging from the most personal, such as individual preferences and traits, to the social and cultural, such as gender stereotypes, to the systemic and institutional, which are related to the dominant culture of the higher education system and institutions (Brown & Watson, 2010; Cardoso et al., 2022b; Carter et al., 2013; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006).

Women face more challenges than men when pursuing doctoral education, such as the timing of the doctorate, the conflict between personal/family and academic demands, access to scientific events, or the supervisory relationship (Carter et al., 2013). Women experience more stress and conflict because of the demands and conciliation of their 'traditional' roles and studies, as well as having to deal with more complex life situations, typically related to increased childcare and family responsibilities, and frequent 'marginalisation' feelings and circumstances (Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter et al., 2013; Guest et al., 2013; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Doctoral studies' pedagogic practises and regimes are recognised to be gendered, whereas institutional and departmental culture, predominantly masculine (reflecting values associated with traditional Western masculinity, such as competition, status, time commitment, high work volume), is more prone to exclude women (Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter et al., 2013; Guest et al., 2013; Ipsos MORI, 2013). Women are more likely to feel 'marginalised', or 'ignored' by this culture and unsupported by university environments (Brown & Watson, 2010). A lack or deficient 'critical mass' of women, including faculty in general and supervisors in particular, can exacerbate these feelings (Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter et al., 2013). This is especially challenging given that the doctoral socialisation process involves negotiating acceptance into the academic culture, which entails identity shifts (Carter et al., 2013) and forging a professional identity (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006).

This framework may have a negative impact on women's doctoral pathways, including doctoral defences (Lantsoght, 2021), as well as professional and career paths, especially when pursuing a research career (Brown & Watson, 2010; Guest et al., 2013). Female candidates have a more negative perception of the doctoral defence, as well as more negative longer-term effects, and report higher levels of uneasiness and issues with defence committees (Lantsoght, 2021). Furthermore, while interest "in working at the university after receiving a PhD" appears to be "as great for women" as it is for men, "significantly fewer women" succeed (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003: 89; Guest et al., 2013; Ipsos MORI, 2013), particularly in fields such as STEM, which remain dominated by men (Cardoso et al., 2022b). Men are also more likely than women to work in non-academic research after completing their doctorates (Waaijer et al., 2016). Nonetheless, both men and women candidates tend to see doctoral work as intellectually stimulating, an opportunity for in-depth studies in a field of special interest, and meaningful, involving something important to others (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003). The freedom and flexibility involved in conducting research are also viewed positively (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003). Hence, the effects of gender are not always detrimental for women (Carter et al., 2013). This is also true when it comes to recognising the satisfaction that comes with pursuing doctoral work or the empowerment that comes with successful completion (Carter et al., 2013).

Despite the literature's important contributions to understanding how gender influences the lives and experiences of doctoral students, studies that investigate gender differences in students' perspectives and conceptions of what doctoral education entails are much rarer, and the authors were unable to identify any comprehensively. In this assumption, the paper seeks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field.

2. Method

To investigate gender differences in students' perceptions of what doctoral education entails, the paper analyses the findings of a study into how Portuguese doctoral students perceive doctoral education in terms of the above-mentioned structuring dimensions (Cardoso et al., 2022a, 2022c). The goal was to learn how doctoral students portrayed doctoral education in relation to each of these dimensions, whether in a more traditional or instrumental sense. The study gathered doctoral students' perspectives through focus groups interviews with a sample of students. This sample was drawn from the doctoral programmes chosen for the study's first empirical component (N=118 programmes), which focused on the universities' perspectives on doctoral education, using the intentional sampling method and aiming for sample representativeness regarding doctoral programme

scientific fields, and universities' nature (private/public) and geographic location. Following the literature's recommendations (Silva et al., 2014; Tong et al., 2007), the number of programmes, each corresponding to a focus group, was set at 11, with a total of 55 doctoral students from three public universities¹. Due to fieldwork constraints, doctoral students' perspectives were eventually gathered through 11 focus groups interviews with a total of 31 students from the three public universities, 11 doctoral programmes in different scientific fields, and evenly distributed by gender (Table 1).

Table 1: Sample's Distribution According to Public University, Doctoral Programme, and Scientific Field, by Gender

Variable		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Public University/Doctoral programme				
University X	Economy	2	2	4
	Astronomy	1	0	1
	Electrical and computer engineering	3	1	4
	Public health	1	3	4
subtotal		7	6	13
University Y	Political science	2	1	3
	Nanoscience and nanotechnology	1	0	1
	Civil Engineering	1	0	1
subtotal		4	1	5
University Z	Studies on globalization	1	3	4
	Neurosciences	0	3	3
	Medieval studies	1	0	1
	Industrial engineering	2	3	5
subtotal		4	9	13
Total		15	16	31

Each of the 31 interviews was given a number that corresponded to both the interviewee and the number assigned to each focus group (for example, Interviewee 1 of Panel 1 = I1P1). The content of interviews was coded using the qualitative data processing software NVivo and a pre-defined analysis grid based on previously identified structuring dimensions of doctoral education (Cardoso et al., 2022a). Each dimension corresponded in the grid to an analysis category and respective themes: foundations; objectives; methods or rationality; expertise; organisation (including structuring, diversification, and internationalisation); and process (including access and recruitment, supervision, results, duration and completion, competencies, and employability).

Content analysis (Selvi, 2019) allowed for the systematisation and interpretation of students' perspectives about doctoral education and its different dimensions. Gender differences in these perspectives were investigated using descriptive statistics.

3. Findings

This section provides an account of the 'big' picture of Portuguese students' perspectives on what doctoral education entails in terms of its structuring dimensions and concept, as well of the 'small' picture of the gender differences in these perspectives.

¹ To ensure confidentiality, universities are referred to as X, Y, and Z.

3.1 The 'Big' Picture

Portuguese doctoral students appear to value a hybrid concept of doctoral education, as evidenced by greater proximity or distance to the traditional concept of doctoral education, as well as by the combination of aspects of this concept with an instrumental one.

A greater distance from the traditional notion of doctoral education, and thus a closer relationship to an instrumental notion, was identified particularly in relation to the methods (rationality) and expertise associated with the doctorate, all aspects related to its organisation, and some specific features of its process.

Doctoral students appeared to value a doctoral education based on inter, trans, or multidisciplinary methods or rationality, as well as a more collaborative expertise enabled by contact and integration in research groups, including those from diverse scientific backgrounds. They also agreed on the structuring of doctoral education through the inclusion of a curricular component (doctoral course) in programmes; the diversification of these programmes, through different types of doctorates other than the research doctorate; and the internationalisation of the doctorate, particularly through the integration of doctoral students in international research environments.

Furthermore, doctoral students agreed on the existence of more detailed and objective criteria and requirements for candidate access and recruitment, as well as the possibility of doctoral research results being presented in formats other than the doctoral thesis, though this was not entirely ruled out. Students, on the other hand, came closer to a traditional concept of doctoral education in terms of supervision. This was suggested by the valorisation of an individual selection of the supervisor (by the candidate), based primarily on academic attributes; the view of co-supervision as only possible if it does not overlap or replace the primordial relationship 'master/apprentice' (supervisor/candidate); the apprehension toward the possibility of co-supervision provided by experts outside academia; the inconsistency with which other than the traditional supervision models (e.g., 'master/apprentice' relationship) were mentioned (e.g., plural orientation models); and the importance placed on 'traditional' supervisory roles and functions.

Doctoral students' perspectives also revealed the presence of a doctoral education concept that combined traditional and more instrumental concepts. This integrated concept was visible in relation to the foundations and objectives of doctoral education, as well as certain aspects of its process, such as degree completion and the competencies and employability it promotes. According to doctoral students, doctoral education was (or should be) based on theoretical and practical foundations (i.e., theory and practice-driven), with an emphasis on both basic and applied research. Furthermore, the 'short' duration of doctoral programmes (e.g., 3 to 4 years) was deemed adequate, even though the degree was thought to be completed through its traditional route (i.e., by public thesis defence exams), albeit with the possibility of a jury with a different composition than the usual one (i.e., inclusion of experts from outside the academia). Doctoral education was also perceived to promote both research and additional competencies (e.g., transversal competencies), as well as professional and career opportunities both within and outside of academia.

3.2 The 'Small' Picture

Gender appeared to influence the hybridity, and even the more instrumental perspective, of doctoral education held by Portuguese doctoral students. Hybrid and more instrumental conceptions emerged as more prevalent among female doctoral students, as evidenced by their positions on the foundations, objectives, and expertise of doctoral education, as well as aspects of its organisation related to the doctorate's diversification and internationalisation, and aspects of its process, specifically those concerning doctoral research results, degree completion, and competencies.

In this context, female students made a more systematic reference to, and thus agreed more than male students, with doctoral education being based on both theoretical and practical foundations (81.3% of all females vs. 73.3% of all males); applied research or the combination of applied and basic research (87.5% of all females vs. 73.3% of all males), and collaborative expertise (75% of all females vs. 66.7% of all males) (Table 2). The following transcripts demonstrate each of the trends identified in female students' discourse:

Doctoral education, in my opinion, should be oriented toward practise. There is a need for a theoretical foundation (...), but one that leads to real-life problem solving and application, which I believe is lacking, (...). I believe the emphasis should be on practise (...). (I5P3)

The doctoral objectives must be considered, but I believe the primary focus should be on applied [research] because we already have some foundations in basic research (...). (I13P4)

The doctoral work should result from the collaboration of multiple people, and we should conduct research activities as we do [the doctorate] (...) in order to grow as researchers (...). (I8P1)

Table 2: Dimensions of Doctoral Education: Gender Differences*

Dimension of doctoral education	Gender				Dimension totals (N=31)	
	Male (N=15)		Female (N=16)			
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Foundations: Combination of theoretical and practical foundations	11	73.3	13	81.3	24	77.4
Objectives: Applied research and combination of basic and applied research	11	73.3	14	87.5	25	80.6
Expertise: Collaborative expertise	10	66.7	12	75.0	22	70.9
Organisation/Diversification: Agreement with the diversification of doctoral education	8	53.3	10	62.5	18	58.1
Organisation/Internationalisation: Agreement with the internationalisation of doctoral education	13	86.7	15	93.8	28	90.3
Process/Access and recruitment: Greater definition, objectivity and detail of criteria and requirements for access and recruitment	14	93.3	12	75.0	26	83.9
Process/Results: Preference for thesis and/or other formats or just other formats, for the presentation of results	8	53.3	10	62.5	18	58.1
Process/Duration: Agreement with current duration (3-4 years) of doctoral education	12	80.0	8	50.0	20	64.5
Process/Completion: Diversification of the composition of the doctoral jury	7	46.7	10	62.5	17	54.8
Process/Competencies Additional competencies to those of research	5	33.3	11	68.8	16	51.6

* Percentages compared to total sample N: Male=14; Female=16; Total N=31

Female students also preferred doctorates that were more diversified (62.5% of all females vs. 53.3% of all males), i.e., included typologies other than the research doctorate, and internationalised, i.e., allowing for experiences and contact with international research contexts (93.8% of all females vs. 86.7% of all males) (Table 2). The transcripts below demonstrate these findings:

I think the variety of doctorate purposes and types is interesting. (...). The doctorate must evolve and adapt to the times, as long as the goal of knowledge generation remains constant. This, on the contrary, does not distort [the doctorate]. (I15P1)

The internationalisation (of doctoral programmes) is advantageous. (...) Having contact with other (international) contexts is beneficial because we are all studying the same area; (...) the more experiences we have from different contexts, the better, because we learn a lot. (I13P4)

Female doctoral students were also drawn to the ability to present doctoral results in various formats other than the doctoral thesis (62.5% of all females vs. 53.3% of all males); to defend the thesis before a jury even if not-strictly academic (62.5% of all females vs. 46.7% of all males); and to receive doctoral training that allowed for competencies other than research competencies (68.8% of all females vs. 33.3% of all males) (Table 2). These positions are exemplified by the following:

A doctoral thesis, in my opinion, is always appropriate, though other methods of presenting the results, such as in articles, are also appropriate (I12P2)

I support the thesis defence in front of a jury. (...) I don't think it matters whether the person (on the jury) is a member of the academy or not, as long as (the person) is focused on the area in which we are working. (...) it turns out to be (...) irrelevant whether it is a member of the academy or not (...). (I6P3)

I believe that other types of competencies, other than research, should be included in the training that is provided (...). So, I believe that other competencies, such as transversal competencies, should be included as an added value (...). There should be a set of optional curricular units where we can (...) acquire [those competencies]. (...) It would be an asset (...), and I don't believe it would distort the definition of a doctorate (...). (I15P1)

Only in two aspects of the doctoral education process, namely access and recruitment for and duration of doctorates, did male doctoral students outperform their female colleagues. Male students revealed greater preference for more well-defined, objective, and detailed criteria and requirements for candidate access and recruitment (93.3% of all males vs. 75% of all females) (Table 2). Male doctoral students were also more likely to agree with the current duration of doctoral programmes (from 3 to 4 years) and, thus, a shorter duration than what has long been associated with the doctorate (80% of all males vs. 50%). The following transcripts from male doctoral students' discourses demonstrate this:

(...) The criteria are well defined, and we submit motivation letters, recommendation letters, and final master's classifications. (...) I agree that criteria exist (and) that they must be objective and transparent. (I14P4)

I am confident that the way (...) the programmes are structured, we will be able to complete it within that time frame. Of course, this is dependent on how we plan and what we want to accomplish with our thesis. (...). But, yes, (I agree with those three years); those three years are the bare minimum; if we want to stay longer, that is up to us. (I4P3)

There were no relevant gender differences in the remaining aspects related to the dimensions of doctoral education, namely methods or rationality, structuring (organisation), supervision (process), and employability (process). As a result, differences according to gender and scientific field were not sought.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The primary goal of the paper was to investigate gender differences in students' perceptions of what doctoral education entails, including its structuring dimensions and concept. Based on the findings, it was possible to confirm that, in terms of these perspectives, male and female students do not come from 'different planets', that is, the former 'from Mars' and the latter 'from Venus'. Indeed, there is a convergence in students' perspectives in that they value a hybrid concept of doctoral education that deviates from its traditional definition while also moving closer to an instrumental one. However, for most of the structuring dimensions of doctoral education, this concept appears to be especially prevalent among female doctoral students. In a slightly more expressive way than their male counterparts, female students value a doctoral education that is more grounded in practical foundations, applied research, or its combination with basic research, and collaborative expertise. They also agree more with a greater diversification of doctoral programmes, including doctorates other than the research doctorate; the presentation of the results of doctoral research in formats other than a thesis; the defence of doctoral work before a jury likely to be composed of non-academic members; and a doctoral training capable of providing not only research competencies but also additional competencies (e.g., transversal competencies).

Some hypotheses can be advanced to explain why female students are more likely to emphasise characteristics of the hybrid or instrumental concepts of doctoral education. One of the reasons could be an attempt by female students to get closer to a concept of doctoral education that they perceive or acknowledge as the most valued by a predominantly male academic culture (Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter et al., 2013; Guest et al., 2013). The concept of doctoral education at issue here appears to correspond to mode 2 of knowledge production, which is currently dominant and characterised by experiential, collaborative, and transdisciplinary processes (Coghlan, 2014). Multidisciplinary research is called upon in Mode 2 to work on specific real-world problems for knowledge production. The stronger tendency for female students to be more aligned with Mode 2 of knowledge production may be related to a perception of greater difficulty in entering the labour market by women with a doctoral degree, leading them to emphasise the need to transform doctoral education (Cardoso et al, 2022b; Waaijer et al., 2016).

On the other hand, valuing those concepts of doctoral education may be a manifestation of a female student's attempt to align with a doctoral education ideal that would be more favourable to or easier to pursue for them, or to facilitate their entry into a labour market outside academia. According to the literature, women may face greater obstacles (references from the paper's background) on their path to completing their doctoral studies, which they tend to approach differently than men (Bireda, 2015). In this sense, the aspects of doctoral education

that female students value more than their male counterparts may constitute the elements of an ideal doctorate that would ease such path.

Nonetheless, some preferences may be explained by additional reasons. The preference for doctoral education that provides competencies other than the research ones may be related, as other studies indicate (Bireda, 2015), to a concern about the doctorate's ability to provide competencies sought as important in the current context of knowledge production. That is the case with time management, which is regarded as essential for balancing doctoral studies with personal and social responsibilities, as well as interaction with supervisors and colleagues (Bireda, 2015). Other competencies valued by female doctoral students include "digital literacy, using research software, research and academic writing skills" (Bireda, 2015: 291).

Furthermore, the emphasis on acquiring competencies other than research competencies may be the result of increased awareness of the difficulties in entering the academic career and the resulting need for more tailored training to the needs of the job market outside of academia. Indeed, especially since the 2008 financial crisis, a more adverse academic employment environment has emerged in Portugal (Cardoso et al., 2022b). The stagnation of the higher education system, with a decrease in the need to recruit academics; the decline in institutions' need to qualify their staff (with variations across sectors and disciplines); and the closure of the academic career in terms of new hires, promotions, and replacements due to significant cuts in public funding - reduced higher education's capacity to absorb doctoral graduates, particularly new graduates (Cardoso et al., 2022b; Carvalho et al, 2022).

Finally, the preference for the presentation of the results of doctoral research in a thesis but also other formats as well as for a doctoral exam jury likely to be composed of non-academic members may be explained by the more negative feelings and attitudes female students tend to share regarding the doctoral defence (Lantsoght, 2021). However, it may also be related to the difficulties in entering the academic career as well as establishing contacts and disseminating the results of their research to other potential employers outside academia.

Although the current study adds to our understanding of how gender influences students' perspectives and conceptions of what doctoral education is (or should be), the authors believe that more research is needed. Similar studies could be conducted with doctoral students at additional universities to get the full picture, as well as studies that included other quantitative (e.g., questionnaires, scales, etc.) and qualitative methodologies (e.g., individual interviews, life stories).

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Gender Equality Plan: An Explorative Analysis of Italian Academia

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Abstract: Since 2015, the European Union, always sensitive to gender issues, has been recommending and actively supporting the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in academic and research organisations: a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality through a process of structural change. Moreover, the European Commission recognises GEPs as an eligibility criterion for participation in all Horizon Europe calls for research and innovation. Gender issues in academia are particularly topical in Italy. According to the last Global Gender Gap Report, in terms of economic participation and opportunities, Italy ranks 110th out of a total of 146 states, after several developing countries. In the country, even though women outnumber men among graduate students, a strong inequality in superior grades of the academic careers persists. In compliance with Decree No. 2/2019, and in line with EU-COM No.152/2020, Italian universities are required to adopt a GEP, which identifies the strategy of individual universities for gender equality. Consequently, most Italian universities have implemented their first GEP edition in last two years. Despite the growing attention to gender issues in academia, studies on GEP implementation and content are still scarce. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the implementation of GEPs in Italian universities by responding to the following research question: (RQ1) What is the state of the art about GEPs in Italian universities? Content analysis will be employed to identify to what extent universities have disclosed the information related to their GEPs. The study consists of the analysis of the total population of 67 Italian public universities that have been drafted referring to the period 2019-2025 (except for one GEP drawn up for 2015-2021). Results highlight that most universities easily disclose information on goals, actions, beneficiaries and institutional members and that universities seem to have difficulties in identifying the subjects operationally involved in the plan implementation, the financial resources and the expected results of the policies adopted for each action. This paper is original for two reasons. First, it provides insights into GEPs as a novelty strategic tool. Second, it represents the first empirical study that provides an overview of the GEPs' structure and contents, with a focus on Italian academia.

Keywords: Gender equality plan, Diversity, Gender gap, Universities, Empirical research

1. Introduction

Gender issues in higher education institutions have attracted considerable attention from scholars and public institutions over the last few decades (Clavero, Galligan, 2021; Sales Oliveira, Augusto, 2017; Osborn et al., 2000; Council of the EU, 2015, 2020; EIGE, 2016). Nowadays, the greater participation of women in all sectors of society is evidenced (WEF, 2006 and 2022), particularly in developed countries. However, these advances have not occurred proportionally. Emerging evidence has highlighted the strongest gender inequalities in academia across the world (Teichler, Höhle, 2013; Górska et al., 2020). In this sector, the under-representation of women in senior academic positions, such as professors and university rectors, represents the most visible manifestation of gender discrimination (Van den Brink, Benschop, 2012; Clavero, Galligan, 2021; Teelken et al., 2021), but it represents only the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the pre-existing inequalities (European Union, 2021). In fact, scholars have demonstrated that women academics have been disproportionately affected by pandemic-related changes (Górska et al., 2021; Boncori, 2020; Guy, Arthur, 2020).

With the aim of reducing the gap, a number of measures and policies have been implemented by institutions at different levels: international, regional and single states. In this sense, the European Union (EU), always sensitive to gender issues (Osborn et al., 2000; Council of the EU, 2015, 2020; EIGE, 2016), has been recommending and actively supporting the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in academic and research organisations: a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality through a process of structural change (EIGE, 2016). Furthermore, the European Commission recognises GEPs as an eligibility criterion for participation in all Horizon Europe calls for research and innovation.

Italian academia is a productive research setting for the study of gender issues. According to the last Global Gender Gap Report (WEF, 2022), in terms of economic participation and opportunities, Italy ranks 110 out of a total of 146 States, behind several developing countries. Even though women graduate students outnumber men in Italy, top academic positions are an area in which inequality clearly persists (Morana, Sagradora, 2021).

In compliance with Decree No. 2/2019, and in line with EU-COM No.152/2020, Italian universities are required to adopt a GEP, which identifies the strategy of individual universities for gender equality. In this regard, in 2021, CRUI (Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities) published a vademecum containing guidelines and suggestions for GEP drafting. As a result, most Italian universities have implemented their first GEP in the last two years. Despite the growing attention to gender issues in academia, studies on GEP implementation and content are still scarce (Clavero and Galligan, 2021). Therefore, this paper aims to explore the implementation of GEPs in Italian universities by responding to the following research question:

(RQ1) What is the state of the art as regards GEPs in Italian universities?

To accomplish the research goals a content analysis was employed (Krippendorff, 2018). The study consists of the analysis of 67 Italian public universities in order to map out the propagation of their GEPs and analyse the content of those that have been drafted with reference to the period 2019-2025 (only one case for 2015-2021).

According to the main findings, most analysed universities easily disclose information about their objectives, actions, beneficiaries and institutional members. At the same time, more difficulties appear in identifying those operationally involved in the plan's implementation, the financial resources and the expected results of the policies adopted for each action.

2. The Gender Equality Plan Background

In 2022, the EU's Gender Equality Index score was 68.6 points out of 100 (EIGE, 2022). Data clearly show that gender equality has still not been achieved, despite the improvements made since the ETAN report was published (Osborn et al., 2000; European Commission, 2021). Prevailing gender inequality is especially apparent in the area of Research and Innovation (R&I) where women students are decidedly thin on the ground in certain disciplines and scientific spheres and where women are poorly represented in senior academic posts and on the boards and committees of R&I institutions. Furthermore, companies and start-ups of a scientific nature — concerned, for example, with technology or engineering — also reveal a lack of women researchers (European Commission, 2021).

Since 2012, the European Commission's strategy on gender equality in R&I in the European research area (ERA) framework has been grounded on three aims: promoting gender equality in scientific careers; guaranteeing gender balance in decision-making processes and bodies; incorporating the gender dimension in R&I content.

In pursuit of these goals, in 2015 and again in 2020, the EU invited Member States and research funding organisations to provide incentives with a view to encourage research performing organisations, including universities, to focus on gender equality and mainstreaming strategies, including with a GEP and the integration of the gender dimension into R&I content (Council of the EU, 2015 and 2020). A GEP is a systematic and strategic measure which defines the priorities and the specific targets to be achieved, based on a detailed assessment of the current situation; it also specifies the action to be taken in order to improve gender equality in R&I organisations (EIGE, 2016).

A further step in that direction was taken in 2021 with the launch of Horizon Europe (HE) — the key funding program for research and innovation. A new eligibility criterion was introduced to strengthen gender equality as a priority: organisations applying for HE funds are required to have a GEP in place. This criterion should be complied with by the following categories of legal entities: research funding bodies (national ministries and other public authorities), higher education institutions and research organisations (both public and private).

The European Commission indicated four compulsory requirements for a GEP: to be a public document available on the organisation's website, to include the dedicated human and financial resources constituting the means and expertise to implement the gender policies, to include data collection and monitoring sex-disaggregated data on personnel (teaching staff, researchers, technical-administrative staff) and to include training activities on gender equality for the whole organisation.

Moreover, there are five gender equality areas that a GEP should seek to address: 1) work-life balance and organisational culture; 2) gender balance in leadership and decision-making; 3) gender equality in recruitment and career progression; 4) integrating the gender dimension into research and teaching content; 5) measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment. Furthermore, for each area, it is desirable to provide a clear definition of the objectives and to list the actions designed to achieve them, specifying indicators, targets, timelines, sharing of responsibilities and allocation of resources (EIGE, 2016).

By specifying these requirements, the Horizon Europe eligibility criterion has put GEPs at the top of the agenda of organisations in the R&I sector. As a result, European universities which require access to funds have to implement a GEP.

In the literature, GEPs have been criticised as an ineffective policy tool for resolving issues of gender in academia. Sales Oliveira and Augusto (2017) argue that the inadequate involvement of key stakeholders in the process integral to a GEP is the main reason for this failure. Clavero and Galligan (2021) show that insufficient attention is paid to the role of academic power in creating gender unfairness at all institutional levels and the role of organisational culture in the perpetuation of gender inequalities. The fact that an institution has a GEP in place does not in itself guarantee the existence of a set of suitable policies to promote gender fairness (O'Connor, 2020; Clavero, Galligan, 2021). Universities may decide to implement GEP measures for reasons which have little to do with a commitment to justice and equality: for instance, with a view to remain competitive on the global market (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019), or because they are legally obliged to do so (Ikävalko & Kantola, 2017). In fact, the existence of a GEP is a positive factor in applying for research funds — such as in the case of the HE program — and in attracting talented staff and greater numbers of prospective students (Clavero, Galligan, 2021).

Nonetheless, GEPs are also recognised as an essential means of creating gender equality awareness and serving to promote cultural change (Barros et al., 2018; EIGE, 2016). According to Clavero and Galligan (2021) the process of producing a GEP may offer an organisation opportunities for adjusting the power balance between genders. This process in itself can raise awareness of gender inequalities through quantitative and qualitative data collection. Furthermore, the process may create inclusive spaces for discussion, learning and cooperation, fostering a commitment to gender equality on the part of students and staff at different levels of the organisation (Clavero, Galligan, 2021). All together, these activities have the potential to promote an active sense of belonging and to ensure a shared commitment to institutional change (Ovseiko et al., 2017).

In light of these considerations and given the recent introduction of GEPs, more empirical research is needed to assess their effect on the universities' strategies to tackle the gender gap (Clavero and Galligan, 2021). However, studies should first consider the analysis of GEPs diffusion and their main characteristics. With that in mind, this paper aims to fill this gap, analysing the current state of GEPs in Italian academia.

3. Methodology

Content analysis has been employed (Krippendorff, 2018) to identify to what extent universities have disclosed the information related to their GEP and mapping the compliance with Decree No. 2/2019, and in line with EU-COM No.152/2020. The study consists in analysing 67 Italian public universities to map out the diffusion of GEPs and analyse the content of those drafted referring to the period 2022-2024. The research process has been divided into three parts. The first step was to verify that the total population of 67 Italian public universities was registered by the CENSIS (Italian centre for social investment studies) according to the classification in terms of large, mega, medium, and small universities and Polytechnics based on the number of students enrolled.

This analysis led to the elimination of 9 universities that were not registered by the CENSIS. The second step was to extract and collect the published GEP, and we found that 6 out of 67 universities did not draw up the document; therefore, there are 59 published GEPs. Finally, the third step was to analyse the content of the GEPs in terms of the time period, number of pages, language(s) adopted, GEP team, GEP context analysis, strategic areas, coherence with the areas suggested by CRUI, and for each area: goals, actions, sub-actions, direct and indirect targets, institutional and operationally responsible, human, logistic and financial resources, output, outcome, timeline, KPIs and their evaluations, priority and SDGs. These factors represent the contents (mandatory and not) of how a GEP action sheet should be drafted according to the CRUI (Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities) suggestions. Moreover, we have included another element of analysis such as the presence of the SDGs which indicate the link between the forecasted goals to meet gender equality with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Successively, a descriptive statistics analysis was performed.

4. Findings

In a sample of 58 universities, 89.65% of universities have published the GEP; while 10.35% have not published the document. Therefore, the final sample consists of 18 large universities, 15 medium universities, 10 mega universities, 6 small universities, and 3 polytechnics (Table 1).

GEPs have been mainly published by universities located in the northern region (21), followed by those located in the south (16); while, in the centre and in the islands, 12 and 3 GEPs have been published, respectively (Table 2). The universities that have not published a GEP are mainly located in the south of Italy (3 out of 6), followed by universities located respectively in the centre (2 out of 6) and in the north (1 out of 6) of the country. Moreover, these universities are mainly large universities (4 out of 6), followed by one medium and one mega university.

The territorial dimension was determined according to the definition used by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). Marche, Lazio, Umbria and Tuscany belong to the central region. Valle D'Aosta Piemonte, Liguria, Lombardia, Emilia Romagna, Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia belong to the northern region. Finally, Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia, Campania, Molise and Abruzzo belong to the southern region, and Sardinia and Sicily to the islands.

Table 1: Number of GEPs by Universities' Size

Size	n	%
Large University	18	34.62
Medium University	15	28.85
Mega University	10	19.23
Small University	6	11.54
Polytechnic	3	5.77

Table 2: Number of GEPs by Geographic Localisation

Geographic localisation	n	%
North	21	40,39
Centre	12	23,08
South	16	30,76
Islands	3	5,77

With regard to the GEPs' general information, Table 3 shows the GEPs' number of pages. Polytechnics, on average, have published the GEPs with the highest number of pages (72.66), with a minimum value of 60 and a maximum value of 86. While, medium universities, on average, have published the GEPs with the least amount of pages (31.93), with a minimum value of 15 and a maximum value of 52.

Based on the estimated time for the achievement of forecasted goals (Table 4), large universities, on average, seem to require the most time (2.66 years) to undertake the actions devoted to reducing the gender gap, with a minimum value of 2 years and a maximum value of 6 years; while, small universities seem to require less time (2.16 years) to implement actions, with a minimum value of 3 years and a maximum value of 2 years.

Table 5 shows that only 6 large (11.53%), 4 medium (7.69%), 4 mega (7.69%), and 3 small (5.76%) universities have published a GEP in both Italian and English. Moreover, it results that only one polytechnic has published the document only in English. While, 12 large (23.07%), 11 medium (21.15%), 6 mega (11.53%), 3 small (5.76%), and 2 polytechnic (3.84%) have published a GEP only in Italian.

Table 6 provides information on the number of universities that have inserted the context analysis into their GEP. Data shows that only 18 universities (about 34.61% of the sample) have provided a full context analysis; while 4 universities (about 7.69% of the sample) have provided the analysis but only partially. In addition, 30 universities (about 57.69% of the sample) have not provided information on the context analysis.

Based on the compliance (Table 7) with Decree No. 2/2019, and in line with EU-COM No.152/2020, the results show that 27 universities (about 55.76% of the sample) have fully reported the thematic areas required by the Decree; while 25 universities (about 44.23% of the sample) have reported the areas but with some changes. The main changes regard the introduction of one or more strategic areas such as institutional communication, the strengthening of gender-related activities and skills, or organisational culture and gender communication, and a different denomination of the areas than the one proposed by the CRUI.

Table 8 shows the number of universities that have disclosed the information regarding the members of the team responsible for drafting the document in their GEPs. Specifically, data shows that 44 universities (about 84.61%) have disclosed this information.

Table 3: GEPs' Pages Number

	Mean	Std. dv.	Max	Min
Large University	40.222	20.758	70	10
Medium University	31.933	10.457	52	15
Mega University	44.600	19.022	90	27
Small University	39.333	21.878	62	11
Polytechnic	72.667	13.013	86	60

Table 4: Foreseen Time for GEPs' Realisation

	Mean	Std. dv.	Max	Min
Large University	2.667	1.029	6	2
Medium University	2.2	0.414	3	2
Mega University	2.4	0.516	3	2
Small University	2.167	0.408	3	2
Polytechnic	2.333	0.577	3	2

Table 5: GEPs' Languages

	Only Italian	Only English	Italian and English
Large University	12	0	6
Medium University	11	0	4
Mega University	6	0	4

	Only Italian	Only English	Italian and English
Small University	3	0	3
Polytechnic	2	1	0

Table 6: Presence of GEPs' Context Analysis

	Yes	No	Partial
Large University	9	8	1
Medium University	3	11	1
Mega University	2	7	1
Small University	2	4	0
Polytechnic	2	0	1

Table 7: Compliance With Strategic Areas Proposed by CRUI

	Yes	No
Large University	6	11
Medium University	9	6
Mega University	5	4
Small University	4	2
Polytechnic	3	0

Table 8: Presence of GEP Team in the Document

	Yes	No
Large University	13	5
Medium University	13	2
Mega University	9	1
Small University	6	0
Polytechnic	3	0

Table 9 shows the universities' compliance with the GEPs' required contents. The sample consists of 46 universities out of 52. In fact, 6 universities have been eliminated from the sample due to missing data regarding

the GEPs' analysis sheet. In fact, most of these universities did not disclose data regarding the area of gender equality in recruitment and career progression.

Specifically, focusing on the mandatory aspects of the document (recognisable in the table by the asterisk *), data show that the indication of the areas regarding the work-life balance and organisational culture (area 1), the gender balance in leadership and decision-making (area 2), the gender equality in recruitment and career progression (area 3), the integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content (area 4) and the measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment (area 5), are information disclosed by 100% of the sample. For each strategic area, universities seem to be able to identify the goals to reach and the actions to implement in favour of gender equality processes in organisations. Moreover, most of the universities have highlighted, in their GEP, the main beneficiaries and the institutions responsible for the strategies devoted to reducing and guaranteeing gender equality with percentages that range from 93.47% to 97.82%. A high percentage have been registered also in the information regarding the deadline to achieve the forecasted actions and KPIs useful to monitor and measure their accomplishment.

However, universities seem to have issues in identifying how human and financial resources can contribute to the realisation of gender equality, the operational responsibility for the effective realisation of the plan, and the outcome in terms of social and economic changes generated in the organisation. In fact, the percentage of universities that have disclosed these issues ranges from 45.65% to 67.39%.

Finally, universities seem to report little content regarding sub-actions, indirect targets, logistic resources, output, KPIs evaluation process, goals priority and SDGs. This result could be related to the fact that this information is not compulsory to disclose.

Table 9: Compliance With the GEPs' Contents

	Universities (n=46)				
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5
Thematic area*	46	46	46	46	46
Goals*	43	43	43	43	43
Actions*	45	45	45	45	44
Sub-actions	20	18	18	18	19
Direct Target*	43	43	43	42	43
Indirect Target	24	23	24	24	24
Institutional Responsible*	43	44	44	44	44
Operational Responsible*	29	27	27	28	28
Human resources*	22	21	21	22	21
Logistic resources	4	3	4	5	5
Financial resources*	24	23	23	24	26
Output	21	21	21	21	21
Outcome*	30	30	31	30	30

	Universities (n=46)				
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5
Timeline*	41	41	41	41	41
KPIs*	41	40	40	41	42
KPIs Evaluation Procedure	6	6	6	6	6
Priority	6	6	6	6	6
SDGs	23	24	24	24	24

5. Conclusions

According to the definition of the European Commission, GEPs are considered a document concerning a set of actions integrated into the organisational strategic vision, useful to identify: gender distortions and inequalities; implement innovative strategies to overcome these issues; define objectives; and monitor their achievement through suitable indicators. The intent of a plan for gender equality, the areas of intervention and the issues to be addressed can vary depending on the specific situations in which they are implemented. What can be a good idea for one university is not necessarily the best choice for another. This means that, within the scope of their autonomy, universities cannot choose to broaden the actions and/or other types of discrimination as long as the policies are clearly defined. In this context, considering that gender equality is a fundamental value of the European Union and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which benefits research and innovation (R&I), is able to attract and retain talent, ensures that everyone can maximise their potential, and supports democratic and equitable societies, it becomes pivotal to understand how universities are taking action for gender equality.

This paper aims to identify to what extent universities have disclosed the information related to the GEPs to investigate their compliance with the requirements established by UE.

What emerged is that 6 universities (about 11.53% of the sample) have not drafted a GEP yet. This data is worrying because universities are required to draft the Positive Action Plan (PAP) that requires, as a continuation of the Gender balance sheet, the mandatory adoption of a GEP. This is even more important considering that a GEP represents a mandatory document for participation in all Horizon Europe calls for research and innovation. Therefore, universities lacking a GEP miss the opportunity to have access to one of the most ambitious and advanced tools to foster transnational scientific collaboration and mobility in Europe (such as the Horizon Europe program) and ignore their role in being part of the social, economic and environmental change promoted by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Focusing the attention on the universities that have published a GEP, it emerged that 6 GEPs out of 52 had been drafted in a way that does not allow the comparison. This result shows that there is still confusion on how the document has to be drafted and what it should contain. However, the CRUI has published a document comprising all the instructions to follow to elaborate a GEP; therefore, universities should pay more attention to what is suggested by such an important institution.

Finally, with regard to compliance with the GEPs' contents, we found that the components of a GEP that are mainly disclosed are the five areas of intervention defined by the European Commission.

For each area, universities mainly provide information on the goals, actions, main beneficiaries and institutional members. Conversely, almost half of the sample seems to have difficulties in identifying the subjects operationally involved in the drafting and effective implementation of the stated actions, the financial resources intended for the implementation of the plan and the expected results of the policies adopted for each action. On the one hand, these results show that universities are aware of their situation on issues related to gender inequalities, how to manage and collect data to identify objectives geared toward achieving gender equality based on the starting situation and how to prepare an action plan, which defines how these objectives will be

achieved. On the other hand, it seems that universities are still reluctant to allocate financial resources to reduce the gender gap, and to identify offices or specific people solely responsible for carrying out actions devoted to promoting an equilibrium between men and women.

The contribution is advanced scientific knowledge about the adoption of a GEP as a novel instrument in academia. The study also suggests to university managers the need to accurately satisfy the compulsory requirements of GEPs to improve the disclosure, and to be more conscious about the importance of implementing GEPs to obtain funds to develop their research missions. Furthermore, the study can help policymakers to understand how universities can be helped to implement actions to overcome gender inequalities in academia.

The study has some limitations. First, the exploratory analysis focused on the compliance contents of GEPs, while other research could analyse what actions should be undertaken to address gender inequalities. Second, the study focused on the Italian context; it could be interesting to examine the implementations of GEPs with a comparative perspective at the European level. Third, the study observed the GEPs in their first versions; future longitudinal studies will better understand the evolution of this practice and observe the changes over time. Considering the above limitations, the next step of our research is going more in-depth on the subject, analysing the kind of thematic areas and key actions included in the GEPs to identify and address gender inequalities. Doing so, we expect to contribute to the literature debate around gender issues through an in-depth analysis of GEPs with a specific focus on academia as a field requiring further study (Clavero, Galligan, 2021).

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On Leggings and Lemongrass Shots: How Momfluencing Perpetuates the Feminine Mystique

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Abstract: In this paper, I situate the Instagram ‘momfluencing’ industry within Betty Friedan’s framework of the feminine mystique, specifically the sexual sell. The sexual sell is the concept of targeting housewives for profit, promising identity and fulfilment in exchange for product purchase. I bring this into conversation with the momfluencing industry by integrating Friedan’s research on the impact of 1950s women’s magazines with modern research on the impact of social media advertisements (specifically through influencers) on women. Then, I apply my comparative work to some of the most popular momfluencers. I claim that while advertisements today do not appeal so explicitly to a woman’s rightful place in the home, the sexual sell has not been eradicated—it has mutated. What makes the momfluencer different (and more dangerous) than the straightforward magazines of the 1950s is her marketing approach: she is not just selling products. Rather, she brands herself and she is the product. Furthermore, I illustrate how momfluencing has armed and mobilized the sexual sell by exploiting the existing identity crises in women. Their lack of fulfilment is what feeds, and has always fed, the feminine mystique. I then state that because the momfluencer can only succeed at the financial and emotional expense of other women, the industry is ultimately destructive. While the momfluencing industry has the potential to be a powerful feminist play with its opportunities for women entrepreneurs, its rampant success must be interrogated: Why is the flawless housewife who ‘has it all’ still the picture of achievement for women? This leads to my conclusion that despite isolated empowerment to the momfluencer herself, the success of her industry limits the role of women everywhere because it squanders women’s identities while capping their potentials at housewifery, impeding progress that could be made otherwise. By showcasing unachievable domestic fantasies and capitalising on women’s lack of fulfilment, the momfluencing industry perpetuates Friedan’s feminine mystique.

Keywords: Feminine mystique, Sexual sell, Social media, Momfluencer, Instagram

1. Introduction

In 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (2010, p. 38) unearthed the culturally embedded myth that ‘the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity.’ This myth, aptly named the ‘feminine mystique,’ encompasses heteronormative cultural ideas surrounding the nuclear family and the so-called nature of women – namely, docile submissiveness within the tunnel vision of housewifery. Under this philosophy, a life outside of the home spoils a woman’s femininity, rejecting her biologically branded destiny (Friedan, 2010, pp. 38, 223). The feminine mystique’s undercurrents are exceptionally strong in advertising, bolstered by a marketing tactic which Friedan (2010, p. 181) terms the ‘sexual sell.’ Through ‘deceptively simple, clever, outrageous ads and commercials,’ the sexual sell siphons women’s purchasing power, which today accounts for 85% of consumer spending in the United States (Friedan, 2010, p. 201; Purchasing Power of Women, 2020). These advertisements peddle counterfeit gratification to unhappy housewives by presenting products as shortcuts to feminine fulfilment (Friedan, 2010, p. 182). A Pyrex advertisement from the 1950s captures the essence of the sexual sell: See Figure 1.

Numerous details above scream for feminist criticism – for example, the apron over her wedding dress, her bent-over stance, the erroneous exclamation at the top left – but the most important, and destructive, element of the ad is more subtle. The second paragraph of the copy states, ‘The not-so-glamorous tasks of the kitchen become fun, too, with Pyrex’ (Vishnu, 2021). Pyrex is exploiting housewives’ dissatisfaction with their limited yet exhausting daily tasks, promising that ‘just one dish’ will ‘make failure-free cooking easy’ (Vishnu, 2021). With a heavy gesture to bigger issues than dinner prep, this begs the question: *Does* an all-in-one grease-expelling casserole pan *actually* solve a woman’s problems? In this paper, I will answer this question by bringing the sexual sell into contemporary conversation with the social media influencing industry.



Figure 1: 1950s Pyrex Advertisement (Vishnu, 2021)

2. Momfluencing as the Modern Sexual Sell

The influencing industry extends and complicates Friedan's discussion on the sexual sell. While advertisements today do not appeal so explicitly to a woman's rightful place in the home, the sexual sell has not been eradicated – it has mutated. The Instagram influencer, the face of modern marketing, *influences* followers' lives and purchases through posting 'advertorials,' sponsored content of products that they review and endorse (Abidin, 2016, p. 3). The most popular influencer accounts, such as @hudabeauty and @chiaraferragni, boast over 25 million followers (Schaffer, 2021). While every influencer has their specialty, such as beauty, fashion, or fitness, there is a certain brand that seems pervasively popular: that of the influencer housewife, or 'momfluencer,' as she has been nicknamed. The majority of her followers are female. She endorses gluten-free face serums and pebble ice machines. She plasters her grid with pictures of children clad in organic cotton and proffers discount codes on luxury leggings. Her goal, not far from the 1950s ads Friedan criticizes, is to sway her followers through 'highly gendered content and practices' that suggest she is a woman who 'has it all' – the house with the white picket fence, the loyal husband and stable income, the litter of children filling the home, and so on (Chae, 2017, p. 258). Through 'the monetization of motherhood as identity,' she is the modern incarnate of the sexual sell (Petersen, 2021). Despite isolated empowerment to the momfluencer herself, the success of her industry limits women's progress on a large scale. The momfluencing industry showcases unachievable domestic fantasies and capitalises on women's lack of fulfilment through the sexual sell, thus perpetuating Friedan's feminine mystique.

2.1 Affective Expertise and Vicarious Living

Like anyone else working a full-time job, a momfluencer's career absorbs most of her day, but unlike anyone else, she must make it look effortless. This is what Jezer-Morton (2021) terms 'affective expertise,' the

tightrope a momfluencer must balance between authenticity and aspiration. She must play the role of housewife fancifully, with just the right sprinkle of reality, to maintain popularity (and profit). One example of affective expertise is the following post from momfluencer @annasaccone: See Figure 2.



Figure 2: Example of a Momfluencer's Affective Expertise (Saccone, 2021)

Despite the conflicting message above (the poised picture beside a caption admitting distress), most of the comments are gracious, assuring her that she makes motherhood look easy and she is doing an amazing job (Saccone, 2021). Because of her careful affective expertise, a momfluencer's followers are attached to her; they believe they are her intimate friends while still seeing her as a celebrity. Women hunger for 'the *illusion* of that sense of achievement that housewives seem to need,' and the momfluencer offers that illusion (Friedan, 2010, p. 190). One woman shares:

Instagram reminded me of the world beyond my increasingly messy house. The influencers I followed were dedicated moms who still had time to work on their own projects, go shopping and try new skincare products. Someday, I hoped I would, too. (Dallas, 2021)

A momfluencer's followers want her to be the women and mothers they fear they are not. They 'divert [their] guilt and disguise [their] growing sense of emptiness' by emotionally investing in the retouched life of their influencer idol (Friedan, 2010, p. 200). They argue over her son's exact birth date, notice an outfit she hasn't worn in a while, and express deep (if not creepy) admiration for her family (Mealy, 2020; Blanche, 2019; Swanson, 2021). They feast on the image of her perfection, extracting lifestyle and beauty ideals from this image. Through the momfluencer, they engage in 'vicarious living,' a term Friedan (2010, p. 252) defines as 'a systematic denial and repression of one's own personality, and an attempt to substitute some other personality.' Vicarious living is implicit in the conventional definition of femininity sustaining the feminine mystique, and it cannot be separated from the reciprocal self-criticism it causes within women (Friedan, 2010, p. 252). In the following screenshot of a post by @lydiabright, the comments are responses to her caption 'Summer body pending' (soon after recovering from giving birth): See Figure 3.

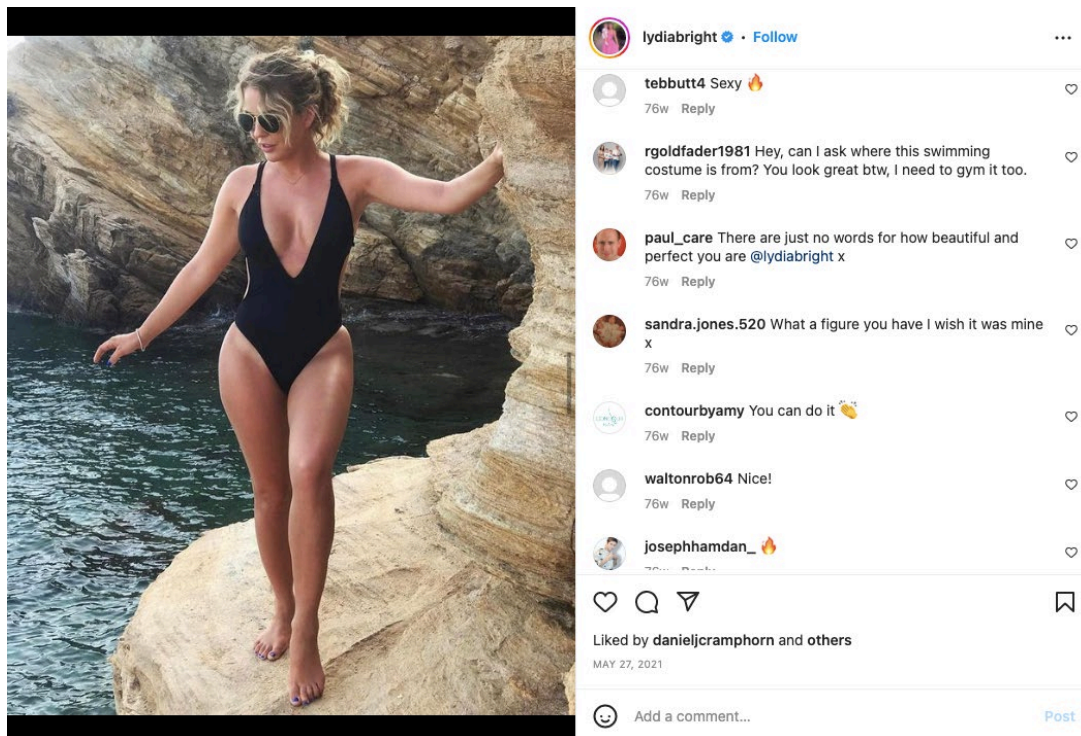


Figure 3: Example of Followers Vicariously Living Through the Momfluencer: Praising her and Criticising Themselves (Bright, 2021)

They praise her body ('There are just no words for how beautiful and perfect you are'), exalting it as the standard of beauty, but then use this standard to judge their own bodies ('What a figure you have I wish it was mine x') (Bright, 2021). Her followers define what a woman's body should look like based on what her body looks like – the momfluencer constructs their reality. And even though Lydia mentions in the caption that this is an old photo, from before she was pregnant, that disclaimer struggles to divorce the 'Sexy' picture from the idea of the postpartum body (Bright, 2021). Her followers could be seen as 'unaware victims,' vicariously living for her beauty, constancy, and perfection but berating themselves in the process (Friedan, 2010, p. 202). is problematic because it squanders women's sense of self-esteem and promotes housewifery as an end goal, impeding progress that could be made otherwise.

2.2 The Momfluencer's Marketing Approach

Momfluencing has armed and mobilized the sexual sell by exploiting the existing identity crises in women. Their lack of fulfilment is what feeds, and has always fed, the feminine mystique (Friedan, 2010, p. 180). Whether it be beauty magazines, makeup tutorials, or their favourite momfluencers, women have long looked to 'glossy public images to decide every detail of their lives' (Friedan, 2010, p. 64). Studies show that women use social media more than men do (Demographics of Social Media Users, 2021). One likely reason for this is women's desperate search for 'a new image' to model themselves after because 'they have no idea who they are' (Friedan, 2010, p. 64). In pre-influencer culture, ads targeted women by giving a product 'a new personality' (Friedan, 2010, p. 189). Today, that *personality* is as true to form as it gets – it is the (performed) personality of the momfluencer. Her image has virtually the same function as the image in 1950s magazines: 'young and frivolous, . . . fluffy and feminine; . . . gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home' (Friedan, 2010, p. 32). The average momfluencer's endorsements are beauty products, fashion pieces, home and kitchen helps, and fitness supplies – strangely reminiscent of the content in women's magazines of Friedan's (2010, p. 33) time, which 'contained almost no mention of the world beyond the home.' What makes the momfluencer different (and more dangerous) than the straightforward magazines of the 1950s, however, is her marketing approach.

While each momfluencer claims uniqueness in some form, there is one common denominator among them: they're all selling something. Because the momfluencer fosters pseudo-intimate relationships with her followers, she can 'inject advertising into these relationships' and influence their purchasing decisions (Coco and Eckert, 2020, p. 180). For example, one momfluencer @livingmybeststyle flatters her followers by calling them her child's 'IG aunties' (Roach, 2020). This approach works: Coco and Eckert (2020, p. 186) found that

those who believe an influencer is authentic in their advertorials feel more connected to the influencer and thus more inclined to make purchases. Furthermore, followers buy things not only because they trust the influencer but also because they want to support them, as the swipe-ups and the 15% off discount codes are an influencer's commission. Nevertheless, this connection to the influencer is not absolutely necessary – the majority of women who follow an influencer have purchased something via sponsored content, irrespective of their personal attitudes toward the influencer (Coco and Eckert, 2020, p. 187). Therefore, Instagram advertorials are successful in and of themselves, a testament to the deeply embedded power of the sexual sell. It feasts on 'the reservoir that their lack of identity, lack of purpose, creates, to be manipulated into dollars at the point of purchase' (Friedan, 2010, p. 182). Because the momfluencer can only succeed at the financial and emotional expense of other women, the industry is destructive on a large scale.

2.3 The Limits of Momfluencing as a Career Path

Momfluencing has the potential to be a powerful feminist play with its opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Wanting 'something more' from housework is nothing new to American housewives, but today, it can be realized, albeit two-dimensionally, through momfluencing careers (Friedan, 2010, p. 59). Housewifery is now monetizable – not just for living comfortably but for living *in excess* – as demonstrated by the (choice few) momfluencers who make it to the top. In recent years, more and more women have felt inspired to pursue momfluencing careers themselves. One woman says she simply 'wanted to have something for herself outside the day-to-day activities of raising a toddler,' so she created a skincare account @phithegoldenskin, which has quickly gained a large following (Buscemi, 2019). But many women invest time and money into photo-editing and blog-writing classes only to be clotheslined by the cutthroat industry (Jezer-Morton, 2021). Despite how 'easy' it seems to succeed as a social media presence, most people do not succeed in the endeavour. The images of the momfluencer's achievements are precisely the images that hinder women's progress.

Momfluencing does not just curtail women who try and fail to become momfluencers; it also reinforces the stereotype that a woman's place is in the home. This causes one to investigate the limits of momfluencing as a career path. Successful momfluencers are 'hailed as examples of self-made success' (Caldeira, 2018). However, while they support their families substantially or even single-handedly with their social media presences, they accomplish this by 'commodifying the importance of motherhood' (Jezer-Morton, 2021). A momfluencer's success only comes at the expense of other women. Therefore, momfluencers' accomplishments 'shift the focus onto generic celebrations of individualized empowerment, choice and commodity feminism,' making little progress in the aggregate for women (Caldeira, 2018). In this vein, Chae (2017, p. 259) asserts that an 'influencers' image of having it all is just another fantasy that provides an illusory sense of the empowerment of women.' If this valorisation of housewifery continues, women will never truly escape the harmful norms from which the feminine mystique spawns. Friedan (2010, p. 244) uses the phrase, 'liberate them to have careers at home,' to capture the irony of introducing motherhood to a capitalist economic landscape. She (2010, p. 35) defines having a career as 'being somebody yourself, not just existing in and through others.' By this definition, then, where does momfluencing belong? Because the success of the momfluencer depends on how her followers perceive her, does this imply that she only exists in and through others? A dichotomy thus emerges between the career itself and the job description: the momfluencer is, ironically, neither full-time housewife nor career woman.

3. Conclusion

There is nothing inherently malicious about the momfluencer, or even her chosen career path – rather, it's the success of the industry itself that must be interrogated. Why is the flawless housewife who 'has it all' *still* the pinnacle of achievement for women? The suit-clad marketers at long tables in the 1960s would have a heyday over the opportunities available today for 'manipulating the emotions of American women to serve the needs of business' (Friedan, 2010, p. 182). People can now purchase ad space in the form of a woman. The momfluencer is not just selling products – she brands herself and she *is* the product. Woman, a *product*. This is the sexual sell in 2022. The feminine mystique, Friedan (2010, p. 53) notes, 'feeds on the very facts which might contradict it.' It does not matter how many momfluencers out-earn their husbands. Whatever strides they may make for female empowerment are undermined by default of the industry, where 'potentially disruptive feminist ideals' bow to 'commercial interests, comfortably co-existing with their idealized and limited representations of femininities and beauty ideals' (Caldeira, 2018). Her followers' 'benign envy,' masked in admiration, hides their personal dissatisfaction and thereby drives them to flagrant consumerism (Lee and Eastin, 2020, p. 78).

The age of momfluencing has enlarged the lethal emptiness of women and reinforced normative gender stereotypes. The delicate balance in a momfluencer's marketing – more personalized and persistent than any algorithm – lies in instilling a background frustration, quiet enough that her followers do not hear 'the strange, dissatisfied voice stirring within [them]' but loud enough that they keep buying (Friedan, 2010, p. 23). The very nature of her career is consumerism. The sexual sell is her primary marketing tactic. She encourages women to go for their goals with a coy reminder to check out a new swimsuit line she's endorsing (Hannemann, 2021). Her 30-day self-care plan may not include a Pyrex pan, but she promises that her lemongrass wellness shots will help you live your best life. The feminine mystique will last as long as she practises the sexual sell – as long as she continues to idealize housewifery for profit and as long as she promises fulfilment from buying things. So, to address the question posed at the beginning of this essay, the answer is no: As convenient as it would be for a new Pyrex pan to endow a woman with life-long happiness, it simply cannot.

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An Acute Crisis Adds to Unresolved Chronic Crisis

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Abstract: Residents in a community in the South Peninsula of the Western Cape, South Africa live with the reality of unresolved challenges. The women and children of this community face a burden from the prevailing inequality and structural violence that plays out in their daily lives as high levels of unemployment, substance abuse, violence in many forms, food insecurity, high school dropout rates and teenage pregnancy. The complexities of living in this community were exacerbated by the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown regulations that destabilised all previous notions of normality. The pre-existing social challenges can be viewed as the residents' experiences of hazards and stressors that have been in place for years in the unequal social structures of South Africa (The World Bank 2022). In this environment, of what can be interpreted as a community in chronic crisis (Dekker et al., 2021), the addition of the acute crisis of the pandemic, posed further cumulative effects on households that impacted more seriously on those who are already the most vulnerable. This paper presents reflections on the stories of women talking about their experiences of the global pandemic to this coastal community. We aim to show the impact on their lives as members of families within their community. The analysis will utilise the phases of a crisis (Emergency Management, 2022) where the pre-crisis or prodromal phase was recognised as life in the chronic crisis of structural violence. The acute or crisis phase of the pandemic became a lens for the effects of an existing long-term crisis compounded by the. The response or chronic phase of the acute crisis was again found to be exacerbated by the existence of a long drawn-out response phase to the chronic crisis. This paper is a window into the innovative attempts by this community to cope with the immense challenges of Covid-19, followed now by the post-crisis (resolution) phase that reflects the ongoing efforts to rebuild the community in the face of the cumulative effects of the pandemic, as but a temporary diversion from the challenges of a continuous chronic crisis. The post-crisis phase remains incomplete, however, a deeper understanding of crisis upon crisis provides knowledge that can assist those implementing social interventions in this community to tackle challenges as a state of chronic crisis for residents.

Keywords: Structural violence, Covid-19 a crisis, Social challenges, Burden on women, Crisis on crisis

1. Introduction

A community in the South Peninsula of the Western Cape, South Africa faces the daily reality of the injustices related to inequality that exists in South Africa (The World Bank 2022). The challenges faced by those in this community follow the national trend to include, high levels of unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, and various forms of violence including personal and structural violence. Although the girl friendliness index (GFI) positions South Africa as having a government amongst the more friendly in Africa (Fambasayi, 2020), it is also reported that this country has amongst the worst statistics for abuse of children, with rape at levels of more than 25 000 per year and indications that one in three girls experience some type of sexual abuse before the age of majority of 18 years of age (Munyati, 2017). In this national landscape, the women of the community reported on here, carry a collective burden of the added impact of gender inequality and abuse. They experience all forms of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, and statutory rape that in South Africa has risen by close to 50% as demonstrated by the number of girls between 10 and 14 years old delivering at state health facilities (Barron et al., 2022). The social challenges existed and then Covid-19 arrived and, as in other contexts across the globe, the challenges of living in this community were exacerbated by the social impact of the pandemic and the regulations imposed. The strict lock down put in place to manage the health care infrastructure and curb the spread of the virus was harshest on those already at risk (Barron et al., 2022).

In this paper our narrative analysis represents women's expressions of the impact of the pandemic and the related structural response on their own lives, their families, and the community. We acknowledge that the existing social challenges are experienced as hazards and stressors that have remained unresolved for years. Through reflection we come to the realisation that this can be interpreted as a community existing in a state of chronic crisis (Dekker et al., 2021). In this already tenuous environment, Covid-19 emerged as an extreme period of disruption which our reflections highlighted as an additional acute crisis, posing further cumulative effects on households already at risk. The stories gathered support the notion that those women and children who were already the most vulnerable in this community were further unjustly impacted by the pandemic. What is not yet fully known is how the recovery phase will play out, what the longer-term impact of the pandemic will be on this community and how this will be experienced by the women as they endeavour to regain some sort of stability in the face of the ongoing challenges of living in chronic crisis.

The concept of structural violence contributes to understanding the challenges in this community. It is a term that originates through the work of Johan Galtung (1969), and it was later used by Paul Farmer (2003) to explore the situational realities that lead to some diseases disproportionately affecting the poor. “The power of structural violence . . . is to uncover inhumane social pressures and conditions that otherwise go unnoticed” (Rodgers and O’Neill, 2012, p. 404). In this thinking, diseases like HIV-AIDS and tuberculosis, and now even Covid-19 can be understood as biosocial phenomena that are shaped by the economy, history, and society such that many communities are characterised by unemployment, poverty, inadequate access to basic resources, and discrimination (Farmer, 2020). Structural inequities often align closely to experiences of poverty, racism, disenfranchisement and are “embodied and experienced as violence” (Farmer 2010, p. 293). The people of the community in this study experience structural violence and the women and children carry a heavy burden of damage to body and mind because of the circumstances.

2. Methodology

The study followed a participatory, observation methodology (Du Plessis, 2016) that explored the experiences of women, in a particular community in the Western Cape, South Africa, whose lives were severely disrupted by the arrival of the global Covid-19 pandemic to this coastal area. Verbal stories were gathered and documented, and these were reflected on by the researchers to gain an understanding of the impact of the pandemic on the participants and their families. Through the process of data generation, it was realised that one perspective that can be applied is to view the pandemic as an acute crisis that added suffering as additional to the already existing chronic crisis (Dekker et al., 2021). This particular analysis is therefore an interpretation of the data according to the phases of a crisis (Emergency Management, 2022) to explore the impact of the pandemic as experienced in the day-to-day life of women residents in this community. Through this lens, the pre-crisis or prodromal phase was considered to be life in the context of the hardships already experienced by the women before the arrival of the pandemic. The addition of the challenges due to the Covid-19 virus was analysed as the acute or crisis phase and the response or chronic phase covers the ways in which the women in this community coped during the pandemic. The post-crisis, resolution phase is still underway, and we continue to follow the observational methodology to appreciate the efforts to rebuild the community in the face of the problems left by the pandemic that are not yet completely resolved.

3. Findings

After an initial read of the stories, the four stages of a crisis; prodromal, crisis, response and post-crisis phases (Emergency Management, 2022), guided our reflections on the stories of women in this community. The aim was to place attention on the attempts of this community to overcome the additional crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic but alongside this to gain some understanding of how the women can continue with the work they were trying to do before the pandemic and the ways in which they can move the community out of what can now be understood as a state of chronic crisis (Dekker et al., 2021). This lens of analysis that allowed the picture of a crisis on top of a crisis to emerge can help in the ongoing interventional work in this community. Below follows some of the key findings of a community in crisis.

3.1 Prodromal, Pre-Crisis Phase

We considered the pre-crisis or prodromal phase as the life of those in this community before the arrival of the Covid-19 virus to South Africa. We recognised this period as that of living in a community experiencing the effects of structural violence as a chronic crisis (Dekker et al., 2021). This was expressed by one woman as; ‘This is our community, but it is difficult to be here as a woman. We suffer a lot, and no-one can protect us from harm and maybe no-one even tries. Every day there is something horrible happening and it is always women and young girls who suffer the most’ (P3).

3.2 Crisis Phase

The Covid-19 crisis was a dynamic situation that brought with it daily changes in the early stages. In crisis management the importance of mitigation and preparedness are stressed, and in this process, it is recommended that actions are taken to limit the risks and prepare for the next phase of the crisis (Heath, 1998). Because the people in this community were already living on the edge they were unable to take steps to mitigate against the crisis that was about to place a huge strain on those already so vulnerable. They were unable to prepare in any real way for the total lock down that was implemented throughout South Africa, with a relatively short notice period of two weeks. The women explained that they and even most of their husbands, were in casual type jobs and that they are unable to save money. They could not stock up the house in preparation for

the weeks of lockdown; 'We never have enough money so how we could go shop for extra food and things. Electricity would run out and without work we could not even buy food. We took the lockdown very seriously at first and tried by all means to ... stay indoors but how could we get the goods to survive' (P1). They also spoke of the reality that they would have no income when unable to go to work; 'I don't have permanent job. I clean for a few people. They said I could come back after Covid and one of them gave me two weeks of pay to help me' (P11). Another resident focused on the impact on the children; 'Suddenly schools was closed. My children are fed at school every day. I do not have food to feed them. I did not want them to die of the virus, but I did not know how to get them food when schools are closed' (P2).

Other women expressed their anxiety and that finding information during the pandemic was difficult with many running out of airtime and data on their mobile phones quite soon after the start of the lockdown; 'I didn't know what was happening. My phone went dead, and I could not buy time. My neighbour helped me, and I watched the television and radio to get information. But it was hard, and I did not understand a lot so it was very scary' (P8).

Large families and households had to find ways to manage in the small spaces they were officially restricted to; 'We tried by all means to obey the rules...our houses are small ...it was not good and we fought' (P4). The children could not easily be kept indoors, and they naturally wanted to wander beyond the boundaries of their properties; 'The children got bored and wanted to go out... We always worry about our girls and maybe it was even worse in Covid, I don't know for sure but I think even more got harmed' (P10)

Despite all these challenges there were women who were able to respond to the needs and serve the community during the lockdown and into the response phase. In an attempt to prepare, one resident continued as a front-line worker to look after the elderly she already cared for and she tried to share the little she had with others. Then also the five women running a fledgling farm garden had permission to keep going under the regulations. In addition to growing vegetables, they used a wood oven to bake bread for the elderly and destitute; 'We baked 100s of loaves of bread as long as we could get flour (mostly donated by local businesses) and we took these to the grannies (who are often foster mothers to their grandchildren) and others in need. It was good to help in this way, but people were still hungry and sometimes they only ate what we could give them that day' (P1). The humanity came through and it was heart-warming to hear the experiences of those who explained that; '... in this Covid the community spirit rose to be better than it had been in a long time, and we cared for each other again...' (P7).

The turning point for us in our reflections on the Covid-19 pandemic in this community was when we realised that the acute or crisis phase of the pandemic put the spotlight on the social impact of an acute public health crisis as additional to the existing long-term crisis faced by the residents.

3.3 Response Phase

The response or chronic phase of the pandemic was taken as the lengthy period when the hard lock down was replaced with steadily less strict regulations until all regulations were lifted in 2022. This phase was again found to be influenced by the community having unresolved issues from the long-drawn-out cycle of crisis and response phases of the chronic crisis they are experiencing. The reflections turned out to be a foggy window into the innovative attempts by this community to cope with the immense challenges of Covid-19. The farm garden was central to the efforts to support the community, at least with regards to food security. It became; '...the place where people came if they needed to talk about things or get information and the place where vegetables and often bread was collected... and we supported three soup kitchens and gave food to those who wanted to help feed others' (P5). What was obvious was that the stress response was most markedly on those with children who were not able to go to school or in the later regulations were able to return but as split classes for part of the week only; 'Even now still she goes to school only two days a week. I cannot manage the days she is not in school, and she just wants to be out in the streets with her friends' (P3). The elderly in the community are accustomed to daily visits and support from family members or friends and while the necessary visits to bring supplies continued, as time went on it was found that many of the elderly women suffered loneliness and even physical effects because they were cut off from their usual emotional support systems (Péres, 2021). Household resources were depleted and with no income daily life became very difficult for many. The stories told point to mental health issues and the lack of support for those with raised anxiety, depression and other challenges; 'Some of the strong women are suffering now too and you can see there is sadness more than before here. I know of dying because of Covid and women are getting desperate' (P8).

As mentioned in the crisis phase, there were women who continued to serve the community during the entire lockdown levels of the pandemic. The particular mechanisms to help the community that emerged over time in the response phase were that some women helped the children in the area; 'Children could not go to school for a long time, we tried to help the high school children to keep studying and the younger kids we had games and lunch available' (P9). Yet others; '...found that my neighbours had no food and took it upon myself to feed them also...' (P5). In a further attempt to assist one resident offered a small apartment attached to her house as an isolation facility for those in the community who could not access the regional state isolation facilities. The nursing care was done by high school learners who were available 24-hours a day for those in isolation.

During the pandemic it became apparent that the focus shifted almost entirely to the Covid-19 and the responses to the many underlying social challenges in the community were put on hold during these nearly three years. They are now resurfacing but somehow the double assault is not something talked about. Only over time will we see how this community will emerge from the pandemic and re-commence facing their other challenges. The positive learning and negative effects of the pandemic are continuously being exposed and the next stage of the study will show ever more of the longer term impacts.

3.4 Post-Crisis Phase (Recovery)

In general, for those facing a crisis there is the drive to rebuild and return to what was in place before the crisis (Emergency Management, 2022). In many ways the world is facing the Covid-19 pandemic in a similar way, although the virus is still present and we cannot easily return to exactly how things were before the arrival of the virus, and have gained some skills, hence talk of a 'new normal' (Berwick, 2020). For this community the post-pandemic crisis phase is still incomplete and happening and may never be complete because other pressures are re-emerging.

The Covid19 pandemic dragged on with steadily less restrictions in place but leaving a wake of destruction in its path. In essence we have not reached the post-crisis phase because the world is still in response mode. However, the phases can be viewed as running simultaneously in this case and there are efforts to recover but for many reasons these are hampered. For example, in this community we heard from one mother that; 'She does not want to go to school. She liked being at home and not having to do work. I don't know what to do to make her go back to school and I think she might never go' (P5). If we do not succeed in the children resuming their schooling because they prefer freedom from the structures of the system found during the hard lockdown and the extended period when they attended school for only two days a week, we face a lost generation in this community. The chance for recovery is then low and all the pre-pandemic challenges will be amplified.

Ultimately the notion of recovery is problematic for this community who faced the pandemic on top of their chronic social crises. Here the residents are confused about what they are striving to return to or what exactly recovery from the effects of the pandemic would look like. As voiced by one woman; 'When they say we will return to normal we don't know what that means. This place was not normal for a long time. Covid made it worse because people died of it but also it was better because the other shootings stopped and people helped each other. The home situation was bad though for most of us. I think for women we are pleased Covid is gone but scared of what next' (P10).

4. Concluding Comments

What emerged is the reality that resolution of the acute Covid-19 crisis is impacted by the unresolved and long-standing challenges in the pre-existing chronic crisis. In the longitudinal co-design study of this community we now enter a next step as the researchers and community continue to engage to understand and learn from the experiences of the women related to their situation of endeavouring to recover from the effects of the pandemic while still in the drawn-out cyclical phases presented by the social realities of structural violence.

This community lived in a cycle of happenings that place it in the category of chronic crisis (Dekker et al., 2021). Some women report that the Covid-19 pandemic gave them the opportunity to focus on 'an enemy together'. However, recovery from the acute Covid crisis, is hampered by the re-emergence of the unresolved issues of the chronic crisis; a cycle in which women and children of this community carry the major burden of the basket of social determinants of disease such as crime, violence, unemployment and, poverty. There has been no time to celebrate the good work done during the pandemic nor any efforts to capture the lessons learnt so that this community can be more ready for the next crisis. This because all the issues that were put on hold are again resurfacing, needing attention and bringing stress. The stories show that the post-crisis (resolution) phase that in many places reflects the ongoing efforts to rebuild in the face of the problems left by the pandemic, are not a priority for this community.

The fault lines in the community became even more obvious following the receding of the virus and the challenges have grown bigger. The already high levels of unemployment rose even higher, and many had to contend with multiple additional crises such as loss of household income, hunger, anxiety, health risks of the virus and school closures that placed parents, in particular mothers, under additional strain. Access to school feeding schemes were not available, children were not occupied, and they resisted the pressures of being contained in their homes. In general, there were higher levels of interpersonal conflict due to the impact of the lockdown regulations and pandemic.

It is our intention that through this process of reflection, a deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic on a community already in crisis may contribute to the implementation of social interventions in this community. Although the pre-Covid challenges may be thought of as insurmountable, attempts were and still are being made to relieve the state of chronic crisis.

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Challenges of Women's Digital Inclusion in the Portuguese Context

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Abstract: The gender barrier in the technological area represents a significant challenge for the members States of European Union. Also, in Portugal the participation of men and women in ICT is still uneven. This position is the result of the historical evolution of the position of women in the Portuguese society. This article aims to review the digitally index of women and the level of representation of women specialists in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Portugal comparing with the position occupied by men and the rank occupied by women in other members States of the European Union. It also intended to know the policies that have been implemented in Portugal with the aim of improving the digital inclusion of women. To achieve our goals, we supported our study in statistics data and we recapitulate Portuguese policies adopted to strengthen female representation in the digitally and ICT market. Furthermore, we looked at the 2020 European Commission report on this subject (which presents pre-pandemic COVID-19 data, 2021 (which represents data during the period of the pandemics and the period of the emergence State in Portugal) and the 2022 report (which represents post-pandemic data to understand the evolution and impact of female digital inclusion caused by the COVID-19 period. The research technique adopted is document analysis based on the systematization of statistical data from the years 2019, 2020 and 2021, reading articles, academic books on the subject and the political programs implemented in Portugal to meet the digital challenges of women. we conclude that Portugal is on the right path, however, it is still too early to assess the success of the measures implemented.

Keywords: Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Women, Digitally index, Public policies, Portugal, Asymmetry

1. Introduction

For the asymmetry between man and women in the access, learning and use of ICT and for the use of internet, historical, social, cultural, and political factors contribute to it.

According to Castells (2016), society cannot determine technology but uses it. The uses of technology can slow down or accelerate social development, with the State having an essential role in this movement. As stated by the author, technology alone cannot determine the historical evolution of society, but the capacity to dominate technology can influence the realization of essential social changes. As a result, all sectors and social groups must participate in the technological revolution. This model is the way to ensure that society will evolve positively and inclusively.

According to Saavedra et al. (2011), the dualism that associated science with man and nature with women was established in the 17th century with Francis Bacon, and since then this association of values has accompanied us throughout history, continuing to influence the choice of professions, despite being known examples of renowned women in the field of mathematics and physics.

In Portugal, schools and textbooks have only very recently implemented the alteration of this stereotype that has haunted us for years. Many families also followed this dualism, eventually influencing the choice of Portuguese young women regarding the educational path to follow and, consequently, as to the profession to be performed in the future. Thus, even today there is a strong number of women dedicated to the areas of education, health and social protection, the arts and humanities, the social sciences and law; and a more reduced number of women dedicated to the study of science, mathematics and informatics, as well as in the field of engineering and manufacturing (SAAVEDRA, 2011).

The reasons responsible for maintaining this stereotype may be related to some historical factors. It should be recalled that in Portugal, just over 40 years ago, the difference between men and women was still very marked due to the political dictatorship in which we lived. Consequently, the limitations imposed on women were several and this reality was not really changed until after April 25th, 1974. Although the Revolution of April 25th (commonly known as the “Cravos” Revolution) overthrew the fascist regime, the emancipation of Portuguese women was not immediate. Women's emancipation was sedimenting step by step and began to truly impose itself in the 1980s and more sharply in the 1990s. According to Irene Pimentel, it was not until the 1980s that the operative concept of gender emerged in Portugal (CARDOSO, 2016). That is why the path of equality between men and women in Portugal began slightly later than in the other Member States of the European Union where the rate of feminisation in the digital world is higher.

Making a brief synthesis of the evolution on the education and integration of women at the professional and social level in Portugal since the twentieth century, with interest for our study, in order to better understand the position of women in Portuguese society today, it is worth highlighting the following facts.

During the First Portuguese Republic that took place between 1911-1926, about 80% of women in Portugal were illiterate. Only from then on was the path to compulsory education opened from 7 to 11 years for boys and girls. However, in practice, there were not enough schools for this right to be exercised by all; and only from then on were women able to start working in the civil service. However, the First Republic was short-termed and the politicians of the time, with the aim of breaking with the ideals of the monarchy, were eventually lost in heated debates whose primary objective was to end monarchical ideals. Therefore, the achievements have been few, especially with regard to the position of women. In 1914, with the First Great War, women had an intervening role in society, however, this social intervention was summarized to education and hospital organizations from the rear, thus maintaining the role of caregiver (ALVES, 2015).

However, in Portugal there was a setback in the position and right of women in society with the installation of the dictatorial political regime, called the *Estado Novo*, preceded by the Military Dictatorship installed since 1926. The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic of 1933 provided in Article 5 that citizens were equal before the law, but provided for the exception: "*the differences resulting from their nature and the good of the family are saved as far as women are concerned*." The 1933 National Labour Statute also limited the possibility for women to work outside the home, and in cases where they could work the wage gap paid for the same work performed by a man was considerable. In addition, the Civil Code of the 1867 Portuguese remained in force in which several norms were foreseen within the family with the supremacy of male power (CARDOSO, 2016).

Portuguese women lived, therefore, in a condition of legal inequality *vis-à-vis* man, inequality in status within the family and the couple, but also in terms of political, social, labour and cultural rights. Only with the revolution of April 25th, 1974 Portugal starts living in a climate of freedom. Thus, on April 2nd, 1976, the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic was adopted, declaring the principle of equal choice of profession, access to work and pay without gender discrimination; and in the area of the family ensured equal rights and conjugal duties. It is indispensable to review the various Portuguese legal codes, such as labour legislation and the civil code. More specifically with regard to higher education, there began to be a renewal of the teaching taught in universities, the influence of the Annals' school and the "new history" of anthropological orientation, directed to the studies of private and daily life, as well as changes in Portuguese society itself, more specifically, the massive entry of women into higher education (NUNES, 1961-1986). Before the revolution of April 25th, 1974, very few women were studying in higher education (LOUSADA, 2013). However, to this day, despite existing legislation and a change in the social mind-set, the family remains a singular feminine noun. (MACEDO, 2022). Thus, even during the 21st century and, nevertheless, the Portuguese constitutional framework, which is very rich in norms that enshrine equal rights between men and women, as well as the varied legislation that has been published in defence of gender equality, in fact, the majority of Portuguese women continue to have the burden of domestic management and family management, with the education of children. That is, the family remains a burden more of women than men and of course this social factor has a strong impact on the choice of the professional area of studies (MACEDO, 2022).

In addition, a political factor also contributes to the problem. Thus, in 2015 the measures that were being implemented with the aim of increasing the digital index in Portugal left out the development of human capital and the private sector, prioritizing investment in the digitization of public administration. With the proposal to update the Portugal Digital agenda, Portugal has approved the *Resolução de Conselho de Ministros 22/2015, de 16 de abril*. Consequently, initiatives aimed at the development of human capital in the digital area are beginning to be implemented.

2. Literature Review

In the literature existing, Isabel Fonseca, co-author of this paper and principal researcher of the Smart Cities and Law, E.Governance and Rights: Contributing to the definition and implementation of a Global Strategy for Smart Cities (NORTE-01-0145-FEDER-000063) left an important contribute to this subject in Portugal with "Smart Cities and Law, E.Governance and Rights: (retomando) o diálogo com a Benedita", in *Liber Amicorum Benedita Mac Crorie*, Escola de Direito da Universidade do Minho, vol. I, Braga: UMinho Editora, 2022, pp. 509 a 527. This section focuses on the related research efforts in light of this research.

Also Eva Macedo presents us with a important bibliographic collection in this area, having been highlighted with Rosmaninho prize – a important distinction in women and human rights.

3. Methodology

In methodological terms, this article fits into two research paradigms: quantitative and qualitative and involves inductive and deductive reasoning. We aim to quantify and qualify the process by identifying the reasons behind the measure phenomenon. The research techniques adopted are the document analysis from the systematization of statistical data for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021, articles and European Union reports.

It is important to note that the technological areas consist of several sections. However, we will focus on the digital competences of the women and the ICT field because it is an area that lacks qualified human resources and has been impacted by the public health crisis of COVID-19.

The active participation of historically excluded groups will have the capacity to impact society's destiny, enforcing the creation of an inclusive and modern legal framework in the digital era. In this context, it is fundamental that women, as a socially excluded group of different and essential stages of history, take part in this "*accelerated process of technological modernization (...)*" (translated by the authors from the original language – Spanish. Castells, 2016, p.8).

We also recognize that factors such as limitation, devaluation, disqualification, and exclusion affect women at different levels depending on factors such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation, among others. However, we comprehend that an intersectional approach goes beyond the mere sum of identities and the "*(...) simples reconhecimento da multiplicidade dos sistemas de opressão (...)*" (Bielgi cit in Pires, 2009, p. 190)- that means the simple recognition of the multiplicity of systems of oppression – but demands that multiple aspects besides political, social, economic and cultural contexts be deepened. To avoid adopting a simple idea of intersectionality, we will focus our analysis without delving into the reasons for specific situations.

4. Objectives

Therefore, this article aims to review the digitally index of women and the level of representation of women specialists in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Portugal comparing with the position occupied by men and the rank occupied by women in other members States of the European Union. It also intended to know the policies that have been implemented in Portugal with the aim of improving the digital inclusion of women.

To achieve our goals, we supported our study in statistics data and we recapitulate Portuguese policies adopted to strengthen female representation in the digitally and ICT market. Furthermore, we looked at the 2020 European Commission report on this subject (which presents pre-pandemic COVID-19 data, 2021 (which represents data during the period of the pandemics and the period of the emergence State in Portugal) and the 2022 report (which represents post-pandemic data to understand the evolution and impact of female digital inclusion caused by the COVID-19 period. The research technique adopted is document analysis based on the systematization of statistical data from the years 2019, 2020 and 2021, reading articles, academic books on the subject and the political programs implemented in Portugal to meet the digital challenges of women. The next step will be to recapitulate Portuguese policies adopted to strengthen female representation in the digitally and ICT market.

According to our objectives we systematized this study as follows.

- The importance of ICT training and the women's challenges in the digital field
- Women's digital Competences and their position in the ICT Sector in Portugal
- The COVID-19 pandemic impact on digital skills indicators
- *Policies for the development of human capital in the digital area specially for digital inclusion of women in Portugal*
- *General conclusions*

5. The Importance of ICT Training and the Women's Challenges in the Digital Field

Several processes are leading to an accelerated change in the productive sector that impacts the global labour market, among them the advance of new technologies and the social and economic political choices being made. However, it is not our purpose to scrutinize the reasons for the changes in the productive sector but only to illustrate the need for human resources training in the technology sector.

The technology sector has been experiencing gradual growth. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine and the economic consequences it generated, rising inflation, and the climate and energy crises,

accelerated the sector's expansion. On the authority of the person in charge of the Software Development Department, Beltrão Coelho, *"TI é um mercado de pleno emprego, onde a procura de talentos na área continuará a ter forte predominância."* (Bandeira, 2002, p. 7) – that means IT is a full-employment market, where the hunt for talent in the area will continue to have a strong predominance.

In addition, the European Union (EU) has also invested significant resources in Member States to support digital transformation. Thus, a total of EUR 127 billion was devoted to digital sector-related reforms and investments in national recovery and resilience plans. In turn, Member States have devoted, on average, 26% of their Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) allocation to digital transformation, staying above the mandatory 20% threshold. These financings are an unprecedented opportunity to accelerate digitalization, increase the UE's resilience and reduce external dependence.

Considering Portugal's circumstances, it is necessary to accelerate its digitalization rates. On the report of Robert Walters consultancy (2022), the ICT sector is one of the fastest growing in the country. The transformation processes to the business fabric and Public Administration will increase the demand for qualified professionals in the ICT sector even more. Nevertheless, this is an area that suffers from a lack of specialists. There are vacancies for around 15,000 IT professionals in Portugal. Data from IDC Portugal show that by 2025, 90% of organizations will lack ICT resources. More specifically, there will be a lack of more than 1.15 million professionals in Western Europe. There will be a lack of more than 10,000 professionals by 2025.

One of the challenges faced in Portugal to fill vacancies in the ICT area, although not the only one, is related to training. The number of technicians specialized in ICT areas in Portugal is below the European average. However, we point out that the low value of wages practiced also contribute to qualified professionals leaving the country. Carapuça (2022, p. 23) verifies the need for an increase "in the number of graduates in ICT and the number of specialists in general, graduated or not.". Another factor that must be considered is the phenomenon of the "informational city" and the Smart Cities that bring together the use of ICT in the urban environment to solve the most diverse problems faced in cities.

For these reasons, the ICT market is promising and requires more qualified workers. A country that invests in skilled labour training in ICT also invests in innovation and is closer to developing solutions that guarantee its digital sovereignty. The expansion of the ICT trade and the emergence of labour in the area can be an essential chance for women to have the opportunity to be recognized for their abilities, mainly from a collective and social point of view. This movement can impulse change to the space women occupy in society.

According to Piscitelli (2002), subordination experienced by women varies concerning the historical period, and the place examined. Despite the particularities, it is a universal phenomenon that occurs in all parts of the world and all historical periods. As claimed by feminist currents, the occurrence is structured based on the social construction that is made of women and can be modified. Such subordination also reflects on the division of labour and exclusionary processes based on gender. Regarding some of the barriers faced by women in accessing the labour market, we highlight those exposed by Diogo and Coutinho:

"(...) Dificuldade de inclusão; sua força de trabalho é social e culturalmente desvalorizada; recebem os menores salários; possuem baixa qualificação profissional, sendo conduzidas aos setores de trabalho intensivo, onde predomina a exploração do trabalho manual e repetitivo; freqüentemente são obrigadas a pautar suas possibilidades de inserção laboral nas suas responsabilidades domésticas e familiares, acumulando trabalhos dentro e fora de casa." (Coutinho e Diogo, 2006 p. 122-123) – that means the difficulty of inclusion; social and cultural devaluation of the workforce; lower wages; low professional qualification led to the intensive work sectors, where the exploration of manual and repetitive work predominates; accumulating jobs inside and outside home.

As a first conclusion: even with the emergence of careers related to ICT and the lack of labour in the area, women continue to face barriers to their insertion in the labour market, as we will appreciate in the following topic.

6. Women's Digital Competences and Their Position in the ICT Sector in Portugal

The European Commission annually publishes the economy and society digitally index (ESDI). It summarizes the indicators of Europe's digital performance and monitors the progress made in the EU Member States regarding digital competitiveness in human capital domains (available in the European Commission website - <https://ec.europa.eu/commission>). The most recent index version of ESDI is from 2022 and it presents data for 2021.

How we can observe above on the graphic (Source: 2022 ESDI Report), Portugal ranks 15th.

However, in the Human capital dimension, Portugal ranks 14th of the 27 EU countries.

As we can observe bellow, data from 2021 indicates that 55% of the Portuguese population has at least basic digital skills and 29% of it has above basic digital skills, exceeding the European average.

Level of digital skills	PORTUGAL	EUROPEAN UNION AVERAGE
At least basic digital skills	55%	54%
Above basic digital skills	29%	26%

About ICT specialists in Portugal, the average of employed in Portugal corresponds to the EU average and the average of ICT female specialists (21%) in Portugal surpassing the EU average (19%).. However, the level of ICT graduates (2,6%) is lower than the European average (3.9%).

ICT	PORTUGAL	EUROPEAN UNION AVERAGE
ICT specialists	4,7%	4,5%
ICT graduates	2,6%	3,9%
ICT female specialists	21%	19%

The level of experts across Europe is still very low too. As far as Portugal is concerned, in addition to the number of specialists still very low for the needs faced with digitization of services and companies, the number of women specialists is insignificant. This is a problem that originates in education. Considering education levels, the area related to ICT is the one with the lowest number of graduates in Portugal. Thus, in 2020, around 7,000 students graduated in a universe of 86,000 graduates. The proportion of women exclusively ICT specialists in Portugal is 21 %, exceeding the EU average of only 19 %. Which means that not even a fourth of ICT specialists in Portugal are women. In addition, there has been a positive trend in the last 10 years in the growth in the number of women with ICT degrees, women accounted for only 20.1% last year while men accounted for 79.9% of graduates. Consequently, also with regard to employment in these areas, in the last 10 years only one woman in five people working in the ICT sector. It is also verified that men are more represented in areas related to research and business while women are more represented in the state sector. There is, therefore, a notorious gender asymmetry in the employment of women in companies, where the feminisation rate is only 27.7%. Men are more focused on engineering and technology and women are more represented in medical sciences and health.

But the problem isn't just around this. In addition to the lack of ITC specialists, we see that the percentage of women with basic digital skills is still far from the desirable. The position held by Portuguese women in the digital field, calculated on the basis of internet use, digital skills and ICT work, ranks 14th, and is below Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, France, Spain, Estonia, Malta, Austria, Belgium and Slovenia. According to the data obtained in the 2021 report on the use of the internet by women, 79% of Portuguese women habitually use the internet, 17% of women have never used the internet and 58% of women use the internet to relate to public administration. When we compared this data with the European Union with regard to women's use of the internet, we found that 87% of women use the internet, only 8% of women have never used the internet and 65% of women use the internet to relate to public administration.

In summary, in Portugal the digital and digital knowledge index is similar between men and women, but with regard to higher education and the exercise of ICT-related professional activities, women are in a large minority. Given the growing need for skilled ICT labour, increasing women's participation in ICT is a challenge to address. In addition, there is also a need to increase women's basic digital skills.

7. The COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Digital Skills Indicators

We remember that in Portugal, the emergence State has been decreed in March of 2020 and it was remained, between advances and setbacks, until June 2021. Thus, the last report of ESDI (2022) exposes the data obtained after the pandemic. So, to understand the impact we will also use the 2019 and 2020 data (before the pandemic and during the pandemic). The intention is to offer an overview of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the progress of the female digital skills. Sometimes we compare the Portuguese square in DESI with the European Square for a better understanding.

How we can observe below, before COVID-19 pandemic (according to data from 2019) Portugal ranks 19th in the 27 members States, during the pandemic (according to data from 2020) Portugal has climbing three steps up and after the pandemic Portugal has climbing one step more, ranking 15th.

Table 1: Portuguese's rank and square on the Digital Index Before, During and After COVID-19 (Women and man)

IDES	Portugal		European Union
	Rank	Square	Square
2022 – data from 2021	15	50,8	52,3
2021 – data from 2020	16	49,8	50,7
2020 – data from 2019	19	49,6	52,6

However it not represents an increase on digital skills as we can observe on the table above.

Table 2: Portuguese Average of Digital Skills Before, During and After Pandemics COVID-19

Digital Skills	Before pandemics EDSI 2020	During pandemics EDSI 2021	After pandemics EDSI 2022
At least basic digital skills	52%	52%	55%
Above basic digital skills	32%	32%	29%

The impact of COVID-19 on the digital skills level of the Portuguese population is not significant. We saw an increase of 52% up to 55% of the population who has at least basic digital skills. About ICT, Portugal marks a significant increase in the proportion of ICT specialists from 3.6% to approximately 4,7%. The share of female ICT specialists has increased considerably from 18% to 22%, but after pandemics this average is lower (21%) as we can observe bellow.

Table 3: ICT Average Before, During and After Pandemics COVID-19

ICT	Before pandemics	During pandemics	After pandemics
ICT specialists	3,6%	4%	4,7%
ICT female specialists	18%	22%	21%
ICT graduate	2,2%	2,3%	2,6%

The COVID-19 crisis had an important impact on key societal indicators, relating to the use of internet services by citizens because to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, Portugal has taken many targeted measures in digital. Because that, after the COVID-19 crisis, Portugal is advanced promoting digital services, but has already a weak performance in the digital skills indicators. Portugal ranks 19th in the EDSI index and on the human capital dimension, Portugal ranks 21st out of 28 EU countries.

8. Policies for the Development of Human Capital in the Digital Area Specially for Digital Inclusion of Women in Portugal

As we have seen above, when we present the exhibition on the statistical data of women's participation in the digital world, the Portuguese State is currently facing two major challenges with regard to the inclusion of women in the digital world: on the one hand, almost half of its population, which also includes women, does not have basic digital skills; on the other hand, only 1/4 of ICT specialists are women and only 1/5 of all ICT workers are women. These facts therefore call for a solution and a strategy. What strategies have been adopted by the Portuguese to address this problem?

Under the motto "*No one can be left behind*", the 2030 Agenda is deeply transformative and provides a roadmap for the removal of all structural obstacles to equality between women and men, in the national territory and in terms of development cooperation. Accordingly, on April 21st 2020, the Portuguese government approved a strategy and action plan for the digital transition identifying the empowerment and digital inclusion of people

as one of the national priorities, in line with the Recovery and Resilience Plan with a total allocation of more than EUR 16 million and which should be implemented by 2026. The digital dimension concentrates 22.1 % of the overall amount of the Portuguese PRR, i.e. higher than the amount used by most Member States. The most prominent digital measures included in the plan are education and training in digital skills.

Thus, Portugal has promoted digital skills through various initiatives and programs: in schools the Digital School Program for teachers, an initiative of Digital Teacher Training to train workers; the Employment Digital initiative; the Youth Digital Program for unemployed young people; the UPSKILL Program to requalify unemployed people, converting them into IT specialists; the "Adult Boost Program" to update the skills of adults of active age; as well as the Technological Academies Programme. The digital inclusion of the population has been addressed through the "I AM Digital" Program, through the "MUDA" (Movement for Active Digital Use). All of these initiatives include men and women, so contributing to increase the level of basic skills of the general population.

More focused on a gender perspective, we highlight the INCoDe.2030 Roadmap – Digital Empowerment initiative, which is a national initiative that promotes digital skills among the general public, providing studies, measures and platforms to boost digital inclusion and literacy, training, qualification and gender convergence programs. INCoDe.2030 includes initiatives to monitor gender balance, collect disaggregated data and boost women's participation.

In addition to this program that aims to boost digital literacy, within the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030, Portugal has launched The Program "Engineers for a Day" that has promoted the option for engineering and technologies among primary and secondary school students, with about ten thousand participants since 2017. She has also promoted the "Promote – Gender Equality Opportunities in Senior Management" Project that aims to develop female talents and foster their promotion to top management functions of companies.

9. Conclusions

The paper started by providing a historical context about the different circumstances that influence women's professional choices and the context of inequality between men and women in other spheres of life. We supported our study with statistics data to review the digital index of women's representation as specialists in ICT. We recapitulated Portuguese policies adopted to strengthen the female model in the digital ICT market.

In that regard, it is possible to pronounce that the level of representation of women specialists in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Portugal is still deficient as well as the average of internet use by women. These are two different problems to be solved. On the one hand, the labour market is increasingly offering jobs in the digital area, so it is an opportunity that should also be used by women; and, on the other hand, daily life increasingly calls for the use of digital media. The COVID-19 period highlighted the importance of women having greater digital skills and the choice of women for ICT-related professions to be well represented in this field.

The Portuguese State has actively contributed to the digital inclusion of women and strongly encouraged their choice of engineering and ICT but in fact the concern with the development of human capital in the digital area in Portugal only started in 2016 (just over 5 years ago). The initiatives for the inclusion of women that the Portuguese State has taught seem promising. However, it is necessary to check whether such programs are sufficient and inclusive in practice to ensure that no one is left behind. Portugal still lags significantly behind the Member States with the best performance. Therefore, studying the digital policies applied in other Member States may be interesting to understand what Portugal can do to improve in the digital.

As for the need to increase the number of women specialists in ICT, the incentive program carried out among girls in primary and secondary education is a commendable example. Only through education will it be possible to create awareness of the importance of learning ICT and demonstrate the immensity of the labour market. Nevertheless, the programs must continue for the long term. On the other hand, it is also necessary that the other factors that also influence women's distance from the labour market, and which we do not intend to delve into here, are also addressed: social and cultural appreciation of the female workforce; increased and equalization of female and male wages; promotion of supports to make possible that women do not have to give up their professional life in the name of domestic and family life. Only from an holistic approach will it be possible for the inclusion of women in the ICT market to correspond to an advance capable of repositioning them in society.

In any case, it seems that Portugal is on the right track. This is a subject that deserves further study, and our intention is to raise some topics contributing to this reflection that is not exhausted here.

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The Professional Paths Development in Polish Cultural Organizations From Female Perspective

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Abstract: The last decades have been characterized by numerous changes in the functioning of the organizations. One of them concerns the understanding of the organizational roles of women who, initially identified with lower administrative staff, began to use specialist and managerial positions more and more often and more effectively. Despite what numerous studies have highlighted the increase in the participation of women in leadership positions in organizations is still slow, even in sectors with high feminization rates. This paper focuses on one of the most feminized organizations in the economy – public cultural organizations. On the one hand, they are perceived as traditional, stiff, boring, and by some, even unnecessary organizations. On the other hand, people perceive them as progressive, inspiring, and extremely important from the viewpoint of broadly understood social development and thus consider them as ‘friendly’ for marginalized groups, including women. This paper presents the findings of a research conducted between January 2021 and April 2022 among cultural workers in Poland. The research was based on a survey among 512 public cultural organizations and 20 biographic interviews with female managers working in various cultural organizations in Poland. The purpose of this research was to map the organizational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers. The study provided rich empirical material documenting the impact of the far-reaching gendered nature of work in public cultural organizations, which influences the professional development of women in these workplaces. Additionally, and what makes Polish case interesting to study, is the context of the research. As proven by this study, although, previously functioning in Poland socialist system, supported the professional activation of women, the transformation period 1989 significantly slowed down those processes and consequently in some sectors of economy even deepened existing inequalities. Public cultural organizations, according to participants of those studies, are its example. The findings presented in this paper broaden the knowledge about both gender inequality in cultural industries and theory of gendered organizations. The main contribution of the study revealed career development challenges for women working in public cultural organizations.

Keywords: Gender inequality in cultural organizations, Gendered organization, Leadership, Cultural workers, Cultural organizations

1. Introduction

Recently more and more researchers pay attention to the changes that have occurred in defining the organizational roles of women. Women who were initially identified with lower administrative staff, begun to reach more and more effectively also for specialist and managerial positions in organizations (Klenke, 2017; Olko, Filip, 2016). At the same time, when analysing the structure of the economy, it can be noticed that there are sectors with a high level of feminization. The research run by UNESCO (2017) showed that in 58% of countries with available data (there were data collected from 197 countries), there are more women working in cultural organizations compared to those in other sectors. However, as some studies show (e.g., Dodd, 2012), this does not mean that professional development in this sector is easier for women and there is no dependence suggesting that they more often occupy senior managerial positions. This makes the phenomenon worth exploring. Although there are some studies that look at the situation of women in cultural organizations (e.g. Anheier, 2009; Dodd, 2012; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Góral, 2021) they are mostly quantitative studies that seek to map the phenomenon’s scale. Most of the research focusing on situation of women in creative industries deals primarily with business organizations such as media or advertising (Martin, Jerrard & Wright, 2018; Dodd, 2012; Banks & Milestone, 2011; Swandson & Wise, 2000). Also it can be noticed that, with notable exceptions (e.g., Balwin & Ackerson, 2017; Góral 2022), scholars have said little so far about the direct perspective of those working in public organizations in the sector. This research gap motivates the selection of this subject for analysis.

The research problem posed for the purpose of this paper is: How, in context of gender equality, the organizational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers looks like? To answer this research problem, the research among cultural workers in Poland was conducted. The research was based on a survey among 512 public cultural organizations and 20 biographic interviews with female managers working in various public cultural organizations in Poland. For the purpose of the research cultural organizations are understood as those organizations that deal with both the production of cultural goods and its dissemination. This includes various forms of organization, for example theatre, cinema, film organization, museum, library, opera, operetta, philharmonic, orchestra, cultural centre, artistic centre, art gallery, research and documentation

centre (Markusen, Schrock, 2006). By public cultural organizations are in this study meant those that are publicly funded and thus are part of public sector. The purpose of this research was to reflect on the organisational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers from the perspective of women who work in the sector. The study provided rich empirical material documenting the impact of the far-reaching gendered nature of work in public cultural organizations, which influences the professional development of women in these workplaces. The research serves as an introduction to further, more extensive studies on women in cultural organizations.

The results of the research presented in this paper fill in the research gap of the evident lack of scientific data on the functioning of women in organisations. Caroline Criado Perez (2019) shows in her study that there exist hundreds of studies and analyses on various aspects of life, including organizational life, based on data about men as the default social actors. Meanwhile, lack of data on women results in their systematic discrimination in all areas of life. Thus, it seems reasonable to explore the phenomenon of gender diversity in the authorities of Polish public cultural organizations.

The paper is arranged in the following manner: the deliberations begin with a theoretical reflection on women's presence in cultural organizations and underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in organizations. Next, the method and results of the study are presented. This is followed by a discussion and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

The nature of a cultural organization is inherently gendered as it does not operate in a void but is part of existing social structures. It is worth noting that when analysing the structure of the economy, it can be noticed that there are sectors where the path of women to management positions seems faster and easier. An example of this is, among others, the culture sector. In their research Helmut Anheier (2009) or David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2015) underline the high level of feminization of this sector. According to the latest data of the Polish Central Statistical Office (2019) and studies conducted by Góral (2021) more than half of the staff working in organizations operating in the field of culture, entertainment and leisure in Poland is women. It should not be a surprise, as some studies show, that public cultural organizations are considered "safe and quiet" workplaces, mainly because of the stability of employment, which is believed to be the main object of interest for women (Mc Tavish and Miller, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). Cultural organizations are also commonly perceived as a working space offering major freedom of activity, creativity, higher democratisation of management processes and willingness to experiment, manifested for example by lack of fixed working hours or the possibility to work in a project mode (Banks, Gill, Taylor, 2013), which, according to many researchers, helps engage the groups that are marginalised in the labour market, including women (UNESCO, 2017). However, those working models, as underlined by Dodd (2012) seem to be problematic for women and when studied deeper they do not seem to facilitate the career paths of women in the sector.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from other studies. As underlined by Balwin and Ackerson (2017) while looking closer at the organizational structure of cultural organizations, especially those publicly funded one can notice low representation of women in managerial positions. The typical head of a public cultural organization is assumed to be a white man with little responsibility for care work outside of his career (Szreder, 2016, Sudół, 2020). Although public cultural organizations constantly change and respond to external economic, social, political and demographical pressures, including those related to the promotion of diversity, as indicated by Simon (2012), these primarily manifest in relation to the external environment of these organizations, especially to the audience: opening to increasingly diverse recipient groups and their needs, expanding the diversity of exhibited works, and developing broad cooperation (Wiggins, 2004; Simon, 2010; Kemp & Poole, 2016). Meanwhile, questions about gender equality and inclusion related to staff remain largely unanswered. It is similar as to other sectors of economy, also those with low representation of women. Researchers note that, despite the implementation and promotion of anti-discrimination regulations and a growing awareness of the leadership skills of women, their share in leadership positions in organizations is increasing only at a slow pace (Lips, Keener, 2007). According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, the indicator of women's share in leadership positions (not broken down into sectors) has been one of the slowest ones to change over the years, for example compared to such indicators as access to education, medical care or share in the labour market in general.

Although scientific literature on the advantages of having women in managerial positions in organizations is quite limited, there are some studies showing that gender diversity in terms of leadership is beneficial for organizations. For example, the research conducted by Adler (2001) and Catalyst (2004) in the USA revealed a

positive correlation between the presence of women in managerial positions and the profitability of organizations. The results of research conducted by Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) in the United Kingdom also highlight a positive correlation between the presence of women in executive positions in the examined organizations and their high market value. Kupczyk (2009), too, notes the importance of women-managers for the success of organizations. Women are behind 83% of consumer purchases and companies that employ women, in managerial positions, can better understand the gender complexity of the market and better tailor their products and services to the needs of potential customers. However, the existing studies on gender diversity in leadership positions focus mainly on business organizations. There were no similar studies conducted so far in cultural organizations.

Considering this theoretical background, it seems necessary to fill in the research gap of the evident lack of scientific data on the functioning of women in various types of organizations, especially in managerial positions. To fill in this research gap the the purpose of this research was to reflect on the organisational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers from the perspective of women who work in the sector.

3. Method

The purpose of this research was to reflect on the organizational environment of Polish cultural organizations from female perspective. To achieve the set goal and solve the research problem (How, in context of gender equality, the organizational environment of Polish cultural organizations looks like?) the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What is the scale of differences in the level of participation of women in top managerial positions in public cultural organizations in Poland?

RQ2: According to women working in public cultural organizations in Poland, what are the professional development paths in this sector?

RQ3: What is, in the opinion of women working in public culture organizations, the impact of the gender structure of the organizational environment of cultural organizations on the development of women's career paths in cultural organizations?

To achieve the set research objective, mixed research was conducted: quantitative with the use of surveys (Babbie, 2013; Wieczorkowska-Wierzbińska, Wierzbiński, Król, 2015) and qualitative, based on 20 biographic interviews with female managers working in various public cultural organizations in Poland. The research was carried out in two stages.

The first stage of the research was quantitative in nature. The surveys were collected from 512 public cultural organizations, which were selected for the study according to the following key: (1) all public cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, i.e. 71 organizations; (2) all public cultural organizations co-run by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, i.e. 47 organizations; (3) all public cultural organizations whose organizers (individually or in cooperation with a lower-level organization) are provincial governments, i.e. 181 organizations; (4) all public cultural organizations whose organizers or co-organizers are municipal governments in voivodship cities, i.e. 213 organizations. Quantitative analysis of the collected material allowed to obtain numerical and percentage data, which were presented in tabular form. Such a presentation of the collected material enabled a comparative analysis of the collected data and an answer to the first of the research questions posed.

In the second stage of the study, it was decided to look deeper in order to understand the phenomenon noticed during first stage of the research. For this purpose interviews with women working in cultural organizations were conducted. To provide a purposive sample, twenty women were invited to the study. They were all managers with at least medium-level managerial positions at Polish public cultural organizations, which allowed providing rich narratives within a specific context through shared sectoral characteristics (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000). The details of the respondents are presented in Table 1. This research strategy allowed to learn in detail the experiences of women who reached at least medium-level managerial positions in their professional careers in the culture sector and to partly explain the observed phenomena as they are seen by people from the system (Welman & Kruger, 1999; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2016).

Table 1: Research Participants' Characteristics

	Name of the Respondent	Type of cultural institution in which she is currently working	Years in the sector	Role of the Institution	Additional Information
1	Maria	museum	20	Deputy Director	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; additionally associated with NGOs; artist
2	Anna	theater	10	Department Manager	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
3	Marta	cultural center	17	Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner
4	Aleksandra	museum	15	Department Manager	3 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
5	Ilona	museum	8	Department Manager	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs
6	Kamila	theater	12	Deputy Director	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
7	Monika	cultural center	6	Department Manager	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs
8	Magda	museum	5	Department Manager	1 child in nursery; husband/partner; artist
9	Agnieszka	cultural center	9	Deputy Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner; artist
10	Iwona	museum	13	Department Manager	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
11	Sabina	museum	17	Senior Specialist	2 children of school and preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs; Ph.D. candidate
12	Aldona	cultural center	10	Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner
13	Fiona	museum	15	Deputy Director	3 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
14	Malwina	cultural center	12	Festival Director / Department Manager	husband/partner; associated with NGOs
15	Mila	cultural center	13	Department Manager	husband/partner
16	Karo	museum	10	Department Manager	Single / no family obligations
17	Sara	cultural center	20	Department Manager	2 children; husband/partner
18	Dana	museum	15	Department Manager	husband/partner
19	Ola	museum	18	Department Manager	Single / no family obligations; PhD student
20	Nora	Theater	15	Director	2 children in school age; husband/partner

Source: Own study

The material collected during the second stage of the research was studied in a way to highlight moments in which participants defined themselves and articulated related goals, confusions, or tensions, which were collected as themes comparable to previous research on what it means to be a woman and work in a public cultural organization, what it means to be a woman manager, and how to navigate your career at workplaces. This narrative highlighted the career paths of women in culture organizations look like and how their stories are interpreted by women who experienced them in context of the gender structure of the organizational environment of cultural organizations. This material allowed to answer the second and third of the research questions.

4. Research Results

4.1 The Gender Structure Among Managers of Polish Cultural Organizations

The research showed that in over 90% of the surveyed public cultural organizations, women account for over 50% of all people employed in managerial, administrative and technical positions (Table 2). The highest percentage was noticed among employees for whom the local self-government is the organizer (municipalities). A higher percentage of women among the employees of the surveyed cultural organizations were also noticed among non-artistic cultural organizations, i.e., museums, libraries, art galleries, community centers as well as documentation and research centers. The greater share of men among those employed in artistic cultural organizations, which included theatres, philharmonics, operas, artistic ensembles and choirs, and orchestras, as shown in the research, was largely since a significant proportion of jobs in these organizations are related to, among others, stage, lighting and sound systems, and these are most often occupied by men.

Table 2: Share of Women in Managerial Positions Among Employees in Public Cultural Organizations, Broken Down by the Organizer of the Cultural Organizations

Cultural organization by organizer	Number of cultural organizations included in the research	The number of cultural organizations for which women constitute over 50% of employees	% of cultural organizations for which women constitute over 50% of employees	The number of cultural organizations where men account for over 50% of employees	% of cultural organizations for which men constitute over 50% of employees
Total	225	204	90%	21	10%
Cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	28	25	89%	3	11%
Cultural organizations for which Ministry of Culture and National Heritage is co-organizer	16	15	94%	1	6%
Cultural organizations organized by the provincial government	76	65	85%	11	15%
Cultural organizations organized by the commune self-government (municipalities)	105	99	94%	6	6%

Source: Own study

Research has clearly shown that despite the high percentage of women among employees of public cultural organizations, regardless of the type of cultural organization represented or the type of organizer, the share of women in top management positions is lower (Table 3). This is most evident in the case of cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Women are directors in only 12 out of 71 cultural organizations of this type, which is 17% of all organizations. Only one woman is the director of a national museum, which is generally considered the most prestigious type of organization to work at in the sector. The share of women in managerial positions increases along with the lowering of the administrative rank of the organizer, and so in the case of cultural organizations co-organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage it is 25%, for those cultural organizations, for those organized by the provincial government it is 33%, and for organizations organized by the municipal government it is 37%.

The share of women in the positions of deputy directors is higher comparing to the top management level. Regardless of the organizer of the cultural organization, over 50% of all deputy director positions in the surveyed cultural organizations are held by women. Interestingly, the positions of chief accountant in cultural organizations are dominated by women - in over 93% of the surveyed cultural organizations these positions are held by women.

Table 3: Share of Women in top Managerial Positions in Public Cultural Organizations, Broken Down by the Organizer of the Cultural Organization

Cultural organization by organizer	Number of cultural organizations included in the research	number of women holding top management positions (director)	% share of women among people holding the highest managerial positions (director)	Total number of positions of vice-directors of the organizations included in the survey	Number of women vice-directors	% share of women among vice-directors	% share of women among persons performing the functions of chief accountant
Cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	71	12	17%	106	55	52%	93%
Cultural organizations for which Ministry of Culture and National Heritage is co-organizer	47	12	25%	47	14	30%	92%
Cultural organizations organized by the provincial government	181	71	33%	148	83	56%	92%
Cultural organizations organized by the commune self-government (municipalities)	213	84	37%	135	74	55%	93%

Source: Own study

The share of women in managerial positions increases significantly as the level in the organizational structure is lowered. Over 90% of managerial positions (heads of departments, teams) are held by women. They are the least represented at this level in cultural organizations co-organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, however, the indicator still exceeds 79% there, which is a significant change compared to the data on top-level managerial functions in the surveyed organizations.

4.2 The Professional Development Paths in Cultural Organizations From Women's Perspective

The picture drawn from quantitative research was completed with the data gathered during the interviews with women working in public cultural organizations in Poland. As shown during the first stage of the research, the share of women in managerial positions in public cultural organizations is inversely proportional to the number of women working in these organizations. In order to understand this phenomenon 20 women working in managerial positions in public cultural organizations were interviewed about their professional development paths.

According to my respondents, working in the culture sector is ruled by its own rules. Maria says *it is working with the 'creative matter'. It requires creativity in different fields and dimensions. It is not only about the process of designing certain activities, meaning their 'content', but also about organization*. However, working in cultural organizations is not only about engaging in the process of creating and enjoying art. It is also, and often mainly as underlines by my respondents, about managing cultural activities and that is, considering how art is being created, a complex matter. What was initially appreciated by them: a diverse and flexible work environment often turned out for my respondents to be a trap, as some superiors quickly exploited the respondents' willingness to work flexible hours, weekends, and travel, thus making them always stay at work. Besides substantive duties related to the implementation of artistic projects, work in cultural organizations involves administrative and technical duties: *"The curator, the manager, the technical staff member – they are one and the same person"* (Agnieszka).

Respondents felt that additional duties indirectly related to their scope of responsibilities weighed heavily on them and distracted them from 'actual work'. Anna, Ilona and Monika emphasized they were often expected to perform additional, mainly administrative duties, that were assigned to them as they were women. For example, they were expected to provide emotional support to new employees and those in difficult situations, accompany guests, serve coffee or prepare rooms for meetings and gatherings organized by superiors. These duties were somehow "inscribed" in work in culture and were treated as obvious. As underlined by respondents, often those additional tasks did not support them during their professional development, but on the contrary, they were seen as a burden. It was particularly heavy when the respondents had to increasingly balance their professional with nonprofessional work, namely family and private life. Nevertheless, they felt they could not refuse additional involvement, hoping it would positively influence their professional position in the future and appreciation from superiors.

The respondents felt that the professional development at their workplaces was difficult and often incomprehensible for women, especially progression to management positions. Karo emphasized in her story that it was only the third time that she managed to receive a promotion to a managerial position in the museum, despite her belief that in previous attempts she had been the optimal candidate for this position:

"It was only in the third attempt that I became Department Head. The first two times someone else was always chosen – a man – although I am not sure whether it mattered. I was always the better substantive candidate: I had knowledge, experience ... but other arguments won, such as longer or closer acquaintance with the director. It was only when they failed that the director became convinced of me and chose me: the person with the best knowledge and experience" (Karo).

Many similar stories were told during the interviews. The respondents underlined that full availability and presence in the right circles of the organization's decision makers and artists were often key, which was difficult for the respondents, given the workload of additional tasks they were given. Also, meetings of the 'inner circles' often took place during weekends or late evening hours, so joining them was difficult for those women who had to take care for additional duties as a part of their private lives. The knowledge about possible promotion opportunities was equally important, and this knowledge was often restricted to directors' inner circles of acquaintances and did not reach other employees. Iwona underlined that the opportunities for raising qualifications at her workplace were supposedly universal, while in practice, only the select few whom the director arbitrarily considered promising could raise their qualifications, thus limiting development possibilities for the rest. The limited and often discretionary access to development opportunities and unclear promotion criteria often demotivated the respondents: *"If you won't discover what you can do in the first few years and start pursuing it later, then you doesn't really care anymore and you start looking for another job"* (Sabina).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The study showed also that despite numerous changes in recent decades regarding the approach to organizational roles, especially highlighting the changes that occurred in the organizational roles of women (Klenke, 2017), there can still be found evidence in public cultural organizations that corroborate the notion cultural workplaces are increasingly dependent on the retraditionalized "incitement of family relations of appropriation" (Adkins, 1999, p.132). Women face numerous challenges in their professional development in this sector, thus complicating their career paths. The fact that they significantly outnumber men in public cultural organizations does not change this situation.

The conducted research shows that women in public cultural organizations, although dominate among staff members, occupy top management positions less often than men, while middle management positions are more available to them. Thus, based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that despite the clear visible numerical advantage of women employed in public cultural organizations, there is a large disproportion in terms of their number in top management positions in these organizations. This phenomenon may indicate the existence of the so-called "glass ceiling" (Ballenger, 2010; Legato, Glezerman, 2017) and "sticky floor" (Khawaja, Eddy, Ward, 2017). Using these metaphors, researchers define invisible barriers that make it difficult for marginalized groups, including women, to reach managerial positions - this phenomenon increases the higher the position in the organization is concerned.

The research allowed building a general model of women's participation in managerial positions in public cultural organizations in Poland: men dominate in the highest managerial positions - directors, if women appear on them, it is usually as deputies. This tendency is more clearly visible in organizations supervised by the Ministry of Culture and Cultural Heritage. Meanwhile, in relation to public cultural organizations operating on a smaller scale, although the trend is still visible, it is not so clear. The results of the conducted research showing the imbalance in the distribution of power in organizations seem to reflect a broader trend, also characteristic of other sectors of the economy, including those with a high level of feminization, such as higher education (Sulkowski et al., 2019) or the social sector (Davidson, Burke, Richardsen, 2011). Regarding the cultural sector, the observed trend is also characteristic of other countries, e.g. Great Britain (Dodd, 2012; Skillset, 2010), Germany, France and Italy (Anheier, 2017). One can even be tempted to say that it looks like a universal trend. Admittedly, looking at how this phenomenon has changed over time (e.g., UNESCO, 2017), more and more women hold managerial positions in cultural organizations, but changes in this area are progressing slowly. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (2020), the indicator regarding the share of women in leadership positions (without division into sectors) is one of the slowest changing over the years, compared to, for example, indicators related to issues such as access to education, medical care or participation in the labor market in general.

As underlined by the respondents during the interviews women are facing numerous challenges while trying to develop professionally towards managerial positions in cultural organizations. Those are often linked with still existing stereotypical approach towards social roles assigned to men and women, which is being present not only in private but also professional environment of the society (Klenke, 2017). Some researchers, while trying to understand the studied phenomenon underline the different organization of professional and personal life of women than men, emphasizing that the imbalance in the development of professional career increases with age. Senior management positions are usually reached at a later age (Skillset, 2010; Aluchna, 2013). While at the initial stage of professional career development, its pace is similar for both women and men, when women decide to start a family, discrepancies begin to appear, and men significantly move forward. In many cases, as Orr and Stevenson (2018) emphasize, this difference is never evened out. Managerial positions often require more time commitment, in the case of cultural organizations often in non-standard working hours, which is a greater challenge for women, who must combine professional work with family responsibilities to a greater extent than men (Dodd, 2012).

However, the findings presented in this article are limited in that they are based on limited number of studied cases, including surveys from 512 cultural organizations deepened with the voices of 20 women working in Polish public cultural organizations. Thus, their stories are not generalizable, but they still offer several points of departure for future research. However, it is believed that the insights from this study extend beyond the public cultural organizations, as there are many other examples of similar female experiences in organizations worthy of exploration. Also it would be interesting to explore how women are navigating through their work environment in cultural organizations and how their strategies aimed at reaching top managerial positions look like.

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Women in Management Positions: A Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda

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Abstract: Throughout history, there has been an idea that women had to follow orders, which caused them to be kept in subordinate positions even after they entered the labor market; fortunately, during the last few decades, research focused on gender and female leadership has increased substantially. This has facilitated the visibility of women's potential in top positions in organizations around the world. It has been proven that the presence of women on boards of directors' benefits organizations because it allows them to have a wider diversity of talent for business management. The present study aimed to analyze theoretical and empirical studies on the factors that facilitate women's access to board positions between 2017 and 2022. This systematic review was conducted based on the PRISMA statement strategy of articles in the Proquest, Ebsco, ScienceDirect and Scopus databases. Articles published between the indicated years were selected, in Spanish and English, using inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a subsequent critical analysis of the articles obtained. A total of 34 articles were included from which the corresponding results were extracted. The results show that there is a greater amount of research on the subject in European and North American countries, published almost entirely in English. And according to the analysis, the factors that facilitate women's access to board positions can be divided into political types, such as rules, regulations and quotas, cultural factors such as support for women, equal opportunities and gender equity, organizational factors such as organizational culture, policies, practices and training programs, and social factors such as media visibility, the presence of mentors and partner support. The research concludes that the most investigated factors were political, as these factors increase the number of women on boards in the short term; however, it's also necessary to highlight the importance of a fusion with social, cultural, and organizational factors to achieve long-term improvement; as well as the commitment of all the agents that interact in the professional life of women. This paper will contribute to future scientific research on women's access to board positions.

Key words: Gender diversity, Gender equity, Female leadership, Women on top, Business management

1. Introduction

The presence of women in board positions has made some progress in recent years (Kowalewska, 2020). This is expressed by De Vita and Magliocco (2018) who mention that many countries have made efforts to overcome barriers to advancement to senior corporate management in pursuit of equal gender representation on boards. As more countries seek to join the quest for greater diversity in the labor sector, it represents progress towards the long-awaited equal opportunities for women (Nae, 2022). Among the progress made, Scandinavian countries stand out as leading the list when it comes to female representation in board positions. In 2018, the European Institute for Gender Equality indicated that women were positioned in 40% of Norwegian corporate boards (Kowalewska, 2020).

Addressing this issue through scientific research can help identify problems and uncover potential avenues that can facilitate obtaining more diverse boards. The publication of research analyzing the existing theory of women on boards also contributes to future research examining the scope and future improvement of women's leadership and increasing women's representation on boards.

1.1 Women in Board Positions Worldwide

Jurisdictions around the world have expressed the importance of women's participation in decision-making positions, both within government and in corporations. Because many studies have mentioned that the presence of women on boards adds value to a firm, as stated by Ismail et al. (2019) who mention that it's important to prioritize the presence of women in board positions due to the benefits they bring to companies. Among them are better corporate governance practices, better company performance, innovation, strong orientation towards stakeholders and corporate social responsibility (Brieger et al., 2019). In the absence of female participation within boards Lewellyn and Muller (2020) point out that there would be ethical and financial implications. Recent studies have shown that lack of gender diversity in boardrooms can lead to less effective

governance and ethical violations, such as fraud and financial underperformance. But for now, this progress has proven to be minimal as data continues to reflect a low representation of women on boards. This underrepresentation turns out to be a global issue (Peña et al., 2022).

Regarding the issue Huang et al. (2020) mention that gender diversity on corporate boards has been noticeable lately but it's far from being gender balanced. Osi and Teng (2021) indicate that UNESCO in 2017, reported that globally gender equity in leadership positions wasn't visualized, demonstrated by the absence of women in board positions within Asian organizations. According to data indicated by Centrum PUCP et al. (2018) a 2018 study published by Grant Thornton stated that the average percentage of women in board positions was 24% globally, the regions leading participation were Eastern Europe (36%), Latin America (30%), and the EU (27%). In Latin America, the country with the greatest progress in female participation was Mexico. And in the case of Peru, in 2018 the participation of women in managerial positions reached 9.2%, caused to some extent by a reduction in the number of directors. These data show that, although the participation of women on boards has increased over the years, it still doesn't carry much weight because it doesn't represent even a third of the positions on global boards.

1.2 Barriers in Women's Access to Board Positions

There are barriers that make it impossible or difficult for women to advance to board positions, such as sociocultural factor, the effect of social status and the glass ceiling influence female participation in the private sector (Al et al., 2020). Nae (2022) details that gender stereotypes for leadership within the corporate culture, lack of wellness programs for working women, and ingrained cultural ideas about the role of women in families are some of the barriers that limit women. Osi and Teng (2021) stated that gender stereotypes hindered women's advancement in the work sector and created a bias in the organizational culture, underestimated women's capacity, and creates a refusal by companies to promoted them. Halrynjo and Blair (2021) explain that there is gender favoritism when board appointments are made, inferring that today's traditionally male-dominated boards may be an obstacle to women's advancement to positions such as board chairs. There are also cultural barriers that derive not only from factors external to women, but also from women's behavior. Since, by imposing submissive behavior, women may be less inclined to assume leadership positions (Kowalewska, 2020). Maida and Weber (2022) expressed that the culture where sexism predominates could prevent a real change in organizations even by establishing a gender quota in the boards.

2. Methodology

A systematic literature review was performed based on the PRISMA Statement (Hutton et al., 2016) where clear and homogeneous data were obtained (Garcia, 2015). The databases Ebsco, Proquest, ScienceDirect and Scopus were selected because higher quality articles were found. The set of keywords was used for the search: [(women on boards) or (women and board and access)].

As can be seen in figure 1 with the PRISMA statement. For the identification process a total of 6,796,649 results were obtained. The inclusion criteria were subject area or sub-area, full text, open access, peer-reviewed or refereed publications, date of publication, type of source, and type of document. The exclusion factors were database filter, subject or matter filter, thesaurus term and language. Finally, the delete of duplicates in Excel. For the screening, were considered titles that contained the terms "women", "female" or "gender diversity" and "board". In terms of eligibility, the abstract, key words and methodology were analyzed, and the content was checked to see if it was in line with the research topic. Finally, 34 records were included in the analysis.

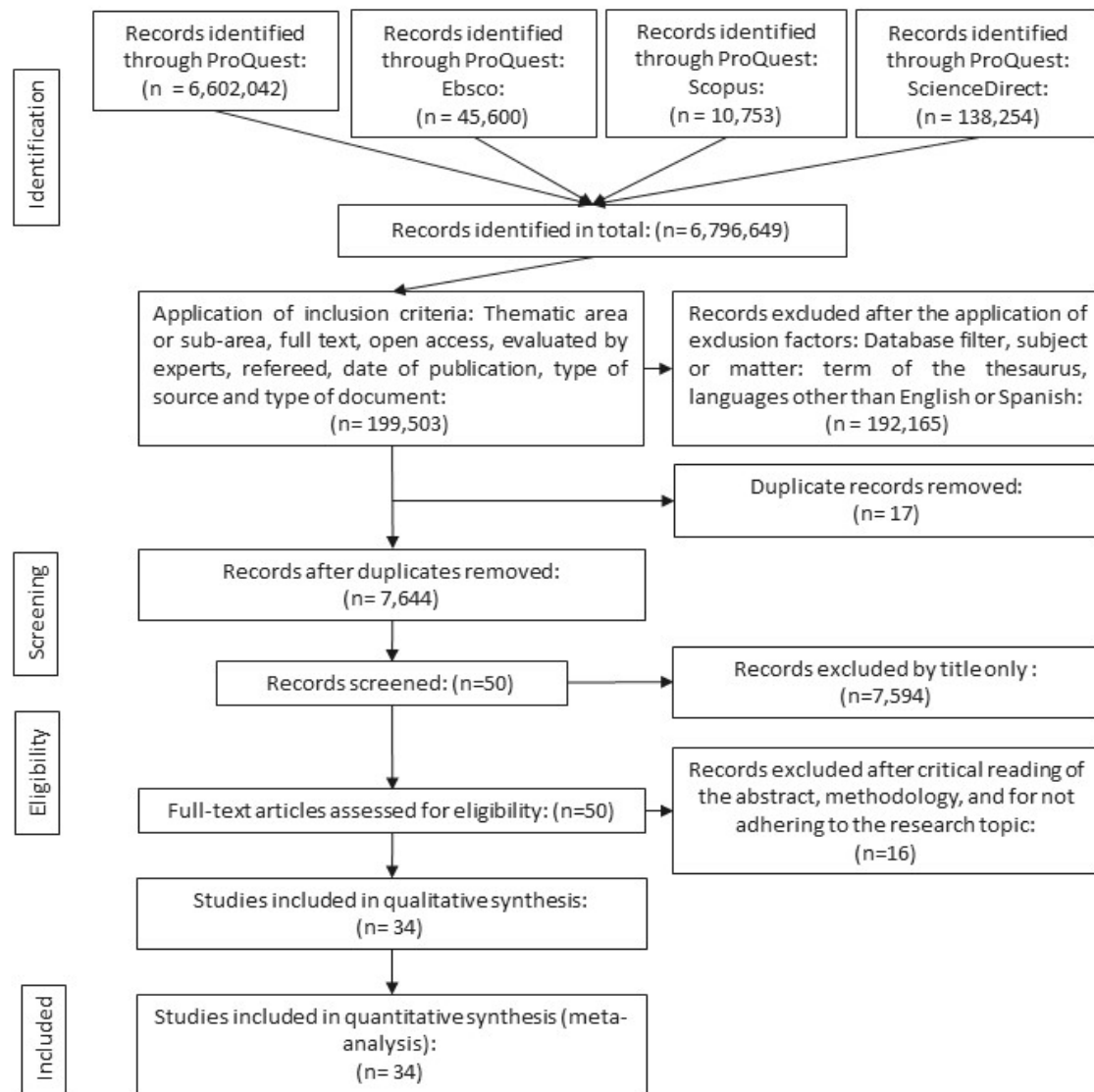


Figure 1: PRISMA Statement

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Analysis of Articles

About the distribution of articles by database, the number of articles found in each of the four databases used: Ebsco, Proquest, ScienceDirect and Scopus. To identify the databases that may be most useful for searching for articles related to women in directories for future projects. Out of a universe of 34 scientific articles reviewed, the main databases were Proquest and Scopus with 41% each and the other two databases were Ebsco and ScienceDirect with 9% each. This suggests that Scopus and Proquest were the most used databases for publications related to gender equity and women's participation in boards.

Figure 2 details the distribution of articles by publication year, with the purpose of identifying the frequencies in the interest about the subject that it had during the period studied. These correspond to the period from 2017 to 2022. The year in which the highest number of scientific articles were published was in 2021 with 32%. 21% were published in 2020. In the year 2019 the 15% were published, in the years 2018 and 2022 the 12% were published and finally for 2017 were 9%. The number of publications made in 2021 exceeded three times the amount published in 2017, and that every year since 2017 and except for 2022, there has been an increase in the publication of articles. This could mean that interest in women's access to board positions has been increasing among researchers around the world over the past five years.

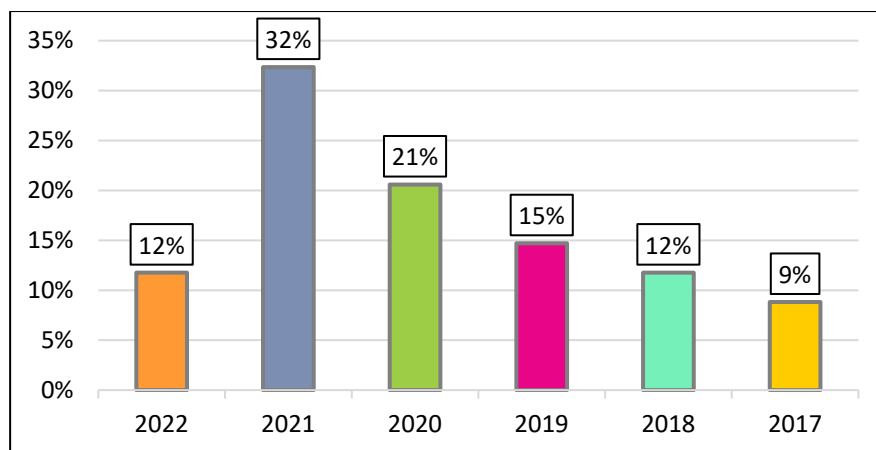


Figure 2: Distribution of Articles by Publication Year

Regarding the language of the articles published in English and Spanish. To identify the language in which most of the articles are useful for future research; of these 34 articles, 97% were in English and only 3% were published in Spanish. This could be interpreted as not publishing a considerable number of articles and scientific research on the subject in Latin American or Spanish-speaking journals, which could be a limitation for future research focusing on the context of a country or sector within Latin America.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of articles by continent studied. It's important to identify which were the contexts from which there is the greatest scientific literature on women in directories. Among them, 56% studied the European context, 18% the North American reality and the worldwide level respectively, 12% the Asian continent, and 3% studied the South American context. These results are consistent with those found in the previous figure, which shows a lack of research on women's access to board positions in the context of South American countries. This could be due to a long history of a sexist culture of which some ideologies still prevail that could be hindering the advancement of gender equity in leadership positions.

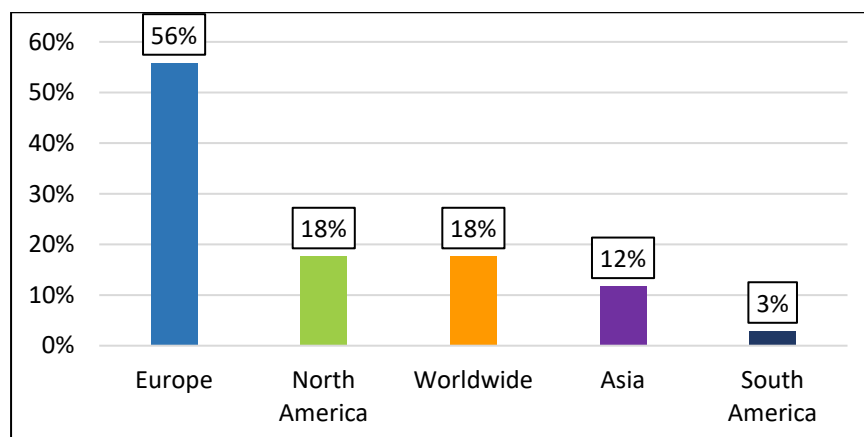


Figure 3: Distribution of Articles by Continent Studied

Figure 4 shows the countries of affiliation of the journals where these articles were published to identify the countries in which there are the largest number of magazines where they investigated women's access in directories. The United Kingdom is the country with the highest number of journals touching the research topic in the selected period with 41%, followed by the United States with 26%, and the Netherlands with 18%. Switzerland, Spain, Poland, Denmark, and Malaysia present only 3% each. The results are in line with what was previously established. This shows that European and North American countries are indeed actively researching women's access to board positions and gender equity.

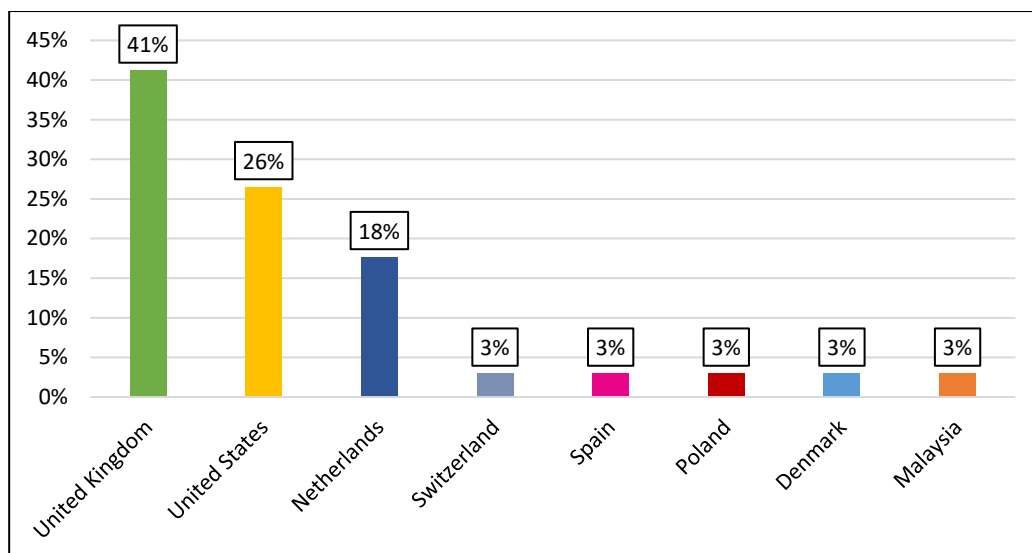


Figure 4: Countries of Affiliation of the Journals Corresponding to the Scientific Articles

3.2 Overall Analysis of Articles

Regarding the type of approach used in the selected articles, there were 41% qualitative and 59% mixed articles. This is due to the nature of the research topic, since it's oriented towards describing factors and characteristics, as well as describing motives and circumstances regarding the factors of women's access to board positions.

Table 1 presents the factors studied in the selected articles, which can be divided into 4 categories. Among them, "Political" factors were studied by 53%, "Organizational" by 35%, "Social" in 26% and "Cultural" by 18%. Of which, the 26% studied two of the factors and 3% studied three of the factors, but the vast majority of 71% focused on only one type of factors. The extensive investigation of political factors can be based on the actions that countries are taking to guarantee and facilitate the access of women to leadership positions, these actions such as female empowerment policies and the application of mandatory quotas to public and private companies have occurred during the last decade and have attracted the interest of researchers.

Table 1: Factors Studied in Selected Articles

Factors	Quantity
Political	53%
Organizational	35%
Social	26%
Cultural	18%

Table 2 presents the most used definitions in the articles. Among the results obtained, it was distinguished that the term "Board" was present in 44% of the articles, followed by "Directive board" with 15%, "Management board" with 12%, "Corporate directory" with 9%, "Boardroom" and "Corporate board" with 6% and the definitions of "Directive council", "General management" and "Corporate governance" with 3% each. It can be observed that the researchers handle different definitions of what boards of directors are, this due to different organizational realities around the world but which finally refer to the highest positions in an organization. The term "Board" has a broader concept than those that follow it, which could be the reason why it's presented more frequently in the articles that investigate this topic.

Table 2: Definitions Most Used in Selected Articles

Definition	Quantity
Board	44%
Directive board	15%
Management board	12%

Definition	Quantity
Corporate directory	9%
Corporate board	6%
Boardroom	6%
Directive council	3%
General management	3%
Corporate governance	3%

In table 3 you can see the most used terms in the 34 scientific articles, 10 were identified. The most used was "Woman" in 100% of the articles, "Gender" in 94%, "Diversity" in 82% and "Country" in 47%. From these results, it can be interpreted that when talking about women and gender within the organizational context, this is easily related to the concept of board diversity. The term "Country" reflects the researchers' interest in focusing on a national reality, since each country has a "Culture" that is different and independent from others. Another term that is repeated is "Quota", this refers to the mandatory and voluntary quotas that have been raised through past research as a possible access factor for women in board positions.

Table 3: Most Used Terms in Selected Articles

Term	Quantity
Woman	100%
Gender	94%
Diversity	82%
Country	47%
Quota	41%
Position	38%
Culture	35%
Social	29%
Regulation	26%
Directory	21%

Table 4 presents the definitions used for the different types of factors. Among the main cultural factors are equal opportunity and gender equality. Among the organizational factors are policies, practices, and organizational culture. The most frequent within the political type were regulations and quotas, both mandatory and voluntary. And in the main social factors are civic norms, and the development of business skills, capabilities, and leadership. Researchers have proposed a wide variety of factors that are involved in women's career paths and that can influence their access to boards of directors.

Table 4: Definitions Used for the Different Types of Factors

Cultural	Organizational	Political	Social
Support for women	Organizational policies	Standards	Women's capacity
Equal opportunities	Organizational practices	Regulations	Civic norms
Promotion of women	Orientation programs	Mandatory dues	Less gender stereotypes
Gender diversity	Social capital	Voluntary quotas	Willingness to lead
Gender equality	Organizational culture	Policies	Business skills
Power distance	Code of good governance	Institutions	Media visibility
Individualism	Voluntary initiative	Reforms	Presence of mentors
Indulgence	Organizational values	Mandates	Partner support

In the systematic review conducted on the 34 articles published in the period 2017-2022, it was found that the access factors for women in board positions were mostly investigated in Europe and North America. The factors identified were classified according to the environment in which they apply: cultural, organizational, political, and social. This is in line with authors (Cabeza et al., 2019; Joecks, 2020; Maida and Weber, 2022; Osi and Teng, 2021; Pucheta et al., 2021; Ricks, 2018) who point to cultural factors such as the importance of equal gender opportunities, promotion of women in the business environment and support for gender diversity in board positions. Authors (Afzali et al., 2021; Blommaert and Van den Brink, 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Chen and Houser, 2019; Haldar et al., 2020; Halliday et al., 2021; Halrynjo and Blair, 2021; Kirsch, 2022; Kowalewska, 2021; Mateos de Cabo et al., 2022; Mensi et al., 2021; Osi and Teng, 2021) that investigated the functioning of salient organizational factors such as board culture, practices, policies, orientation programs and codes of good governance. On policies, the authors (Brieger et al., 2019; Cabeza et al., 2019; Dewally et al., 2017; De Vita and Magliocco, 2018; Foster, 2017; Heller and Gabaldon, 2018; Huang et al., 2020; Kowalewska, 2020 and 2021; Lewellyn and Muller, 2020; Maida and Weber, 2022; Martínez et al., 2020; Mateos de Cabo et al., 2019; Seierstad et al., 2017; Seierstad et al., 2021; Sharda, 2019; Thams et al., 2018; Wawryszak, 2021) focused on mandatory quotas, voluntary quotas, regulations, and policies. And authors (Afzali et al., 2021; Blommaert and Van den Brink, 2020; Brieger et al., 2019; Chen and Houser, 2019; Goyal et al., 2021; Halrynjo and Blair, 2021; Osi and Teng, 2021; Peña et al., 2022; Ricks, 2018) who pointed to social factors such as civic norms, mainly in respect for women, reduction of gender stereotypes, leadership in women and business skills development. The findings follow the line of results reported by external studies (Doldor et al., 2012; European Parliament, 2021) that point out the importance of the combination of these factors for the identification of measures to be taken and the long-term pursuit of gender equity. In comparison to that mentioned by (Deloitte, 2022; Gregorič et al., 2017; ILO, 2020; Smith, 2018) who mention that factors sometimes bring a negative effect on organizations, or that, even applying various combinations of factors in a country, it may remain with low or no representation of women on boards. They also suggest that mandatory factors may even be evaded by organizations and wouldn't really be beneficial for women.

4. Conclusions

Among the findings obtained, it can be indicated that databases such as Scopus and Proquest have a greater number of articles that provide useful information for research related to women's access to board positions. It could be seen that there has been an increase in the interest of researchers around the world with respect to the topic studied. It was reflected in European and North American countries, and their search to create measures that allow women to obtain a better representation in directories. The studied factors are cultural, organizational, political, and social. The most studied were the political ones, because they are more effective in increasing the number of women on boards in a shorter period. These factors should be employed once the country has been analyzed, and the only way to bring about long-term change is to use them in tandem. This also requires the commitment of change agents such as government, society, organizations, and women themselves. The identification of the factors will allow future researchers to have more specific knowledge of the possible promoters of greater gender diversity on boards of directors.

Among the articles studied, it was possible to note limitations such as a clear lack of study of the subject applied to the South American reality. Therefore, for future empirical studies it may be useful to conduct research on South American countries to have a broader perspective on the different contexts in which the topic is developed. The language was also a limitation, it should be encouraged to conduct future research in Spanish to help increase the sources of information on the topic in the Spanish-speaking scientific literature.

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Factors that Facilitate Women's Access to Management Positions: The Case of Peruvian Companies

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Abstract: Over the past few years, the presence of women as managers is important for corporate performance, several international organizations have raised their voices to seek the commitment of states around the world; women have begun to have greater recognition of their social and intellectual abilities to manage companies, but full gender equity within the corporate world is yet to be seen. Following goal number 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 established by the UN, it's important to improve the situation in countries such as Peru, where the presence of women in managerial positions is still very low so it's necessary to have more women breaking the glass ceiling and climbing to top management positions (Salas et al., 2020). This research study aimed to describe the factors that facilitate women's access to managerial positions. About the methodology, it was a descriptive type of research, with a quantitative, non-experimental, and cross-sectional approach; the population is all the women who held managerial positions in companies in Lima and Callao during 2021, and the sample was 30 women, with a non-probabilistic sampling for convenience; the technique used was the survey and the instrument was the questionnaire. The results obtained showed that among the factors with the greatest impact were myths and stereotypes, the most required factor to facilitate the access of women in managerial positions was the change in social paradigms, the required impact was the reduction of gender inequality and according to the perspective of women managers the participation of women in managerial positions was proportional to a greater economic return and it's expected that women managers can make way for other women in various areas of the organization. It was concluded that the factors that are most involved in the access of women to management positions are those linked to the culture and thinking of the population, so it requires a long-term plan and the commitment of women, organizations, the environment, the culture, and government entities to facilitate the access of women in management positions in Lima and Callao.

Keywords: Manager's gender, Gender diversity, Gender equity, Female leadership, Business management

1. Introduction

In the last 5 years, there has been an increase in research articles on various factors that can generate an increase of women in leadership positions such as management and directorships within organizations, since gender diversity brings benefits not only for companies but also brings social and economic benefits for the country in which it takes place. This is something important because it's part of the mechanisms used to increase business productivity in organizations in addition to supporting goal number 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals established by the UN for 2030 (ILO [International Labour Organization], 2019). However, globally there has been evidence of the weak representation of women in management and board positions, as indicated in the Grant Thornton report (2022), where it's mentioned that although there was an increase in the percentage compared to the previous year, the global proportion of women in senior positions is 32%. While Deloitte (2022) in its most recent edition, indicated that the percentage of women in board positions globally in 2021 was 19.7%. Chen and Houser (2019) detailed that stereotypes influence how capable women are seen to be in developing these skills. Governments around the world, over the past few years, have paid attention to gender balance. Not only because of the quest to assert women's rights in societies traditionally based on male power, but also because of the effect that government measures have on society and the opportunities that society gives to women. Among the measures employed by governments are both mandatory and voluntary quotas, but organizations in countries such as India have created mechanisms to circumvent them (ILO, 2020). Demonstrating that the actions taken aren't sufficient to achieve full gender balance.

Access factors comprise aspects in terms of different environments that allow the creation of measures and actions taken by various actors interacting with women in their working life. Osi and Teng (2021), named them as facilitators that women encounter before and during their professional life to reach the CEO position. These are tools of the legal or voluntary type that serve to break the "glass ceiling" which is defined as what prevents women from continuing to climb to higher job positions within the company in which they work (Ordóñez and Pérez, 2020).

1.1 Objective

The general objective is “Describe the factors that facilitate the access of women in management positions in companies in Lima and Callao, in the year 2021”. It’s necessary to investigate the factors that facilitate access for women in managerial positions in Lima and Callao since women currently don't have a significant representation in senior positions such as managers and boards compared to the male presence. According to ILO (2017) in South America, female talent is underutilized and it’s visible that the region has a loss of female talent in leadership positions due to obstacles such as functions, gender stereotypes, and the family and domestic burdens assigned to women. An identification of the Peruvian context must be made before the planning of measures that facilitate or guide women to leadership positions within the administrative boards of Peruvian companies. And that greater gender equality can then be made visible.

2. Literature Review

Regarding the factors that facilitate women's access to managerial positions, Osi and Teng (2021) mentioned the influential and required factors on the professional success of women such as the drivers of professional success for women leaders and reflect the different levels of relationships and interactions women have in their organizations (mentors, colleagues, and subordinates) and families (husbands, sons, and fathers), which reflect cultural norms and standards such as myths and stereotypes, lack of training, discrimination (Osi and Teng, 2021; Tahir et al., 2021), machismo (Barrueto, 2021), lack of gender equality policies (Centrum, 2018) and workplace harassment (Pwc, WomenCEO Perú and IFC, 2021). The required factors could be commitment and greater momentum from the CEO and senior management (ILO, 2019), change of social paradigms (Barrueto, 2021), promotion of laws that consider their participation (Seierstad et al., 2017; Heller and Gabaldon, 2018) and female empowerment policies (Centrum, 2018; Brieger, 2019; Lewellyn, 2020). About women in managerial positions Núñez and Tannert (2018) explain that they are women with the necessary skills to lead organizations. Barrueto (2021) mentions that there are determining factors for these women to reach senior management positions, such as the expected required impact like the reduction of gender inequality (Halliday et al., 2021), ILO (2019) mentions greater sustainability over time of the company, greater innovation, greater female employment, and the improved profitability of a company. And the perspective of women's participation as mentioned by Barrueto (2021) about greater female participation in boards generates greater economic returns (ILO, 2019) and consideration of the importance of promoting active female participation in managerial positions.

Various antecedents have been written worldwide, the article by Halliday et al. (2021) analysed the national context as a key factor for the integration of organizational leadership and the presence of women on boards. Their results showed that having female directors generates a greater impact in organizations within national contexts with macho cultures, with less gender equality. Osi and Teng (2021) studied factors that challenged and enabled women in their working lives were identified, such as the presence of myths and stereotypes, and discrimination. They also identified facilitators such as a culture with equal opportunities, constant support from organizations through orientation programs, professional training, and more. ILO (2019) presented a study that looked at solutions to increase gender diversity, they found it’s that a woman is the president of the board of directors since there is evidence that this causes more women in intermediate-level positions in organizational leadership positions; having more women in executive positions also generates benefits to the organization such as greater sustainability, greater profitability, and innovation. The study by Ricks (2018) investigated the skills useful to women in board positions in the education sector to reach the top level in the organizational hierarchy to set a pattern or path for other women to rise as well. The role of culture in equal opportunities and the importance of a commitment on the part of organizations and society so that women can have access to training in these skills is also pointed out. Seierstad et al. (2017) examined the promotion of laws that consider the participation of women has a great influence on the increase of women in high positions. He found it necessary to have constant support and accompaniment from political forces to generate significant progress. Also pointed out that national policies referring to women on the board of directors should not be recreated by other countries without prior evaluation of the national context, because there are factors that may differ from one country to another, even belonging to the same geographical region. Lewellyn and Muller (2020) tried to identify causal pathways and discover how empowering forces and cultural dimensions together affect gender diversity on corporate boards. Among their findings, the positive relationship between having greater economic and political power and having more women on boards stands out. The beliefs and attitudes of the culture towards women do affect the presence of women in board positions.

Studies on women in managerial positions have also been published in Peru. Pwc, WomenCEO Perú, and IFC (2021) offered a guide with recommendations to get more female directors in Peruvian companies to increase the number of women in senior positions. Within the context of women in high positions, factors that must be addressed were mentioned; an example was workplace harassment. The guide detailed eight strategies that link the organizational culture that offers the same opportunities to men and women, the commitment of the general management, compliance with the legal framework, the rights to equality and non-discrimination, organizational policies that promote diversity, strategies of gender, the promotion of female leadership and alliances with specialized organizations. Barrueto (2021) investigated factors that influence the presence of women managers in companies in Metropolitan Lima and their impact. Among the results obtained, the main influential factors were myths and social stereotypes, followed by machismo. The factors that benefit the permanence of women in managerial positions were the commitment on the part of managers and changes in social paradigms. WomenCEO Perú et al. (2021) made a report about the participation of women on the boards of directors located in the context of Peru, it was mentioned that women are in 40% of companies listed on the stock market also confirmed that a diverse board of directors adds value to companies. It also raised an access factor, the employment profile of women, focusing on their capabilities, which is why organizations must commit to training them and providing equal opportunities. In the study carried out by Centrum PUCP et al. (2018) to learn about his journey and experience in the position, access factors such as years of experience in the field and internationally, and shareholder confidence were identified. The need for policies that achieve female empowerment was mentioned. Jara (2020) carried out an investigation analysing the relationship between the entry of women to the board of directors and the diversity of its composition, the results obtained showed that the participation of women directors contributes to improving diversity on boards since they increase the diversity of knowledge.

3. Methodology

This research is descriptive, non-experimental, and cross-sectional design. The population is all the women who held a managerial position in Lima and Callao, during 2021. Currently, there is no exact data on the number of women who held managerial positions in Peru, according to a study by the consulting firm Spencer Stuart (2016), the percentage of women in the general manager position was 7% in Peru. And a sample of 30 women who worked in managerial positions within companies in Lima and Callao during the year 2021 was used. As it's an unknown quantity, a non-probabilistic sampling is used with purpose since there are limitations in terms of the number of women who can be contacted.

In the analysis unit, inclusion criteria such as the position held by these women was applied. It must be a managerial or board position depending on the type of company in which they work, they must have held the position during the year 2021 and they must have worked in Lima or Callao. The technique used is the survey, and the instrument is the questionnaire. The instrument will be adapted from that belonging to the scientific article by Barrueto (2021) a questionnaire made up of seven questions from which the last two will be eliminated. since they are specific to the context studied in the article and do not correspond to the present investigation. Three sociodemographic questions will be added to obtain the approximate profile of women in managerial positions.

4. Data Collection

The call for participants was made through private LinkedIn messaging and direct contact, and the questionnaire was sent virtually through the Google form with prior confirmation of participation. The participants were previously informed of the importance of providing objective answers to identify the factors that allow women access to management positions. The data obtained were extracted and treated using Excel to find the mode and frequency statistics, the descriptive statistics and the results were presented in frequency graphs and sector graphs for their analysis and interpretation. Copyrights were respected for the adaptation of the Barrueto (2021) instrument applied in her research. In the application of the questionnaire, an informed consent message was presented, and the participants were informed of the use and management of the information collected so that they know the implications of their responses.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Results

Three introductory questions were asked to find out the general profile of the respondents. 53% of the participants are in an age range between 40 and 49 years, followed by 23% between 30 and 39, 20% between

50 and 59 years, 3% between 20 and 29 years old, and finally, no one reaches 60 years of age. About the distribution of the positions held by the respondents in 2021, there were 60% held the position of general manager, 10% of them were executive directors, 7% had positions as director financial and operations manager, 10% had another type of manager, while 3% was a commercial director, and finally, none had positions as an administrative manager or another type of director. For the size of the company in which they worked, half of the respondents 47% worked as a manager or director in medium-sized companies, 47% of them worked in small companies and only 7% in large companies.

Regarding the objective of identifying the influential factors in the access of women to managerial positions in companies in Lima and Callao, in the year 2021, the following results were found. As shown in figure 1, the most influential factors were myths and/or stereotypes with 83%, and machismo with 73% of the respondents having selected them. Followed by the lack of policies on gender equality and discrimination with 50% and 53% respectively. Finally, 23% of the respondents identified the lack of training as an influential factor, and only 20% selected harassment at work.

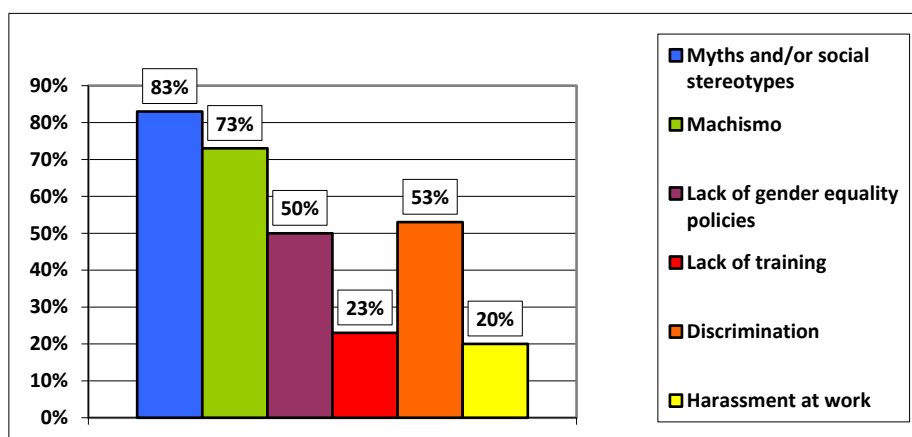


Figure 1: Factors That Influence the Participation of Women in Management

Regarding the objective of identifying the factors required in the access of women in managerial positions in companies in Lima and Callao, in the year 2021, the results displayed in figure 2 were found. Among the respondents, 93% of them identified the change of social paradigms as a required factor, while 83% believe that policies for female empowerment from schools are necessary, 70% of the respondents identified the commitment and greater impulse from CEOs and senior management as a requirement to achieve greater participation of women in management, only 30% selected the promotion of laws that consider their participation and finally 10% believe that other factors are required.

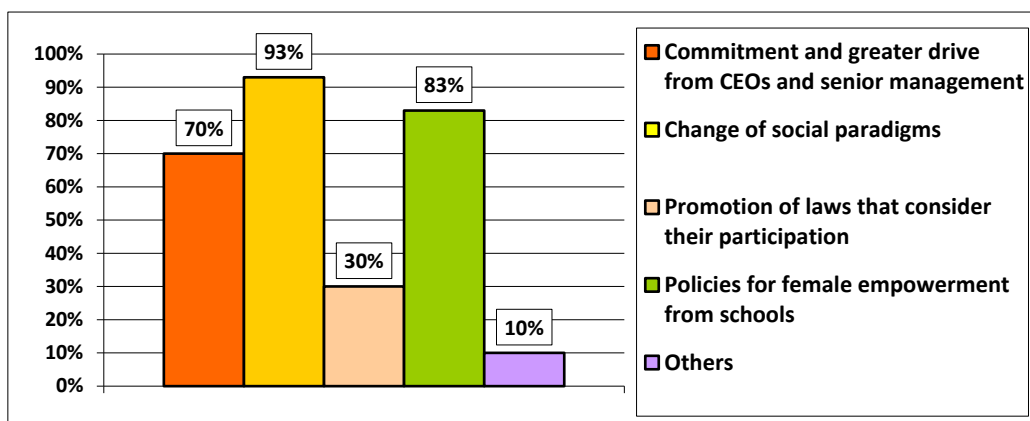


Figure 2: Factors Required to Achieve Greater Participation of Women in Management

Regarding the objective of identifying the required impact of women's participation for women's access to managerial positions in companies in Lima and Callao, in the year 2021, figure 3 shows the results obtained. 47% of the respondents believed the participation of women in management should generate a reduction in gender inequality, 40% greater sustainability over time for the company, and an improvement in profitability. While 37% chose all the alternatives, they were 27% thought that there should be more female employment and 20%

more innovation. Lastly, only 3% of participants expressed that other impacts are required from the participation of women in management.

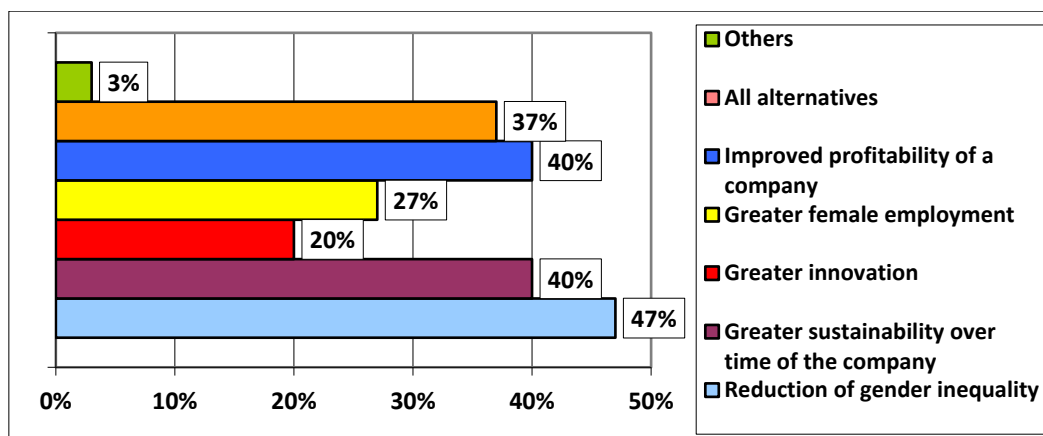


Figure 3: Required Impact of Women's Participation in Management

The objective of identifying the perspective on the access of women in managerial positions in companies of Lima and Callao, in the year 2021. Figure 4 details the results obtained from the perspective of the respondents on whether companies with greater female participation at levels of business managers and in high executive positions present higher economic returns. There were 93% of those answered yes, while 7% thought no.

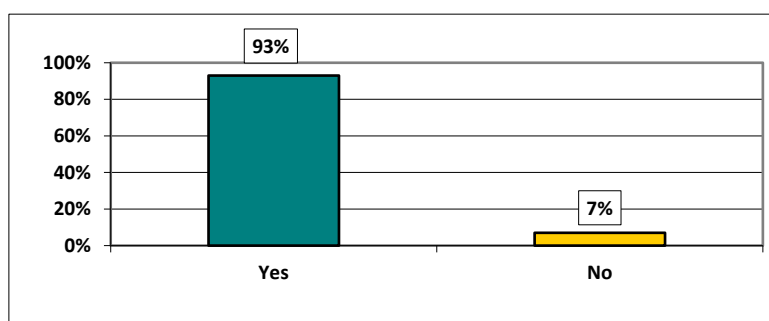


Figure 4: Perspective on Whether Companies With Greater Female Participation at Business Management Levels and in Senior Executive Positions Present Higher Economic Returns

Figure 5 presents the results regarding the consideration of the importance of promoting active female participation in boards. Among the respondents, 100% answered yes and none answered no. It can be seen that currently women in management positions are aware of the importance and need to promote active female participation, and this is a good indicator that they would be willing to do their part to better achieve expectations that more women can ascend to managerial positions in Peru.

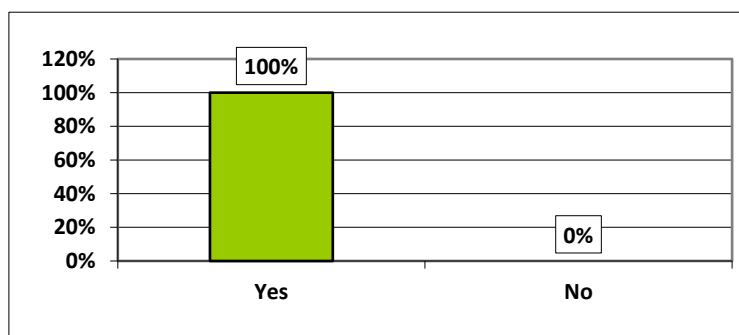


Figure 5: Consideration of the Importance of Promoting the Active Participation of Women In Peruvian Business Management

5.2 Discussion

In the present investigation, the main objective is to describe the factors that facilitate the access of women in management positions in companies in Lima and Callao, in the year 2021. In this regard, after obtaining the results of the questionnaire, it was possible to detail that the profile of women in management positions during 2021 was that of a woman between 40 and 49 years of age, with the position of general manager of medium-sized or small companies. It was also identified that the factor that most influences the presence of women in senior management is "myths and stereotypes" and "machismo" (Barrueto, 2021; Lewellyn and Muller, 2020; Osi and Teng, 2021). The most required factor to achieve a greater presence of women in management was "the change in social paradigms" which contradicts Barrueto (2021), and "female empowerment policies" (Centrum PUCP et al., 2018). The most required impact of the participation of women in management were the "reduction of gender inequality" (Halliday et al., 2021), "greater sustainability in the time of a company" and "improvement of profitability of a company" in the second place (Centrum PUCP et al., 2018). From the perspective of the respondents, it was possible to discover that almost all the respondents consider that companies with greater female participation at business management levels do present higher returns (Barrueto, 2021; ILO, 2019) and that they do consider it important to promote the active participation of women in Peruvian business management (Barrueto, 2021).

However, the results found cannot be generalized to other realities, there are some limitations; first, direct contact with surveyed managers was difficult, and second, the population is small. Therefore, it would be necessary to carry out other investigations that cover a larger sample if the topic is sought to be deepened in the future. Another limitation was the lack of scientific articles that investigate the variables in the Peruvian and Latin American context to compare results in a more detailed way.

It's recommended that more research be carried out that investigates the access of women to high command positions such as management and boards within the Peruvian and Latin American context. In future studies, it would be beneficial to expand the dimensions presented, in addition to the creation and use of instruments with a greater number of questions that allow a greater scope.

6. Conclusion

It was concluded that the factors that facilitate the access of women in managerial positions are determined by those that have a great positive and negative influence on the possibility of their promotion and these are mostly established by culture, which is why a change in social paradigms and promoting female leadership from an early stage of formation. In the Peruvian context, culture is an extremely important factor, but the organization has a decisive role in generating an improvement in the current situation. There are expectations for the participation of women in management, one of which is the reduction of gender inequality. One would then be talking about a commitment at a general level, where both women, organizations, the social and cultural environment, as well as government authorities, commit to change to facilitate women's access to management positions.

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Do Women Have the Right Skills, Network and Support to Become CEOs?

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Abstract: This study investigates how women board members in listed companies perceive the fit between women's leadership skills and how the role of CEO in listed companies is defined in the recruitment process. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 women board members, representing all listed companies in Iceland, to obtain an understanding of their experiences regarding support of women candidates and whether they believe estimates of women's leadership skills contribute to the small number of women holding the position of CEO in a listed company. Data analysis revealed three themes; the first theme concerns networks and their impact on the appointments of CEO; the second deals with support for women seeking CEO positions and the third considers assessment of women's leadership skills in relation to CEO appointments. The findings provide a new insight into the experience of women board members as regards the assessment of women's leadership skills and the support to take on the position of CEO in listed companies in Iceland, but only limited research is available about the topic. The findings indicate that when selecting the CEOs of listed companies, it is a matter of importance that the applicant is a member of a male network and complies with masculine stereotypes of leadership styles. The findings suggest that when appointing CEOs of listed companies there is more support for men's overconfidence than women's reserved demeanour and men's overconfidence is perceived as a better fit to how the role of CEO is defined in the recruitment process. The study provides new insights into how these outdated ideas on effective leadership and gender roles impact decisions when CEOs of listed companies are selected with corresponding likelihood of women being overlooked as successful candidates in the selection process.

Keywords: Gender, Effective leadership, CEO recruitment, Listed companies, Boards, Stereotypes

1. Introduction

Recent multinational research shows that conservative views, where men are seen as better qualified for leadership than women, are more common in countries where equal rights policies have made slow progress and that there is greater likelihood of women being found in high-level corporate leadership positions where the concept of equal rights is more widely accepted (van Mensvoort *et al.* 2021). In Iceland, gender equality is seen as being at an advanced level (WEF 2022) and women's labour market participation is high. Nevertheless, of the 22 companies listed on the Nasdaq Iceland Stock Exchange, only three are headed by women CEOs which is more in line with the gender ratio in leadership positions in countries where gender equality enjoys only limited progress (van Mensvoort *et al.* 2021).

The enactment of board gender quota legislation in Iceland has had the effect of ensuring that women represent at least 40% of board members, nonetheless, Iceland has not experienced the intended spill-over effect of reaching gender parity in CEO and executive level positions (Óladóttir *et al.* 2021). Various explanations have emerged, such as women's lack of confidence in their own abilities (Óladóttir *et al.* 2021) and that conflicting demands of family and work exercise a negative impact (Júlíusdóttir *et al.* 2018). Furthermore, recent Icelandic research indicates that the prevalent CEO recruitment practices exclude women through overreliance on board members' networks and listings from recruitment agencies (Christiansen *et al.* 2021).

Knowledge of effective leadership has evolved from focusing on uniform leadership skills (Carlyle, 1841/2013) to the appreciation of diverse competencies based on knowledge and training (Day *et al.* 2014), emphasising clear objectives and ease of communication (Gómez-Leal *et al.*, 2021). A leader's real ability comprises being able to use more than one leadership style in step with each task and circumstance (Amiri *et al.* 2020) and integrate firmness and support to ensure success (Pearce *et al.*, 2019). Those traits are characteristic of female priorities in leadership and administration (Garikipati and Kambhampati 2021), but there is a dearth of research aiming to evaluate women's real leadership abilities to take on high-profile leadership roles.

It is important to further deepen our understanding of how women's leadership skills are assessed in the CEO recruitment process at listed companies as limited research is available on this topic. This study focuses on the experiences and perspectives of women sitting on the boards of listed companies in Iceland to gain an insight into the assessment and support regarding women's leadership competence as CEOs. The research question is:

What is the experience of women board members in listed companies of the assessment and support regarding women's leadership skills to serve as CEOs in listed companies?

2. Review of Literature

In order to succeed, leaders use a variety of leadership styles (Amiri *et al.* 2020) and adapt to circumstances to respond to the needs of customers and colleagues (Sandstrom and Reynolds, 2020) and to meet current challenges regarding the mediation of knowledge and information (Alade and Windapo 2020). A leader's abilities to strengthen cooperation and consensus, as well as sharpening foresight and accountability, are of crucial importance in times of change (McGuire *et al.*, 2020; Veil *et al.* 2020) where flexibility and versatility can have a decisive impact (Petridou and Zahariadis 2021).

Corporate success and performance have been associated with CEOs' leadership skills (Chadwick and Dawson 2018) where effective leadership, among other things, comprises personal firmness, education and skills involving communication, motivation and personal influence (Kaur and Singh 2018). Success is often regarded as being based on diverse competencies for communication and policy formation that the leader in question practises and develops (Day *et al.* 2014). An effective leader can communicate knowledge and information, adapt to circumstances and harness collegiate abilities (Blanchard 2019). A human approach accompanied by a transformative, ethical, honest and servant leadership is also associated with success (Hoch *et al.* 2016), especially if characterised by a combination of firm principles and empathy (Eva *et al.* 2019), thus interweaving formal and informal aspects of leadership (Pearce *et al.* 2019).

Collins (2001) published landmark research and outlined the attributes of the effective leadership of CEOs who, on the one hand, are characterised by *personal humility* and, on the other, *professional will*, but those qualities were not identified in comparative companies that had not shown a similar degree of financial success. A large number of recent studies compare Collins' (2001) conclusions, highlighting that a leader's determination, ease of communication and personal humility are traits that stimulate corporate success (Gilotio *et al.* 2020; Ou *et al.* 2018). From the above it may be gathered that knowledge of effective leadership has developed from narrowly defined abilities (Carlyle 1841/2013) towards multiple skills to inspire a diverse group for success (Veil *et al.* 2020). Feminine areas of emphasis in leadership are distinguished by use of social abilities, a democratic leadership style and flexibility for different tasks and circumstances, encouraging staff participation, rewarding good performance and combining firmness and support to ensure success (Amiri *et al.* 2020; Eagly *et al.* 2003; Pearce *et al.* 2019).

Experienced managers, men and women, make use of networks to support their professional advancement (Broadbridge 2010) and access to such a network is seen as an effective method for women's corporate leadership promotion (Krivkovich *et al.* 2018). Women's networks are based on employment strategies and can be used to support individuals who seek professional advancement (Singh *et al.* 2006). Men and women use networks differently (van den Brink and Benschop 2013). Men's networks provide more professional information and contain more links with high-placed individuals (McDonald 2011) and men are more likely to strategically make use of such connections when seeking promotion (Broadbridge 2010). Women are less likely than men to use networking when seeking high-level positions (Small *et al.* 2007) and limited access to a network is seen as one of the explanations for the lack of women in managerial positions (Ibarra *et al.* 2013).

There is no difference in perspectives of male and female leadership skills when own assessment and that of others is investigated in parallel. But when others' assessment is examined on its own a significantly higher estimation appears of women's leadership skills compared to those of men (Paustian-Underdahl *et al.* 2014). When women emphasise their own abilities, they are considered less attractive and simultaneously less likely to obtain leadership roles (Paustian-Underdahl *et al.* 2014), and when women demonstrate assertiveness they are deemed unattractive and are less likely to be hired, but the same does not apply to assertive males.

Leadership perspectives and whether certain individuals are regarded as good leaders depend on stereotypes and whether those concerned reflect values and traditions of the group in question (Hoyt and Chemers 2008). Stereotypes regarding women's abilities and their roles influence assessments of their leadership qualities and thus may explain why a qualified woman is less likely to advance to a top-level management position than an equally qualified man (Vial and Napier 2018). Research on the perspectives of more than 16 thousand individuals in 22 OECD countries (van Mensvoort *et al.* 2021) indicated that the further equality issues are advanced in each country, the more likely it is that attitudes are favourable towards women being effective CEOs. Males are less likely than females to believe that women can be successful CEOs and with rising age and lower education this attitude becomes more established. Recent research indicates that in Iceland professionalism is lacking in the

CEO recruitment and selection process for listed companies (Christiansen *et al.* 2021; Óladóttir *et al.* 2021). Practices of exclusion and discrimination towards women are not unique to Iceland and have also been found to occur in executive search practices in Finland, for example (Meriläinen *et al.* 2015).

3. Methods and Data Analysis

The aim of the present study is to concentrate on the perspectives and experiences of women board members in listed companies of *the support for women and assessment of women's leadership qualities to become CEOs* in listed companies and how they have experienced *areas of emphasis in relation to women's leadership skills* in the recruitment process.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 women board members to obtain an understanding of their experiences regarding support of women candidates and to determine whether they believe estimates of women's leadership skills contribute to the fact that only few women have the position of CEO in a listed company. A grounded-theory approach is appropriate where the phenomenon is examined from the perspectives and experiences of participants regarding processes, decisions, and barriers in the context of CEO recruitment and selection (Esterberg 2002; Merriam and Tisdell 2016).

The research made use of a purposive sampling, inviting participants who had experience of the phenomenon under study (Holloway and Schwarz 2018). In June 2020 invitations were submitted to women on the boards of all listed companies on the Icelandic stock market, in total 19 listed companies with a total of 45 women board members. The interviews were aided by a framework containing questions regarding experience in various aspects of the recruitment process of CEOs of listed companies, *inter alia*, issues relevant to the research question; that is, criteria for selecting CEOs and assessment of women's leadership skills and how they were supported. The interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams during the period 15 June to 6 July 2020; they lasted 60-130 minutes, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were given aliases to ensure their anonymity.

Data analysis began concurrently with data acquisition. The interviews were coded in line with research objectives and the research question. At first, open coding was used where the interviews were read line by line, paragraph by paragraph and page by page until themes began to appear focusing on interviewees' perception and experience regarding support and assessment. Those themes were revealing and repeated themselves in the interviews. The next stage was targeted coding looking for indications of an idea or concept which helped develop an image of the main conclusions. A special effort was made to find the core element in interviewees' perception and those themes were reduced and deleted which did not answer the research question and new elements emerged. At the same time, constant comparison was used to gain a better overview of the data followed by axial coding to help determine whether and how themes from the open coding process were linked or overlapped (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

4. Findings

Data analysis revealed three themes; the first concerns the networks and their impact on the appointments of CEO; the second deals with support for women seeking CEO positions and the third considers assessment of women's leadership skills in relation to CEO appointments.

4.1 Networks

All participants talk about the importance of support through networks, they also point out that men began using networks well before women did, as Jonina explains: "You have more or less your own network, a peer network, which you try to support professionally, perhaps one another and this is something the men have realized through time." The participants also speak of different areas of emphasis between men and women, as Jonina says: "The guys are highly efficient in this area, but we are not; that is, we cannot be bothered always to go out for a beer after work ... we prefer going home to our children." Moreover, they feel that men's priorities in networking do not always suit women. Table 1 presents examples of direct quotes illuminating the first theme.

Table 1: First Theme: Networks. Examples of Direct Quotes

Representative quote	Interpretation
Networks	
<i>"I had expected a much more professional discussion or something of that nature, but this is a bit of the Icelandic way; you want to like people and preferably know them, or know a lot about them, before you make decisions of this kind ... then the men, apparently, have a better chance for they are often a majority presence on the boards, they have experience which the women lack and they have connections with the other men ... after all this, you have kind of removed the discussion from a professional process, reducing it to: I know him and he is absolutely splendid".</i>	Male personal relationships and networks appear to have stronger impact than a professional dialogue
<i>"I would really have liked to see a woman getting this position ... they did not even line up any candidates ... a name just appears very quickly, and it is just pushed through, and that is the end of it. And of course, it somehow just springs from the network of the men on the board and there is no one who hesitates at this."</i>	All the participants understand the value of networks when selecting for high level positions, but in general men's network determine who is selected

4.2 Support

Many participants express support for women holding CEO positions, however, the actual support for CEO candidates is often behind the scenes and support for female candidates is not coordinated. The participants make the point that support, both from men and women, often has a strong and decisive effect on women's opportunities to be selected for top leadership positions. Although the participants describe general support for women, they also make the point that support for CEO candidates is often behind the scenes and support for female candidates is not coordinated. They emphasise the need for basing support on the competence of the candidate in question, not gender. Men's support is equally important as that of women and the participants make the point that they themselves even received more backing from men in their own careers. In table 2 examples of direct quotes from the second theme are presented.

Table 2: Second Theme: Support for Women. Examples of Direct Quotes

Representative quote	Interpretation
Support	
<i>"If I had not discussed the matter with NN and if she had been less supportive, I just might have given up the idea and said, well, enough is enough, I will stop here. But there I received a small energy boost, and I did not need much, just an eye-opener and encouragement."</i>	The actual support for CEO candidates is often behind the scenes
<i>"Yes, I experienced ... more support from men".</i>	The support of men is no less important than the support from women
<i>"I have really received more support from men, and this is perhaps just because I have worked more with men".</i>	

4.3 Assessment of Women's Leadership Skills

The interviews reveal how decision makers evaluate competencies of women and men differently when assessing women's leadership skills to take on a CEO position, and the modest, yet diligent, approach of women candidates is not well received. The participants explain that female candidates are generally highly competent and even more so than men who apply. In spite of women's leadership qualifications for CEO positions the interviews reveal that the men are more likely to promote themselves and recommend one another. Men are often positively received when they boast their own capabilities but the opposite being the case when women try to promote their competences. The participants express that there is high demand for leadership qualities that both men and women often possess, such as communication and relationships, allocating tasks, motivating people, encouraging their professional development, being flexible and formulating a vision, as Ingibjorg describes:

Being able to act as a spokesman, both internally and externally and have the skill to develop an effective team, just to be able to tune the engine so that it runs. ... This has to do with abilities, trained skills, other experience and interest and I see no distinction between the genders in this regard.

Many of the participants observe that the process relating to CEO appointments should be more professional, as Gyda points out, speaking of the importance of "defining the CEO position from a professional point of view", adding that the dialogue on leadership competence, methods of selection and appointment must be strategic and transparent. The interviews reveal that even though women have the required leadership competencies their humility is not well received during the selection process. Women are less likely to boast of their competencies than men and their humble approach when presenting themselves during the interviews decreases their potentials as applicants. The participants point out how men tend to flaunt their own competencies even though they might not have the required qualifications. Apparently, this overconfident presentation style has a stronger impact on how CEOs are selected than actual leadership competencies and experience as can be seen in table 3 presenting examples of direct quotes from the third theme.

Table 3: Third Theme: Assessment of Women's Leadership Skills. Examples of Direct Quotes

Representative quote	Interpretation
Leadership skills	
<i>"I simply did not believe this until I saw it, in many instances the women were much better qualified than the men who were applying."</i>	Women often possess the leadership skills the companies need
<i>"Somehow the problem is how men versus women speak of their own competencies ... they are perhaps more prone to highlight their own achievements in order to advertise themselves."</i>	Men are positively received when they boast their own capabilities but the opposite being the case when women try to promote their competences
<i>"Because the men apply even though they only tick one box, while the women, ...sometimes we see this perfectionism."</i>	

5. Discussion

The findings provide a new insight into the experience of women board members as regards the assessment and support of women's leadership skills to take on the position of CEO in listed companies in Iceland. The findings moreover demonstrate that the women board members perceive that the women's leadership skills are not deemed to align with how the role of CEO in listed companies is defined in the recruitment process. The findings indicate the importance that the candidate conforms with masculine stereotypes of leadership styles and outdated knowledge on effective leadership. In addition, the interviews reveal the importance that the applicant is a member of a male network.

The interviews reveal that women use networks differently and less deliberately than men and this confirms the results of earlier research (van den Brink and Benschop 2013). Moreover, the findings indicate that the women board members experience men's networks as overly influential in the selection process. The women on the boards explained that the organisation and appearance of men's networks is often at odds with women's attitudes and priorities. Those findings are in many ways in agreement with research by Greguletz *et al.* (2019) who suggest that women can feel unwelcome in somewhat homogeneous groups of men, characterised by male interests and the timings of gatherings are often at odds with family life.

The findings reveal that the principles of leadership skills guiding CEO appointments are not in accordance with current knowledge of effective leadership, which is based on diverse abilities to focus on others and built on a modest approach to motivate, inform, develop trust and harness the capacity of a diverse group of people and lead them to success (Alade and Windapo, 2020; Amiri *et al.* 2020; Eva *et al.* 2019; Gómez-Leal *et al.* 2021; Ou *et al.* 2018; Sandstrom and Reynolds 2020). These findings reflect outdated notions of effective leaders not known to have been suggested in earlier research on selection of CEOs in listed companies. In the process, little importance is given to the skill of creating success by means of a humble approach (Collins 2001; Ou *et al.* 2018) combining *professional will* and *personal humility* (Collins 2001) in terms of which a leader is able to merge formal authority and an empowering and co-operative management approach (Pearce *et al.* 2019). Such leadership success factors are more likely to emerge among women than men (Eagly *et al.* 2003; Garikipati and Kambhampati 2021).

Clear examples of contradictory demands regarding women's leadership skills can be found in indications that more demands are placed upon women in recruitment interviews than upon men. Those contradictory demands have not been clearly indicated in earlier research on the topic of appointment of corporate CEOs. Those demands may, for example, be gleaned from a comment by one participant "... in this situation you cannot show humility, it simply is not going to work." This refers to the example that candidates must demonstrate unwavering self-confidence and blow their own trumpet, while it was not considered appropriate for women to speak too highly of themselves. This is in accordance with findings by Paustian-Underdahl *et al.* (2014), which demonstrate that when women show a strong and assertive performance, they are considered unattractive and less likely to land the position of CEO, whereas such attitudes show no links with men's strong views and determination.

The participants describe a strong male influence on company boards, stating that the men have quite often found members of their own network for the CEO position and they are reluctant to place their trust in women's abilities. This agrees with the findings of van Mensvoort *et al.* (2021) indicating that men in the OECD countries are less inclined to think women can be effective CEOs; this attitude is more to be expected as the men grew older and support is also less likely from men in managerial positions.

The findings show that although women are generally seen as possessing leadership skills, they are not appointed CEOs in listed companies and predominant perspectives and priorities appear to trigger a disregard for qualified individuals when selecting CEOs (Bongiorno *et al.* 2014). With the above in mind, it would be a matter of considerable interest to seek viable methods and build on recent evidence on effective leadership to increase the number of women appointed as CEOs in listed companies in Iceland.

Among the contributions of the study is to provide a new insight into the experience of women board members of the recruitment process of CEOs in listed companies in Iceland. Also, an important contribution is that the findings demonstrate how the candidate for the CEO position should conform with outdated knowledge on effective leadership not known to have been suggested in earlier research on selection of CEOs in listed companies.

6. Conclusion

In this research the findings suggest a certain underrating of feminine skills and overrating of abilities often related to men. Also, the research provides indications that such assessments of men's and women's qualifications for CEO positions are not based on current state of knowledge as to what should be regarded as effective leadership qualifications. Those findings, along with the evidence of contradictory perspectives, reflect the impact of stereotypes regarding women's abilities and roles and outdated ideas as to effective leadership that are not in step with organizational progress in Iceland in the interest of gender equality.

Basing decision-making on CEO selection in listed companies on such perspectives leads to increased likelihood of overlooking highly qualified individuals, of all genders, who could have significant potential to lead the companies to success. It may be concluded that it is high time to focus on applicants' real leadership qualities,

thereby endeavouring to ensure that the perspectives and decision-making of those in charge of appointing CEOs of listed companies comply with the latest knowledge in this field.

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Perspectives on Gender Mainstreaming in International Cooperation in STI: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: Gender equality is the fifth Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goal. However, there are still global gaps to be addressed for leveraging science, technology, and innovation (STI) for achieving this goal. Countries and governments at all levels need to effectively utilize STI to help mobilize the global community to assist in gender mainstreaming. International cooperation encompasses a great diversity of countries, regions, dominant religions, and cultures in broad terms – and this is undoubtedly a relevant hinderance to a gender equality narrative. Even within most homogeneous areas, such as the European countries, different levels of awareness on gender issues still prevail, impacting the practical relevance of the problem. Many gender-related projects, actions, and policies aim to counteract this. However, there is no clear guidance on what is expected from the institutions about addressing gender equality to mainstream gender into international dialogues. Therefore, gender equality runs the risk of remaining a “good intention”. In addition, there is little explicit data on the gender dimension in international agreements. The design for this study includes qualitative and quantitative data collected in the EU Horizon 2020 Gender STI. The framework is developed based on three main data sources collected from semi-structured interviews, an online survey, and a mapping exercise on gender equality in STI agreements in different regions worldwide. These sources, collected from more than 60 countries worldwide, allow data triangulation to validate the qualitative insights related to gender mainstreaming in STI. This paper offers critical insights on gender mainstreaming in international dialogues, which are becoming an essential instrument of change if cultural differences are considered. The institutional profile and professional culture are relevant to define each gender balance action's range and foster data production on the subject. Moreover, recent requirements in European funding instruments, such as Horizon Europe, have a broad impact on the international cooperation landscape, inducing a general institutional change and a reverse cultural bias.

Keywords: Gender mainstreaming, International cooperation, STI international dialogues, Gender research, Comparative study

1. Introduction

Gender equality is undergoing changes that are bringing an impact beyond anything we have seen in the 20th century. The Treaty of Rome incorporates the principle of equal pay for equal work and furthering, Marseille Declaration (2022) enforces gender equality based on the Ljubljana Declaration (2021) plus forward movement with the implementation of the new strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation (R&I). Following this, the European Union (EU) should mainstream and integrate the gender dimension in all the international cooperation activities in R&I, including the preparation and design, the implementation, and monitoring and evaluating policies.

Even though actions on gender equality have already taken place, it seems that more focused and implementable guidance is still missing.

This work aims to perform a comparative analysis worldwide, focusing on the main barriers and implementation measures of gender equality in international cooperation STI actions. We analyze, extract and summarize the collected data, namely a mapping exercise on gender equality in STI bilateral and multilateral agreements (528 revised), an online survey (204 responses), and structured interviews (80) performed with key actors in international cooperation activities in different regions of the world. This should reflect a foundation for current barriers in STI for gender mainstreaming and equality. Primarily through the range of the collected data, a worldwide overview can be given to help set the following actions in agreements, policies, memorandum of

understanding, and activities from different actors. By finding a common international experience, work can be done more efficiently and focused.

2. Literature Review

According to the literature, the lack of gender perspective results from the historical interaction of science, technology, and masculinity, guiding knowledge production and innovation (Cockburn, 1993; Harding, 1991). This phenomenon, embedded in male normativity, is manifested in different and interconnected ways in STI fields. In facing this scenario, the European Research Area Communication (2012) defined three objectives to foster an institutional change: gender equality in scientific careers, gender balance in decision-making, and integration of the gender dimension into the content of R&I.

These objectives considered dense literature on related topics and the research indicated differences in the distribution of gender within the areas of knowledge of universities. Following the research carried out by the United Nations, only 35% of the students enrolled in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) courses are women (UNESCO, 2017). Several studies have been made to understand the channels through which these differences are perpetuated.

2.1 Stereotypes

One aspect is the existence of stereotypes based on gender that allows the creation of preconceived judgments of people based on perception (McKinnon & O'Connell, 2020). Studies have shown that gender stereotypes are present and linked with representations and perceptions in society in which women are portrayed as having traits such as warmth and nurture. At the same time, men are depicted with characteristics such as competence and assertiveness (Fiske et al., 2002). In this sense, male stereotypes are much more linked with science, as rationality and objectivity are co-constitutive concepts of masculinity (Cockburn, 1993; Harding, 1991).

Therefore, girls and women are embedded in a frame where they frequently are not perceived as suited for science. When they enter areas of scientific endeavor, they are directed to careers linked to the warmth presented by those stereotypes. Research has indicated that gender stereotypes significantly affect STI fields, especially concerning STEM disciplines, as the hampering of the attraction, retention, and progression of girls and women to STEM (De Melo et al., 2012; McKinnon & O'Connell, 2020). According to Lavy & Sand (2015), this problem can stem from the stereotypical beliefs of teachers and parents of young children.

2.2 Glass Ceiling

Another significant impact is the gender imbalance in career progression and decision-making positions. The literature indicates that there are many "invisible barriers" that prevent women from progressing in their careers or, as Guy (1992) defined, a "glass ceiling". Guy described this metaphor by focusing on the structural barriers in the organizations where women advance into high-level positions – rather than individual or social factors.

According to Connell (2006), the "glass ceiling" approach has limitations since it uses a dichotomous perspective of gender and uses the logic in which the administration is thought to be "independent of gender", or neutral. In this sense, Connell identifies that although *equal* opportunity measures are taken, gender labor divisions are maintained in organizations and society. In her study, she proposes the "gendered institutions" perspective in which she identifies the multidimensional processes responsible for this division with patterns that set the context for practices. She applies a fourfold model with the following dimensions: gender division of labor, gender relations of power, emotion and human relations, and gender culture and symbolism. These dimensions help us understand how these gendered institutions' processes are organized, maintained, and undermined.

2.3 International Relations

This research examined International Relations (IR) literature to understand how gender is considered in the international dimension of STI.

The literature on the concept proposes that gender mainstreaming is a strategy in which all processes of policies take the gender perspective actively into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies. Following the lessons of feminist IR scholars, there are two perspectives on gender mainstreaming in international organizations: the discursive politics, therefore, the language and the meaning of gender equality and difference reflected in cultural norms, organizational identities, policies, procedures, material structures; and institutional politics, with focus on the political and temporal relationships, the bureaucratic and organizational dynamics (Hafner-Burton & Pollack, 2002; True, 2015).

To Hafner-Burton and Pollack (2002), gender mainstreaming presents a concept in which the gender dimension is inserted in all international governance. However, gender mainstreaming demands its adoption by *all* the main actors involved in the policy process, making it dependent on the timing and the nature of mainstreaming processes within and among organizations. They argue that gender mainstreaming is a function of three variables: political opportunities structure (openness of inputs and implementation capacity as outputs), mobilizing structures (collective vehicles of collective action mobilization), and dominant frames (strategic action to create shared understanding and legitimacy). In their study on global development institutions, they suggest structural factors are essential in the tendency to adopt gender mainstreaming. Individual agents also appear as necessary to strategically frame gender mainstreaming. In doing so, they stress the *structure-agent* endeavor, in line with Wendt (1987).

Using feminist analyses, True gives us crucial insights into the limitations and the potential of gender mainstreaming as a strategy for transformation and concludes that transformational potential is better explored at the international level when it involves significant feminist engagement, with the participation of women and men (True, 2015).

3. Methodology

This paper is based on a project's quantitative and qualitative investigation, which includes a consortium of 18 institutions from Europe, America, Asia, and Africa.

The quantitative approach aimed at analyzing gender content in international STI agreements, mapping 528 international agreements in STI through descriptive statistics (Kaur, Stoltzfus & Yellapu, 2018). It also carried out a survey with 204 key individuals from institutions responsible for international dialogues in STI. Based on the quantitative results, the qualitative analysis - the main data source used in this research paper - developed the framework to conduct 80 semi-structured interviews worldwide. All these data will be analyzed on this paper from a comparative perspective that considers the different regions covered, targeting their differences.

The diversity of the consortium in the Gender STI project has made it possible to conduct interviews with institutions worldwide. The interviews included prominent Universities, Research Performing Organisations, Research, and Technology Organizations, National Research and Education Networks, funding agencies, non-governmental organizations specializing in gender in STI, Ministries, governmental institutions, and companies with high expertise in policy dialogues and international cooperation in STI.

The in-deep interviews took place between January and April 2022. Due to the Covid 19, the interviews were restructured using online and management software tools to perform synchronous and asynchronous work.

3.1 Conduction of the Interviews

The project partners interviewed selected key stakeholders in institutions responsible for international dialogues in STI, and a manual on how to proceed with the interviews was developed.

The methodological choice of semi-structured interviews, is one of the most frequently used interview techniques in qualitative analyses (Kallio et al., 2016), because it allows the investigation different points of view about a fact through the iperspective of reality the interviewed persons have and taking into consideration the culture and the environment they are embedded in. The semi-structured approach also guarantees the comparability between 80 interviews across different institutions, countries, and cultures. The manual had, therefore, two main objectives: 1) inform and support the partners in conducting the interviews; 2) allow a comparative analysis of the answers obtained from different countries and different groups of stakeholders.

It is essential to mention that the questions were designed to offer both qualitative and quantitative insights. This is possible since the questions started with yes or no answers and were then developed into which, why, and how solutions. Therefore, the collection of extensive responses allowed translation to quantitative results that gave a quick overview of the status of gender has in international dialogues.

Another critical issue is the fact that the interviews were primarily conducted in the native language of the stakeholder, and the data was translated and then transcribed into an Excel file with the following structure:

1. List of interviewees (country, organization, role)
2. Long answers which reflect quotes from the interviews
3. Quantitative results which reflect solutions in numerical form

Sheet 1 includes basic information from each interviewee that allows us to analyze results by country, type of organization, and role. In the second sheet, the answers to the interview could be shown with examples, experiences, direct measures, and more and were not space limited. Based on these answers, the classification was used to transcribe the answers in Sheet 3. Most of the questions were laid out so that one could answer a "yes", "no", or "partially; I don't know; n/a". This classification makes it possible to transform the results into quantitative data.

4. Results

The research performs a comparative analysis between world regions, with a focus on the main barriers and the implementation measures of gender equality in international cooperation actions as indicated by the stakeholders. Of the 80 in-depth Interviews, 32 were conducted in Europe (Finland, Austria, Spain, France, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Poland, and Cyprus). In Latin America, 25 Interviews were conducted in Chile, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Argentina, Uruguay, and Panama. The 12 interviews in Asia were held in Australia, India, South Korea, and China. In North America, seven interviews were held in Canada and the USA. The 4 interviews in Africa were conducted in South Africa. The continental distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Continental Distribution of Interviews

Continent	Number of Interviews
Europe	32
Latin America	25
Asia	12
North America	7
Africa	4
Total	80

In-depth interview responses were transcribed. From the total 15 questions for the quantitative analysis, 4 were selected for this paper to provide a detailed analysis by continent.

- Q1 Are there cultural and institutional barriers that could be limiting the inclusion of gender equality measures in international cooperation actions?
- Q2 Do the international cooperation agreements or project proposals in which you have been involved set targets to increase the gender dimension in research and innovation content?
- Q3 During the implementation of the international cooperation agreements/actions in which you have been involved, do you use and/or produce sex-disaggregated data whenever possible?
- Q4 Does your team/organization implement measures to prevent gender-biased research outcomes?

Overall, the answers were classified as "yes", "partially; I don't know; n/a" and "No". Figure 1 reflects the responses of all interviewees who could be categorized, which shows the trend for each question worldwide.

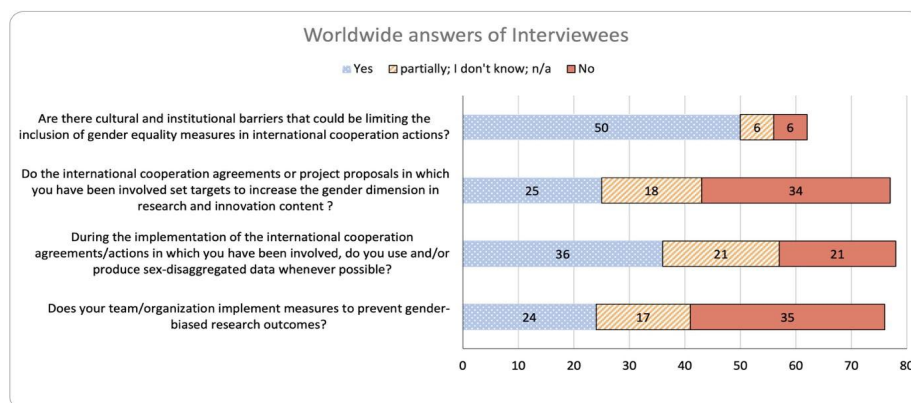


Figure 1: Overall Answers of Interviewees

Figure 2 illustrates the continental distribution of question 1, "Are there cultural and institutional barriers that could be limiting the inclusion of gender equality measures in international cooperation actions?". All regions, with more than 75%, answered this question with "Yes". This indicated that respondents from all the regions acknowledge the barriers to gender equality.

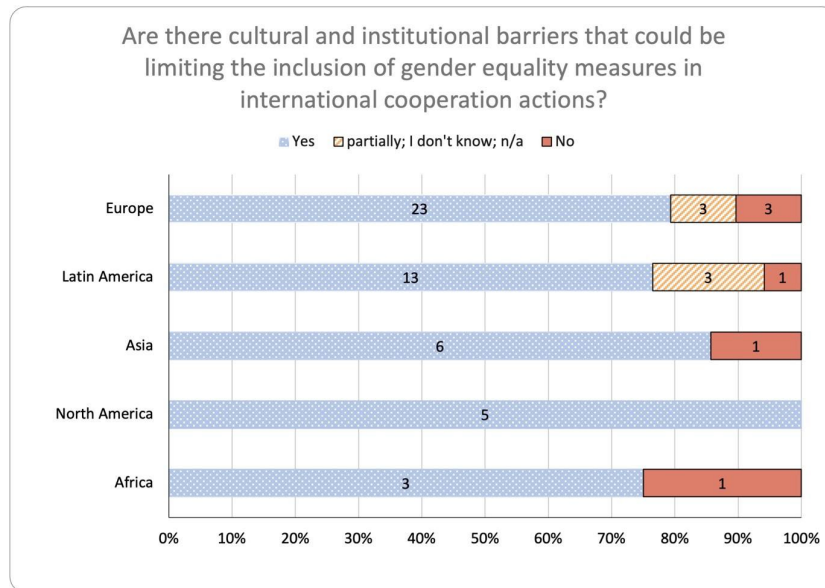


Figure 2: Continental Distribution to Question 1

The results change, however, when presented with more specific questions about the problem. The continental distribution of question 2, "Do the international cooperation agreements or project proposals in which you have been involved set targets to increase the gender dimension in research and innovation content?" is shown in Figure 3. Africa stands out with 75% "Yes". Closely followed by Asia, with more than 50% answering with "Yes". Whereas in Latin America, 56% of interviewees answered "No".

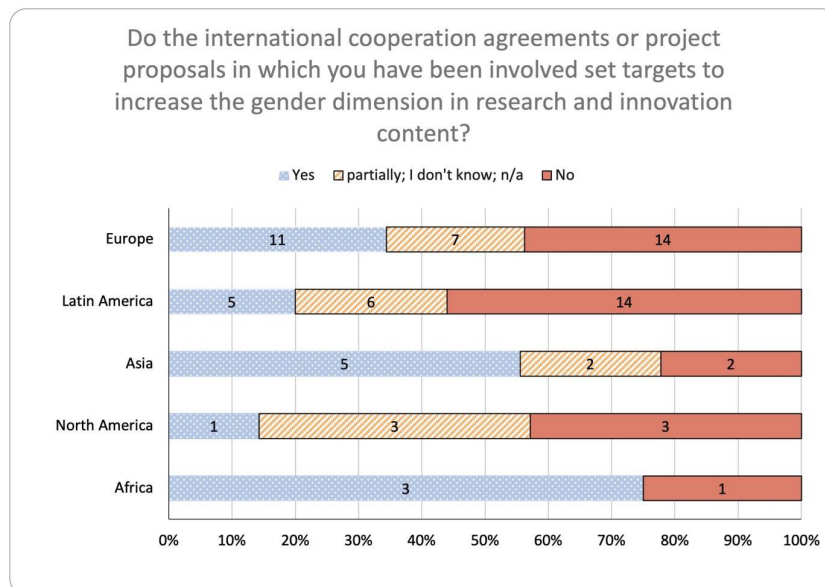


Figure 3: Continental Distribution to Question 2

The question 3 "During the implementation of the international cooperation agreements/actions in which you have been involved, do you use and/or produce sex-disaggregated data whenever possible?" is illustrated in Figure 4. Europe performs outstandingly, with 69% of interviewees answering "Yes". Latin America has a broad range of "partially; I don't know; n/a". Africa (75%) and Asia (50%) have the most significant percentage of interviewees answering "No". While Asia and Africa responded positively about setting the targets (Figure 3),

respondents from both regions affirmed that they do not use or produce sex-disaggregated data (Figure 4) – and Europe shows the inverse result.

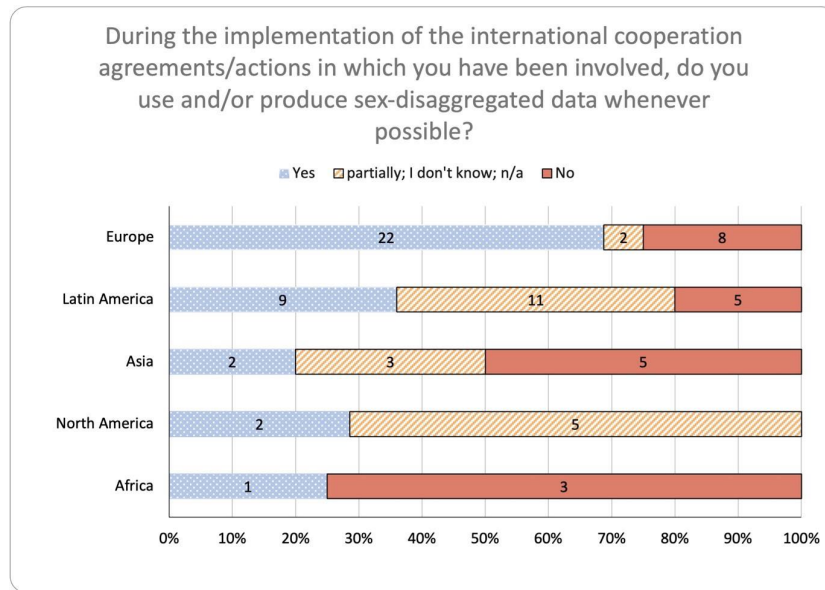


Figure 4: Continental Distribution to Question 3

Question 4 "Does your team/organization implement measures to prevent gender-biased research outcomes?" is illustrated in Figure 5. North America is outstanding, with 86% of interviewees answering "Yes", while in Europe, only 43% implement measures to prevent gender-biased research outcomes. The other regions perform around the 50% mark answering "No".

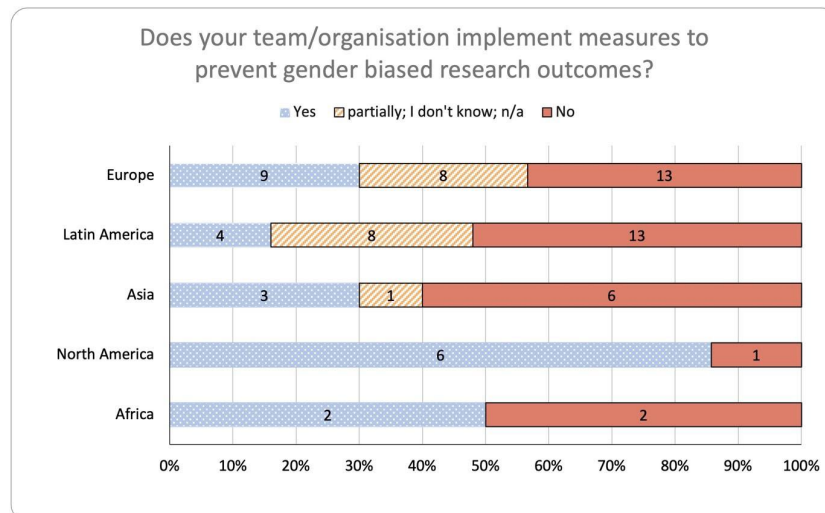


Figure 5: Continental Distribution to the Respective Question 4

These quantitative results apparently point to the fact that even though all the regions are aware of the need of gender mainstreaming, concrete measures are still not the actual picture of STI and that different barriers still limit the inclusion of gender equality measures in international cooperation actions. The qualitative answers below enlighten those results.

In *European* countries, different levels of awareness of gender mainstreaming still prevail, impacting the effective relevance of gender measures. Sometimes, these issues are not considered a priority or a matter of concern. Interviewees pointed to the belief that change must occur naturally and not be induced artificially as the main barrier. This would appear to echo a perception that the problem is in society and, therefore, it cannot be tackled inside institutions. In other words, it appears to indicate that institutions are merely reflections of society and not places of innovative action for developing society.

In STEM especially, it was suggested that "there cannot be equality because there are not enough women in this field". There are cultural barriers in science in which men dominate some fields such as information and communication technologies and do so under the broad view that "it's not a woman thing". Thus, the existence of gender bias in the research ecosystem negatively impacts not only women in some fields but also in leadership roles – either in national or international contexts. Further, they stressed that there are male-oriented industries (e.g., automotive) where men are seen as the standard. At the same time, women are included as experts, consultants, and even senior scientists but not in managerial roles. There are still areas dominated by gendered stereotypes, hampering the diversity responsible for science that aims the social development.

It was highlighted that international cooperation agreements are mostly gender-blind. Gender issues are not formally addressed, and equality in research teams mainly stems from the inner dynamics of the groups. So, there are no formal parity rules, while in general, parity tends to exist in an organic form. These answers show the lack and the need for gender mainstreaming in these institutions.

In *Latin America*, it was stressed by the interviewees that the structures are still patriarchal and that, historically, their countries are still very male-oriented. And even extending beyond this, many prejudices exist against having different or diverse work teams. Respondents stressed the formal educational system and an academic hierarchy favoring male employees to take high positions at the international level. As these specific functions (decision-making) demand full-time dedication, female employees are inhibited from applying due to their social and professional stereotype that women have responsibilities at home – which is not the case for men. Stereotypes appear as a vector for glass ceiling procedures, as indicated in many studies (Bian et al., 2017; Bukstein & Gandelman, 2019; Lavy & Sand, 2015).

It was also pointed out that there is still no formal and natural inclusion of gender aspects into concrete actions for in international cooperation activities. Some answers indicated that the international arena is a more complicated due to cultural differences between countries. Progress on gender has been made in terms of discourse, but there are weaknesses remain in translating this it into implementation actions in the agreements. Respondents stressed that today it is a question of complying with specific regulations.

On the one hand, it is only bureaucratic. Still, on the other hand, it raises the importance of regulations in advancing some issues often avoided by the same bureaucracies. It is common practice to include specific clauses in international agreements but instead in project proposals. This underlines the "fear of change" and the administrative issues on the agreements as main barriers, which include expressions such as "We've always done it this way; so why should we change things". There is also a lack of trained people who are qualified to make and negotiate international agreements. It was emphasized that there is no dedicated unit for gender equity that could revise the agreements appropriately and give advice in many institutions. This is an indication of the difficulty faced for the implementation of actions toward gender mainstreaming, as stressed by (Hafner-Burton & Pollack, 2002).

It was also underlined that decision-makers still do not have enough training to visualize the gaps and do not consider the impact that a research outcome can have when it uses gender glasses.

Asian countries agree that there is a gap in STEM education and that women are not welcome in some institutions because of their activities and responsibilities. As main barriers, they focused on socio-cultural norms; patriarchal underestimation of what women can and cannot do; masculine, macho focus among men and women leaders; lack of gender sensitivity. Those answers point to a leaky pipeline and lack of flow and push. These countries remark that institutional mechanisms to check on such cultural impediments and to ensure equal representation are not in place and that not all the world is socialized with gender aspects (e.g., Arab nations).

In *North America*, it was highlighted that there needs to be awareness of the underrepresentation of women in certain fields. Thus no specific measures are suggested to remedy the situation, and there are not enough women in decision-making positions who can make a difference.

By contrast, in *South Africa*, it was pointed out that there are no institutional barriers but that there are perceived barriers. One of the respondents answered that the problem "is in people's minds, men and women, and if an institution is chasing numbers, it sometimes makes the mistake of naming incompetent women instead of men". It seems to point to the underestimation of glass ceilings hampering women in STI, or that gendered institutions are working under the male normativity, unaware of gender inequalities expressed in the mismatch of social and work environments. The lack of mainstreaming is also perceived in the answers.

5. Conclusion

The results offer an exploratory analysis with a great range of coverage and can help understand the composition of the glass ceiling that tackles gender inequality in STI. Based on the analysis of the results on the barriers and the main measures identified in different regions, this conclusion also reflects on possible solutions that could contribute to the implementation of gender mainstreaming in international dialogues in STI.

As it was stressed that international cooperation agreements are built upon scientific areas of common interest and are mostly gender-blind. A mapping study of 528 STI agreements from 50 countries, conducted by the Gender STI project and aiming to explore how gender equality is addressed in the agreements, showed that gender content was found in 15 percent of the identified agreements. The modification of agreements is not something that can be done easily. However, when a revision is required, this can be done by the inclusion of new clauses. Negotiating and including clear gender clauses in international agreements appears to be a necessary measure, and so also does a linkage to national laws that promotes gender mainstreaming in all agreements.

Furthermore to this, it is necessary to explicitly expose the principle of diversity in agreements. That means, for example, prioritizing the intersectional variables, like class, caste, religion, region, race, ethnicity, age, etc., and suggesting specific measures to eliminate the gender gap in sex ratio, nutrition, health, literacy and education, economic participation, participation in decision-making areas including politics, entrepreneurship, leadership, etc. These clauses will broaden an agreement and help rethink the objective and outcome of the research. Gender equality in the agreements should be part of the scientific integrity principles in international collaboration and a key condition for full use of the existing potential in leadership, scientific knowledge, and creative innovation. Clauses addressing the gender dimension in R&I content should be included, as well as that gender-based violence in international actions shall be monitored. Having a gender committee to look at the agreement that can advise and work more with the policymakers is an important element, as well as workshops on gender mainstreaming in decision-making positions.

Nevertheless, we must consider that the agreement alone does not create awareness. The topic is on the discussion table for implementing the actions in a general way. The results show the importance of gathering macro-level and micro-level data available on a sex-disaggregated level and trying to influence the concerned departments in the organizations that are concerned to work on maintaining this data. At the production of micro-level data, the following shall be considered: orientation of research staff on avoiding gender biases starting directly from framing tools; data collection for use in writing the report and outcomes; initiatives on women's entrepreneurship promotion; the number of women leaders, champions, panelists, authors and participants that international cooperation projects have attracted. In addition, work with artificial intelligence providers to ensure gender (and other) biases are scrubbed from surveys, recruitments, and promotions needs to be considered.

The gender dimension in R&I content remains an issue in the quantitative results. Therefore, gender awareness needs to be the focus of most research projects. There should be a reference to gender mainstreaming, with a clear guideline on how we will do it and also having the gender perspective already included in their work methodology. In addition, incorporating gender equality goals from the beginning of the formulation of actions, as well as developing courses to implement the gender perspective in projects and formulate qualitative gender indicators, are viewed as relevant steps to be considered.

Moreover, assessing gender diversity to establish new policies (regional, national, and international) that promote and condition women's participation, establishing a policy of awareness-raising activities, and incorporating more women in the definition of policies seem to be key measures. Actions aimed at inducing a broad institutional change to attract, retain and promote women and girls working in STI, especially by awakening and flourishing STEM vocations in women, will empower them to develop long-life careers in STI. Furthermore, providing them with broad supportive state laws and regulations to ensure that they will have opportunities equal to those of their male counterparts.

Finally, it is important to draw attention to the fact that for many countries, an important reference point has been the work carried out in the framework of international actions. This is where they have begun to work on gender mainstreaming in their actions, programs, and projects. In this sense, gender mainstreaming has been a lesson learned along the way. Following on from this, many countries have observed and followed the gender equality measures proposed by foreign partners in their joint project proposals. Gender issues are not yet at the core of scientific international cooperation agreements, but the importance of the subject at the national level

and, as we have seen in Horizon Europe, at the European level, will certainly translate into multiple opportunities.

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Gender Representations in Greek Children's Literature: Activities of Male and Female Characters

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Abstract: In recent decades, extensive research has examined gender depiction in children's literature as well as its impacts on young readers' minds and attitudes. Children's picture books are considered an important socializing factor as they provide their audience with a wide variety of information about life. Due to their young age, children have limited experience and knowledge of the world and therefore they depend on books in order to draw information about socially acceptable behaviours. As a cultural product, literature usually expresses the dominant ideology of the society in which it is produced and consumed. Therefore, intentionally or not, books frequently reproduce established attitudes, regardless of their validity, such as gender bias. This happens due to the fact that ideologies penetrate the language itself and by extension the way we think, speak or write. For this reason it is possible for books of the twenty-first century to still depict outdated gender portrayals. Naturally this is not a conscious, out loud statement of the writer or the illustrator, but it appears implicitly, usually as a given. Such gender portrayals can be outlined in a story by a character's interests and activities. Leisure activities, sports and other hobbies can provide hints about the character's personality, physical condition and talents. In the past, research has shown disparities in children's literature, with male characters monopolizing 'energetic' activities and female characters spending their free time more statically. Stereotyped gender representations in picture books reproduce gender biases by implanting them to the next generation's minds. Using content analysis methodology, this qualitative research examines if gender is depicted stereotypically in children's picture books published in Greece from 2009 to 2019. According to findings, both male and female characters of the sample engage in activities which are in agreement with traditional gender-stereotyped traits. Implicit gender categorization of interests and hobbies operates restrictively for young children. This new data can constitute a useful tool for science, publishers and the state, as gender inequalities are considered to be the source of various social problems globally.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, Gender roles, Children's literature, Picture books, Representation

1. Gender Bias in Children's Literature

During recent decades, a large number of studies has revealed stereotypical gender depiction in children's literature (e.g., Heintz, 1987; Albers, 1996; Gooden and Gooden, 2001; Paynter, 2011). Discriminatory portrayals of gender have been found in popular books which have won prestigious awards such as Caldecott and Newbery (Davis and McDaniell, 1999; Gooden and Gooden, 2001), as well as in non-award winning illustrated children's books (Engels, 1981; Poarch and Monk – Turner, 2001), indicating that gender bias is widespread. Over the past decades female characters have been repeatedly found to be under-represented in texts and illustrations of children's books (Gooden and Gooden, 2001). Also, women and girls are depicted in a stereotypical manner, usually presented as passive, less intelligent, dependent and emotional compared to men and boys who are portrayed in books more active and competent (Kramer, 2001). Ever since the 1970's where sexism in children's books was first researched and documented (Weitzman *et al*, 1972) public awareness of the issue has gradually risen. However, recent findings strongly suggest that gender bias is still present at twenty-first century's children's literature (Hamilton *et al*, 2006). This indication raises social concern, since stereotypes cultivate further discriminations.

Books play an important role in children's everyday life, as they are an integral part of primary education, while at the same time they can be found in almost every house. As of that, children interact with books in high frequency. Children's literature provides amusement, cultivates imagination and helps in the development of language skills. Additionally, it operates as a mean of socialization (Allen *et al*, 1993). Children depend on books, among others, to gather information about the world, at a time where they form self-images and identities (Singh, 1998). Therefore, the stimuli they are repeatedly exposed to, such as literature's explicit and implicit ideology in texts and illustrations, can affect their attitudes as well as their future development as adults (Schau and Scott, 1984). That includes the very important psycho-social process of gender identity formation.

Research has confirmed that picture books which reproduce gender stereotypes can affect children's attitudes about the world and themselves negatively, increasing their sexist beliefs (Scott, 1986). Children see themselves in stories they read or listen, and through this identification with the book's characters and what these characters are experiencing, they draw information about what is socially acceptable in various occasions. Therefore it is highly possible for them to imitate behavioural models they are exposed to through

books, including gender roles (Mendoza and Reese, 2001). It is evident from the above, that stereotypical portrayal of gender in children's books can be harmful for young readers, as it limits their aspirations and ignores their talents, cultivating subtle traditional expectations.

2. Male and Female Activities in Picture Books

Due to the fact that children's literature addresses to an audience with poor linguistic skills and limited attention span, children's books usually are defined by their short texts and simple vocabulary. In order to be appealing and understood by children, picture books narrate short stories, which avoid detailed descriptions and introspection, favouring action and dialog (McDowell, 1973). As of that, the reader can draw conclusions about a story's character depending more on its actions. Activities and hobbies that are attributed to each gender in children's books help children to outline female and male portrayals in their minds, as literature often sets for them feminine and masculine standards (Peterson and Lanch, 1990).

Previous research in gender representation has examined literature characters' activities in children's books as indicators of gender depiction. More specifically, Kolbe and la Voie (1981) categorized the activities identified in their sample in three groups: expressive or instrumental activities, important to the plot or not, gender stereotyped or not. According to their findings, gender discrimination was evident, as female characters were depicted in stereotyped activities, which were also of no great significance to the story. A similar approach was made by Heintz (1987), who examined as well activities in Caldecott award winning books. At this research, the activities of the sample were categorized in two main groups: energetic and passive. As energetic, were considered extrovert activities such as doing sports, socialising, or leading a group. As passive, were considered more mild activities such as tidying up or watching television. Findings showed that men monopolized the energetic activities in contrast with women, who once more were depicted in books less interesting and important.

Sexism in children's literature is a serious issue which has emerged in the 1970's. Great efforts have been made ever since for literature to provide more egalitarian gender- role models to children. Although important steps have been made in recent decades, the question still remains: Has gender stereotyping in children's literature been shifted?

3. The Current Study

This study examines the way female and male characters are portrayed in Greek children's literature. More specifically, it explores gender depiction in children's books of Greek writers, which have been published from 2009 to 2019. This period was chosen as it was deemed necessary to establish the current situation in Greece. Although extensive research has been conducted in the subject area in many European countries, Greece has not collected similar data in the last decades. The current research attempts to fill in that gap of information in order to shed light in attitudes and ideologies concerning gender.

Main purpose of the study was to investigate Greek dominant ideology about gender, as it appears in children's literature. For this purpose all books that were published in the decade 2009-2019 in Greece, and fell into the category of children's literature or picture books, were listed and coded. More specifically, all books published for children in the decade 2009-2019 were gathered from *biblionet*, a data base which includes all editorial production in Greece and operates under the auspices of Hellenic Institution of Culture. According to *biblionet* 5.375 titles fell into the category of children's books. These books were examined one by one in order to collect only picture-books and literature for preschool children (ages 4-6). As of that activity books (e.g. colouring exercises), educational books (e.g. teaching the farm animals) and books for older children were excluded, leaving a total of 925 titles. These titles were coded, and from them a random sample of 45 books was chosen, as this was considered to be more representative of the average book's ideology. Since the current study aimed to reveal implicit messages concerning gender in books' texts and illustrations, qualitative content analyses was applied to the sample. This methodology is considered to be the most affective for searching hidden messages in texts and other means of communication (Huckin, 2004). The sample of 45 books was considered to be adequate for the purposes of the study since qualitative research is an analytical and thorough methodology and therefore is usually applied in smaller samples.

It is very common for children's books to depict a character performing an activity of some sort. The way a person chooses to spend their free time is suggestive of their personality. Hence, this research examines leisure activities and interests of literary characters according to gender. The activities performed in the sample were categorized in two main groups according to characters who perform them: adults of each

gender and minors of each gender. Through this categorization, gender role depictions of every age group can become visible.

4. Findings

Prior to examining the ways that gender is portrayed in children's literature, all the main characters of the sample were categorised and counted according to gender, in order to establish the quantitative male and female representation in literature nowadays. As main characters, were considered those who appeared in the book's title or those who monopolized illustrations and narration, whether they were human, animals or humanised objects. The categorization showed that 63% of the sample's main characters were male (male:29, female:17), which indicates an underrepresentation of female characters in Greek children's literature. This finding is compatible with ample international research precedents, according to which male characters still outnumber female in children's books, reinforcing gender inequality (McCabe *et al*, 2011). However this research mainly focuses on the ways male and female characters are depicted in books, as through the examination of narrations' implicit messages, further discriminations considering gender can be revealed.

Many of the sample's books feature adults, either as main or secondary characters. Several of them are depicted engaging in activities other than everyday obligations such as work or child rearing. Women of the sample appear more energetic than men on their leisure time, whether they are animals or humans. More specifically, some adult female characters have artistic interests such as singing and dancing. Additionally, a mother enjoys painting and another loves ballet. In a few occasions women choose to read a book. Other women spend their time productively, while remaining in the house area. Some of them cook or bake while others appear to knit or weave. A young princess spends a lot of time with her tablet and a giraffe shops constantly online cookware. Also, many adult female characters appear to be concerned with their appearance. This applies to people, animals and rarely even vegetables. Female of all sorts, are depicted either trying dresses and shoes, spending their money on fashion houses in order to purchase impressive outfits, go to the hair salon or to the pool for sunbathing. Although most of the adult female characters seem to prefer one activity on their free time, the giant's wife has many interests (Rousaki, 2014). This woman is bored because she spends a lot of time alone in the house, as her husband, the giant, is always outside. One day, after finishing the chores at home, she finds a cooking book and learns to cook delicious dishes for her husband. In a similar manner she learns gardening and later on domestic constructions. Her interest and dexterity in constructions make her the only adult female character of the sample who chooses a non-stereotypical activity. However, she makes good use of her new skill constructing a bicycle for her husband. This, in conjunction with the above, suggests that her primary concern is to please her absent spouse. Additionally, the only woman of the sample appearing to have a more contemporary attitude is a mother who leaves the house to have dinner with her friends. It is important though to mention that in the rest of the book she appears to cook and take care of the house and her son (Plisi, 2017).

Adult male characters don't seem to spend their free time as energetically as female, since they engage in a smaller variety of activities. Several of them appear lazy as they choose to relax. Those who are people snore on their house's sofa, while others who are animals sleep under a tree's shadow or at the branch of an arbour. Some of them prefer reading, although in one occasion, this is related to their profession. Rarely they appear to surf on the internet or listen to sports and the news on the radio. Also a prince enjoys painting when he is in a good mood. The most eccentric interest of the sample is that of a king who loves to throw extravagant theme parties, obliging his nationals to donate personal items and dress accordingly to the theme of the occasion (Iliopoulos, 2016).

Children's interests and hobbies, as well as adults', can give information about their personality and stimuli they perceive from the environment. According to findings, boys and girls of the sample appeared in activities with different frequencies. In more detail, boys were depicted more often engaging in an activity, while at the same time they presented a wider variety of interests. These differences alone could suggest gender bias; although they could relate to the fact that male main characters of the sample were cumulatively more than female.

Minor female characters are depicted with interests which are either stereotypically attributed to women, or don't require intense physical movement. More specifically, some of the girls play with dolls, dollhouses and stuffed animals. When the group of children consists of both genders' girls appear to play team games like hide and seek. Also one young giraffe loves to cook while another enjoys listening to music. Sometimes girls are involved in activities with adults. For example, a little girl is taught by her stepmother to make origami (a folding technique which gives paper impressive shapes) which becomes her new hobby. Similarly, another girl

and her brother prepare a sweet treat with their grandmother. Besides cooking, this girl enjoys solving mysteries, as she does later in the narration (Varvogli, 2015). Although this is a non-stereotypical interest, it is something she does with her brother. Therefore it is not safe to assume that she solves mysteries completely by her initiative.

Even when minor female characters appear to have many interests and talents, they are still depicted in a generally traditional manner. For example a little princess, who after reading a drawing book learned to paint beautiful works of art. Later, and in a similar way, she learned playing the piano, dancing, gardening and singing (Strikou-Tomopoulou, 2017). This girl not only has many interests but is also very skilled, as the text mentions that she masters all of her hobbies. However her interests are mainly artistic (singing, dancing, playing the piano, painting) and for centuries were considered qualities of the upper class ladies. This may relate to the fact that the girl is portrayed in the illustrations in a medieval dress. Also all of her interests could be characterized domestic concerning the location, since she does so many things without ever leaving the premises of the palace.

Another little girl, who lives with her brother and parents, asks her mother persistently for a dog, as she feels lonely (Petrovits-Androutsopoulou, 2012). The girl explains that she has no one to play with, since her brother is only interested in "boys' games". Her preferred toys seem to be dolls and cooking sets. Although her mother explains to her that toys are for all children and should not be categorized according to gender, she insists on her belief. Despite the fact that the book expresses the politically correct opinion about gender categorization of toys, the main character and narrator of the story, the little girl, seems to undermine the opinion, proving her mother wrong with her toy choices. Furthermore, the fact that a mother with this ideology has two children who play only with stereotypical toys according to their gender is a paradox given that parents usually control and filter their young children's choices.

The most encouraging female character of the sample is a little bird, which makes a short appearance on text and illustrations, skating (Giannaki, 2019). This character is not only depicted performing an activity which is usually attributed to the opposite gender, but is also mentioned to be skilled at it.

Male minor characters of the sample appear to be more active and adventurous than female, presenting a wide variety of interests and hobbies. Many of the boys in the books choose athletic activities such as football, basketball and boxing. Several of them are mentioned to have good performances. A typical example of the above is that of a young boy who narrates his everyday life. The boy is frustrated because, as he claims, his older brother is more accomplished and therefore has better performances in basketball, volleyball, swimming, wrestling, fencing and cycling (Tsitass, 2015). The activities that are attributed to boys in this book are all athletic and demand a good physical condition. Also they are performed outdoors.

Minor male characters don't leave their house only to play sports. Three bear boys enjoy hiking in the mountains and making constructions with all the interesting materials they find along the way. Even when boys stay inside they choose action games. Some male characters seem to be very fond of knights, since they play with swords pretending to protect the king or choose miniature knights and castles for their game. Additionally, a large group of male characters appears to be very interested in vehicles of every kind. More specifically, some boys like to play with miniature cars or ships, while a male bear wants to learn Jet Ski, wind surfing and other water sports. This comes in agreement with the stereotypical belief that men are interested in motorized vehicles and mechanical engineering.

On the other hand there are two male characters who are depicted with artistic interests, but in a very different way. The first case, is that of a small fish which wonders in the vast ocean searching for love. The little fish plays the ukulele (a small guitar) and sings tenderly as an answer to the cruelty of this world (Priovolou, 2014). This is the only male character of the sample who is described as sensitive, which can also be assumed from the instrument he chooses to play. Moreover the text suggests that his sensitivity is his most valuable trait. The second case is that of a young bear who lives with his parents in difficult conditions (Gkrekou, 2018). The father is most of the time displeased, yelling and doing aggressive gestures, while the mother accepts his outbursts stoically. As a result the young bear becomes angry and violent. The boy's problem is solved at the end of the narration when he begins to play drums. Here the hobby of the character is associated directly to his personality as he is described to channel his anger in drums.

Some male characters choose to play games which are not stereotypically attributed to boys but are considered more gender neutral. Three of them spend their time on screen. One of them surfs on the internet and another prefers to watch television programs and movies. The third case is about a young boy who plays

games at his parent's tablet. Although using the tablet is an activity preferred by young children of both genders, the boy is described to prefer games with battles and action. Other male characters also appear to enjoy solving mysteries. One of them engages in the activity in question with his sister, as mentioned above, while the other is determined to become an investigator and therefore spends most of his free time gathering clues about mysteries that he comes across.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Regarding the adult characters of the sample, it is evident from the above that women are depicted more active on their free time than men, as no female is described to relax and be lazy when the opportunity arises. However, it must be noted that most of the female activities are performed in the house area and come in alignment with the traditional female role (e.g. knitting, sewing, cooking, singing, dancing). Additionally, when women leave the house, they do it in order to take care of their appearance (e.g. hair salon, fashion house), which implicitly suggests that they are vain. The only woman who leaves the house for a different reason is a mother who goes to dinner with her friends. Stereotypical representations can also be found in men's depictions, such as their interest in politics and sports. In general, the adult characters of the sample appear to have stereotypical interests according to their gender. Also it must be underlined that there are no characters performing activities traditionally attributed to the other gender. Only exception to that is the giant's wife who makes a bicycle for her husband. Even in this case though, she firstly cleans the house, cooks and takes care of her garden, in other words she is 'fulfilling her gender role' to the fullest. This image of the two genders that emerges from the sample doesn't seem to be representative of today's reality, where, for example, very few women know how to knit or sew. On the contrary, nowadays, men and women of a productive age spend most of their time outside the house, fact that is not depicted in the sample's books.

Considering the minor characters of the sample, girls appear rarely in energetic activities. Usually they are described to play statically, quietly and in the safe environment of their house. On their free time they prefer engaging in activities frequently gender stereotyped (e.g. dolls, cooking, dancing, singing) and occasionally gender neutral (e.g. origami, hide and seek). It is very important to note that no girl of the sample appears to be athletic, to play sports, competitive games or to even like sports. The only minor female character that is depicted more active is the little bird who skates.

On the contrary, minor male characters are depicted more interesting than female, since they appear to be active and adventurous. Most of the boys prefer to spend their free time outside the house, engaging in sports and other hobbies which require intense physical movement. All of them choose activities traditionally attributed to their gender (e.g. football, basketball, wrestling). Even when they play more statically, they mostly prefer 'toys for boys' (e.g. cars, boats, castles, constructions). Additionally, several boys seem to be attracted to battles and races. This competitive side of them suggests that they have dynamic and adventurous personalities. The only exception to the group of male minor characters is the little fish that played the ukulele tenderly.

The current study attempted to examine gender representations in contemporary children's literature published in Greece. Findings strongly indicate that both genders are depicted stereotypically in children's books. Women appear to engage mainly in activities which remind good old housewives and to care about their appearance. Similarly, girls stay mostly at home playing indoor quiet games. On the contrary men seem to have the privilege to relax and do nothing on their free time, while their interests are in alignment with the male tradition (e.g. politics). Finally boys appear quite adventurous and energetic. They love sports and most of the times choose to play outdoors. Even when they stay at home though, they pretend to participate in battles and races with vehicles of every sort. All the above can lead to the conclusion that men appear to be more interesting than women in children's literature.

Summarising, it is evident that the two genders are depicted in a very different manner. Through these representations, children are drawn to believe that men and women come with different traits. Although this discrimination can be restrictive for both genders, boys can form a better self-image through books, since they receive more positive stimuli than girls. On the other hand girls learn through these narrations that women are quieter than men and that their place is mostly inside the house. Gender bias reproduced by books is proven to be harmful for children (Schau and Scott, 1984) as it cultivates further discriminations in adult life. The state, organizations and publishers should take under serious consideration findings like these and intensify their policies in creating a more egalitarian environment for both genders, as European Union visualizes.

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Empowering Women for Household Economic Growth in Latin America: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: The proposed article describes the role played by women in the different strata of society and, above all, the benefits obtained from their participation in the labor market. The objective was to describe how the empowerment of Latin American women has contributed to the economic growth of families during 2011-2021. In terms of methodology, different methodological and theoretical positions from various researchers about women's empowerment were taken to achieve an integration that allows expressing the need to show the importance of women in economic growth to ensure that the research is valuable, transparent, complete, and accurate for the users. Detailed techniques were used within the Prisma 2020 model; 23 sources of information obtained from Scopus, Redalyc, Science Direct, Elibro, Scielo, and Google Scholar were detected, for which inclusion criteria were applied, selecting 11 information bases, as well as exclusion criteria, eliminating 12 articles that were not related and did not show coherence with the research question, were not within the space-time, did not belong to the Latin American continent or agree with the subject of the study. The analytical-synthetic method was used to the extent that it allowed analyzing empowerment with each of its own characteristics and those proposed by the different researchers to synthesize and describe how Latin American women have been empowering themselves and contributing to the economic growth of families during the last 10 years. It was concluded that Latin American women have been empowering themselves significantly, thereby contributing to the economic growth of their families, where their performance has become vitally important thanks to their actions that have strengthened their leadership and skills within their communities, promoting their active participation in conservation and sustainable development, and demonstrating that greater participation of women in economic activity contributes to increasing the Gross Domestic Product, raising growth and compensating for the fall of the working population.

Keywords: Empowering, Women, Latin America, Economic growth, Families

1. Introduction

Different authors have made a revolution with their conception of empowerment, resulting in the emergence of social movements that are part of the liberating struggles and have attracted the interest of many researchers. However, the need to make the concept of empowerment clearer through the use of theoretical, empirical, and practical literature from the community field and the variety of ideas and proposals has led it to become a jack-of-all-trades that explains everything and justifies any action. The Dictionary of Humanitarian Action defines it as "the process by which people, organizations, and communities strengthen their capacities, confidence, vision, and protagonism as a social group to promote positive changes in the situations in which they live." In this way, they achieve absolute control over their decisions, allowing them to improve more and more.

This systematic review highlights the term empowerment but oriented to women, that being who has been identified over the years as the weakest and that, nevertheless, at present, has proven to be one of the basic pillars within families due to her strength and decision, and that, undoubtedly, has contributed to economic growth. For this reason, some transcendental phrases of great impact will be quoted, allowing us to look at women's empowerment.

"I envisioned a company where a woman could be as successful as she wanted to be," said the iconic founder of Mary Kay, who has empowered women around the world and changed lives. Having experienced inequality in the workplace firsthand, Mary Kay knew she had to do something about it, not only for herself but for all women. From there, empowerment, from a feminist perspective (Batliwala, as cited in Yiwady, D. et al., 2021), is defined as the process of challenging existing power relations and gaining greater control over the sources of power and becomes manifest as a redistribution of power, whether among nations, classes, races, castes, genders or individuals; it refers to concepts, such as power, rights, interests, choices, and control, that today have begun to form part of women's daily lives. All this is reflected in aspects such as reflexivity, self-concept, self-esteem, collective actions, and political participation of women, which, in turn, is reflected in changes in

the individual, family, and social life of women worldwide. This means that the concept of women's empowerment refers to the integration of women in the different important areas of society and to the value that they generate in the daily activities of global growth and development.

In Latin America, women's participation in the labor market is limited. The female participation rate went from around 20% in the 1960s to more than 60% in the early 2010s; the growth rate slowed down from 2000 onwards (Bustelo et al., 2020, p1). By 2017, the scenario changed; it was evident a higher rate of labor participation, reaching 50.2% exactly, and by 2018, there are about 117 million women who are part of the labor force as a result of an "unstoppable phenomenon" of persistent increase in participation rates in a labor market, in which, however, "we are still far from the goal of gender equality" (International Labor Organization, 2018, para. 4). The so-called "glass ceilings" refer to the barriers that limit women's access to hierarchical positions and hinder women's career progression. In Latin America, women are not highly valued in senior executive positions. Based on the information corresponding to more than 1,200 publicly traded companies, it was observed that women occupy only 8.5% of the boards of directors, 9.2% are executives, and the number of executive directors amounted to 4.2%. In turn, companies led by women are smaller than those led by men because of the greater barriers women face (Bustelo et al., 2020, p3).

Peru, being one of the countries of the Latin American conglomerate, through the INEI (National Institute of Statistics and Informatics), shows some statistics regarding the presence of women within the executive branch, indicating that it has not remained constant. It shows that their participation in high-level positions represents 26.3% compared to 73.7% of the positions occupied by men. This shows that there is a labor gap in the participation of women in high-level positions.

Arthur Lewis and his book "Theory of Economic Growth" points out that there are four forms of economic growth: the first is simple growth, where new sources of production are added but without changing the organization or enterprises; the second is capital accumulation, as more technique is applied, more capital is invested, and there is a natural increase in enterprises and, thus, growth; the third form concerns change in the structure and organization of production but keeping the same capital and technology; the fourth reports on the progress and regional challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, which proposes to build a better future through the implementation of actions that will strengthen the country by achieving sustainable development, where working women are at the forefront of attention. It is also mentioned that, in 2015, 193 countries all over the world, including Latin American countries, adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and established seventeen goals (SDGs) with a gender focus as a necessary condition for the progress of nations, whose main objective is gender equality. Targets on gender equality are integrated into 11 of the 17 goals (at different levels), and one of them explicitly addresses gender equality (SDG 5): to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. From there, the need for women to be taken into account and have access to decent work is emphasized, as it contributes to the reduction of inequalities that limit their empowerment and socioeconomic leadership and contributes to the country's development.

The development framework also establishes in its objectives 5, 8, and 10 to analyze women's autonomy. This is understood as the capacity of women to generate income, as well as the conditions to perform in their area of work as a competent, capable, and professional person, and, in this way, generate income and personal finances from resources coming from their efforts, because both women and men have the right to paid work, as mentioned in the legal normative basis of high hierarchical rank that is the Political Constitution of each country (Medina and Fernandez, 2021).

On the other hand, a study conducted for the Journal *Economía y Sociología* on the female dimension of technology, labor, and economic markets, during the period 1990-2017 showed that increasing access to and use of ICTs was accompanied by a decreasing rate of women involved in activities that exposed them to high risk or that were characterized by low effective demand and low earnings. The declining rate of women in vulnerable jobs appears to be of critical importance (Lechman, 2019). It is worth noting that the study is based on a capitalist system that, compared to socialism, does allow equality or utopia and the relevance of democracy, which does not occur with capitalism, which denies the ideals above, and, focusing on women, many obstacles do not allow gender equality, since they have been burdened with work at home (housewives) and in a job with a meager remuneration due to underestimation of functions. All this ignores the possibility of differences between men and women. If there is one, it is perhaps due to a matter of preferences. Given this, the Society for Critical Economics (SEC) mentions that the existence of gender asymmetries in production

relations is one of the ways through which the system oppresses women and not men, and, therefore, it is essential to take them into account to transform the economy.

There is a wide gender gap, and according to the annual report of the World Economic Forum, the average participation in the labor market is 55% for women and 82% for men, which shows unequal intervention. This situation occurs in all countries in the world, even in the so-called "developed" countries. In the best-ranked countries (Iceland, Norway, and Finland), women earn 86% of men's earnings, although only 64% of female university graduates participate to a lesser extent in the labor market (82% versus 87% for men), and, again, only 37% of senior positions are held by women although representation in ministerial positions has improved (44%). This global study concludes that if improvements continue at this pace, the gender gap will not be closed until 2133 (Ferrero et al., 2016).

Although the topic of women's empowerment has already been studied in general terms, there is still a limited number of studies on how women in Latin America have been empowering themselves and, thanks to this, they have contributed to the economic growth of their countries and, for this, it is necessary to understand how the variables Women's Empowerment and Economic Growth encompass the perspectives in the economic context at the Latin American level. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to describe how the empowerment of Latin American women has contributed to the economic growth of families during the years 2011-2021 through the review of the scientific literature published in those years.

This study was a literature review, whose representative variables are Women's Empowerment and Economic Growth, to observe whether they influence Latin American societies in the financial, political, and social spheres and to detect the impact they generate.

2. Methodology

In this systematic review, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement was used, which was published in 2009, allowing to document the transparency of the review and to answer the question: How have Latin American women been empowered and contributed to the economic growth of families during the years 2011-2021? With this, the different methodological and theoretical positions of various researchers about women's empowerment were analyzed to, in the end, achieve an integration that allows expressing the need to show the importance of empowered women in economic growth.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established using search engines, such as Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo, Science Direct, Elibro, and Google Scholar; in English, Spanish, or Portuguese; between 2011 and 2021; in the Latin American context. It was considered that the title, abstract, and introduction determine the influence of women's empowerment on the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective. The second criterion specifies those articles and research that are not related and do not show coherence with the research question, such as not being within the selected period, not belonging to the Latin American continent, and not matching the subject of the study.

To answer the proposed question, the analytical-synthetic method was used insofar as it allowed for the analysis of empowerment with each of its own characteristics and those suggested by different researchers to synthesize and describe how Latin American women have been empowered and contributed to the economic growth of their families during the last 10 years.

3. Results

During the systematic review, 23 sources of information containing topics of interest for the selected research were identified. However, when the inclusion criteria were applied, 11 sources were selected because they met the above specifications; however, 12 sources were discarded.

According to the inclusion criteria, the following was obtained: 5 articles published in Science Direct, Google Scholar, and Redalyc; 3 journals published in Google Scholar and Scielo; 2 publications in Redalyc and Google Scholar; 1 thesis in Google Scholar. On the other hand, according to the exclusion criteria, the following were considered: 5 articles published in Scopus, Scielo, and Google Scholar; 3 journals published in Scopus and Google Scholar; 1 publication in Scopus; 1 thesis in Scopus; and finally, 2 books published in Elibro and Google Scholar.

Because of this, it was possible to perform an analysis of each of the different investigations and interpret the results referring to women's empowerment in the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective. The selection process is shown in the following figure:

To clarify the study, tables and figures will be made to organize the information found in the search engines according to the inclusion criteria.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Used

INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
-Indicators: Research indicating women's empowerment in the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective. -Language: Spanish, English, and Portuguese. -Source: (Latin American countries). -Period: 2011 to 2021. -Type of publication: scientific articles. -Databases and search engines: Scopus, Redalyc, Science Direct, Elibro, Scielo, and Google Scholar.	-They do not show coherence with the research question. -It is not within the selected periods. -It does not agree with the subject of study. -It does not belong to the Latin American continent.

Note. Own Elaboration

As for the sources of information used to carry out this systematic review, the search engines already mentioned were considered, from which information records were obtained.

Subsequently, for the search for information and to ensure the process sensitivity, a detail of all the information about the systematic review was elaborated as follows:

Table 2: Results of the Information Search

Sources obtained	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Search engines
Article	5	5	Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo, Science Direct, Elibro, and Google Scholar
Magazine	3	3	
Publication	2	1	
Thesis	1	1	
Book		2	
Total	11	12	

Note. Own Elaboration

Table 3: Studies found by Year of Publication

Type of document	Year of publication	Frequency	%
	2011-2014	1	9%
Scientific article	2015-2017	1	9%
	2018-2021	9	82%
TOTAL		11	100%

Note. Own Elaboration

Table 4: Studies Found by Country

Countries	Frequency	Percentage %
Argentina	1	9%
Brazil	1	9%
Chile	1	9%
Colombia	4	36%
Mexico	2	18%
Peru	2	18%
TOTAL	11	100%

Note. Own Elaboration

Table 5: Studies Found by Type of Bibliographic Source

Countries	Frequency	Percentage %
Article	5	45%
Journal	3	27%
Publication	2	18%
Thesis	1	9%
TOTAL	11	100%

Note. Own Elaboration

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The literature review shows that women's empowerment in society has evolved gradually, evidencing major changes regarding the value of women in society. Such is the case that the International Labor Organization shows real data, where greater labor participation of women is registered, being that, at present, they are part of the workforce and integrate political participation and high positions within society. Therefore, it is considered that female empowerment has contributed to the growth and development of the economy in Latin America, with some variations over time.

Economic growth has undergone cyclical transformations; one of them has been the pandemic stage, which proved to be the most revolutionary as far as our years of study are concerned since it disrupted the economy, affecting mainly women and the activities carried out by them. To this end, governments took actions to ensure the recognition of women in the economic sphere, such as including them in decision-making in initiatives to revive the economy. However, a limiting factor for women's participation in the labor market is the overload of domestic work and care of their children from 0 to 5 years old due to the maternal responsibility they must assume. Another limitation is education since many of them do not have access to higher education, which limits their entrepreneurship. However, when they do have access, they receive better training in business creation.

As it is well known, women who work in rural areas are responsible for the harvest and production of their crops. Still, they do not have the necessary information to take advantage of the opportunities to generate value for their benefit and that of their families. On the other hand, for the indigenous women of the Amazon, who constantly live the inequality of their communities, being relegated to a position that does not allow them to develop their capacities, and even less to be considered for important activities or are just not listened to, The Leticia Pact emerged as an initiative of the Presidential Summit held by the government of Colombia to achieve a commitment of seven countries that share the Amazon biome (Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia,

Brazil, Suriname, and Guyana) for the preservation, conservation, and care of the Amazon territory and its sustainable development, considering the empowerment of indigenous women one of its principal axes.

The empowerment and positioning of women through their actions have made it possible to rescue the relevance of their participation, recognizing their incidence in Latin America and, thus, changing the perspective, culture, and thoughts chosen in various countries regarding the place that women deserve in the growth and economic development of a nation. Little by little, household chores and childcare division has been promoted, leaving aside excessive machismo.

Most of the studies highlight the efforts made by some Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, to implement strategies that contribute to reducing salary gaps and eradicating labor inequality between men and women, highlighting women's empowerment in society and their contribution to the growth and development of the economy in the various countries. Likewise, statistical data corroborate that women represent a key role in all areas, and the results are very evident where women's empowerment is given great importance: in Colombia, with 36%; in Peru and Mexico, 18%; and in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 9% of research is related to the topic under study. Therefore, there is evidence of favorable results in women's empowerment and, consequently, in the development of the economy.

Regarding the studies carried out according to the types of bibliographic sources, there was a high frequency of article publications. It represents 45% as opposed to the journal with 27%, publications with 18%, and thesis with 9%, showing that Latin America is more interested in writing articles. This provides further progress in the field of research and has been beneficial since it has contributed to the knowledge of the research focused on determining the influence of women's empowerment on the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective and taking the period between the years 2011-2021.

Based on the above, it is concluded:

- Women in Latin America have been empowered in such a significant way that they have contributed to their families' economic growth in the last 10 years. Their role over the years has become more important, thanks to their actions that have strengthened their leadership and skills within their communities, promoting their active participation in conservation and sustainable development and demonstrating that the higher participation of women in economic activity contributes to increasing the Gross Domestic Product, raising growth and counterbalancing the decline in the working population. Similarly, inclusive policies that foster the inclusion of women will ensure a more solid response to the Latin American community.
- The potential that women represent for the progress of the world economy must be capitalized on to increase the capacity for economic development and job creation in any country.

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Influence of Workplace Microaggressions on Engineering Female Faculty Motivation to do Research

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Abstract: Negative and often unconscious beliefs about marginalised groups, including women and people of colour, sometimes manifest in discriminatory and degrading slights called microaggressions. Since most often microaggressions are in the form of subtle actions, unobtrusive comments, or humorous gestures, they are frequently overlooked as innocent and harmless, specifically to bystanders. However, their adverse effects on those on the receiving end are anything but innocuous, even if perpetrators are utterly unaware of their harmful comments or behaviours. Minorities and marginalized individuals often find microaggressions more harmful than blatant racism and discrimination. Six hundred and eleven STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) faculty from ten USA universities completed an online survey in the spring of 2021, of which 39% self-identified as Underrepresented Minority, URM, faculty. This study revealed that on average, URM women were 50% more susceptible to gender microaggressions, which correlated negatively with autonomy (having choice) and competence (being capable and effective), and positively with amotivation (lack of motivation). Case in point, 38% of them believed their opinions were overlooked in a group discussion because of their gender. Women with intersecting identities, such as women of colour, experienced both forms of gender and racial/ethnic microaggressions. They have experienced being ignored at work, being treated differently, and their opinion being overlooked based on their gender and/or their race/ethnicity. While detecting bias and microaggression and acknowledging their occurrence is crucial, taking deliberate and precise actions to disrupt and prevent them from re-occurring is even more pivotal. By realising the prevalence of discrimination and microaggressions towards underrepresented minority female faculty, and sharing insights into the complex and overarching race, ethnic, and gender relations among other social constructs, this study deepens our understanding of the challenges and barriers that this group has to grapple with. By adopting and creating effective institutional policies and professional training in support of diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency we can improve the experiences of URM faculty and positively impact their motivation and productivity.

Keywords: Gender microaggressions, Gender discrimination, Motivation, Underrepresented minority, URM faculty, Female faculty

1. Theoretical Framework and Objectives

According to the US National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES, 2020), underrepresented minority (URM) STEM faculty are identified as those whose representation in STEM fields are smaller than in the USA population; typically, gender, race, and ethnicity are the most studied demographics. The term microaggression was first used in 1970 by Chester Pierce, a Harvard University psychiatrist, to describe his observation of the subtle insults and daily indignities inflicted on African Americans by non-blacks, which he emphasized were more offensive than blatant racism. Since most often microaggressions are in the form of subtle actions, unobtrusive comments, or humorous gestures, they are frequently overlooked as innocent and harmless, specifically to bystanders (Haynes-Baratz et al, 2021; Lilienfeld, 2017; Torino et al, 2018). The adverse effects of microaggressions on those on the receiving end are anything but innocuous, even if perpetrators are utterly unaware of their harmful comments or behaviors. Because of microaggressions' ambiguous and imperceptible nature, minorities and marginalized individuals often find microaggressions are more harmful than blatant racism and discrimination (Pierce, 1970; Smith, 2020; Sue et al, 2007, 2008).

Microaggressions verify that racial and gender discrimination are not maladies of the past and they still exist in the modern higher education (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury, 2018). External factors and social conditions, such as microaggressions in educational settings, negatively impacted URM faculty's perceptions of their competence, sense of relatedness and belonging, and excluded them from formal and informal networking opportunities, causing failure in the institutional retainment of URM faculty, especially in STEM fields (Mountz, 2016; Payton et al, 2018; Ryan and Niemiec, 2009; Williams 2020). Assumptions of inferiority emanated from microaggression were also negatively correlated with job satisfaction (Carr, 2017) and research productivity (Zambrana et al, 2021). Female and African Americans faculty are the most susceptible targets for workplace microaggression and some of their harmful impacts such as stress and psychological ruin (Lui, 2019; O'Meara et al, 2000; Pierce, 1995; Stolzenberg et al, 2019, 2020; Young et al, 2015; Zambrana et al, 2021). The combination

of high-demand careers in research universities and structural racism incessantly contributed to compounded stress, depression, poor health, and even early death (Pierce, 1995).

This study utilized self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Deci et al, 1997) as a framework to understand faculty motivation for research (Stupnisky et al, 2019, 2022). SDT recognizes autonomy (choice), competence (self-efficacy), and relatedness (connectedness) as three basic individual psychological needs and defines the degrees to which these are satisfied as determining the type and level of motivation for particular tasks. Motivation itself has been categorized into various forms: autonomous motivation (enjoyable [intrinsic] and/or valuable [identified]), controlled motivation (to gain rewards or avoid punishment [external] and/or to prevent guilt or anxiety [introjected]), and amotivation (lack of motivation), the worst psychological state for productivity.

The current study first examined the percentage of STEM URM faculty and various subgroups who experienced gender and/or racial/ethnic microaggressions. We then investigated the relationship between STEM URM faculty members' perceived gender and racial microaggressions with their motivation to conduct research and productivity. Another population of significant interest within URM are those with intersecting marginalized identities, such as women who identify with a race other than white. Intersectionality is a framework to describe the interweaving and overlapping of social identities (Crenshaw, 1989). This population endures compounded negative effects and consequences of gender as well as racial and/or ethnic discrimination and daily microaggressions (Essed, 1990; Stergiopoulos and Rosenberg, 2020). This study further examined if reports of microaggressions were higher for URM with intersecting identities. Additionally, we tested if these microaggressions related to the motivation and perceive of success for this population.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1 Participants and Procedure

In February of 2021, 611 STEM faculty members from 10 USA Doctoral Universities (R2 Higher Research Activity Carnegie Classification) completed an online survey. Participant demographic and position details are in Table 1. Faculty reported contract time percentages as research 40.10% ($SD=21.73$), teaching 36.26% ($SD=20.25$), service 12.54% ($SD=10.13$), and other/administration 7.85% ($SD=16.30$).

Table 1: Full Sample Participant Characteristics

		Count	Percent
Primary Disciplinary Area	Life sciences	150	24.6
	Social sciences	92	15.1
	Engineering	85	13.9
	Psychology	48	7.9
	CISE	36	5.9
	Geoscience	34	5.7
	Mathematical sciences	32	5.2
	Physics and astronomy	32	5.2
	Chemistry	30	4.9
	STEM education learning research	27	4.4
	Materials research	7	1.1
	No response	38	6.2
Academic Rank	Assistant Professor	185	30.3
	Associate Professor	156	25.5
	Full Professor	208	34.0
	Instructor/teaching professor	15	2.5
	Research scientist/analyst	5	0.9

		Count	Percent
	Other	42	6.9
Tenure Status	On tenure track but not tenured	174	28.5
	Tenured	353	57.8
	Not on tenure track	77	12.6
	Other	7	1.1
Gender Identity	Man	347	56.8
	Woman	254	41.6
	I prefer not to respond	10	1.6
Racial Identification	White	484	79.2
	Asian	73	12
	Multiracial	17	2.8
	Other	15	2.5
	Black or African American	12	2.0
	American Indian or Alaska Native	3	0.5
	No response	7	1.2
Ethnicity	Not of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin	560	91.7
	Yes, another Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin	23	3.8
	Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano	22	3.6
	No response	6	1.0
International	No	442	72.3
	Yes	165	27.0
	No response	4	0.7
Underrepresented minority (self-identified)	No	373	61.1
	Yes	236	38.6
	No response	2	0.3

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Microaggressions

Two separate scales were used, one for gender microaggressions and one for race and ethnicity (Table 2), both involving five items on a five-point scale (1 = *Never*, 5 = *Very often*). To measure gender microaggression, we adapted five items from Yang and Carroll (2018). It included statements such as: “My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my gender”. The racial and ethnic microaggressions scale (REMS) was adapted from Nadal (2011), with the heading question as: “How many times this academic year have you experienced

the following interactions?”, followed by specific questions such as: “An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race”.

Table 2: Full Sample Scale Reliabilities and Descriptive Statistics

Measure	α	# items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Actual range	Skew	Kurtosis
Basic Needs							
Autonomy	.83	4	4.05	0.65	1.25-5	-0.78	1.06
Competence	.84	4	4.19	0.58	1.75-5	-0.74	1.24
Relatedness	.87	4	3.86	0.73	1-5	-0.81	1.02
Motivation							
Intrinsic	.86	3	4.49	0.59	2-5	-1.23	1.90
Identified	.69	3	4.37	0.61	2-5	-1.13	1.40
Autonomous	.86	6	4.43	0.56	2-5	-1.19	1.85
Introjected	.86	3	3.45	1.06	1-5	-0.46	-0.72
External	.56	3	3.40	0.81	1-5	-0.24	-0.30
Amotivation	.83	3	1.81	0.80	1-5	1.02	0.59
Research Success							
Activity	.85	3	3.32	0.85	1-5	-0.19	-0.44
Publications	.89	3	3.05	0.98	1-5	0.05	-0.56
Grants	.90	3	3.18	0.79	1-5	-0.09	-0.10
Overall	.92	12	3.16	0.94	1-5	-0.32	-0.57
Microaggression							
Gendered Microaggressions	.96	5	1.58	0.92	1-5	1.78	2.68
Racial & Ethnic Microaggressions	.93	5	1.31	0.64	1-5	2.67	7.88

Note. Autonomous motivation is the amalgamation of intrinsic and identified motivation.

2.2.2 SDT psychological needs

Twelve items adapted from Stupnisky et al (2017) measured faculty members' perceived level of need satisfaction regarding their research. Following the question, “Regarding your RESEARCH, to what extent do you agree with the following?” were four items equally distributed among three subscales (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*): autonomy (“I have a sense of freedom to make my own choices.”), competence (“I have confidence in my ability to do things well.”), and relatedness (“I am supported by the people whom I care about [students, colleagues, etc.]”).

2.2.3 Motivation

Motivation was measured using twelve items adapted from Stupnisky et al (2019; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). Regarding the question, “To what extent are the following reasons for why you engage in RESEARCH?”, faculty members responded to three items distributed across five subscales: intrinsic (“It is enjoyable to engage in research.”), identified (“My research is important to me.”), introjected (“I would feel guilty not engaging in research.”), external motivation (“Because I am paid to produce research.”), and amotivation (“Honestly, I don’t know why I do research.”). Exploratory factor analysis revealed the intrinsic and identified subscales be combined to form the autonomous motivation subscale, which is consistent with past research on faculty motivation for research (Stupnisky et al, 2017, 2019, 2022).

2.2.4 Success

Faculty rated their perceived success in research over the last three academic years in three areas: conducting research activities, publishing research, and securing external grant funding for research. In each area they rated four items on a 5-point scale (1 = *Well below average*, 3 = *Average*, 5 = *Well above average*; Stupnisky et al, 2019): “Your own standards”, “Your department’s standards for tenure and promotion”, “Colleagues in your department”, and “Colleagues in your field(s)”.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 displays a breakdown of who self-identified as URM based on gender, race, and ethnicity. Among the 236 (38.6%) faculty who self-identified as URM, women (77.12%) were the biggest demographic, one-third were non-white (30.60%), and 17.45% had Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish ethnicity. The URM faculty included 57 (23.65%) women who also reported other intersecting marginalized identities. As for those who did not identify as URM, the majority were men (300, 80.4%), while 70 (18.8%) were women.

Table 3: Self-Identified URM by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

URM x Gender	URM (236)		Non-URM (373)	
Women (254)	182	77.1%	70	18.8%
Men (347)	47	19.9%	300	80.4%
I prefer not to respond/Other	7	2.97%	3	0.80%
URM x Race				
White (484)	161	68.2%	323	86.6%
Asian (73)	32	13.8%	41	11.0%
Multiracial (17)	13	5.60%	3	0.80%
Other (15)	12	5.17%	2	0.54%
Black or African American (12)	11	4.74%	1	0.27%
American Indian or Alaska Native (3)	3	1.29%	1	0.27%
No response (7)	4	1.69%	1	0.27%
URM x Ethnicity				
Not of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin	194	82.2%	366	98.12%
Yes, another Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin	20	8.90%	2	0.54%
Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano	21	8.47%	2	0.54%
No response	1	0.42%	3	0.80%
URM Women with Intersecting Identities				
Women who are not white and/or have Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin	57	24.15%		

Note. Full sample counts for gender, race, and ethnicity in parentheses in first rows and column. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

3.2 Group Differences, Gender Microaggression

Comparing URM women to non-URM faculty, our study revealed on average URM female faculty were 50% more susceptible to gender microaggressions; case in point, 35.2% believed their opinions were overlooked in a group discussion because of their gender. Women with intersecting identities, such as women of colour, experienced

compounded forms of gender and racial/ethnic microaggressions; specifically, they reported being ignored at work, being treated differently, and their opinion being overlooked based on their gender and/or their race/ethnicity.

3.3 Group Differences in Racial and/or Ethnic Microaggression

Results showed that non-white URM faculty reported racial and/or ethnic microaggressions 38% more than non-URM faculty (Table 4). Our descriptive analysis of URM women with intersecting identities showed that this group is 43% more susceptible to racial microaggressions at work than their non-URM peers, which is the highest percentage among all the URM subgroups. Responding to the survey questions, 28.1% of this subgroup disclosed that they were treated differently than their co-workers of another race/ethnicity by an employer or colleague.

Table 4: Level of Agreement With Gender and Race/Ethnicity on Respective Microaggression Items

	Gender Microaggression Questions				
Question 1	An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my gender.				
Question 2	My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my gender.				
Question 3	I was ignored at work because of my gender.				
Question 4	Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other gender.				
Question 5	An employer or co-worker treated me differently than co-workers of another gender.				
	Percent of Responses				
Gender Microaggressions	Question1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
URM	25.34	32.58	23.60	25.79	32.58
URM Women	37.65	26.47	30.00	37.03	24.53
URM Women with Intersecting Identities	24.53	28.30	18.87	20.75	26.42
	Racial/Ethnic Microaggression Survey Questions				
Question 1	An employer or co-worker was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race.				
Question 2	My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race.				
Question 3	I was ignored at school or work because of my race.				
Question 4	Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.				
Question 5	An employer or co-worker treated me differently than co-workers of the other race/ethnicity.				
	Percent of Responses				
Racial/Ethnic Microaggressions	Question1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
URM	13.38	14.61	10.96	05.55	16.97
URM Women with Intersecting Identities	20.75	28.85	22.64	16.98	30.19
URM non-white and with Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish Ethnicity	23.16	26.60	21.28	17.89	28.42

Note. Responses for gender microaggressions shown for all URM (236), self-identified URM women ($n = 182$) and URM Women with Intersecting Identities ($n = 57$), and racial/ethnic microaggression shown for all URM (236), self-identified URM nonwhites ($n = 75$), and URM Women with Intersecting Identities ($n = 57$). All the microaggression questions were answered on the response scale: 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Infrequently*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 4 = *Frequently*, 5 = *Very often*. The values shown in this table are the average of options 3 and above.

3.4 Correlations

We found a moderate negative correlation between gender microaggressions and autonomy and relatedness among all URM faculty (Table 5). We also found a positive correlation between gender microaggression and

amotivation. Both results indicate gender microaggressions related to maladaptive motivational states for URM faculty. Unexpectedly, among URM faculty there was a low positive correlation between racial/ethnic microaggression and perceive of success.

Table 5: Correlations Microaggressions, Motivation, Perceived Success for URM

	Gender Microaggression	Racial/ethnic Microaggression
Autonomy	-.21**	-.01
Competence	-.08	.12
Relatedness	-.30**	-.10
Autonomous	-.09	-.10
Introjected	.09	-.08
External	.09	.03
Amotivation	.17*	.09
Self-report Success	-.06	.16*

Note. Correlations for gender and racial/ethnic microaggression were analyzed all self-identified URM faculty (236).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

For the URM faculty who did not identify as white, we were surprised to find a positive correlation between racial/ethnic microaggressions and external motivation, although it was small. Another unexpected discovery was among the URM women with intersecting identities, they showed a moderate positive correlation between racial/ethnic microaggressions and competence (Table 6). We did not find any correlation between perceive of success and any form of microaggressions for these specific groups

Table 6: Correlations Microaggressions, Motivation, Perceived Success Broken Down by Groups: Gender, Race/Ethnicity

	URM Race/Ethnicity	URM Women	URM Women with Intersecting Identities	
	Racial/ethnic Microaggression	Gender Microaggression	Racial/ethnic Microaggression	Gender Microaggression
Autonomy	-.06	-.11	.14	-.09
Competence	.18	.02	.36*	.05
Relatedness	-.08	-.22**	.18	.05
Autonomous	-.08	-.01	-.06	-.17
Introjected	-.07	-.10	.10	.02
External	.18*	.01	.08	.03
Amotivation	.08	.06	-.07	.05
Self-report Success	.03	.04	.21	.13

Note. Correlations for gender and racial/ethnic microaggression were analyzed for all self-identified URM faculty (236). However, results for gender microaggressions are shown only for self-identified URM women ($n = 182$) and URM Women with Intersecting Identities ($n = 57$), and for race discrimination only for self-identified URM nonwhites ($n = 75$) URM Women with Intersecting Identities.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

4. Conclusions and Significance of Study

This study examined underrepresented minority STEM faculty and their experiences with race, ethnicity, and gender-related microaggressions, and how these experiences related to their motivation and success in conducting research. A critical finding was that URM STEM faculty reported various forms of microaggressions such as being treated differently, their opinions being overlooked, or being ignored in a group setting because of their gender, race and/or ethnicity. These discoveries are in line with previous studies (Lui, 2019; O'Meara et al, 2000; Pierce, 1995; Stolzenberg et al, 2019, 2020; Young et al, 2015). Our study also revealed that URM women with intersecting identities, in addition to gender microaggressions, were more likely to experience microaggressions based on their race and/or ethnicity that likely compounded the negative effects (Essed, 1990; Stergiopoulos, E., and Rosenberg, N., 2020).

In a series of published studies, workplace discrimination and microaggressions were negatively correlated with job satisfaction (Carr, 2017) and research productivity (Zambrana et al, 2021). Our analysis supports these claims by finding significant negative correlations for gender microaggressions with autonomy and relatedness, as well as a positive correlation to amotivation, among URM women faculty.

This study contributes to the research literature on faculty development, research success, and motivation by examining URM faculty with a large representative sample, established multi-item measures, and a well-grounded theoretical framework. A limitation was that other URM groups were not measured, such as based on socioeconomic status, disability, and sexuality, which should be considered for future studies.

Implications for higher education include adapting effective institutional policies and professional training in support of diversity, inclusion, cultural competency, and cultural humility that could positively impact the motivation and productivity of URM faculty. Sue et al. (2019) insisted that inaction and passive bystanders are not effective ways to disarm microaggressions or protect the victims. Furthermore, establishing resources and adapting or initiating programs to address and diminish race, ethnicity, and gender-related misconduct could significantly decrease race-related stress among URM faculty especially the younger generation (Lui, 2019). While detecting bias and microaggression is crucial to acknowledge its occurrences, deliberate and precise actions are required to disrupt and prevent them from re-occurring (Haynes-Baratz et al, 2021). The three core innate human psychological needs described in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2008) could influence and contribute to URM faculty's motivation to survive and thrive in less than suitable atmosphere of STEM disciplines and to overcome the tremendous challenges they face (Lechuga, 2012). Hence, alongside current conventional faculty development programs, typically focused on advancing promotions and tenure, higher education administrators should consider adopting SDT as the framework to create a professional development curriculum addressing and advocating specific needs and challenges of underrepresented faculty and students to bolster their sense of relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

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Intersectional Discrimination in European Labour Markets in the Voices of TCN Women

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Abstract: Despite migration being a universal and secular phenomenon, recent studies and latest statistics show that unemployment among third-country nationals aged between 15 and 64 years old is generally higher than the rate among the overall population (76% among newcomers). Within this context, the current study aims to find out common patterns concerning the barriers that Third Country National (TCN) Women face in the host labour market and facilitating factors they used to cross them. The current research is supported by a qualitative methodology, based on 74 interviews to women from nine European countries and the analysis of 11 success stories. The interviewees have a very heterogeneous sociodemographic profile, concerning age, country of origin, host country and educational background. Despite some TCN women being employed, most are currently unemployed or in precarious condition. Our study proposes a four-fold categorisation of barriers faced by TCN women: i) cultural and linguistic; ii) diplomas; iii) support system; iv) discrimination. The lack of language skills was mentioned by almost all the women interviewed because free or easily affordable courses are limited. The second category of barriers entails the complexity of recognising academic qualifications and working experience from their home countries. The lack of a supporting system has impact in different dimensions of social and professional inclusion. The last category represents a large number of dimensions, related to an intersectional discrimination based on gender, race and religion. Regarding the facilitating factors that 11 women with integration success stories shared, we would highlight: i) the role and importance of Social and Solidarity migrant organisations as a support for TCN women; ii) the recognition the added-value of TCN women skills, such as being proficient in several foreign languages; iii) the empowerment of success stories reported by the storyteller herself and by other women in a similar situation; iv) the resilience to not give up, despite a considerable amount of obstacles.

Keywords: TCN women, Intersectionality, Labour integration

1. Introduction

Despite some political European strategies for migration, migrants still face a lot of challenges, namely in the field of work integration. Specifically, Third Country Nationals (TCN) Women are, “from a legal point of view, much more vulnerable to discrimination than EU citizens” (Benedí Lahuerta, 2009, pp.754-755). According to the European Commission, TCN is “Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code)”².

The 2018 Council of Europe report on gender perspectives on migration mentioned that the participation of TCN women in the labour market remains significantly fragmented and limited (Council of Europe, 2018). This reveals, on the one hand, that TCN women are structurally excluded from entering the labour market (Lutz, 2016). On the other hand, civic actors lack awareness, competences and infrastructure to integrate migrant women meaningfully in their activities.

Recent studies have shown that the EU labour market is a core area of marginalisation for migrant women, and, indeed, an area which spills over to other aspects of those women’s adaption to their communal and social environment (Di Stasio *et al.*, 2019).

This paper aims to share the preliminary results of a European Project “ENFEM - Female TCNs Integration in Local Communities through Employability and Entrepreneurship Local Oriented Strategies”. In particular, we focus on the first part of the project, concerning the perceptions of TCN Women on their challenges and

¹ENFEM - Female TCNs Integration in Local Communities through Employability and Entrepreneurship Local Oriented Strategies (Project Number: GAP-101038287). There are nine European countries taking part of the project (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, and Spain).

²https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/third-country-national_pt

strategies for integration in the host country. The findings concern nine European Union countries: Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

2. Migration and Migrants

Migration is a social phenomenon that has gained even more attention, specifically at European Level (Menz, 2016). Even though there is not a consensual and universally accepted definition for “migrant”, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) assumes that it is “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons”.

In a more recent report (2021), IOM reveals that the current global estimate is that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates to 3.6 per cent of the global population. Despite the numbers, the international migrant worker population is currently still gendered, with 58.5 per cent of male proportion of all migrant workers (IOM, 2021), there is a worldwide trend of feminization of migration (Ramos & Patrício, 2015).

There are several reasons for migrating that Góis (2019) systematised into three main push factors: i) the climate change; ii) the need and/or the desire to find other ways of life; iii) the lack of opportunities. In the center of decision for the migration journey, there are many factors that interfere. Some of them are rational and some are emotional, and the decision often combines migrant-centred and structural factors (Reis Oliveira *et al.*, 2017). For instance, the migration policies in the host-country is one of the structural factors which varies significantly between countries, despite a common matrix since the 1970s, centred on European intercultural policies (Dervin *et al.*, 2011).

The migration phenomenon is a growing and enduring problem, for different reasons. Amidst the most expressive ones, there is the annual increase in the number of migrants over the planet, most of them with the ambition to reach the global north. Besides, it is clear that migrants still face a lot of obstacles to be integrated, namely to get a decent work in the labour market (Careja, 2019; Oliveri, 2016).

Statistics show that employment rates of non-EU born (2020) are still lower than native born. So, the rate is 61,9% compared to 73,5% for native-born citizens. Adding gender to these data, we can observe that the differential is 52,5% for non-EU born women compared to 68,3% for native-born women (Eurostat, 2020). The European labour markets are very heterogeneous, and there is significant variation among countries. In fact, some countries show a higher percentage of non-EU-born female employment, above 70%, as is the case of Czechia, Estonia and Portugal. Nevertheless, others have a lower percentage, below 43%, as is the case of Belgium and Greece (Eurostat, 2000³).

According to the European Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, in 2019, around 34 million inhabitants were born outside the EU, representing around 8% of the EU population. Above a quarter of this migrants are highly educated, with 26,8% having a high level of education in 2019 (Eurostats, EU-LFS). In addition, and according to European Parliament resolution on intersectional discrimination in the European Union (2022), across the EU 91% of black women are overqualified for their jobs, compared with 48% of white women.

There is a pattern to the type of work migrants do in the host countries, as low-end occupations. For women, it is primarily domestic work, office cleaning, landscaping, food preparation services, prostitution, and agriculture (Crippa, 2020; Bauder, 2006). However, there is a more recent trend towards more qualified jobs for migrant women, namely in highly skilled jobs such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) (Bolzani *et al.*, 2021).

The role of Social and Solidarity Economy organisations dedicated to support migrants, namely with mutual help and peer support represents a fact and is now fully recognised and studied among researchers. The growth of such organisations has been promoting the increase of an active participation of migrant women, by their engagement as volunteers, as workers or even as social entrepreneurs (Fisseha, 2018; Valentova & Alieva, 2018; Braun, 2017; Mesmin, 2017).

³https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/a/ae/Employment_rates_for_the_population_aged_20-64_years%2C_by_country_of_birth_and_by_sex%2C_2020_%28%25%29_MI2021.png

3. Intersectional Discrimination

The obstacles for migrants and particularly for migrant women have been revealed through different studies (Debono, 2021; Koulirakis *et al.*, 2019; Lutz, 2016), showing that the combination of being a migrant, a woman, a mom and a TCN National represents an even more difficult path to integration.

It is from this perspective that we follow the contributions of the theory of intersectionality used in different research and intervention contexts to shape the relationships of the different master categories which are sex/gender, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and disability (Nogueira, 2017). The theory of intersectionality began to be developed by African-American studies and black feminists, in the 1980s. Crenshaw (1989) opens up a new approach in anti-discrimination studies, starting by analysing the multidimensionality of black women's experiences. More recently, this theory has been applied to better understand migration experiences (Domass, 2021).

According to the report by the Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ, 2019), intersectionality has gained attention in Europe over the last ten years, both in academic and policy spheres. Intersectional approach caters to the multidimensionality of peoples' experiences and identities. As an example at the international level, the Resolution 73/195 adopted by the General Assembly, on 19 December 2018, on "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration" set the *Gender-responsive* as one of the ten so-called "cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles".

Despite the tradition of the so called "colour-blindness" tradition in Europe that show reluctance to face the significance of race and racism (CIJ, 2019), several studies have been conducted on intersectional discrimination of women migrants (Crippa, 2020; Garrido *et al.*, 2009).

Crippa (2020) systematised the contributions of a number of studies (Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Ortensi 2019; Marchetti and Garofalo Geymonat 2019; Moro 2011) classifying the type of discrimination into three categories:

- the triple discrimination - on the grounds of their race (some nationalities are preferred to others), their gender, and their social class;
- the new identity - based on the need to adapt to a new female role within a new culture and a different society, usually feeling alone and isolated without the support from the 'extended family';
- the language and communication, cultural shocks, and post-traumatic effects - both during the migration path and once in the country of destination, including domestic violence in the host country.

Garrido *et al.* (2009) add to these three categories the following issues: family structures, women's role within the household, social networks and political environment in the host country. Several empirical studies (Domass, 2021; Weichselbaumer, 2016) has shown that there is a specific discrimination in the labour market against female migrants wearing a headscarf/hijab.

4. Methodology

The research question underlying the present study is: What are the perceptions of TCN women about the facilitating and hindering factors that influence their integration into the labour market?

In order to address such a question, we collected primary data by listening directly to TCN women. We started with 74 testimonies with an exploratory approach to their voices. Finally, we analysed 11 success stories reported by TCNs in different countries. All data were collected between March and May 2022.

The 74 women interviewed have a very heterogeneous socio-demographic profile, in terms of age, country of origin, host country (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain) and educational background – some of them with little qualifications but some others with high education degree. Despite some TCN women being employed, most of them are currently in precariat situation or unemployed.

Regarding collecting the 11 success stories from TCN Women in the 9 EU countries (Table 1), our sample is also heterogeneous. The following table characterizes our sample, identifying the host country, the country of origin, the number of years that each TCN woman has been staying in the host country, their background qualifications when they left their country of origin, and the main reason that led them to choose a given host country - the push factor. The findings of the analysis will be detailed.

Table 1: Characterising the WSS's Profiles

Woman Success Story (Code WSS)	Host Country	Country of origin	Years of stay in the host country	Background qualifications in the country of origin	Push factor for migration
WSS 1	Cyprus	Dominican Republic	20 years	Bachelors' Degree as a Hotel Administrator	Marriage
WSS 2	France	Dominican Republic	30 years	High school studies	To join her sister in law
WSS 3	Italy	Cabe Verde Islands	15 years	Middle high school	Economic issues
WSS 4	Greece	Iraq	5 years	High school	Desire for reunification with family in Europe
WSS 5	Greece	Ukraine	10 years	High school	Economic issues and to practice English
WSS 6	Netherlands	Nigeria	24 years	Higher Nation Diploma – Polytechnic	Marriage
WSS 7	Spain	Morocco	3,5 years	3 rd year of secondary school	As a child, she followed her parents, because of economic issues
WSS 8	Portugal	Venezuela	5 years	Bachelors' Degree in Law	Political repression
WSS 9	Lithuania	Ukraine	7 years	Bachelors' Degree as a lecturer at a college	Marriage
WSS 10	Romania	Jordan	4 years	1 st year Master Degree of Care Nursing	To study – Scholarship for cultural exchange program
WSS 11	Romania	Syria	30 years	High School	To study medicine

Source: Authors' elaboration

5. Findings - Exploratory Qualitative Analysis of the 74 TCN Women

Our study proposes a four-fold categorisation of barriers faced by TCN women: i) cultural and linguistic; ii) diplomas; iii) support system; iv) discrimination.

The lack of language knowledge was mentioned by almost every women interviewed because free or easily affordable courses are often limited. Paradoxically, this barrier seems to represent a major obstacle to employment. In fact, it is also by professional integration that immigrants can learn the host language. The lack of language skills also impacts on their daily routines, namely, to find training and a job position, or to have access to the national social security and health care systems.

The second category of barriers entails the complexity of the process of recognising academic qualifications and working experience from their home countries: These barriers make TCN Women feel their previous life is undervalued: *"My studies don't have any value here, neither do my 10 years of experience as a social worker because for Spain, Gaza doesn't exist on the map"* (Immigrant in Spain).

The lack of a supporting network has an impact in different dimensions of social and professional inclusion. Namely, being far away from the family makes the work-life balance difficult. In addition, the lack of public or low-cost childcare services is especially important for single or working parents.

The last category represents a large number of dimensions, related to an intersectional discrimination based on gender, race and religion. Some women felt discrimination, especially Muslim women because of wearing the hijab. In fact, the empirical data suggest that TCN women are in a particular vulnerable situation because they are not only facing gender-based discrimination but also racism and xenophobia in the host country. Particularly in the workplace, TCN women clearly feel that there is horizontal discrimination, namely by performing jobs that are in the "shadow", in the rearward: *"they don't want us to be seen in front"* (Immigrant in Greece).

6. Findings - In-Depth Analysis of 11 Women Success Stories

As previously stated, we collected 11 success stories from TCN Women in the 9 EU countries. As partners working directly with migrant women, we asked them if they felt comfortable in sharing their story of integration. This approach implies that the ones who answered the request regard themselves as someone with a successful integration story. Every women utterances entail words such as *"I'm very proud"* and *"I'm happy"* to classify their pathway and their achievement in the host country. Despite the success they also experienced and reported some barriers, as *"life itself is a never-ending struggle"* (WSS 6 in the Netherlands).

The eleven women are highly qualified. Actually, some of them came to the host country specifically to complete their studies (WSS 10 and 11 in Romania). The push factors to the choice of the host country were either due to situations of marriage or due to the previous experience of family members, but also to escape socioeconomic and political turmoil (eg. WSS 8 in Portugal).

Mostly, they found job relatively easily, even if it was not always their "dream job". In fact, some women stated their integration journey with part-time, low qualified and precarious jobs. In some cases, they reported to have faced difficulties in accessing essential goods - *"I've been through difficult times when I had no food, no money"* (WSS 5 in Greece).

Regarding hindering factors, our successful women mentioned the proficiency in the language of the host country and also sexism and xenophobia in the labour market - *"I felt prejudice [...] because I'm migrant. The job market will not offer equal opportunities to nationals and TCNs. You tend to be regarded as a threat and will be expected to accept short-term, low-skilled and low-paid jobs, local people do not want to do"* (WSS 8 in Portugal). Being simultaneously migrant, woman and a mom is, in some of the success stories, challenging. In fact, *"being a mother of four children while working"* (WSS 11 in Romania) is demanding on work-life balance, namely because of the weak support system.

The identity must be reinvented and, sometimes, it can be very defiant, namely not be able to communicate properly as you used to do your entire life - *"you suddenly feel that you are illiterate, you, you lose your identity when you lack language skills that allow you to communicate your world view"* (WSS in Portugal).

Despite the communicative issues, adapting to a new reality, sometimes very different from the one they have known all their life long, can be very challenging, even physically - *"having to deal with extreme weather and climate change"* (WSS 6 in the Netherlands).

Less qualified women also report the struggle in accessing information about their rights and the administrative operation in the host country: *"The knowledge about administrative matters is the main point for migrants since it is through the institutions and their work at the social level that we, as migrants, could improve our expertise and skills"* (WSS 3 in Italy). The lack of information, namely about their diploma's recognition and the associated costs they have to cover is also pointed out as a major drawback.

Regarding facilitating factors, TCN women highlight the importance of learning, as quick as possible, the host country's language. To do so, they suggest socialising, to get a job or even to work as a volunteer: *"by working you can learn faster. However, it's difficult"* (WSS 1 Cyprus). They also stress the benefits of further education and training, namely language courses. Learn about the language but also about the local culture and values: *"I even learned how to cook the traditional dishes of Cyprus"* (WSS 1 in Cyprus).

Their narratives stand out the role and significance of social economy organisations supporting migrant women. Contact and mutual help with other migrant women experiencing similar situations seem to have an important role for integration. Some women mention the importance of solidarity support by friends or colleagues, namely in situations of temporary housing and food needs. This solidarity makes them feel, somehow, lucky: *"When the student club, where I ate, was either closed or there was bad weather, I was unable to eat on some occasions. However, I was lucky, as I had an acquaintance who worked at the airport and would bring me food from flights"* (WSS 5 in Greece).

Their story telling emphasises the need to ask for help, and not to be ashamed of it. There are people and institutions that are able to support migrant women *"none of us is alone"* (WSS 5 in Greece). In fact, some of those women are working precisely in NGOs.

The women interviewed also show a pattern in terms of entrepreneurship attitude. In fact, they are very active citizens: i) either directly by political engagement (WSS 1 in Cyprus); ii) either by engagement in movements supporting women in similar situations; iii) by participating in the local community, namely in church activities (WSS 6 in the Netherlands); iv) or even starting businesses. For instance, in Martinique, our testimony is from the Dominican Republic and started up her own hair and beauty salon and *"the clientele is both local as well as from the Latin-American community"* (WSS 2 in France)

Being proficient in several languages has proved to be an asset, particularly in terms of employment as interpreters or in work situations in the tourism sector: *"I knew Ukrainian, Russian and spoke English (after a certain point I started speaking basic Greek) is quite useful for seasonal jobs"* (WSS 4 in Greece).

Some of these women explicitly see themselves as role models which was the reason why they accepted our invitation to share their stories. In the case of WSS 11 in Romania, who has even participated in media programmes to share her success story. And the case of WSS 6 in the Netherlands decided to write inspirational success books to inspire others who might be in a similar situation. They have and plan to keep inspiring other women – *"I believe I can formalise my knowledge in digital business and train other dreamers that want to upskill and reskill themselves"* (WSS 8 in Portugal).

The eleven TCN women that shared their integration stories are satisfied with the life they have today and feel that they reached a good status:

"I feel happy and proud to be a translator and to be able to help myself and others" (WSS 4 in Greece)

"I am very proud and happy to be able to work and to help my family" (WSS 7 in Spain)

"When I think that 7 years ago when I came to Lithuania with no knowledge of the language, and now I can run a programme, teach, write and speak at conferences in Lithuanian, I don't even feel that I am a foreigner" (WSS 9 in Lithuania)

"I also earned the nationality of Romania after a successful journey with the Romanian language and work" (WSS 11 in Romania)

Despite feeling fulfilled, and explaining that the migration experience allowed for a "change of identity", as it obliged them to reinvent themselves and overcome their difficulties, several women dream of returning to similar functions they had already performed in their country of origin – *"Teaching at university is still in my future plans"* (WSS 9 in Lithuania) *"I clearly regard Law as a way of life: I have the desire to help, to solve problems and to give guidance and advice to those who need it"* (WSS 8 in Portugal).

7. Final Remarks

As previously stated, the study here presented is a work in progress. However, we believe that, at this stage, it is already possible to put forward some pragmatic measures that can be tested by researchers and stakeholders working in the field of TCN women's integration.

Our preliminary results are quite in line with previous studies, namely concerning the obstacles for TCN women's integration. Our findings reinforce that regardless the increasing European and national policies and measures, the integration of TCN women still remains a striking structural and social problem. To cope with this very complex and multidimensional issue it is vital to give visibility to TCN women in order to understand general patterns, but also their singular needs.

Overall, the interviews carried out provided very useful insights on the research topic and helped unveil different views by encouraging the sharing of representations and awareness of participants concerning the barriers and strategies to fully succeed in integrating the host country.

This way, and as a research action, we share some good practices that can be used as recommendations. They are addressed to TCN women themselves and to other stakeholders working in the field of migrations such as NGO, local authorities, policymakers and employers:

- To diversify the strategies of integration, because of the heterogeneity of situations of each TCN woman;
- To give the floor to TCN women in order to empower themselves, to give visibility to their added value and persuade them to inspire other TCN women;
- To share TCN success stories to raise awareness to employers and the general public;
- To work with the double expertise of professionals trained to support TCN women and also TCN women themselves according to their self-determination;
- To create a network and a community of practice for professionals working in different fields;
- To integrate TCN women in real-life situations with other citizens, even as volunteers;
- To learn the language and the culture of the host country;
- To create network and support groups of and to TCN women;
- To promote Social and Solidarity organisations of migrants;
- To set up a support system, using public services, social and solidarity services but also Private Sponsorship programs that guide individual solidarity wishes. Those programs already exist, primarily for refugees, since the late 1970s, in Canada and worldwide. The UN Refugee Agency recognises the great impact of such programs, together with more institutional support.

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Place-Based Solutions for Net Zero: Gender Considerations on ‘Green’ Skills

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Abstract: There is a global effort towards transitioning to a zero or low-carbon economy due to climate change and the current energy crises. This requires a shift in socio-technical systems and cross collaboration amidst sectors. The move to a clean energy-based economy also involves the creation of a broad range of skills, the upskilling and reskilling of the existing workforce, and providing opportunities for training. While many critical analyses of emerging decarbonisation or green skills, focus on issues of clean energy transition and the distribution of opportunities between fossil fuel-based and clean energy industries, there is limited critical analysis of justice and equality regarding the distribution of opportunities for developing key green skills for place-based decarbonisation. There is evidence of asymmetric power relations and gender inequalities regarding the acquisition of skills, employment opportunities, kinds of jobs and pay gap which disproportionately affect women. This paper presents compelling evidence of hegemonic masculinisation within the energy industry; this tendency is now mirrored in ecological industries and technologies, including within the renewable energy sector, leading to an ‘eco-masculinisation’ of the sector. Just transition principles promote a fair distribution of resources and the representation of vulnerable groups, including women and minorities. By relying on local assets and resources, including human resources, place-based approaches to green skills could address local communities’ needs while strengthening their resilience. These processes are pivotal to a fair and equitable transition. By explicitly articulating the context of place in understanding the gender(ed) dynamics of decarbonisation and skills, the authors identify and reflect on an innovative way of understanding the intersections between infrastructures, skills, and masculinisation in the transition to low zero carbon.

Keywords: Place-based, Gender and energy, Just transition, Net Zero, Green skills

1. Introduction

The global energy crisis, exacerbated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, is calling for a shift towards clean energy transition in different sectors and at different scales. This transition will require moving away from fossil fuel-based industries and technologies causing a transformation in the kinds and availability of jobs. Governments are currently developing decarbonisation agendas, which include planning for up-skilling and re-skilling schemes to prepare and support the workforce through such transitions (e.g., BEIS, 2021). However, there is evidence that the energy industry and technology fields are male dominated (Powerful Women, 2022). Questions arise about just processes of energy transitions and for whom. While studies centering on exploring the gender and energy nexus mainly focus on investigating gender inequality within social structures and access to resources (Kooijman et al., 2018), less evidence has been given to inequalities within material infrastructures such as within energy technologies and industries. Contributing to fill this research gap is particularly timely giving global endeavours to foster green energy transitions.

In 2019, the UK government has committed to become a Net Zero economy by 2050 (Institute for Government, 2020); this requires socio-technical systems shifts within and between several sectors, including transport, energy, construction, and the digital economy. Transitions to decarbonisation are calling for greater share of the costs and the benefits deriving from such processes to ensure the inclusion and recognition of marginalised and vulnerable communities and are aiming to defy environmental degradation and inequality (Kanger and Schot, 2019). Further, transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to a clean energy one also requires cross collaboration among sectors, users, and technologies, creating the need for a wide range of skills across emerging energy systems. This needs reskilling and upskilling of existent workforce, as well as creating opportunities for training.

A key element of energy transition is the move to green skills. However, there is evidence that the shift to green skills and the ramping up of low-carbon skills is easier in some places than others. Moreover, while there is mention of young people entering the workforce (Cole and Barras, 2022), there is no specific quota reserved to women and female young adults. The adoption of a whole system approach to just transitions, reveals that there is a historical and deeply embedded gap regarding women’s participation in the energy technology job market. The masculinisation of the energy technology sector uncovers issues of inequality and asymmetric distribution of power and resources including regarding skills training and employment.

This paper argues that place-based approaches for Net Zero can support greater distribution of resources and benefits across the local communities, and the recognition of marginalised groups including vulnerable women

and minorities, for a just transition. Section two discusses the green skills for Net Zero landscape; section three, introduces a conceptualisation of a gender approach to place-based models for a just transition; section four, presents the research methods, followed by a gendered analysis of green skills; finally, section six provides a discussion and concluding remarks.

2. 'Green' skills for Net Zero Transition

There is a global effort to address climate change concerns and transitioning towards zero or low-carbon energy systems; this implies a shift from carbon-intensive and fossil fuel-based industries and economies to increased use of decentralised and renewable energy-based systems (Bray et al., 2022). This transition will affect around 20% of existing UK jobs (c. 6.3 million workers), with about 3 million workers needing upskilling and another 3 million with skills in high demand. Major sectors identified are construction, manufacturing, and transport. Significant transformation will also happen in the oil and gas sectors (Robins et al., 2019; Green Jobs Taskforce, 2021).

Although there is no universal definition of green skills, OEC/Cedefop (2014:16), define them as “the skills needed by the workforce, in all sectors and at all levels, in order to help the adaptation of the products, services and processes to the changes due to climate change and to environmental requirements and regulations”. However, the lack of a clear definition constrains investment by local education providers and businesses. These kinds of skills are often associated with those required by technology, engineering, science and STEM jobs, and they are used interchangeably with other terms such as climate emergency skills and decarbonisation skills (Scottish Government, 2020).

Engineering UK (2022) report, for instance, indicates three different types of Net Zero jobs, new and direct jobs, and technical jobs. New and emerging jobs include carbon monitoring and hydrogen cells technicians, jobs that would need upskilling include architects and environmental consultants, while those that would be required in greater number, include insulation installers and energy designers (Scottish Government, 2020). The report stresses the need for greater disaggregated and specific data regarding the numbers needed for each of these categories. Forecasts of new jobs remain vague in skills strategies including distinguishing between direct or indirect jobs. The lack of accurate disaggregated data also limits an understanding of who is engaged in training and jobs opportunities, and whether more inclusive measures (e.g., flexibility), to ensure the participation of marginalised groups, such as vulnerable women and minorities, are adopted. Further, limited analysis of green skills is provided in relation to place-specific characteristics and place-based value.

3. A Gendered Approach to Place-Based Models for a Just Transition

Just transition is defined as “a fair and equitable process of moving towards a post-carbon society” (McCauley and Heffron, 2018:2). Just transition in energy entails justice principles of fair distribution and representation. Distributional justice is concerned with issues related to the sharing of resources (including knowledge and skills), the benefits and costs regarding decarbonisation processes (Jenkins et al., 2016). Representative justice relates to the recognition of rights and participation in decision-making processes of marginalised groups, including vulnerable women and minorities (ibid.). Increased diversity, including gender, racial and ethnic, and the appreciation for diverse perspectives can contribute to greater innovation and resilience of local communities.

A gendered approach in unpacking skills for decarbonisation reveals strong asymmetries in relation to inclusion, (who is included in green skills transition, what would be meaningful inclusion, and how we can aim to have a more inclusive outcomes from developing local decarbonisation skills), and power (how power is embedded and represented in decarbonisation skills and its relationship to place). The recognition of the intersectionality of gender with other categories such as age, ethnicity and status, discloses hegemonic forms of interlinked oppressions within the energy industry (Bell et al., 2020). As Bell et al. (2020) point out, those embedded in these systems are structured hierarchically. There is a tendency of the renewable energy (RE) sector to mirror practices and masculinist identities of the fossil-fuel based energy industry. Hultman and Pulé (2019), discuss how this trend translated the conceptualisation of the ‘industrial/breadwinner’, which highlights the interlinks between male domination, power and privilege, and industrialisation with critical socio-environmental consequences, to an ‘eco-masculinisation’ of the RE sector (Dagget, 2018). Pursuing solutions to this trend, Hultman and Pulé (2019) call for ecological masculinities that rather align with feminist views of transforming the masculine hegemonisation and “domination of marginalised groups and individuals along with other-than-human nature” (Hedenqvist et al, 2021:209).

A just transition implies not only a transformation of technologic and technical aspects, but also of “social geographies, social meanings, and the political organization of energy production, distribution, and consumption” (Miller et al., 2015:30), while challenging societal constraints on equality and justice. Place-based approaches to decarbonisation could offer alternative solutions to issues of underrepresentation and uneven distribution of resources. A focus on place is important to supporting a just transition to a Net Zero economy for all. Each city, town and rural area faces a range of different skills challenges and has a different combination of assets with which to respond to the opportunities presented by the transition to Net Zero. This underlines the clear benefit in strengthening linkages and networks to allow for the sharing of learning and best practice across businesses, individuals, and place-based organisations. This perspective argues that a place-based approach is critical to achieving industrial decarbonisation (Devine-Wright, 2022). Building networks and collaborative practices for learning and action around shared social and environmental values can support the development of more sustainable and inclusive business models (Lüdeke-Freund et al. 2016; Roome and Louche, 2016; Dybdahl, 2019). Outcomes of such processes, include diminished transport emissions, development of local jobs, green recovery, extending product life cycles, encouraging consumer awareness/behaviour change and progressive cost reduction. Place, and geographical proximity are important aspects of decarbonisation as they can foster a recoupling between, people, resources, community, and environment, which enables more inclusive and just forms of value exchanges (Bocken et al. 2015). Yet, a discussion on place-based forms of value creation and exchange, and skills for Net Zero is lacking at policy and programmes levels.

4. Method

This paper is informed by a review of grey and peer-reviewed literature (November 2021 - January 2023) and participant observation (November 2021- February 2023) on 11 occasions. The desk-based review included national and regional reports; national and local level strategies, such as Local Skills Improvement Plans; and white papers for workforce resilience, achieving, and facilitating Net Zero; five-year utility business plans; papers on green recovery and growth. Participant observation was carried out through an involvement of the researchers in discussions and meetings with local stakeholders such as the Brighton and Hove City Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the South East Energy Hub; working groups of regional importance in the Sussex region, such as Hydrogen Sussex; and Sussex Chamber of Commerce.

Although the collected primary data is centred around observations and participation in discussions focused on Sussex, a broader search of existing secondary UK and international literature confirmed that the learnings from these regional observations are illustrative of broader trends and dynamics of skills development alongside a place-based agenda for Net Zero. For example, the secondary data collection involved the review of 11 national and 15 regional hydrogen strategies worldwide (Hiteva and Mininni, forthcoming). Detailed notes were taken from the participant observations, and they were used to identify some of the key terms used in the secondary data search and the codes used in the data analysis.

The analysis of place-based models for Net Zero was combined with a gender analysis of secondary data such as academic articles and reports on gender and energy, training and employment in energy technology and infrastructure. The European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender analysis as ‘the study of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers, etc., between women and men in their assigned gender roles’ (EIGE, 2019:3).

In particular, a gender lens in this paper was used to analyse decarbonisation skills policies, programmes and projects which can have different effects on women due to historical socio-structural inequalities faced by many women, in relation to their experiences, roles and responsibilities, and their level of access to resources and decision-making within the decarbonisation skills context. Gender analysis was particularly useful here in helping to understand the situatedness of gender in the place-based context of decarbonisation skills.

5. A Gendered Analysis of ‘Green’ Skills

While emphasis in transition to decarbonisation has been given to the technical and technology transfer, less attention has been paid to who participates in such processes and how. Critical analyses on skills and workforce gaps are scarce; this paper aims at filling this gap by analysing existing literature regarding gender equality and women’s participation in green skills training and employment. Greater equality and inclusion are key to social justice and just transition, as gender diversity also contribute to more innovative and inclusive solutions. With 400,000 jobs needed (National Grid, 2020), for instance in the UK, in the energy sector to achieve Net Zero targets by 2050, the role of women and female young adults is often overlooked; they could be essential to the workforce.

The Green Jobs Taskforce (2021) recognises the need to address issues of unequal participation of underrepresented groups such as indigenous communities, minority groups and women; yet, the emphasis of 'green skills' is often STEM skills, with scarce consideration of the variety of green skills needed for "transformative business models for sustainable value creation" (Ward, 2018; Rosenberg et al., 2019:9). Skills for 'green jobs' also comprise transferable workplace skills like business skills, customer service, entrepreneurship, and sales and marketing skills (ILO, 2019). As Kwauk and Casey (2022) argue, often, the outcomes of investment in green skills are mainly centred on economic growth and poverty reduction albeit within remits of achieving sustainability. Indeed, organisations and institutions involved in skills for green jobs, pose different emphasis on social and ecological aspects, including issues of marginalisation of vulnerable groups, financial power asymmetries, extractivism, inequitable distribution of resources and critical industries across geographical contexts (Eberle et al., 2019; *ibid.*). Green growth ideologies are often entangled in neoliberal values and patriarchal norms that have fashioned current uneven and unsustainable systems of power across groups and geographies (Raworth, 2017; Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Kwauk and Casey, 2021). Scarce synergy between energy policy and planning with broader socio-ecological considerations and outcomes is often due to male domination of energy industries, with a majority of male energy engineers, economists and bureaucrats leading energy policy design and implementation (Healy and Barry, 2017). This results in what Cecelski (2004) refers to, the invisibility of women's needs and priorities (Mang-Benz, 2021).

Several gaps have been identified from our analysis. First, there is a lack of women's representation within green skills training and jobs. A review by Naoum et al. (2020), for instance, highlights that, although there have been efforts toward including women in the construction workforce, to address skills shortages and to diversify the workforce, the number of women employed in the sector has not substantially increased. The authors recognise "the omission of women as a disadvantage to the industry, making it impossible to obtain the best people when half the population is excluded" (2020:3). There is also tendency to employ women within low-level and non-technical positions (Lieu et al., 2020).

Second, there is scarce women's representation in executive position within the existing workforce. PowerFul Women (2022) report indicates that women occupy only 27% of all board roles in the top (c. 80) UK energy companies. This implies a lack of leadership and participation in decision-making over companies' strategies, visions, and direction towards clean energy transition, as well as influencing who is included in processes and how. On the last point, the intersectionality of gender with other societal structures, such as age, ethnicity, and status, and socially defined roles and responsibilities see many women marginalised within the domestic sphere. Caring (for children and the elderly), and household responsibilities are gendered with the assumption that they are women's responsibilities. This long-lasting trend evident in both the Global South (Kooijman, et al., 2018) and the Global North (Van der Lippe et al., 2020), reflects femininity and masculinity discourses according to which domestic work is seen as 'women's work', while men are seen as breadwinners (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Time for household activities is unremunerated and taken for granted. Due to these activities, many women tend to follow a 'zig zag' career path; greater flexibility of jobs and training, including work reintegration training, and increased transparency regarding promotions are essential to increase gender equality in green jobs and training (Naoum, 2020).

Regarding training, the exclusion of women and female young adults from energy technology and decarbonisation training, also results in slower uptake of new technologies and the masculinisation of technology design. Further, in relations to job reintegration according to Energy & Utility Skills over 75% of women who are willing to return to their engineering job after a career break or maternity leave, are discouraged by inflexible working hours and practices (EU Skills 2020). Greater flexibility should be accompanied by increased awareness of the opportunities within the sector, and organisational commitment to tackle main challenges of underrepresented groups (NUS et al., 2018; Green Jobs Taskforce, 2021). This includes dealing with "root causes of gender-based inequities in the green economy" and challenging gendered customs and policies (Kwauk and Casey, 2022:6).

Third, hegemonic masculinity of the energy industry is also evident regarding gendered pay gap, with women suffering from lower wages. The structural hierarchy of wage labour that operates against women also affects their personal worth (Weeks, 2011). Further, there are around 76% fewer women than men working in the energy sector; an important difference from the average 8% gap found in the total workforce "according to 2018 data from 29 countries (22 IEA members). The average gender wage gap conditional on skills in the energy sector among those countries is approximately -15%, meaning women working in the sector earn 15% less than men, even when controlling for skill level" (IEA, 2022). Innovative approaches that respond to local communities' needs are required also to challenge power asymmetries and the dominant masculine culture.

These aspects are further exacerbated by gender blindness in energy policy, which “breeds and entrenches socio-economic inequalities”, and by the assumption of gender neutrality of energy according to which men and women equally benefit from energy technology access and services (Mang-Benza, 2021:2).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Achieving Net Zero interlinks with creating green jobs that require a set of skills specific to critical infrastructure sectors, including energy, ICT, transport, waste and water management. However, the gendered analysis of green skills reveals underrepresentation and uneven distribution of resources, comprising skills, knowledge, and jobs, which operate against many women. Further, the RE sector seems to reproduce male-dominated practices of the fossil fuel industry (Boyd et al., 2019). This undermines meaningful changes. The acquisition of green skills contributes to gaining specific expertise needed to respond to the energy and climate crises and to women’s participation within the RE sector, essential to greater gender equality in energy technology education and employment, as case studies (e.g., Mininni, 2023) show.

Yet, adding women into the green skills agenda, is only one piece of the puzzle. To achieve greater transformative transition, it is critical for governments, organisations and industries to support women in challenging socio-cultural structures and practices (IRENA, 2019), including redistribution of power. Women-led organisation, for instance, can foster greater women’s participation in solar training and distribution of solar service (Allen, et al, 2019). While there is greater awareness and interest in the gender-energy nexus, also regarding skills and employment for green jobs, due to the scarcity of research into the correlation between gender equality and energy transition, it is difficult to evaluate the gender impact of energy transition policies (Clancy and Feenstra, 2019). Further, elements that could contribute to greater transformative action and empowerment of women are gender-responsive policies, and gender-inclusive training opportunities. For example, Gonzales et al., discuss cases of women’s inclusion in the geothermal industry, through technical skills training; this was accompanied by regular gender sensitization and equal access for both men and women to employment benefits, including legally mandated maternity leave (2019).

Just transition is calling for fairer processes not only at the technical and technologic level, but also regarding greater inclusion of marginalised groups, and equality. For instance, Ofgem, the UK energy regulator, is pushing for greater inclusion and diversity in terms of the distribution of costs and benefits, and representation within the workforce according to population sets in zones where energy companies work (Ofgem, 2022). A key aspect of their strategy is to improve underrepresentation of women and minorities at management and executive level. Just energy transition could present opportunities for integrating women and other vulnerable groups to advance justice and equality as distributive and representative justice principles concern also how individuals relate to their surrounding environment including social, economic and environmental infrastructures, networks, and within nature. Hence, greater consideration should be given to the relationship between place, social and environmental targets, such as Net Zero, and the impacts that related policies and programmes have on the energy sector labour force. This implies a shift in the conceptualisation of place, not only as a physical or geographical area where energy companies operate or provide services, but also as the communities and environments which bear the consequences of climate change and await the benefit of Net Zero action.

Gendered dynamics in decarbonisation processes are embedded within socio-cultural practices and norms that are specific to different contexts. The focus of gender analysis in energy transition has been within industries; we posit that gendered distribution of resources and opportunities are embedded within a place. This perspective emphasises the importance of recognising the intersectionality of gender with other societal structures (e.g., ethnicity, age, economic and education status), and with women’s gendered roles and responsibilities (e.g., as mothers) which are rooted within place. Future research should expand gendered primary analysis of skills for green jobs in diverse geographies and within broader RE industries and sectors.

Place-based approaches to training and jobs could be critical to accommodating the needs of local communities in a disaggregated and intersectional way also in consideration of people’s status and gender. Discussing what skills are needed and recognised for decarbonisation; and who are these skills accessible to helps to unpack how skills for decarbonisation provide direct opportunities to participate in value creation. Greater gendered justice and equality are calling not only for women’s inclusion in skills transfer and within the decarbonisation workforce, but also for shifting power relations and challenging socio-structural constraints on gender equality, such as hegemonic masculinity within the energy sector. This requires transformation in the education and employment systems towards more inclusive and representational of marginalised groups, together with more gender responsive decarbonisation policies.

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Challenges Facing Palestinian Women in Assuming Leadership Positions in Higher Education Institutions: Glass Ceiling

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to reveal the opinions of women leaders about the challenges facing Palestinian women that prevents women from being a leader, which is called the glass ceiling. Mix method was used in this research, using a survey and a questionnaire. The participants of the study consisted of (15) women leaders working in higher education universities in Palestine holding the following positions: heads, deans, committee chairpersons, administrative officers, and vice chancellors. The research came out with several results. The most important challenges came in descending order as follows: social cultural and political challenges, organizational and management challenges, family challenges, and finally the psychological and subjective challenges got the fourth rank. Women are excluded from assuming administrative positions due to several factors, including nepotism and male bias; Women have the ability and competence, but they need a supporter to strengthen them and enhance their confidence to take the step of candidacy for leadership; Lack of confidence in women's capabilities and their scientific and practical competence from the point of view of men, and fear of the decisions they will make upon assuming higher positions. It is recommended that establishing formal and informal professional networks among women is necessary to strengthen communication, exchange experiences and information, discuss and analyse problems and provide solutions. Also, it is necessary for higher education institutions to provide an organizational climate supportive of women assuming leadership positions, providing them with the latest techniques and modern management methods, to overcome obstacles, and the consequent provision of training and qualification programs and courses that enable them to master their work.

Keywords: Palestinian women, Women in Higher education, Glass ceiling, Leadership development, Women and leadership

1. Introduction

The Palestinian society is governed by the Zionist occupation and siege, which has made it different from other societies around the world. These conditions affected the education and status of Palestinian women and increased their suffering from the oppression of the occupation. This is evident in the dispersion and loss of the Palestinian society and its subordination to more than one educational system and more than one curriculum, and the interference of the occupation authorities during the educational learning process. All these things negatively affected the educational process of women and the preservation of their cultural identity, as well as directly affecting their education and access to leadership positions in their work.

Despite these exceptional circumstances, Palestinian women have played their roles in various professional fields in society. Palestinian women actively participate in the struggle and resistance in all available forms. She's a martyr, she's wounded, and she's also a prisoner. She plays a great role in the sustenance of her children and participates in supporting men. She's also the breadwinner for her family After losing her husband. Palestinian women have proven their strength and talent as a leading force. Then many of them realized their potential roles and began to contribute to the fields of education, medicine, engineering, and other sciences that contribute to building the Palestinian society. The Palestinian government had encouraged them to participate in all sectors of production and services. Employment Rights for woman was included in the Labor Law No. (7) of 2000 as seen in article 100 of 2000 which states, 'there should be no discrimination between men and women at work (2000).

Female participation rate in the labor force: According to the statement of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics on March 7, 2022, the number of females in Palestine reached 2.63 million females out of the estimated total population in the middle of 2022 comprising a rate of 49%, while the sex ratio reached 103.3, meaning that there are 103 Males for every 100 females, and the statement stated that there is an increase in the percentage of women's participation in the labor force for the year 2021 compared to 2020, as the percentage of women's participation in the labor force reached 17% of all women of working age in 2021, after the percentage was 16% In the year 2020, while the rate of men's participation in the labor force reached 69%, with 65% for the same period.

workplace issue is one of the largest studies that have generated great debates of the state of women in various fields, education, economy, politics. Now, in 2023, women are facing new challenges in the workplace. Despite this added stress and exhaustion, women are rising to the moment as stronger leaders and taking on the extra

work that comes with this: compared with men at the same level, women are doing more to support their teams and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (Burns et al, 2021).

Higher education is a unique space in the sense that the women functioning in Higher education institutions belong to the highly educated class of people who are also economically empowered. They are providing a model for empowerment of women through education and economy.. This environment still holds a lot of challenges for women in managerial positions which are quasi administrative in nature (Kapoor, 2022, 26).

1.1 Research Questions

- What are the challenges facing Palestinian women in assuming leadership positions in higher education institutions: the glass ceiling?
- What are the most important ways to represent women in leadership positions in higher education?

1.2 Literature Review

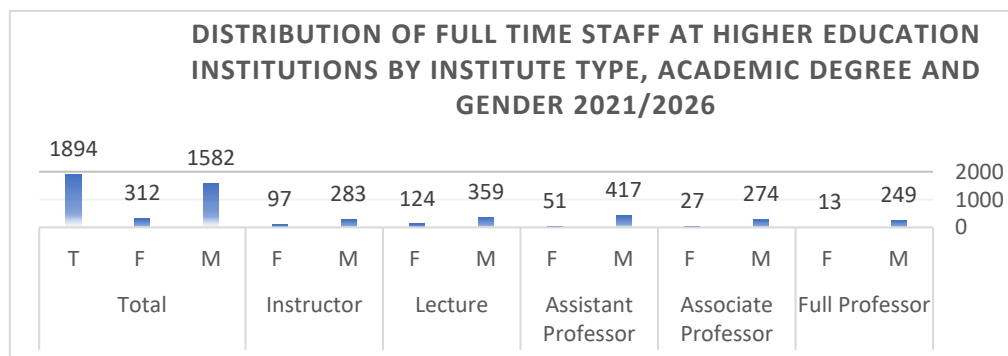
Barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon where women, when compared to men, are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower-authoritative leadership positions (Northouse, 2010). Providing women with encouragement or career advice enables women to draw upon the unique and individualized aspects of their personhood to overcome subtle barriers to attaining leadership roles in academic settings (Hill & Wheat, 2017. 201107).

2. Women Leadership in Palestinian Higher Education

Although women's participation in the workplace and their representation in middle and lower management positions is increasing worldwide, this was not linked to the representation of women at the senior management level, especially in Palestine at universities and large companies, in addition to government jobs, where women's participation is still low (Herzallah et al, 2022:72). The Palestinian woman is different from her counterparts in the world. She is the mother, the wife, the breadwinner, the captive, and the martyr. Therefore, work must be done for women to take all their rights and assume leadership positions in proportion to the efforts exerted by them. "It is not necessary to solve women's problems and integrate them into work through a Western model that is strictly applied, rather, it is possible to create a special experience for Eastern women in general and Palestinian women, in line with the variables and factors surrounding them" (Alqutob,2012:86).

The number of institutions accredited and licensed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education is (51) higher education institutions, including 16 traditional universities (10 in the West Bank and 6 in Gaza), 2 open education universities, 16 university colleges, and 17 intermediate community colleges (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics on March 7, 2022). Table 1 shows the distribution of faculty members in universities for the year 2021 by academic rank and gender.

Table 1: Distribution of Faculty Members in Universities for the Year 2021 by Academic Rank and Gender



The following can be seen from the previous table:

Females comprise (16.5%) of the membership of the teaching staff in Palestinian universities. This indicates the unfairness of women's right to hold office. About (71%) out of them are still lecturers and instructors, that is, they do not hold an academic rank yet. This result reflects one of the most significant challenges faced by the Palestinian women which is the difficulty of traveling to other countries to obtain higher studies, either because of the blockade or because of the economic situation that does not help her and her children to travel.

Change in higher education institutions requires an organized and carefully planned effort. It also requires trained and influential educational leaders who can face challenges and remain strong and steadfast by adapting to events. In this context, the prominent role of the leaders of higher education institutions is evident in their interest in upgrading the roles of working women in these institutions, whether academic or administrative, in light of the growth of their work, their aspirations for the pioneering role entrusted to them, and their willingness to obtain leadership positions within the framework of their work (Al-Awadi and Abu Latifa, 2020: 5).

Organizations need to develop policies, practices and leadership development approaches that do not exclude women through surface level support initiatives, and to go deeper to involve women in decision making and acquiring positions of power to help create a reality that works for them (Gilani et al. ,2022: 181). Women's underrepresentation in organizational leadership roles remains persistent albeit varied global advances in equality in the workplace (Catalyst, 2020; United Nations, 2021).

3. The Effects of the Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling theory is widely used and one of the most compelling theories when analyzing gender inequalities in the workplace. A glass ceiling refers to, "the limits that are placed for women and minorities to prevent their access to senior positions in organizations" (Khayal, 2016: 17). "The "glass ceiling" is one of the most compelling metaphors for analyzing inequalities between men and women in the workplace". (Baxter and Wright, 2000: 275). The phenomenon of the glass ceiling: It is a Western theory in the science of management that emerged in the seventies, and among the most famous definitions of the phenomenon of the glass ceiling is defined by Riggio as "the limits that are placed for women and minorities to prevent their access to senior positions in organizations." (Khayal, 2016: 17)

All women in developed and developing countries suffer from glass ceiling, and it revolves around the barrier that prevents women from assuming leadership positions, as a woman despite her competence and superiority over men in the same field. This term is used to monopolize leadership positions over a group of people according to discrimination, either by gender, color, or otherwise. National and societal culture also impacts women's aspirations to leadership through the dominant societal roles and expectations, the way in which they were expected to do gender appropriately and in their working relations with men. The different constructs of national and societal culture therefore intertwine to create a complex web of inequalities. Thus, there are many challenges women must navigate in their leadership practice and aspirations (Gilani et al. ,2022: 176). To reduce the negative effect of glass ceiling on women's career development, it's recommended to develop self-efficacy by encouraging management to employ mentoring for women executives. Mentoring will support female executives to reduce self-limiting beliefs and lack of self-confidence, which can result in them going forward for promotions (Uduwella et al., 2019: 107).

4. Challenges Facing Women in Assuming Leadership Positions in Higher Education Institutions

Some of studies dealt with the topic of Challenges facing women in assuming leadership positions in higher education institutions like: (Alomair,2015) (Al-Somali,2019) ؛ (Radwan, 2020)؛) Musharraf and Al-Bakri, 2021).

Organizational challenges: The reason for the existence of organizational challenges in higher education institutions is due to the lack of officials' knowledge of women's capabilities and investment in their efficiency at work. Officials do not pay attention to promoting women enable them to do their tasks, to know their style and apply them during work. In addition, there's lack of confidence in them, as they see in them a weak ability to assertiveness and decision-making, because some officials focus only on the emotional aspects of women, neglecting all aspects related to attitudes (Radwan, 2020: 15).

Societal cultural challenges: They mean cultural and societal obstacles and beliefs that make women fear social criticism. These obstacles result from a deficiency in one of the social systems of a given society.

Personal challenges: such as excessive social burdens, poor training competencies, the inability to strike a balance between work and home, psychological pressures, and the inability to decide on a specific job due to the inferior social view of some jobs (Musharraf and Al-Bakri, 2021: 353). The underrepresentation of female leaders in higher education is a global phenomenon. It was shown that difficulty balancing family responsibilities with work demands, organizational factors, and gender stereotypes as major roadblocks for females seeking leadership opportunities in higher education, and an explanation to their overall underrepresentation as academic leaders. It was also shown that cultural and social practices in the form of defined gender roles and

stereotypes, as well as organizational barriers in the form of bureaucracy and gender inequality are major obstacles faced by female leaders (Alomair, 2015: 89).

The Family Challenges are due to the lack of encouragement of the woman's family to develop herself professionally and not supporting her to raise her professional status. In addition, the nature of the work and the compatibility between her tasks and family duties, such as: the husband, taking care of the children, duties, and social events, makes it more difficult for the family to challenge her eagerness and desire to assume leadership positions. (Radwan, 2020: 17)

5. Suggestions to Overcome the Challenges Facing Women in Assuming Leadership Roles

Al-Somali (2019: 51) suggested the following ideas:

- The Ministry of Education should provide the necessary financial allocations, implement decentralization, and delegate authority to women regarding important and financial decisions for their departments, because financial constraints limit the effectiveness of the work of women leaders in universities to a high degree.
- Encouraging job rotation within universities and secondment of female employees between universities, thus contributing to diversity, exchanging experiences, and providing faculty members with skills that enable them to overcome the challenges of the leadership role.
- Benefiting from the experiences of developed countries and methods of activating them in a way that does not contradict the foundations and constants, and is commensurate with the culture, customs, and traditions of our society.

Aoun (2019: 424) also addressed proposals to overcome the challenges facing women in assuming leadership roles as follows:

- Evaluating the image of women and their roles in society and including them in plans at all levels.
- Enriching curricula and academic contents with values that uphold women's ability to lead in high-level positions.
- Highlighting the role of educated women in building the modern nation in various media.
- The need to adopt an effective plan to empower high-level academic leaders, in addition to granting them powers, involving them in decision-making at a high level, and overcoming obstacles in front of them.
- Educating the community through various educational platforms about the importance of empowering women and that they can drive in all locations.

6. Methodology

Mix method was used in this research where quantitative and qualitative methods have been applied on the primary and secondary data. The goal for researchers using the mixed methods approach to research is to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Of course, the strengths and weaknesses associated with the various research approaches are not absolute but rather relative to the context and the way researchers aspire to address the phenomenon under study. For example, if the researcher purports to provide in-depth insight into a phenomenon, the researcher might view selecting a small but informative sample, which is typical of qualitative research. The researcher might use inferential statistics to quantify the results, which is typical of quantitative research, as strengths worthy of combining into a single research study (Williams, 2007). When qualitative data collection precedes quantitative data collection, the intention may be first exploring the problem being studied and then to follow up on this exploration with quantitative data that are amenable to studying a large sample, so that the results can be applied to a population (Molina-Azorin, 2016). The overall purpose and central premise of mixed methods studies is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Study sample: The participants of the study consisted of leader women working in higher education institutions of Palestine. Primary data were collected from the respondents from (15) female leaders represented the Palestinian universities out of (25) universities which means that the leads obtained are adequately representative. The sample was chosen because it consisted of women leaders who held leadership positions in

Palestinian universities, with at least a department head, and have long experience in leadership work in higher education. They agreed to publish the results of the study.

A purposeful sample was selected as follows (4) professor, (2) associate professor, (8) assistant professor, (2) teacher, out of the total number of female participants (16), (9) from Northern governorates (West Bank) and (7) from Southern governorates (Gaza), the number of years of service is (13) had ten years or more and (3) less than ten years, and with regard to marital status, (13) of them were married, (2) single (1) was divorced and there were no widows among the participants in the study. As for the motives for working in higher education, (1) of them was economic, (1) social, (6) personal, and (8) others; As for the number of children (6) of them have less than or equal to three children, (6) of them have more than three children, (6) of them do not have children; As for the work environment (14) of them work in a mixed environment, (2) of them work in a separated environment. When they were asked if women did not take their right to assume leadership positions in higher education (10) answered often, (5) sometimes, (1) rarely.

The sample was collected by snowball sampling, "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich (Creswell, 1988. 119). Women leaders in higher education institutions were elected to participate in the Survey which "can be an efficient way to gather information from large groups of people and can be less time and labor-intensive than other methods of data collection, and they typically make it easier to aggregate findings across multiple respondents" (IES, 2016, 18). The survey items were open-ended to allow respondents to answer in their own words. Sending a list of questions helped to generate ideas. It revealed several issues that should be addressed. So that a questionnaire was designed to structure their response and it contained all their opinions. Its questions covered multiple themes (e.g., social traditions, leadership, the state of diversity, equity, homelife) as well as demographic questions (e.g., social status, type and place of residence, housing conditions, employment, family size, marital status, income, and other living conditions, family status). After analyzing the factors, the survey was re-formulated in the form of a semi-closed questionnaire and sent back to the leaders themselves to be filled out again as a second round.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 The Test Used in the Study: (Statistics Centre, 2017: 27)

To determine the criterion adopted in the study, the length of the five-point Likert scale period (lower and upper limits) used in the fields of study was determined, and the range $(5-1 = 4)$ was calculated, then divided by the number of five scale periods, to obtain the length of the item, i.e. $(4/5 = 0.8)$, and then this value was added to the lowest value in the scale (which is one) in order to determine the upper limit for the first period, and so on, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Shows the Response Scale

Scale	Degree of approval	Item's length	The relative weight of the item
1	Very weak	From 1.0-1.8	From 20%-36%
2	Weak	>1.8-2.6	>36%-52%
3	Medium	>2.6-3.4	>52%-68%
4	High	>3.4-4.2	>68%-84%
5	Very high	>4.2-5	>84%-100%

To interpret the results of the study, and to judge the level of response, the researcher relied on arranging the means at the level of the domains of the tool, and the level of the items in each domain, and the researcher determined the degree of approval according to the test approved for the study.

8. Analysis of the Study Questions

To answer the questions of the study, the qualitative approach was applied, to collect data and reach the most important challenges facing Palestinian women in assuming leadership positions. The researcher came up with many challenges, which the researcher re-designed as a closed questionnaire and returned it to the same study

sample to judge it again and make sure which factors were the most influential. The researcher used the quantitative approach to reach the results through SPSS program. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Results

One-Sample Statistics					
Challenges	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Rank
Organizational & management	16	3.4375	.74505	.18626	2
Psychological & subjective	16	2.7768	.69589	.17397	4
Social cultural and political	16	3.7991	.77994	.19499	1
Family	16	3.2708	.82971	.20743	3
TOTAL	16	3.3185	.46938	.11734	

Results showed the challenges faced by women came in descending order, the social cultural and political challenges ranked, with a high degree of approval, the organizational and management challenges got the second rank with a high degree of approval, the family challenges got the third rank with a medium approval degree, the psychological and subjective challenges got the fourth rank with a medium approval degree.

Social cultural and political challenges: The most impactful challenges came in the following items:

- "The common stereotypical idea of female nature that it is only suitable for certain jobs," with a very high degree of appreciation. The researcher attributes this to women being affected by the Palestinian environment in which they live, and the glass ceiling imposed by society on women.
- Item: "the prevailing masculine culture in Palestinian society," came in second place, with a very high degree of appreciation. The researcher attributes this to the fact that women feel the discrimination between them and men in several matters imposed by the surrounding society where some jobs are reserved for men only.
- The traditional image that society portrays in its culture of women - as housewives, not as leaders.
- Formation of negative attitudes towards women's leadership in society
- Society's belief that women rely more on emotion than reason in decision-making.

Organizational & management challenges: Results show that the mean of the total score for all items of the field (3.43). This result agrees with the study of: (Alomair,2015) (Al-Somali,2019) † (Radwan, 2020) †) Musharraf and Al-Bakri, 2021). The most influential of the organizational and management challenges appeared in the following items:

- "Men not accepting women as boss at work ", with a relative weight of (86.2%), i.e., a very high degree of appreciation. The researcher attribute this to the culture that they inherited from the Palestinian family and society, which showed women as weaker than men, and their belief that it is not right for women to be higher than men in in career progression.
- "Men's fear of a woman leader," came in second place, with a relative weight of (77.4%), that is, with a high degree of appreciation. This is related to the fact that there is a lack of confidence in women's capabilities and their scientific and practical competence from the point of view of men, and fear of the decisions they will make upon assuming higher positions.
- Also, there were other challenges facing them such as underestimation of women's efforts at work, officials' belief that women are less capable of decision-making, and promotion to leadership positions depends on acquaintances or nepotism.

Family challenges Psychological & subjective challenges: The mean of the total score for all items of the domain was (2.77). The study sample agrees on this domain with a medium degree. This result agrees with the study of : (Alomair,2015) (Al-Somali,2019) † (Radwan, 2020) †) (Musharraf and Al-Bakri, 2021). The most influential reasons were as follow:

- Item: "the lack of motivation and desire of women to hold these positions," with a medium rating. The researcher attributes this to some women feeling obligated to their home and family because of

the ideas of the Palestinian society surrounding them, which make them primarily responsible for any shortcomings of their family due to work, and this prevents them from assuming senior positions.

- Item: "the control of a man's thought over a woman's limits her leadership," came in second place, with a medium rating. The researcher attribute this to the fact that some men are influenced by the environment in which they grew up and the ideas of the Palestinian society surrounding them, which denies them/ rejects the idea of them assuming high positions.
- Reducing the margin of freedom and fear makes women less able to claim their rights. In addition to the woman's fear of failure and delay.

Psychological & subjective challenges: This result agrees with the study of :(Alomair,2015) (Al-Somali,2019) : (Radwan, 2020): (Musharraf and Al-Bakri, 2021) The most influential reasons were as follow:

- Item: "the lack of motivation and desire of women to hold these positions," with a medium rating. The researcher attribute this to some women feel obligated to their home and family because of the ideas of the Palestinian society surrounding them, which make them primarily responsible for any shortcomings of their family due to work, and this prevents them from assuming senior positions.
- Item: "the control of a man's thought over a woman limits her leadership," came in second place, with a medium rating. The researcher attribute this to the fact that Some men are influenced by the environment in which they grew up and the ideas of the Palestinian society surrounding them, which denies them/ rejects the idea of them assuming high positions.
- Item: "women are by nature less willing and less able to be in decision-making positions," came in the penultimate order, with a low degree of appreciation. The researcher attributes this to women being ambitious by nature, aspire to leadership, and have the ability and competence to assume senior positions.
- Item: "Weakness of women's ability to communicate with others, especially males," came in the last place, with a low rating. The researcher attribute this to that women are strong by nature and possess intelligence, knowledge, ability, and competence to assume senior positions.

There are statistically significant differences between the averages of the study sample's estimates of the degree of challenges facing Palestinian women in assuming leadership positions in higher education institutions due to the residential area variable in favour of the southern governorates of Palestine (Gaza). This is due to the fact that the environment in Gaza is still governed by some customs and traditions that contradict the culture of Islam which encourages women to practice work and hold them to the highest leadership positions in educational institutions.

Second: Results related to the second question: What are the most important ways to represent women in leadership positions in higher education?

To answer this question, qualitative method has been applied, the researcher used the interview as a tool of this method, the sample of interviewee in the study consisted of leader women working in higher education institutions of Palestine. Primary data were collected from the respondents from (15) female leaders represented the Palestinian universities out of (25) university. The following are their responses to this question :

- Participant 1, "*Enhancing self-confidence.*". This shows that women have the ability and competence, but they need a supporter to strengthen them and enhance their confidence to take the step of candidacy for leadership.
- Participant 2, "*Paying attention to the efficiency of performance in selecting women for leadership positions and avoiding nepotism, trends and gender.*". This shows that women are excluded from assuming administrative positions due to several factors, including nepotism and male bias.
- Participant 3, "*Improvement requires a comprehensive change that begins with the woman herself and the family, and then society with its educational, social and media institutions.*"

This shows that change must start from the woman herself, as she is the one who must help raise her status first and then by participating with the surrounding society.

- Participant 4, "A right is never lost as long as someone strives to claim it."
- Participant 5, "Putting the right person in the right place."

- Participant 6, *"Amending laws and regulations to make them more sensitive to gender."* This shows that the government in Palestine must play a major role and participate in raising the status of women by amending laws and regulations that serve gender.
- Participant 7, *"Developing a culture of community and family support, and giving opportunities to those who deserve it, regardless of gender."* Community in Palestine must play a fundamental role in supporting women, spreading the culture of women taking leadership positions, and giving them the opportunity, they deserve.
- Participant 8, *"women should believe in their abilities and set goals for themselves to work towards achieving them and to be a role model for others"*.
- Participant 9, *"Giving women opportunities to prove themselves and creating a work environment to prove themselves."*
- Participant 10, *"To be assigned in a periodic manner so that everyone takes the same opportunity"*.

Emphasizing that women should be treated as human beings and not as a different person and have the same opportunity that is given to men.

- Participant 11, *"Family support, empowering women and raising their self-confidence. Empowering women economically and paying attention to education."*

The family must play an important role in the life of the female from the beginning of her upbringing and should not differentiate between her and the males in dealings.

- Participant 12, *"Giving women more opportunities and incentives to obtain scholarships for doctoral studies and activating academic feminist blocs at the university in order to demand equal rights and opportunities with men and to monitor violations related to discrimination against women."*

Focusing on women's education, especially higher education, which helps them to assume senior positions in all aspects of their lives.

- Participant 13, *"Family and community support, empowerment and training in the field of leadership learning"*.

9. Conclusion

By collecting information from the questionnaire and the interview, the research came out with several results, the most important of which are: women are excluded from assuming administrative positions due to several factors, including nepotism and male bias. Women have the ability and competence, but they need a supporter to strengthen them and enhance their confidence to take the step of candidacy for leadership. Lack of confidence in women's capabilities and their scientific and practical competence from the point of view of men, and fear of the decisions they will make upon assuming higher positions. It is impossible to eliminate these challenges, but these challenges can be mitigated through the following recommendations:

- Women start with themselves by enhancing their capabilities and multiple skills, increasing their self-confidence and their achievements, and increasing their training for leadership positions.
- It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to set criteria for selecting leadership positions in universities, which should be based on objectivity and equal opportunities.
- Designing training programs for working women on leadership skills that must be available in a leader such as self-management, communication, the skill of influencing others, delegation, initiative and innovation, team building, and stress management.
- It is necessary for higher education institutions to provide an organizational climate supportive of women assuming leadership positions, and the consequent provision of training and qualification programs and courses that enable them to master their work.
- The need to adopt designing training programs aimed at rehabilitating working women on leadership skills that must be available in a leader such as self-management, communication, the skill of influencing others, delegation, initiative and innovation, team building, and stress management.
- Also, it is necessary to provide them with the latest techniques and modern management methods, to overcome obstacles such as social cultural and political challenges, organizational and management, family challenges, psychological and subjective that limit the participation rate of women leaders in decision-making positions.

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Gender Budgeting as a Dynamic Monitoring Tool for Gender Diversity Management in Universities

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Abstract: Since the early 1980s, the economic literature has recognized the importance of valorizing the differences in the corporate context as a necessity and has been fueled by studies using the term "diversity management" (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Keil et al., 2007). The attention placed on the issue by both public and private sector organizations has grown exponentially, embracing new contexts and also new shades of diversity (Di Santo et al., 2013). Gender is a focal element of the organizations' multiplicity, the respect for which requires equal representation of men and women in the workplace (Wawryszak-Misztal, 2021). The EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) Indicator considers different variables, among of which there are employment and education, two closely interdependent aspects which are even more prominently encountered in academia. Gender inequality in academic careers is, in fact, a global phenomenon, although the causes and consequences vary in different national contexts (Piva and Rovelli, 2022). One tool increasingly used by universities to demonstrate their commitment to pursuing gender equality is the gender budget, a document that assesses and restructures budget items considering women's priorities and needs as well as those of men (Addabbo et al., 2015; Bilyk et al., 2021; Lucchese et al., 2022). This paper aims to investigate *whether and how gender budget can communicate the evolution of the gender diversity management approach*. The paper uses a qualitative analysis based on a single case study to answer the research question. In particular, the research is focused on gender budgeting elaborated by the oldest university in Europe: University La Sapienza, set in Rome, Italy. Sapienza University is the most prominent university in Rome and the first to implement this tool. The authors will carry out a documentary analysis of the latest gender budget (2021), comparing it with the previous ones (2016-2020), to see if it is possible to understand how Sapienza's commitment to reducing the gender gap has evolved over the years. From a theoretical point of view, the research contributes to gender studies and non-financial reporting research, focusing on the role of clear and transparent communication in conveying the value and enhancement of diversity. From a managerial perspective, findings could increase the universities' awareness about which information the gender budget should contain to represent the organization's dynamic engagement against gender inequalities.

Keywords: Diversity management, Gender budgeting, Gender equality, Gender gap, University, Non financial reporting

1. Introduction

The debate on corporate social responsibility from the perspective of gender equality began to spread in the 1930s, when the literature began to attribute to the company a social and not merely economic role, due to which it cannot only respond to profit logic, but must be accountable to the needs of its stakeholders. In order to pursue sustainable development, hence to fulfil CSR principles in relation to gender equity, organisations must concern themselves with implementing solutions that encourage equal opportunities in terms of recruitment, remuneration, roles, training, security and work-life balance (Di Santo et al., 2013; Gunluk-Senesen, 2021). The issue of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is closely connected to the organisational flexibility that a company should consider in relation to women's work, in order to alleviate the potential employment discontinuity linked to the maternity event, through adequate work-life balance policies (Di Santo et al., 2013).

In this scenario, there are two elements that have undergone different but closely interdependent developments over the years: diversity management and gender balance.

Since the early 1980s, in fact, the economic literature has recognised diversity management in the corporate context as a social and strategic necessity and has been fuelled by the publication of multiple studies that refer to it using the term 'diversity management', which can be defined as 'the distribution of personal attributes among interdependent members of a work unit' (Jackson et al., 2003, p. 802). The attention paid to the issue by organisations, both in the public and private sector, has grown exponentially, embracing new contexts and also new nuances of diversity. On the one hand, governments are drafting legislation to foster an increasingly comprehensive inclusion of minorities; on the other hand, companies are counting on the increasing participation of women, minorities, older people and people of different nationalities in the business world. Gender is a focal element of the multiplicity of organisations, respect for which requires equal representation of men and women in the workplace (Wieczorek-Szymańska, 2020; Gunluk-Senesen, 2021). To this end, it has become increasingly clear that companies need to adopt policies that promote the recognition of equal rights

for women and men and to invest in upgrading women's skills. Among the tools used by public administrations to declare their achievements in terms of gender equality and actively pursue this goal is the gender balance sheet (O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018).

This paper, therefore, aims to analyse the correlation between gender budgeting and diversity management, asking whether and how gender budgeting can communicate the evolution of the gender diversity management approach. With this purpose, a qualitative methodology is used, considering the specific sector of Universities, as it is a sector where the gender gap is very pronounced, but also one of the firsts implementing the gender budgets.

The work is structured as follows. Section 2 contains a literature review; section 3 defines the research methodology used by the authors; section 4 exposes the findings derived from the analysis of the documents and the pilot case study; section 5 contains the discussion and concluding remarks; section 7 outlines the implications of the work; finally, section 8 declares the limits of the research and the future lines.

2. Literature Review

In order to answer the research question, the authors started their work with a literature analysis following three main strands:

- the origins and development of Gender Diversity Management (GDM) paradigm;
- Gender Budgeting (GB), as a tool used by the public administration to support and communicate GDM
- GB in universities.

The perception that Diversity Management (DM) represented a relevant strategic choice for companies can be traced back to the early 1970s in the United States, with the development of the institutional paradigm of Affirmative Action (Buemi et al., 2015). This term refers to those interventions that, aiming at a reversal of dichotomous categories, thus claiming as positive what the majority considers negative, aim at eradicating discriminatory practices through the implementation of particular strategies, which are aimed at incorporating previously disadvantaged groups in all aspects of community life and at removing obstacles that hinder the realisation of equal opportunities in the labour and social spheres (Anderson et al., 2004; Reddy & Parumasur, 2014). When many Affirmative Actions experts, until then employed within state and federal administrations, began to enter the world of private companies, they imported the importance of policies supporting diversities. Then, diversity integration was perceived as a legal constraint and a potential basis for a competitive advantage for the company (Anderson, 2004). As a consequence, to preserve diversity in the workforce, managers begun to pay attention to how to increase the participation of women and members of ethnic and national minorities (Keil et al., 2007). Diversity experts soon began to question the effectiveness of affirmative action, noticing that many organisations often limited themselves to guaranteeing access to equal services to people from different backgrounds, only generating window-dressing integration. On the other hand, DM aims to enhance diversity through a change in organisational culture and individual attitudes (Keil et al., 2007). Indeed, it faces two interconnected challenges: implementing measures that make an organisation's workforce more diverse, also by invoking positive action; making the workplace as inclusive as possible by promoting not only an aggregation but a real communication and transmission of knowledge (Buemi et al., 2015). There is a particular streams of research among the DM studies referring to the equal representation of men and women in the workplace: Gender Diversity Management (GDM). GDM is not limited to the recruitment of personnel by human resources managers but requires the promotion of conditions valuing different components, inclusive leadership, equal training and career opportunities within the company, mentoring and training development of women leaders (Gros vold et al., 2007; Di santo et al., 2013; Wawryszak-Misztal, 2021). The literature states that female workers have reported a more favourable perception of DM practices than male workers, nevertheless, it should be recognised that taking care of women's wellbeing means enhancing their role within the company and society, thus favouring a better development of both the internal and external environment of the organisation (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012; Gülsoy & Ustabaş, 2019). The gender issue, therefore, does not only concern women.

Studies have identified three different ways in which companies can promote gender equality in the workplace: coercive (through legal interventions), liberal (by initiating voluntary corporate commitment) and collaborative (by implementing cooperative measures in collaboration with stakeholders) (Whitehead & Normand, 2011; Khalifa & Scarparo, 2021; Halaç, 2021). The most common approach among Italian companies is characterised by the search for the third way, an interaction between coercion and voluntarism that reflects the local perspective and priorities (Ravazzani, 2016).

To reach gender equality in a private organisation, a collaboration of both the public and private sectors is needed; in fact, the gap in the corporate environment is exacerbated by the lack of adequate and accessible facilities for childcare and elderly care, both family care roles that statistically weigh much more heavily on the shoulders of women.

The importance of public administrations in playing a proactive and propulsive role in promoting and implementing equal opportunities is also sanctioned by some Directives, among which the Directive of 23 May 2007 of the Department of Public Administration of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers ("Measures to implement equality and equal opportunities between men and women in public administrations"). It introduces Gender Budgeting (GB), as a tool supporting the gender equality process. One of the first definitions of gender budgeting was provided by the European Parliament Resolution of 3 July 2003, developed by the European Commission 2002/2198 (INI), which refers to the theory of gender budget analysis and envisages the achievement of four objectives:

- -equity between the two genders in decision-making;
- -transparency, by highlighting areas of intervention characterised by higher gender inequality and on which more attention should be paid;
- -efficiency, by providing both women and men with the right tools and information to learn about economic, social and political issues in their country;

-awareness, indeed the administrators must participate in this initiative, understand it and share its objectives.

According to the document, GB is an application, in the budget process, of gender mainstreaming, an approach aimed at considering the effects of public policies on the different genders (Addabbo et al., 2015). In this sense, the gender budget becomes a tool for highlighting gender diversity and, at the same time, promoting gender equality. However, gender budgeting is not simply a recognition document, it represents a complex and articulated process, which begins with the evaluation and planning of public policies to be implemented, taking into account the different needs of men and women (Klatzer et al., 2018). To this end, the organisation must analyze the environment in which it operates, identify its stakeholders and outline their gender-sensitive needs, i.e. those aimed at achieving gender equity (Khalifa & Scarpato, 2021; Halaç, 2021). After this first phase of analysis and planning, the gender budget can include an ex-post intervention to monitor the implemented policies, measure their efficiency through selected indicators and report on the results produced, i.e. on the deviations between the budgeted objectives and those actually achieved. The gender budgeting can support the decision-making process of the company in order to trigger the principles of gender mainstreaming in the corporate values and mission.

Italy still records a significant gender gap; indeed the EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) indicator, which places Italy with a score of 63.8 out of 100, in fourteenth place out of the twenty-seven EU member states. A particularly crucial dimension for measuring the gender gap is employment, about which Italy ranks last among the European countries, also due to the impact of the pandemic that has eroded the small improvements recorded in the previous period.

The EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) Indicator considers different variables, among which employment and education. These variables are closely interdependent, especially in the academic sector. Although the causes vary in different national contexts, gender inequality in academia is a global phenomenon (Piva and Rovelli, 2022). Given all this, GB represents a tool that universities increasingly use to consider the women's priorities and needs and demonstrate a commitment to pursuing gender equality (Addabbo et al., 2015; Bilyk et al., 2021; Lucchese et al., 2022).

Previous studies recognise that a vertical segregation is still widespread in Italian public universities, both in the teaching staff component and in the technical-administrative staff component (Ricci et al., 2022). Indeed, it is more difficult for women to reach senior positions (full and associate professors) and managerial roles (highly qualified roles). Nevertheless, Italian universities take positive action to implement a gender equality strategy, planning actions oriented towards wellbeing in the workplace and work-life balance. However, previous studies have also shown that there are hardly any ex-ante economic-financial forecasts for positive actions and that universities only rarely provide a prior indication of the resources needed to implement positive actions (Ricci et al., 2022). Without economic planning, the gender strategy cannot be effective, and the gender budget remains only a reporting tool for recording gender differences between the various categories.

3. Methodology

Without economic planning, the gender strategy cannot be effective, and the gender budget remains only a tool for recording gender differences between categories. The analysis, therefore, aims to identify the contents and communication methods of the GDM policies implemented by the university over the years. In their reading, therefore, an attempt is made to identify the mirror of an evolutionary strategy aimed at the pursuit of gender equality. To this end, the authors adopt a qualitative research methodology, which proves to be particularly suitable when the authors intend to examine in-depth events of operational reality, trying to explain 'how' and 'why' a given phenomenon does not occur and to give an explanation to the causal links existing between the variables involved in the course of its manifestation (Yin, 2009). In particular, the research is based on the reading and analysis of gender budgets drawn up by the oldest university in Europe: La Sapienza University, located in Rome, Italy. In particular, the authors analyse the six gender budgets, which are available on the website of the university (from 2016 to 2021) paying attention to the structure and the information they contain to comprehend how Sapienza's efforts to reduce the gender gap have evolved over the years through the way they are communicated.

4. Findings

From the combined analysis of the documents representing the gender balance sheets drawn up by Sapienza in the last six years, it is easy to perceive certain differences concerning both the structure of the document, which has gained more and more body and identity, and the contents, which are increasingly more articulate and in-depth. The following is what emerged from the comparative analysis of Sapienza's gender balance sheets. The information reported focuses on three aspects

- the structure;
- the gender gap report;
- the Initiatives to pursue a gender equality.

The structure

From a structural point of view, the decisive elements concern: the language used, the articulation, corpulence, in relation to the autonomy of the gender budget.

As far as language is concerned in the 2016 gender balance sheet, Sapienza demonstrates that it considers language as a supporting tool to make explicit its commitment against gender discrimination; in fact, it prefers using of feminine nouns to the usually recurring masculine ones. This choice is also confirmed in subsequent documents.

On the other hand, an aspect that changes over the years concerns the way the document is articulated. Until 2018, in fact, the gender balance did not reach ten pages and did not have a specific index of topics, which were set out in a concise and embryonic manner, if compared to the documents of the 2019-2021 triennium, when, instead, the gender balance is extrapolated from the social balance, of which it previously represented a chapter, and acquires an autonomous identity value.

The direct consequence is that the last gender budgets are also considerably more substantial, articulated and in-depth in terms of content.

The gender gap report

The contents of the documents are increasingly richer and more specific. While they already offer a gender overview of the university component, broken down into students, lecturers and administrative staff, the specificity of this information is becoming more and more detailed, going so far as to also consider categories such as assignees and doctoral students from 2020 onwards. In particular, the university records a female prevalence in the student and technical-administrative staff component, while the prevalence is male when considering researchers and lecturers. These characteristics are constant over time, with a marked increase in recent years in female managers and a slight increase in the female component in the technical-administrative category. Since 2017, the gap in 'senior positions', i.e. in the roles of departmental director and dean of faculty, is also considered. As of 2020, GB is enriched with new indices extrapolated from statistical surveys carried out by parties outside the university with a specification with reference to new levels of education and disciplinary areas. The net monthly salary of graduates by gender, the employment rate at one and five years after graduation, the number of PhD students enrolled by area of study and gender, are just some of the new variables taken into account that help to paint a much more informed picture of the university composition.

The initiatives to pursue a gender equality

Until 2019, the part of the gender balance sheet dedicated to initiatives aimed at pursuing gender equality occupied at most one page of the document and consisted exclusively of the organisation of scientific, seminar, cultural and third mission events, promoted by research groups, laboratories, observatories working on gender issues. From the three-year period 2019-2021, on the other hand, Sapienza not only broadens the range of events on gender issues organised, but also follows two new directions. On the one hand, it enriches the training offer on gender issues, which is divided into: curricular training (within three-year degree courses and master's degree courses), training courses that do not result in the awarding of a qualification, but in certificates of attendance and (non) recognisable credits in curricular courses. On the other hand, it illustrates the resources deployed and to be deployed by the University for the implementation of actions in favour of equal opportunities (including investments to promote smartworking and teleworking, but also to finance nurseries and summer centres). In the three-year period 2019-2021, the total amount of initiatives aimed at gender issues is EUR 1,823,527.88. An analysis of the evolution of the projects promoted in the period analysed shows:- no. 18 initiatives in 2019 for a total value of euro 1,030,200.00; no. 17 initiatives in 2020 for a total value of euro 340,788.88; no. 14 initiatives in 2021 for a total value of euro 452,539.00. The analysis of the average amount financed shows a prevalence of resources per project in 2019 (57,233.33 euro per project), followed by 2021 (32,324.21 euro per project) and finally 2020 (20,046.40 euro per project).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis carried out reveals a growing attention of the case considered towards the topic of gender equality and, at the same time, an increased awareness. These two aspects emerge on the basis of the exponential evolution of the document, both in terms of structure and form and in terms of content.

In particular, according to a formal analysis, the fact that in the first years the GB was perhaps only a small part of the social balance sheet, while in recent years it has come to constitute a document in its own right, already suggests the university's intention to devote more space, both in the information sphere and in the administrative and financial spheres, to interventions that support this social aspect.

The greater attention to the urgent pursuit of gender equality is confirmed by the analysis of two other substantial parameters: the indicators taken into consideration to report the gender gap and the positive actions communicated.

With reference to the indicators, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the analysis has been enriched by involving more areas (whereas previously only the student and lecturer component was taken into account, in the last three-year period the administrative area and also the component of doctoral students and research fellows were also considered) and, above all, by considering new variables (e.g. analysis of the highest levels in the administration, or the student component in terms of mobility or in relation to the degree grade obtained). The consideration of more indices was possible thanks to the involvement of new external bodies that made more targeted statistics available to the university.

Finally, the aspect worth emphasising is the exponential increase in activities that concretely support the pursuit of gender equality. Here, too, more and more space is devoted to them as a consequence of their ever-increasing articulation. This aspect is the one that interests our research more than the others, as it is the practical manifestation of the organisation's commitment to creating inclusive work environments and supporting social equality and women's employment. The three information lines followed by the case study (events, training courses, positive actions) respond to three different needs: raising awareness, improving consciousness, supporting through actions. These three dimensions are interdependent and equally necessary to bring about concrete and positive change. These can be considered as three successive and concomitant moments of a gender diversity management strategy. In this respect, during the period under consideration, events and training courses are coming to outline the topic in an increasingly transversal way, allowing for a more and more comprehensive framing of the gender gap. The most innovative aspect, however, concerns the communication of positive actions, which from 2020 onwards includes not only the declaration of the investments made, but also the explication of the forecast ones, a decision that reveals the company's programmatic approach to gender diversity management and a concrete intention to take action to foster gender equality by intervening in the most critical areas of the work-life balance.

In conclusion, in order to answer the research question, i.e. to define *whether and how gender budget can communicate the evolution of the gender diversity management approach*, it is considered possible to affirm the ability of the gender budget to state the evolution of both the company's awareness and attention to the issue

and the actions concretely implemented or to be implemented. The gender balance, in fact, turns out to be a communication tool and a declaration of intent and, read through a comparative analysis, allows a dynamic interpretation through the analysis of three parameters: the structure of the document, the contents inherent to the reporting of the gender gap and the information, final and forecast, concerning the investments in positive actions.

6. Implications

From a theoretical point of view, the research contributes to gender studies and non-financial reporting research, focusing on the role of clear and transparent communication in conveying the value and enhancement of diversity. From a managerial perspective, findings could increase the universities' awareness about which information the gender budget should contain to represent the organization's dynamic engagement against gender inequalities.

7. Limits and Future Lines of Research

Among the main limitations of the research is the narrow scope of analysis that is considered by the authors, who focus the work on a single pilot case. Looking at a single reality does not make the results generalizable for all Universities. However, this research is intended to be the beginning of a broader analysis that will go on to consider other entities realities in order to validate the results that emerged, confirming or refuting their generalization.

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Weaponizing Resilience: Women in the Trenches and Fringes of Pandemic Pedagogy

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Abstract: This study foregrounds the conflicting social pressures that women educators in the United States face in dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in higher education. Narratives from three standpoints interweave to provide three perspectives on pandemic-informed practices that can build resilience as an inclusive rather than simply an individual process. The three points of view are: a mother in a non-tenure track teaching position who juggles caregiving duties; a male department head navigating how to energize allyship within a neoliberal educational system that suppresses acknowledgment and support of caretaking; and interactions among members of the Facebook group Pandemic Pedagogy, a global social media hub for educators adjusting to the pandemic's impact. Collectively, these standpoints constitute a critical autoethnographic multilogue to deconstruct and remediate the systemic gender inequities exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. The three perspectives converge on implementing feminist ethics of care as both a philosophical and practical foundation for constructively cultivating resilience at the personal, community, and institutional levels.

Keywords: COVID-19, Resilience, Compassion fatigue, Higher education, Critical autoethnography, Online communities

1. Introduction

The United States response to the COVID-19 pandemic from government, institutions, and individuals often has modelled “worst practices” rather than exemplars. Amidst COVID-19 politicization and misinformation, a fragmented patchwork of healthcare and public education, dysfunctional family care systems, and the chaos attendant to shifting educational and support services online, women face disproportionately large challenges throughout the pandemic and its subsequent reverberations. Shouldering the majority of family care responsibilities and already disadvantaged in a mostly male-dominated professional environment, women who work in higher education contend with personal and institutional pressures intensified by the pandemic.

Jo Augustus (2021) summarizes dozens of studies documenting how the COVID-19 pandemic increased childcare and household responsibilities for women, widening already problematic gender inequities in higher education. Similar impacts have been observed worldwide, raising concerns about long-term economic consequences to women and to nations (Abdelkafi, Ben Romdhane, & Mefteh, 2022). The pandemic exposes the precarity many women face amidst major social disruptions, and the research productivity of many women suffered in the face of mounting responsibilities outside the workplace (McMillen, 2021).

2. Method

This study foregrounds the conflicting social pressures that women educators and their students in the United States face in dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in higher education. Narratives from three standpoints interweave to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of pandemic resilience. First, a mother in a non-tenure track teaching position discusses juggling caregiving duties. Next, a male department head navigates how to energize allyship within a neoliberal educational system that suppresses acknowledgment and support of caretaking. Finally, discourse in the Facebook group Pandemic Pedagogy, a global social media hub for educators adjusting to the pandemic, demonstrates how online communities can foster resilience. The three perspectives converge on offering feminist ethics of care as a philosophical and practical basis for constructively enacting resilience. We define resilience in performative terms as the behaviours that individuals, groups, or formally organized institutions engage in to cope with adversity or disruption and its consequences.

The conditions of the global pandemic amplify the need for collaborative autoethnographic research (Roy & Uekusa, 2020). The social isolation resulting from physically distant online work spaces, the reduced availability of sites for extended ethnographic observations in the field, and the attenuation of physical public spaces for collaborations push researchers toward alternative methods for reporting and analysing their professional environments. Combining autoethnographic perspectives can provide one way to circumvent these restrictions, offering transparency to professional and personal activities that have become less observable. Patrice Buzzanell (2021) affirms that “constituting resilience is an unending design project grounded in situated lives” (p. 470), hence the grounding of this project in descriptions and analysis of lived experience. Attention to specific cases that foreground resilience has the advantage of showing how resilience plays out in practice, presenting

“concrete demonstrations of principles that might otherwise remain abstract” in more quantitative studies (Hopkins, Lim, & Phillips, 2011, p. 57).

3. Crises of Care for a (Non-Tenure Track) Teaching Mother

At first, we both worked from home. Then, as the first wave in the United States started to wane, my spouse went back to work a few days a week. When the university opened for Fall 2020 classes, I taught hybrid versions of my courses, working from home Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and teaching face-to-face on Tuesday and Thursday.

3.1 Unravelling (in) the Pandemic

To say that I was “working from home” is a misnomer...or perhaps simply grossly inadequate. With two children in virtual school, I was homeroom teacher, math and reading specialist, and resource officer (the term applied to school police officers in the United States) all in one. I found myself pulled in more than the dual identities of public and private personae women wear so fluidly in modern Western society. My children needed me. My family needed me. My students needed me. My department needed me. And, as all of these entities are crucial to my notion of identity, I needed them. The world may have slowed down, but somehow, my life was careening out of control.

“Mom! He licked me again!”

I check my screen to make sure I’m muted. As a gender scholar, I have done my best to suppress outbursts of toxic masculinity between my two male offspring. The results are varied. Today, I have made it absolutely clear there will be no hitting, pushing, biting, or fighting in all its various forms, as I am, once again, facing a virtual gallery of squares. So, in the absence of traditional, overt aggression, the boys have resorted to licking each other. We are a year into remote learning and their school has announced we will not go back to face-to-face instruction for the next term.

“He licked me first!”

I bring my hand up to make it look like I’m rubbing my nose, which effectively covers my mouth. “Goddamn it! Knock it off!” I yell, taking full advantage of Zoom’s mute function. “I told you I’m on a call!”

I get up from the computer. My alert for the next meeting has already announced I have ten minutes of “free time” to do some dishes. Suddenly, the world that I had been ignoring while in Zoom sessions, grading papers, or advising students, comes into full light. My kids aren’t on their school calls. They also aren’t doing their homework. They are, in fact, blaring YouTube videos while surrounded by empty bags of food and soda cans. None of which they are allowed to have, in general, but particularly not in the living room. My house and my kids have turned into a bad internet meme.

Structural gendered sexism and racism—the ideological systems that disproportionately assign responsibility for the care of children to women—were brutally exacerbated by COVID-19 (Laster Pirtle & Wright, 2021). When economies shut down, both men and women began to work from home; however, the responsibilities for unpaid childcare and learning largely fell to women (Dunatchik et al., 2021; Laster Pirtle & Wright, 2021). With the COVID-19 crisis, the inequities of gendered labour come into sharp focus. In the United States, women were forced to pay for childcare (if available) or find creative childcare options, while concomitantly working longer (and harder) hours without increased wages.

3.2 Reconfiguring Care

Feminist ethics of care prioritize human networks and interpersonal relationships as the highest level of moral development. Caring for self and for others is a primary component of feminist ethics of care, where relationship nurturing between the caregiver and the cared for lies at the core of ethical decision making. Lived experiences and concrete situations of caregiving and care-receiving guide ethical decision making from this perspective. Problematically, “crisis management tends to be conceptualized as a rational and linear process which follows discrete stages of signal detection, preparation/prevention, containment, recovery and learning” and is inherently masculine in nature (Branicki, 2020, p. 873). Purely calculative approaches to crisis management often follow business/profit models, and in so doing, marginalize already vulnerable populations (Branicki, 2020), such as mothers suddenly finding themselves shouldering the dual responsibilities of teaching and working while also maintaining a household and the overall health of the family.

A feminist ethic of care holds greater potential for leading societies through crises. Traditional crisis management is designed to maintain or return to the status quo. It is systematic and universal—what goes for one, goes for all—and stifles debate, resistance, and critique (Griffin, 2015). As the pandemic has demonstrated, the in-home needs of women and children differed greatly, and the answers to their plight were far from universal. A feminist ethic of care applied to crisis management can be “transformative, because it shifts the normative focus towards issues that are often marginalized, makes these issues visible and in so doing improves lives” (Branicki, 2020, p. 873). The transformative nature of feminist ethics has the ability to upend a global system of governance that makes decisions based on established (often inequitable) legal systems and a desire to control populations in an effort to reduce panic (Griffin, 2015). A “feminist crisis management” provides an “alternative perspective that is concerned with caring about, taking care, caregiving and care receiving” (Branicki, 2020, pp. 880-881), as opposed to a systematic set of rules that only extends care to those already cared for.

In terms of resilience, a feminist ethic of care allows for individuals to approach adversity brought about through crises from a standpoint of “we” rather than adopting an individualistic approach. Resilience is not simply a matter of “bouncing back,” but also an opportunity for “bouncing forward” (Houston, 2015) through individual and community growth. Adopting feminist ethics of care allows communities to address crises through interpersonal networking and relationship building. Giving and receiving care becomes a more holistic process that takes the needs of those receiving care into account rather than a universal approach that provides a form of blanket comfort that serves the institution’s interests more than it does the community of stakeholders who constitute the institution. Care can become restorative and transformative as those giving care recognize the needs of those receiving care and how those needs might be exacerbated by traditional systems of control.

4. Cultivating Resilience: A Department Head’s Perspective

My colleague’s narrative in the preceding section illustrates compassion fatigue, understood as the “cost of caring” for others, sometimes more clinically referred to as secondary traumatic stress (Figley, 2002, p. 2). Confronted with increased needs from families, partners, and students throughout the pandemic, many women face escalating expectations of administering care on every front. If left unaddressed, compassion fatigue contributes to a more systemic shutdown: burnout that can interrupt or end academic careers. Studies report “a disproportionate increase in burnout in academic researchers” across many nations, especially in marginalized groups such as women and LGBTQ+ populations (Gewin, 2021, p. 491).

Implementing a feminist ethic of care confronts the reality that the individual’s reservoir of care is finite. On the demand side, policies and practices can re-examine the expenditure of care by structuring expectations of students and the university regarding the nature and type of care women should provide. On the supply side, creating or expanding networks of care can replenish the dwindling ability of women to exercise care for themselves and others.

I have an obligation to use my own power and privilege as a white, male, tenured full professor and department head to address inequities that the untenured women faculty who comprise 50 percent of my department constantly face. The *Pandemic Effects on Legal Academia* study (Deo, 2022) notes the “lack of structural support” (p. 128) for women faculty—particularly women of colour—who are more concentrated in non-tenure track positions that require working with the most students. Allies in the academy who do have greater job security or who wield some power to implement policies can help to counteract regressive or repressive policies and practices.

4.1 Institutional Pressures on Women

Faced with declining enrolments (our university has lost an average of 1,000 students per year since 2020), institutions already enamoured with commodification of education (Schwartzman, 2017) increased their emphasis on “customer satisfaction” to maximize student retention. In most institutions, the student evaluation of teaching (SET) provides a primary indicator of student satisfaction. A growing body of research confirms that SETs demonstrate gender biases against women, especially insofar as they “reinforce gender-stereotypical behaviour in teaching” (Gelber et al., 2022, p. 204; cf. Adams et al., 2022; Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2022). For non-tenure track women faculty, SETs generally constitute the core data in their major—often sole—category of evaluation: teaching. Thus, with institutions desperate to retain students, the key evaluative tool becomes a more powerful means of enforcing traditional gender norms for women and punishing variance from expected “feminine” behaviours.

Many universities, including ours, offered extensions of the tenure and promotion timeline for tenure-track faculty. At our university, tenure-track faculty could opt in to extend their probationary period an additional year. No equivalent measures were offered to faculty on year-to-year contracts or to adjuncts. This extension was especially helpful to a woman faculty member in my department who specializes in community-engaged research. During the pandemic, she also had her first child, so her caregiving strains would intensify while the restricted contact with community members would slow her research.

The extension of the tenure time clock has merit; however, merely extending the timeline neglects the opportunity to expand and improve the modes and metrics of performance evaluation. The timeline extensions pause assessment without reflecting on the nature of assessment itself. One option would be for institutions to expand the scope of what counts as suitable research and creative activity. For example, inclusivity and accessibility of publication venues could be prioritized, reducing continued reliance solely on journals whose prestige rests on the same homogeneous cadres of editors and reviewers as gatekeepers. Furthermore, public intellectual work could receive more credit, especially since it often reaches and can affect a wider audience than abstruse esoterica ensconced within a journal's paywalls. These kinds of changes challenge the type of institutional resilience that materializes as recalcitrance, a re-entrenchment of conventional performance metrics and evaluative methods.

4.2 Resisting Regressive Institutional Resilience

Institutional resilience operates along a continuum between two orientations toward disruption: organizational transformation through embracing change, or reversion through treating change as a threat and returning to the previous status quo. During the worst of the pandemic, our university appeared to embrace transformation. Teaching modalities and schedules were fully negotiable between faculty and their department heads. Sick leave allowances were extended. Central procurement of protective and cleaning supplies gave departments full ability to practice pandemic protocols at no cost to them. All of that changed after approximately one year.

Prevailing messages to employees, students, and the public touted a "return to normal," in effect declaring "mission accomplished." Throughout the pandemic, official administrative messages to all stakeholders still stress continuity: "Keep teaching." "Keep working." "Keep learning." Official messages from our university's human resources office and from upper administration consistently celebrate resumption of past practices rather than framing the pandemic as an opportunity for creative institutional change (Schwartzman, 2020). After vaccinations became more widespread, the university quietly abandoned all COVID protocols. Now, the only acceptable rationale for a full-time instructor to teach fully online is through a medically certified disability filed through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This new, narrower policy applies only to medical conditions of employees themselves. Caregiving to others does not qualify for long-term accommodations.

When manifested as reversion, institutional resilience becomes problematic, as it avoids confronting the potential for constructive change (Schwartzman, 2022). Years before the current pandemic, Evans and Reid (2014) critically examined institutional calls for personal resilience as a way to increase tolerance for inequitable or oppressive institutional practices and thereby bolster an organization's resistance to change. "Business as usual" restores the status quo, treating the pandemic as a momentary blip in an educational system that self-corrects just as the (so-called) "free market" does. Within this model, symptomatic of the neoliberal university, tweaks replace critiques. Default modes of educational and labour practices remain exempt from structural reform. Maximizing flexibility in when, how, and where academic work is performed can mitigate some of the disproportionate impact the pandemic continues to have on women (Augustus, 2021).

4.3 Practices of Empowerment and Support

Research on managing compassion fatigue in the helping professions (Figley, 2002), heavily populated by women (Lepore, 2021), reveals several measures that academic departments can implement locally even when institutional resilience works against women. For example, I try to encourage and enforce boundaries that reasonably limit expectations of caregiving to students. Several of my colleagues have included their email response time (e.g., reply within 48 hours) in their email signature block and on their course syllabi. Many colleagues also state a time frame for their daily availability (e.g., no replies to messages before 8:00AM or after 9:00PM). Women in my department who shoulder familial care responsibilities especially include this information and the reasons for it when orienting students to their courses.

I also try to serve as gatekeeper for the flood of information that flows to department heads for distribution to faculty. The information and tasks continue with no respect for any work/life boundaries. "Keep working. Carry on." As department head, I have complex, high-stakes budget reduction planning documents due over winter

break after the semester has ended and while the university is officially closed. Add a two-day leadership workshop scheduled during winter break, announced during break and less than two weeks in advance. Final course schedule changes are often due on weekends or holidays, even when the university is not in session. In my gatekeeping role, I recognize that the vaunted value of transparency has limits. The constant supply of grim budgetary details gets discussed promptly but within officially designated meeting times during normal work hours.

Selective humour can relieve tension and boost morale. Humour comprises a regular part of my communication with faculty colleagues, who in my performance evaluations express their appreciation of it. Humour can moderate compassion fatigue by reducing stress, reframing unpleasant circumstances, and creating some distance from problems (Moran, 2002). More specifically, humour can buffer the stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Bartzik, Aust, & Peifer, 2021). Humour must be used judiciously, steering clear of insults or pessimism and avoiding trivialization of genuine concerns. To build camaraderie, my humour focuses on making light of our shared challenges and using self-deprecation to expose the plights that department heads face. Humour also can operate strategically to demonstrate the inconsistency or counterproductivity of policies that systematically disadvantage women.

5. Cultivating Resilience via Online Communities

The semester after I became department head and the day our university announced the shift to fully online instruction in March 2020, I established the Facebook group Pandemic Pedagogy. Dedicated to discussions of education throughout the pandemic, the group quickly grew to more than 30,000 members and remains listed on sites worldwide as a key resource on pandemic-era education. The group's membership has always been predominantly female (self-reported at 73%), which could reflect a greater desire or need than males to seek a supportive professional community online.

Pandemic Pedagogy continually demonstrates how an online community collectively cultivates resilience. Members exhibit mutual care in three primary ways:

- Empathy: Acknowledging and validating one another's experiences, attitudes, and feelings.
- Encouragement: Providing positive communication to reassure others that they are valued, capable of taking action, or can cope with challenges.
- Empowerment: Offering suggestions or resources for actions to address specific challenges.

Close examination of one member's narrative illustrates how the online community enacts resilience. The member, a white woman teaching at a university in the southern United States, disclosed:

For the first time in 20 years, I dread class time. My hybrid classes (divided into 3 sections) quickly disintegrated to not one person showing up in class because the administration will not allow us to require attendance. It also will not allow us to default to synchronous online teaching from our office or home, so I stand masked in an empty classroom and lecture to students on Zoom, who have given up on participating in discussion. Except for the trolls, and I have had to deal with class trolls and online...trolls more in the past month than I have had to my entire career. I have been called "cruel" and been accused of "indoctrinating students with my communist/Marxist/Satanic ideologies on critical race theory, feminism, LGBTQ rights, multiculturalism, etc...." which only makes things worse.... To me, the crude behaviours of some of my students feel very gendered. I cannot imagine them attacking my male colleagues as blatantly as they attack me.

The post generated 57 comments and 327 reactions. Member responses reflect how empathy, encouragement, and empowerment demonstrate care and bolster resilience.

Many women in the group offered empathetic comments, reassuring the original poster that she was not alone and was heard by colleagues if not by her institution's administrators. Acknowledging the absurdity of teaching online from an empty classroom, a member responded: "I am so sorry. I, too, lecture in empty classrooms to black boxes on a screen. It's incredibly draining (and kills the 'fire' in me)." Noting the market-modelled mindset of many American universities, another member commiserated: "That's awful. Our university also has no regard or care for faculty. They only care about students' satisfaction."

Encouragement also emerged in member comments, especially after the original poster added, "I did send a detailed letter to administrators about the soul sucking behaviours that we have little guidance (or worse, orders not to) address...." A member enthusiastically replied: "Good job! It's hard to make a move like that, I hope on

some level you feel good that you did it." Several women offered encouragement with comments such as: "I wish I could take your class."

Other members fuelled empowerment, identifying specific means of responding to the students' behaviours. A South Asian graduate student who teaches gender studies recommended consulting with the student judiciary office. Another woman faculty member suggested activating whatever alert systems the institution might use to report behavioural issues to the student services office or the dean of students. Other members suggested technical remedies such as muting, blocking, or placing the offending students in a Zoom waiting room. Additional recommendations included contacting the students' advisors, recording class sessions to document the behaviours, and designating other students as monitors to help maintain order.

Social media offers means of building resilience beyond the physical workplace. Kendra Haines (2022) specifically identifies the Pandemic Pedagogy group as an online community of practice (oCoP) that provides a vital support system for educators centring on sharing personal or professional concerns as well as pedagogical practices. When face-to-face interactions attenuated, social media forums such as Pandemic Pedagogy expanded the ability to compare institutional practices related to gender. Even beyond pandemic-imposed isolation, oCoPs enrich social support networks, a key to coping with crises. Such online networks address resilience as a community, in contrast to institutional emphases on self-reliance as COVID-era flexibility toward women and caregivers rigidifies (Ahn et al., 2021). Expanding social support also can reduce stress associated with compassion fatigue (Cordaro, 2020). Using the relatively new Facebook group feature that allows anonymous posts, members can report inequities and air complaints more freely. As Sara Ahmed (2021) notes, a key to systemic change would be to create an institutional culture that listens with "a feminist ear" (p. 3), valuing complaints as opportunities to address embedded gender biases rather than dismissing them as rumblings of malcontents.

6. Conclusion

Two caveats accompany this study. First, both authors operate from positions of relative privilege as white, cisgender, full-time workers, and middle class economically. Additional research should foreground the impact of intersectional identities on resilience in academic environments, especially highlighting non-binary, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, immigrants, and other marginalized groups (Rahman et al., 2022). Second, this research was conducted in the United States, with its mostly decentralized, privatized, and profit-oriented social support systems. Further studies could complement this work by noting how availability of more robust social support services or more systematic policies that confront gender inequities in other nations constructively build resilience.

Levine and Van Pelt (2021) astutely observe that most universities "misunderstood the nature of the pandemic," treating it "as an interruption in doing business as usual rather than an accelerator of the changes to come" (p. 260). The challenges facing women in higher education neither originated nor will end with COVID-19. Rather, the pandemic exposed many heretofore latent or suppressed ways that higher education structures and practices systematically disadvantage women, particularly those who hold already precarious positions without the protection of tenure. More optimistically, the pandemic has revealed creative ways to cultivate personal and community resilience through collaborative support and collective action. When energized through social media communities, colleagues worldwide can share their experiences, expertise, and solidarity regarding ways not only to cope, but to re-form higher education with insights gleaned from a more feminist ear.

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An Exploration of Critical Incidents Impacting Female Students' Attitude Towards STEM Subjects

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Abstract: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) subjects are extremely important to any nation's economy. For society to flourish sustainably there should be equal involvement of men and women in these professions. Even though the number of women in STEM areas has increased over the past several decades, there is still a sizable underrepresentation of women overall and in key positions. In the winter term 2020/21, among all the 1,090,804 students in STEM subjects at German universities, only 347,197 were female students (31,8%) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). According to research by Corbett and Hill (2015), the following factors limit girls and women from majoring, for example, in computer science: Cultural prejudices, gender biases, and microinequities (subtle discriminatory actions) all contribute to a lack of sense of belonging in these sectors. Overall, this study aims to better understand the key situations that affect girls' and young women's decision for or against a career in STEM. In particular, the research is interested in finding out about subtle or obvious discriminatory but also facilitating actions which influence attitude towards STEM subjects. An online questionnaire was distributed to a student panel via a market research institute, which was answered by 777 German female students aged 16-20 years in May 2022. The questionnaire collected female students' memorable positive and negative critical incidents which had an impact on their attitude towards STEM subjects. On the one hand, female students reported a learning environment in school leading to fear, frustration or anxiety which result into them questioning their math or science competence. On the other hand, female students also reported very positive, memorable experiences and appraisal situations in and offsite the classroom which increase their positive attitude about STEM subjects and might lead to a future career choice in a STEM subject. The authors hope to spark a conversation about how institutions might better tailor their offers to a female audience.

Keywords: Women in STEM, STEM career, Female students, Education, Critical incidents

1. Introduction

The significance of educating women and girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) originates from two main aspects. First, a person should not face any unjust obstacles and barriers based on gender and other discriminatory factors to gain access to STEM education. Secondly, the contribution of women in the STEM sector is considered highly significant for the economic and welfare development of a country. The STEM subjects form important fields of action of the German government's high-tech strategy due to their research, economic and prosperity potential (BMBF 2020). An equal gender-based participation within these fields is a prerequisite for the sustainable and future-oriented development of our society. However, the pattern of underrepresentation of women especially in the STEM disciplines persists in many European countries including Germany (BMBF 2020).

The lack of girls choosing and participating in STEM-related education contributes to the shortage of the STEM-skilled workforce (González-Pérez et al. 2020). This results in the exclusion of female perspectives in developing solutions as well as the scarcity of female candidates prepared to access leadership positions or high management positions such as board of directors which require an educational background in technological subjects (González-Pérez et al. 2020). Ample research has therefore been devoted within various countries from different perspectives and disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and biology, to understand barriers and factors that influence women's and girl's education and career choices (van Tuijl and van der Molen 2016).

This paper attempts to further explore these barriers that girls face in choosing STEM subjects for further education and career choices by examining girls' positive and negative experiences related to STEM subjects at school or in their free time.

2. Literature Review: Attitudes and Determinants Influencing Female Students' Career Choices in STEM

Girls and women face a prevalent inequality in STEM education worldwide, which is exacerbated in higher education and in certain subjects (Chavatzia 2017). Globally, a positive overall trend can be observed in girls' access to education. However, gender differences exist, especially in STEM subject enrollments. Girls seem to lose interest in STEM subjects as they get older, and more so than boys, especially in upper secondary education and this increases as the education level rises (Spearman and Watt 2013). As significant differences continue to exist across regions, countries and within countries, this situation invites reflection on the causes of gender segregation in STEM fields. The low participation and interest of female students is a complex problem with many influencing factors contributing to the choice and enrolment in STEM education and career. These determinants are derived from a range of disciplines and theories, including sociological, psychological, socio-cultural and socio-historical factors. A substantial body of literature is available in the domain of STEM (van Tuijl and van der Molen 2016).

Two psychological theories - Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Expectancy-Value Model of Motivation (EVMM) - played a significant role in explaining the education and career choice behavior of students (van Tuijl and van der Molen 2016). Both theories suggest that career interest and choice form a complex human agency process. Some of the core influencing concepts include performance, self-efficacy (perceived capabilities or ability beliefs (EVMM)), subjective value, outcome expectations, goals as well as well-being and satisfaction. EVMM further describes four types of values: intrinsic values (expected enjoyment/interest in an activity or task), attainment value (perceived importance be competent at a task), utility values (perceived usefulness of a task in obtaining rewards/facilitating the achievement of goals) and perceived cost (in terms of effort and evoked emotions, such as fear of failure) (van Tuijl and van der Molen 2016). These values along with the ability beliefs may predict the educational and occupational preferences and choices. These psychological factors have many inter-relations. For instance, ability belief tends to predict a child's task values, and the subjective task values are closely linked to educational and career choices (Durik 2006).

The self-efficacy and task values are largely shaped by individual characteristics (e.g., abilities, experiences, goals, interests etc.) to environmental influences (cultural, peer beliefs and behaviors) (González-Pérez et al. 2020). Different obstacles in the form of environmental influences (school's learning environment, media, parents, peers) are witnessed in three developmental periods, childhood and adolescence, emerging adulthood and young to middle adulthood (Kaleva et al. 2019). In childhood and adolescence, gender stereotypes about STEM, parents' expectations of daughters, peer norms, and its lack of fit with personal goals repel girls from STEM fields (Kaleva et al. 2019). Parents', teachers' and peers' beliefs, behavior, perception, and attitude towards STEM can be passed on, implicitly or explicitly, shaping the girls own attitude towards STEM (Eccles 2015, Raabe 2009). Parents also shape their children's self-image through their feedback, both positively and negatively (Eccles 2009). The learning environment and the socialization process at school influence girls' interest and engagement in STEM, for instance, teachers' own STEM self-efficacy and gender stereotyping behavior could hinder their performance and intrinsic value of STEM subjects (Francis et al. 2017). Gender stereotyping has also shown to influence girls' ability beliefs, task values and STEM identity (Nix et al. 2015, Makarova 2019). From an early age, males are thought to have greater intellectual abilities than females, for example interest in math/physics is associated with males (Bian et al. 2017). Parents supporting traditional gender role stereotypes evaluate their children's competencies differently: In male-related activities, girls' abilities are underestimated and boys' are overestimated (Eccles 2009). In emerging adulthood, feeling like a misfit in STEM classes, being outnumbered by male peers, and lack of female role models make women avoid STEM majors or leave prematurely (Kaleva et al. 2019). Even women who selected math intensive majors find it difficult to associate with math compared to male gender (Nosek 2002).

Media as well plays a very important role in portraying characteristics of individuals working in STEM (i.e., people lacking social abilities, unattractive appearance etc.) (Steinke 2017). Despite their negative impact on girls STEM choice, there is evidence that the right interventions can allow the environmental influencers to create positive impact, fostering girls interests in STEM (van den Hurk et al. 2019, Rozek et al. 2015). In addition, increasing the female STEM role-models in class (female teachers), at home, and outside, can positively influence girls' attitudes toward STEM, boosts their STEM identity and sense of belonging (González-

Pérez et al. 2020). In addition, gender-responsive curricula and connecting it to real-world situations, as well as hands-on teaching approaches, such as labs, can promote girls' interest in STEM.

The spectrum of research in STEM over the world shows that cross-culturally, cross-nationally these factors can function and affect female student's STEM choice differently, making it important to understand each factor country and culture wise, and tailor the interventions and policies accordingly (Gebauer, M.M., 2021, Miralles-Cardona 2021). This paper supports this with a study of critical incidents reported by German school girls.

3. Methodology

An online questionnaire was used in May 2022 to gain data for this study. A reputable market research panel collected the data in Germany and 777 female students between 16-20 years from all German federal states finalized the questionnaire. Although the questionnaire consisted primarily of quantitative questions, it also included qualitative components. The critical incident technique which was originally proposed by Flanagan (1954) has been used to collect subtle or obvious discriminatory but also facilitating actions which influence girls' attitude towards STEM subjects.

23,4% of the participants are 16 years or younger, 15% are 17 years old, 29,3% 18 years old, 14,6% 19 years old and 17,8% are 20 years or older. The majority of girls (83%) are seeking to get A-Levels, 7,6% are seeking to get an advanced technical college entrance qualification and 9,3% are seeking to get a secondary school certificate. From the overall sample, 70% of all girls reported to have a general interest in STEM subjects.

The female students answered questions concerning their values, their attitude towards STEM, role models in STEM and described positive and negative critical incidents. In the acquired 777 questionnaires, a total number of 524 critical incidents were reported and collected. Some girls reported several incidents which were counted separately. The reported incidents were grouped into trigger categories in an inductive approach. Categories were built in several rounds. Once a final set of categories was developed by three researchers, another researcher categorized the incidents. Deviations between the category groupings were assessed by a further researcher who decided on the categorization. The percentage of agreement for the placement into categories was 96,6%. According to Gremler (2004), Perreault and Leigh's (1989) reliability index I_r , is more precise than the percentage of agreement because it also considers the number of categories. Perreault and Leigh's (1989) inter-rater reliability was 88,9% whereas Muñoz-Leiva et al. (2006) note that values above 75% are considered acceptable.

4. Analysis

Through the analysis of incidents seven different trigger categories were extracted. Table 1 shows the trigger categories and their descriptions. The following analysis of the trigger categories is based on the number of incidents classified into the categories.

Table 1: Incident Trigger Categories

Incident trigger category	Trigger category description	No. positive	No. negative	Total No (%)
Teacher personality and motivation	Incidents related to teacher influence e.g., personality and motivation (own enthusiasm for the subject taught and the way the students are encouraged or discouraged e.g., by derogatory comments), learning atmosphere	57	137	194 (30,0%)
School lesson design	Incidents related to school lesson's design (e.g., methodology, didactics, explanation of content in an easily comprehensible way, individual support, how subject is positioned in school)	63	49	112 (21,4%)
Student experience	Incidents related to specific students' experiences (e.g., good or bad grades, pride about success, embarrassment, having fun)	53	39	92 (17,6%)
Student perception of own ability	Incidents related to student's ability or perceived ability in STEM subjects (e.g., the ability to resolve complex tasks or to explain the subject, having difficulties to	30	28	58 (11,1%)

Incident trigger category	Trigger category description	No. positive	No. negative	Total No (%)
	understand STEM subjects, limitations such as dyscalculia)			
Personal perception of STEM	Incidents related to the girls' perception of STEM, i.e., whether they perceive STEM topics as interesting and relevant (e.g., as relevant for everyday life) or as boring or even irrelevant	29	15	44 (8,4%)
Influence of personal environment	Incidents related to student's personal environment (private and out-of-school context, e.g., parents, friends, offerings by companies or universities)	13	6	19 (3,6%)
Influence of (social) media	Incidents related to the portrayal of STEM in media (e.g., in films, social media, series)	5	0	5 (1%)
Total (percentage)		250 (47,7%)	274 (52,3%)	524 (100%)

Table 1 shows that students reported more negative (52,3%) than positive (47,7%) incidents overall. The majority of incidents relate to the teacher's personality and motivation (30,0%), followed by the school lesson design (21,4%) and the students' general experience (17,6%). The trigger categories and the respective incidents are described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Teacher Personality and Motivation

The majority of negative incidents were reported in this trigger category and revolved around a negative atmosphere because of the teacher's personality and motivation in class. The mind map in Figure 1 summarizes the issues reported by students.

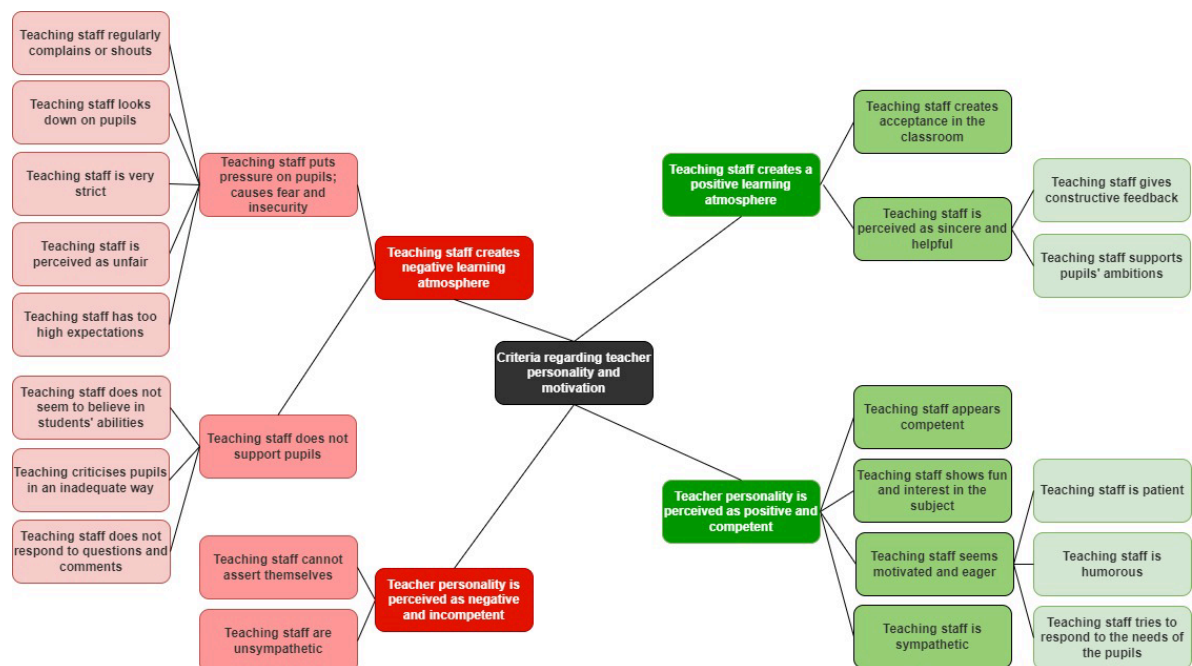


Figure 1: Critical Incidents Related to Teacher Personality and Motivation

The girls perceive the teachers as not sympathetic, cannot assert themselves, do not appear to be competent. They feel that teachers put students under pressure which results in student fear and insecurity.

"Even though most teachers pretend this isn't true, teachers make up the entire class and your relationship with it! If a teacher can't explain well or is not passionate about their job, the subject sucks. Also, you shouldn't have to be afraid of the teacher. It is mentally very stressful" (negative, 1170).

Students also reported that teachers do not believe in student's abilities. Moreover, teachers sometimes encourage boys while at the same time they deny girls' competencies in STEM subjects.

"I was told by a male teacher that science was only for males and that people with female associations had no chance in the same field. That was humiliating and discouraging at the same time" (negative, 1098).

"In further education, my math teachers often told me I was stupid or something similar. In technology class, I was the only girl and often got excluded. In both situations, I felt very hurt" (negative, 201).

However, some students also report positive incidents and that teachers are sympathetic, create a positive atmosphere in class and are very helpful and encourage students.

"Good teachers who are enthusiastic about the subject that they teach, automatically convey enjoyment of what students are learning" (positive, 345).

My teacher has seen my "potential" in math and has told me this several times and has awakened my ambition and interest with the first good grades" (positive, 238).

4.2 School Lesson Design

The second most often reported trigger category is school lesson design. In this category, the girls reported more positive (56,3%) than negative (43,8%) incidents. School lessons are perceived as positive, if teachers explain the topics in a comprehensible way, use everyday examples as well as different teaching methods. Figure 2 summarizes the issues reported by students regarding school lesson design.



Figure 2: Critical Incidents Related to School Lesson Design

The girls also appreciate experiments they can do by themselves (e.g., microscopy, use of construction kits, programming).

"At school, we were allowed to dissect a lung in biology while we discussed the respiratory system. Everyone had a lot of fun in the lesson, and we could remember the processes much better. This class was one of the best biology lessons, and I would like to see more practical work in this subject" (positive, 380).

"My computer science teacher had us write codes on our own. We had a goal to reach, but we had to solve every little thing ourselves. It was great!" (positive, 929).

In contrast, regarding the negative incidents, girls report about tests and gradings that they perceive as too strict or even unfair, school lessons that are only theoretical, topics that are not well explained and presented in a manner that the girls perceive as not having any practical relevance. Also, the way teachers interact in their lessons with the students makes a difference.

"Experiments are not properly explained and are boring. Mostly only frontal teaching" (negative, 161).

"Having to go to the front of the blackboard even though you don't know the solution. Just embarrassing and very humiliating feeling" (negative, 617).

"Physics, on the other hand, I find very horrible. Our teacher writes everything on the blackboard, and I just sit through 3 hours a week. It's boring and made incomprehensible" (negative, 612).

4.3 Student Experience

Incidents concerning specific students' experiences are often related to obtaining good or bad grades, but also to experiences about being proud of e.g., solving a complex math problem or feeling embarrassed about making mistakes. In this category, positive incidents (57.6 %) outweigh negative incidents (42.4 %).

"Success in the subjects, especially good grades" (positive, 101).

"Whenever you have the chance to show the others how to do something in math, you feel proud of yourself" (positive, 834).

"Bad grades in some of these subjects, made me feel more negative about these subjects" (negative, 950).

4.4 Student Perception of own Ability

Incidents related to the students' ability or their perceived ability in STEM subjects, often address the perception of being or not being able to understand certain topics or complex interrelationships, being or not being talented, but also describe personal limitations such as dyscalculia and dyslexia. The proportion of positive incidents (51.7%) versus negative incidents (48.3%) in this category is almost balanced.

"It makes me feel good to raise my hand when we discuss complex interrelationships in the classroom, or to explain such relationships in exams, this is fun. Since I started to dive deeper and understand complex things, I am much more interested in this field" (positive, 1181).

"Maths overwhelms me, that's why I often feel frustrated and disoriented in Math lessons" (negative, 942).

"[...] Also, I have dyscalculia as well as dyslexia. The teachers considered my dyscalculia irrelevant, which made my experience with math hell on earth" (negative, 791).

4.5 Personal Perception of STEM

Incidents concerning the girls' perception of STEM subjects and topics relate to perceiving the subjects as interesting, relevant, challenging, or boring, irrelevant, difficult on the negative side. The introduction of interesting topics seems to raise sustained interest in the field in general. Also, the practical relevance or irrelevance for everyday life frequently represents a trigger for the positive or negative perception of STEM subjects.

"I have been positively influenced by natural sciences, especially chemistry and biology, from a young age. I never liked boring stuff like office or sales work where everything is very monotonous. So, I started to inquire about and do internships to get involved. Consequently, I decided to do my "Fachabitur" in chemistry and biology, which was the best decision of my life. I am more than satisfied" (positive, 230)

"[...] for example, I have dropped Chemistry and Physics, because these subjects are so far from reality and appear complicated to me. Also, in Maths, I often question myself 'What is the relation/ the benefit of this method (e.g. vector analysis) for my life? Why should there ever be a situation when I need this kind of knowledge?" (negative, 942).

"Computer Science: only excel tables, boring, unnecessary" (negative, 1121).

4.6 Influence of Personal Environment

Incidents in this category show the influence of the students' personal environment towards their perception of STEM subjects. In this category, the positive incidents (68,4%) clearly outweigh the negative ones (31,6%). However, this category is very small (only 3.6% of all incidents), especially in comparison to the number of incidents reported from school. The incidents involve for example their friends or parents. Also, private, out-of-school activities such as offerings by companies (e.g., German Girls' Day) or universities influence the students' interest in STEM. In all cases in which students reported about such offerings, they did it in a positive way.

"A man at Girls Day talked so enthusiastically about technology that he inspired me." (positive, 638)

"I used to hate math; there was no particular reason for it, but all my friends hated math, and I found no reason NOT to feel the same" (negative, 497).

4.7 Influence of (Social) Media

Only a small number of students described a critical incident in this category (1,0%). They relate to the portrayal of STEM in the media. All incidents in this category are positive. Students report especially on films, videos in social media and series.

"When I discovered the YouTube channel Mailab, I found out that chemistry can also be fun. That was about 4 years ago" (positive, 138).

"When I watched The Big Bang Theory a few years ago, I developed a great interest in science or even chemistry from watching Breaking Bad" (positive, 864).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The overall results of experiences amongst girls show a small disparity in the number of positive and negative incidents (47.7% positive incidents).

The study identified seven different trigger categories for the critical incidents. The environmental influencers mainly consisted of the school learning environment (i.e., the teachers and experience of curriculum lesson design), peers, out-of-school STEM activities and media. Teachers form the largest part of the barrier group (30%), with more negative incidents reported. Both negative and positive experiences seem to be mainly shaped by teachers own self-efficacy, enthusiasm, beliefs, and perception of STEM. There is also a concerning evidence of unfair and abusive treatment that persist in classrooms in form of gender stereotyping, unfair grading, shouting, sarcasm and more. This hampers the intrinsic value of the STEM subject and increases its perceived cost for the girls. The second barrier group consists of the teaching methods and curriculum design (21.4%). Both the positive and negative experiences here indicate the need for practical hands-on over dominantly theoretical learning. A perceived relationship of class material and enjoyment of subject to the teacher's abilities is also reported. The influence of peers in form of friends and out-of-school STEM activities towards STEM choice forms a small number of incidents (3.6%). While forming only 1% of the incidents, media shaped the interest towards STEM choice.

The categories, students' experiences, students' perception of own ability and students' perception of STEM highlights the significance of students' self-efficacy, self-concept, math-efficacy/identity, and subjective task value in STEM choice, as observed in previous research. The grades, ability to solve a task or making a mistake affects the ability beliefs of the students. The self-efficacy is also affected by underlying conditions such as dyslexia. Students' STEM identity is also affected by their subjective task value in terms of subjects' relevance in real world. Subjects are also expected to be interesting, challenging, and enjoyable.

In conclusion, despite a small disparity between overall negative and positive incidents, there persists significant barriers for the girls during STEM enrolments. Having both positive and negative incidents within the same trigger category indicates that with right interventions, the negative influencers can turn to positive ones. In contrast to prominent role of parents and peers in research, their part was smaller in this study. However, teachers had the strongest influence and considering their negative and positive effects, teachers' behavior and teaching methods should be investigated from a pedagogical and didactical point of view. Their own beliefs and perceptions related to STEM talent development should be known before recruiting them. A teacher's expected role forms a mix of learner yet expert curriculum designer, negotiator and asker,

collaborator yet a teacher and motivator. Appropriate training should be provided, for example incremental-based support intervention training to encourage students to develop a growth mindset and see their intelligence as malleable. The learning environment should be non-judgmental, safe, inclusive, and interactive, wherein students are not stigmatized for having learning difficulties (ex. dyslexia), are encouraged to ask questions, can display their abilities by answering or explaining subjects, have hand-on practical experience, understand the practical relevance of the subject and nurture math efficacy/identity. It plays an important role in increasing their self-esteem and resulting STEM self-efficacy. Even with lower number of incidents, social media as well as peer support plays an important role in fostering STEM choice and can be used as positive influencers. Media can boost much lacking representation of female role models to increase female STEM identity and belonging. Out-of-school STEM activities show a great potential, too and should be considered as a right intervention in building STEM efficacy and identity.

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Queer Terror Management: The Effect of Death Attitudes on Gender Stereotypes

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Abstract: The present research aims to facilitate radical, intersectional psychosocial intervention in gender stereotypes. Queer terror management theory provides a theoretical framework for an effect of death attitudes on stereotypes about sex, gender and desire. An initial version of the theory assumed that death acceptance would inhibit the activation of gender stereotypes, depending on the moderating role of mortality salience. A quasi-experiment with Implicit Association Tests and explicit surveys was run to put the theory to an initial test. Results showed that a more positive death valence in wave 1 - not death acceptance or mortality salience - was associated with less implicit sexual identification, gender prejudice and homonegativity. Explicit results were not conclusive. Future research shall replicate the quasi-experiment and broaden its scope to further kinds of social prejudice.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, Queer theory, Terror management, Death valence, Psychosocial intervention, Intersectionality

1. Introduction

The present research aims to facilitate radical, intersectional psychosocial intervention in gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are precursors of gender-based discrimination (Roth et al., 2018) that reflects in global economies, violence and a lack of political participation (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2019; World Health Organization, 2018; Worldbank, 2015). Gender-based discrimination often intersects with other kinds of prejudice, but the underlying stereotypes depend on each context.

1.1 Gender-Based Discrimination in the US

The central theories of the present research stem from the US (Butler, 1990; Greenberg, 1986) and are not necessarily applicable to other cultural contexts (Burke et al., 2009; Wendt et al., 2014). To guarantee cultural validity, our research is limited to the US context.

Women in the US earned 18.5% less than men in 2019 (OECD, 2019). Economic discrimination was especially prevalent for trans women in 2011 (Grant et al., 2016). In the US, 25% of cis women (World Health Organization, 2018) and ca. 27% of trans people (Stotzer, 2009) experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Likewise, 20% of the US hate crimes in 2019 were motivated by homo- and transphobia (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019), which is especially prevalent for racialised trans women (Gold and Piccoli, 2020; Patil, 2020). Cis women's political participation in the US congress was limited to 19% in 2015 (Worldbank, 2015), while LGBTIQ+ people's accession to high-level political offices remain a reason for breaking news (for example: Helsel, 2019).

1.2 Recent Psychosocial Interventions

Recent US-based interventions in gender discrimination address rational and emotional consciousness about stereotypes in specific contexts. These interventions slightly reduce stereotypes by means of experiential learning, including role-plays and group discussions (Kilmartin et al., 2015; Kollmayer et al., 2018; Zawadzki et al., 2014). If patriarchy exists since more than 5,000 years (Lerner, 1986), a decrease in gender stereotypes requires a more profound psychosocial intervention. Yet, none of the mentioned programs further examined the concept of gender or the precursors of gender stereotypes.

1.3 Objective

The objective of the present research is to propose and test a novel theoretical framework for a more radical, intersectional psychosocial intervention in gender stereotypes. To approach this objective, we will first examine gender stereotypes and their possible precursors.

Social psychology defines gender as a set of fixed ideas about the cultural meanings of female, male and the relations between them (Brannon, 2017; Marecek et al., 2003). In accordance with this view, Butler's version of queer theory (1990) proposes sex, gender and desire as an interacting system of bodily, psychological and

relational trait expectations. We consider that a queer perspective on social psychology would align its gender definition more with its still binarised research practice.

Both - queer theory and social psychology's terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1986) - assume death attitudes to precede gender stereotypes. If death attitudes precede gender stereotypes and other kinds of social prejudice (Maj and Kossowska, 2016; Wong, 2008), then they promise for a more radical , intersectional approach to psychosocial intervention. However, Butler (1990, 1997) explains the development of gender stereotypes with outdated Freudian psychoanalysis. We contrast these assumptions with the more recent social psychological theories of terror and meaning management (Pyszczynski et al., 2015; Wong, 2008).

Queer terror management theory (Stiller, 2021) integrates queer, terror and meaning management theories. Guided by the question of death attitudes' relation with gender stereotypes, we discuss our results for an initial test of the theory in regards its potential for psychosocial intervention in gender stereotypes.

2. Theory

Social psychology defines the concept of gender as fixed ideas about the cultural meanings of female, male and the relations between them (Brannon, 2017; Marecek et al., 2003). However, in social psychological research practice, trait ascription and self-categorisation often confound sex with gender (Wood and Eagly, 2015), while sexist relational attitudes have only been included as gender stereotypes in ambivalent sexism research (Connor et al., 2017).

We thus apply a queer perspective (Butler, 1990) to the social psychological concept of gender in order to align it more with research practice. To our understanding, Butler (1990) proposes a broader gender construct as a system of interacting, socially shared expectations about bodily traits (sex), psychological traits (gender) and relational traits (desire). Therein, sex is the social interpretation of anatomy, hormones and chromosomes; gender is the trait ascription along with sexed bodies and desire is the socially expected sexual orientation (for interaction details, see Butler, 1990; Stiller, 2021).

To intervene in gender stereotypes, a deeper understanding of gender is as necessary as understanding the possible precursors of stereotypes. Butler (1990, pp. 79-97) draws on Freud to explain how gender emerges from fear of death via oedipal conflict. This reference to an outdated psychoanalysis (Becker, 1973) tackles fear of death as a possible precursor of gender stereotypes, but stagnates without means for intervention.

Terror management theory transfers modern psychoanalysis to testable, social psychological assumptions (Greenberg et al., 1986). The theory posits that humans are aware of their own mortality in the long term. This awareness benefits survival with planned actions to avoid death, but paradoxically implies paralysing death anxiety ("terror") in the short term.

Symbolic immortality serves to buffer death anxiety. Cultural worldviews provide symbolic immortality against death anxiety, since they are shared parts of the self that remain in the others' minds when one's own body dies. Self-esteem derives from how well we fit into those worldviews. In turn, the momentary reminder of our own mortality - mortality salience (MS) - increases the need to buffer death anxiety with cultural worldviews and self-esteem. These cultural worldviews and the resulting self-conceptions include homophobic prejudice (Fairlamb et al., 2022) and gender stereotypes at work (Hoyt et al., 2011), in politics (Hoyt et al., 2009), and in judicial affairs (Rosenblatt et al., 1989).

In terror management theory, death is considered as negative and death denial as the only strategy to cope with it (Pyszczynski et al., 2015). If death denial was per se adaptive, traumatised or terminally ill people would not experience positive consequences in confrontation with their undeniable mortality, such as personal and interpersonal growth (Taku et al., 2021; Samarel, 2018). Avoiding a felt death threat in clinical psychology is associated with persistent post-traumatic stress and anxiety disorders (Blakey et al., 2021; Ehlers and Clark, 2000; Thwaites and Freeston, 2005). By contrast, adaptive coping strategies do not aim to avoid a fictitious death threat (Thwaites and Freeston, 2005). Death denial in social psychology explains gender stereotypes, but it does not hold a major potential for psychosocial intervention in them.

In the terror management extension of meaning management theory, Wong (2008) postulates death acceptance as an alternative coping strategy that increases personal well-being and reduces social prejudice. Wong (2008) explains that negative death valence precedes death denial and positive death valence precedes death acceptance. If death acceptance reduces social prejudice (Maj and Kossowska, 2016; Wong, 2008), for example based on gender, then it could serve as a framework for a more radical and a possibly more intersectional approach to psychosocial intervention.

So far, terror management research on gender stereotypes did not account for death acceptance, nor did it differentiate between sex and gender. Thus, MS describes the cause of an unclear effect. Therefore, terror management requires a queer perspective. Vice versa, Butler's (1990) queer theory does not consider death denial as a precursor of gender stereotypes and thus concludes on intervention only by means of parody. Some queer theorists even deny mortality by unreservedly praising operations and hormones for trans people (Coll-Planas, 2012). Queer theory can use its full subversive potential when it stops denying death. Although queer theory departs from relativism and terror management theory from a post-positivist epistemology, their explanations may complement each other towards the goal of more effective psychosocial interventions in gender stereotypes.

2.1 Hypotheses

In a synthesis of the prior theories, queer terror management theory proposes three main hypotheses: First, sex, gender and desire interact as factors of a queer gender concept. Second, higher death acceptance precedes a lower activation of stereotypes about sex, gender and desire. We assume that the prior levels of death acceptance set the baseline for the MS effect. Third, the association between death acceptance and gender stereotypes is therefore moderated by MS. When people are reminded of their mortality, higher death acceptance is associated with less gender stereotype activation than lower death acceptance.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

An initial test of the hypotheses was carried out in early 2019 with an online quasi-experiment in two waves. The test was restricted to US residents. After dropouts and exclusion for "wild-clicking", 75 of the original 165 participants' data from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (www.mturk.com) were considered valid for analysis (for exclusion procedures, see Carpenter et al., 2017; Greenwald et al., 1998). Participants were aged 19-63 years, 35 of them identified their gender as women, 39 as men and one as non-binary. Fifty-nine participants described their ethnicity as Caucasian, eight as African American, six as Asian and two as Hispanic. Their varying levels of education reached a median of a Bachelor's degree, their levels of income a median of 2,000-4,000 USD per month.

3.2 Procedure

We ensured the quasi-experiment's technical functioning by means of a pilot test with 10 participants. The actual quasi-experiment in two waves was carried out under the guise of a cover story about the influence of community factors on emotional experience. After an informed consent and a positive attention test (calculate $3 + 2$), explicit surveys followed Implicit Association Tests (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998) in both waves. Wave 1 with the death measures was remunerated with 2,80 USD for 35 minutes. Wave 2 with the experimental manipulation and the gender-related measures was compensated with 3,51 USD for 40 minutes. Finally, participants were debriefed.

3.3 Measures

Despite recent criticism on IAT validity as a measure for stable personality traits (Schimmack, 2021), it remains the most valid measure for intergroup differences in sensitive social attitudes and stereotypes (Vianello and Bar-Anan, 2021; Kurdi et al., 2021).

In wave 1, implicit death attitudes were measured with the Death Attitude IAT, including death anxiety, valence and acceptance (Bassett and Dabbs, 2003; Bassett et al., 2004). On an explicit level, we measured fear of death, rejection of one's own death and death acceptance with the Multidimensional Orientation toward Death and Dying Inventory (MODDI-F; Wittkowski, 2001; validated for the US: MacDougall and Farreras, 2016; $\alpha = .87$).

After one week – in wave 2 – we first measured participants' self esteem (Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale; Robins et al., 2001) and life satisfaction (Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener et al., 1985; $\alpha = .93$) to account for possible covariates of death attitudes (Pyszczynski et al., 2015; Wong, 2008). In the subsequent experimental manipulation, 37 participants were randomly assigned to the mortality salience (MS) task of writing an essay about two open-ended questions on death-related thoughts and feelings. The 38 remaining participants answered the same questions about dental pain to ensure the death-specificity of the measured fears. In accordance with the standard procedure in terror management research (Burke et al., 2009), these essays

were followed by a distraction task (The Positive and Negative Affective Schedule; Watson and Clark, 1994; $\alpha = .92$).

We then measured implicit sexual identity with IAT associations between self/other-related words (I, me, mine – they, theirs, other) and female/male words (female, woman, girl – male, man, boy; Greenwald et al., 2002). Sexual prejudice was measured with an IAT combining female/male word with good/bad words (joy, happy, smile – agony, stink, filth; Greenwald et al., 2002). We measured implicit gender prejudice by combining female/male words with words for agentic/communal traits (independent, competitive – communal, cooperative; Rudman and Glick, 2001). Implicit gender identity was measured by combining agentic/communal traits with self/other words (Greenwald and Farnham, 2000). Finally, we combined words for hetero/homosexual (gay, lesbian – heterosexual, straight) with good/bad words to measure implicit homonegativity (Banse et al., 2001).

Explicit sex, gender and desire measures comprised the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory towards Women (Glick and Fiske, 1996; $\alpha = .89$), towards Men (Glick and Fiske, 1999; $\alpha = .92$) and the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison and Morrison, 2002; $\alpha = .86$).

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses showed an overall good internal consistency and construct validity (for details, see Stiller, 2021, p. 91-92). Data for implicit death valence and implicit stereotypes about sex, gender and desire as well as explicit death fear, hostile sexism towards men and positive affect were normally distributed and thus further analysed with Person correlations, t-tests and linear regressions. Data for implicit death anxiety and acceptance, explicit death acceptance and rejection, self-esteem, life satisfaction, negative affect, ambivalent sexism towards women and modern homonegativity were not normally distributed and thus further analysed with Spearman correlations, Mann-Whitney U-tests and linear regressions.

The aspired statistical power of the quasi-experiment could not be reached due to participant exclusion procedures and economic restrictions. With the given sample size, only medium ($1 - \beta = .842$) and large effect sizes were detectable ($1 - \beta = .999$).

In the preliminary analyses, we also accounted for the associations between demographic data with the measures for death attitudes and gender-related stereotypes (for details, see Stiller, 2021, p. 90-91). Ethnicity, education and income were not significantly associated with the experimental measures.

4.2 Central Results

Hypothesis 1 assumed the explicit and implicit measures for sex, gender and desire to be highly correlated as factors of a broader, queer gender construct. Due to the small sample size, a factor analysis was not possible. Correlations were small till medium sized (see Tables 1 and 2), except for the insignificant correlations of the implicit sex and desire measures with gender identity and gender prejudice. The rather small correlations did not suggest a factor construct. This might nonetheless trace back to our small sample and to the outdated implicit measures for stereotypes about gendered traits (Bakan, 1966 in Wood and Eagly, 2015).

Table 1: Pearson Correlations Between IAT's for sex, Gender and Desire

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) sexual identity		.604**	-.309*	-.120	.172
(2) sexual prejudice			-.328*	-.103	-.119
(3) homonegativity				.056	-.053
(4) gender identity					.013
(5) gender prejudice					

Note. ** $p < .001$, * $p < .050$. 1-5: IAT's as described in the method section for Measures.

Table 2: Spearman Correlations Between Explicit Measures

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) ambivalent sexism (women)		.782**	.705**
(1) ambivalent sexism (men)			.552**
(3) modern homonegativity			

Note. ** $p < .001$, * $p < .050$. Ambivalent sexism (w): ambivalent sexism against women

(Glick and Fiske, 1996), ambivalent sexism (m): ambivalent sexism against men (Glick and Fiske, 1999), modern homonegativity (Morrison and Morrison, 2002).

Hypothesis 2 suggested an association between death acceptance in wave 1 with less stereotypes on sex, gender and desire in wave 2. In bootstrapped linear regression analyses, implicit death acceptance was associated with slightly less stereotypes on gendered traits, $\rho(66) = -.207$, $p = .046$, but death acceptance was not associated with implicit stereotypes about gender identity, $\rho(70) = .121$, $p = .156$, sexual identity, $\rho(71) = -.064$, $p = .296$, sexual prejudice, $\rho(71) = -.037$, $p = .379$, or homonegativity, $\rho(71) = .157$, $p = .094$. On an explicit level, death acceptance was associated with slightly more ambivalent sexism towards women, $\rho(74) = .261$, $p = .012$, but not with ambivalent sexism towards men, $\rho(74) = .108$, $p = .178$, or with homonegativity, $\rho(74) = .187$, $p = .054$.

These contradictory findings may imply an initially intensified, explicit search for a scapegoat (women), while implicit death acceptance increases gradually. Furthermore, they might reflect a lack of variability in death acceptance within our sample ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.88$ for the MODDI-F). Overall, death acceptance did not show a major potential for intervention in gender-related stereotypes.

By contrast, the covariate of implicit death valence - a precursor of death acceptance versus denial - was associated with all three theoretical aspects of the queer gender concept: A more positive death valence in wave 1 predicted less stereotypes about sexual identity, $r(72) = -.274$, $p = .019$, gendered traits, $r(67) = -.257$, $p = .034$, and homosexuality, $r(72) = .436$, $p < .001$, in wave 2.

In further covariate analyses, higher explicit death acceptance was related to higher self-esteem, $\rho(74) = .407$, $p < .001$, and to more life satisfaction, $\rho(74) = .347$, $p = .002$. Explicit death fears, in turn, were associated with less death acceptance, $\rho(74) = -.694$, $p < .001$, less self-esteem, $\rho(74) = -.337$, $p = .003$, and less life satisfaction, $\rho(74) = -.257$, $p = .026$.

Hypothesis 3 assumed MS as a moderator between death acceptance and stereotypes about sex, gender and desire. No MS effect was found on the implicit or explicit measures for sex, gender and desire (for a summary, see Stiller, 2021, p. 105-107). As an exception, ambivalent sexism towards women was slightly higher in the control group, $U = 479,50$, $p = .018$. Although it explained more variance, this opposite moderation effect, $\beta = -.321$, $t(72) = -2.99$, $p = .004$, may have been a casual finding, as it did not reproduce across the other gender-related measures.

5. Discussion

We hypothesised that sex, gender and desire form part of a queer gender concept, that more death acceptance is associated with less stereotypes about sex, gender and desire and that the association between death acceptance and stereotypes about sex, gender and desire is moderated by mortality salience (MS). Our quasi-experiment was limited to the US context. Despite the quasi-experiment's two waves, we cannot assume causality. With this foreword, we will now discuss the results for each hypothesis.

5.1 A Queer Gender Construct

Results for hypothesis 1 were not conclusive. Implicit and explicit measures for sex, gender and desire showed small till medium-sized correlations, with the exception of stereotypes about gendered traits. Possible explanations might lie in the small sample size, the unavailability of quantitative queer measures or in the outdated approach to gendered traits. The verification of the proposed queer gender concept remains open to future research.

5.2 Death Acceptance

Hypothesis 2 was only partially confirmed. Although death acceptance in wave 1 was associated with a slightly less implicit gender stereotypes, it was also associated with a slight increase of ambivalent sexism towards women on an explicit level. In contrast to our prediction, death acceptance was not associated with other stereotypes about sex, gender and desire. These ambiguous findings might result from scapegoating or from a lack of variance in death acceptance. The subsequent results for hypothesis 3 – especially for the covariate of death valence - will further clarify the results.

5.3 Mortality Salience

Hypothesis 3 suggested a moderating effect of MS between death acceptance in wave 1 and gender-related stereotypes in wave 2. We did not find implicit or explicit MS effects. The lack of a MS effects might be due to an anxiety buffering function of the previous measures for self-esteem and life satisfaction. Furthermore, participants' MS might still be affected by the death-related measures in wave 1. However, there is no evidence for MS effects to last longer than one week (Kashdan et al., 2014). We rather assume that our results reflect an overestimation of the MS effect due to a publication bias over the past 30 years (Rodríguez-Ferreiro et al., 2019).

5.4 Death Valence

In terror management theory, death is presumed as negative: MS automatically results in death denial (Greenberg et al., 1986). Death denial is the opposite of death acceptance (Bassett and colleagues, 2004). Wong (2008) assumes that death acceptance grounds on positive death valence and that positive death valence decreases social prejudice. We found small, but consistent associations between a more positive death valence and less implicit stereotypes about sexual identity, gendered traits and homosexuality supporting Wong's (2008) assumption. As a result, we hypothesise that the MS effect might be confounded with death valence and suggest to review the terror management process. The results of our quasi-experiment further imply a revision of queer terror management theory (Stiller, 2021). In lign with our results, death valence rather than death acceptance or MS seem to precede stereotypes about sex, gender and desire.

6. Future Research

Death valence is assumed to precede other kinds of social prejudice (Maj and Kossowska, 2016; Wong, 2008), such as racism or ableism. In the future, we seek to better understand the conditions of a more positive death valence and to check whether death valence can be manipulated for intervention purposes. Future research might then compare the effects of death valence and MS to refine the terror management process. In addition, we would like to retest the associations between death valence and gender stereotypes - and broaden the research scope to other kinds of social prejudice. If future findings confirm an association between positive death valence (pre) and gender stereotypes (post), we could start to create more radical interventions in gender stereotypes. If death valence also affects other kinds of prejudice, a change of our death attitudes even holds the potential for a more intersectional intervention frame.

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The Importance of Women Participation in Ensuring Justice in Energy Transition in ASEAN and G7

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Abstract: Many countries have increased their climate ambitions, including net-zero by 2060. Gender equality is essential for just energy transition (JET). United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5 and 7 promote gender equality and access to sustainable energy for all. Women's participation in JET is crucial, yet they are underrepresented in the energy industry. This study promotes women's participation in the JET and strives to reconcile justice and inclusivity in the energy transition from upstream and downstream ASEAN beneficiaries with G7 precedents. This paper aims to analyse the aspect of justice in the energy transition from women's perspectives in ASEAN and G7 countries. Most of the literature on women's issues in the energy sector is related to energy poverty and energy access. Hence, this paper will contribute to the literature on women's perspectives in the energy transition both in the workforce and in society as consumers. This paper analyses to answer a question on "how far women in ASEAN have participated in the energy transition (leadership roles to end-users) compared to women in G7 economies?". We use case studies with cross-analysis of ASEAN and G7 countries throughout this paper to demonstrate the contrast and similarity of gender equality in energy sector by exploring women's experience as workers in the energy sector and as energy consumers (dirty to clean cooking – clean electricity). We applied strategy basic research by conducting content analysis with intensive literature reviews, and additional aspects of women's perspectives on this area, those who work and live in these regions to develop regional context. We also adopted the three tenets of justice by Jenkins et al (2016) and analysed the data collected using this framework. This paper finds that ASEAN and G7 regions are almost at the same level in terms of women participation in ensuring a just energy transition. Despite having more women in the leadership roles in renewable energy sector, G7 is almost at the same level as ASEAN in their effort of improving women's participation to accelerate and ensure a just transition in the regions.

Keywords: Women, Just energy transition, Tenets of justice, Distributional justice, Recognition justice, Procedural justice, Gender

1. Introduction

Women's participation in the energy transition is important (Maji et al. 2021; Wiese 2020; Yasmin and Grundmann 2020). The United Nations supports the importance of women's roles under its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5 and 7 – gender equality and access to clean energy for all society. To promote a just energy transition (JET), all policies and decision-making processes should consider gender, age, handicap, and culture. However, this paper only focuses on women. Energy transition (ET) can influence women as energy users. Women can contribute to a JET by inventing renewable energy technology or adopting leadership roles. Despite this fact, women are still underrepresented in ET in general.

According to World Bank Indicators (n.d.), most ASEAN countries are classified as lower middle-income (Indonesia, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam). More than 43% of 2020's total energy demand in ASEAN was fossil fuels, and more than 60% of the electricity mix was fossil fuels, mainly coal (ASEAN Centre for Energy [ACE] 2022). G7 members have a track record of fostering innovation, creating new technologies, and commercialising through supportive policies in a stable economic climate. G7 decarbonization leadership would benefit its members by creating new knowledge, technologies, and jobs. Lessons learned could help other nations make transitions faster and less uncertain so they can apply G7 innovation, policies, and regulations (International Energy Agency [IEA] 2020).

This paper aims to analyse the aspect of justice in the energy transition in the context of women's participation in energy transition in ASEAN and G7. Currently, there is limited literature on women's perspectives in the energy transition around ASEAN and G7 countries. Hence, this paper will contribute to the literature on women's participation in the energy transition both in the workforce and in society as consumers.

This paper applies strategic basic research, which involves theoretical works to gain new knowledge, and the results could be helpful for policymaking (Thomas 2021). This paper addresses a research question on: how far

women in ASEAN have participated in the energy transition (leadership roles to end-users) compared to women in G7 economies? To answer this question, this paper applies the three tenets of justice in the energy transition by Jenkins et al (2016): recognition justice, procedural justice, and distributional justice. These tenets are used to analyse how far the two groups of countries have established an energy transition system that is inclusive to all society, in this context, women. We conduct interviews with women who work and live in these regions to acquire regional contexts.

Our paper has five sections. Section 2 discusses all literature on women's perspectives in the energy transition to provide an understanding of the current narrative in this field; section 3 discusses the methodology that we undertook in this research; section 4 is the discussion and analysis using the three tenets of justice and section 5 presents the conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women in the Energy Transition

Men have played more significant roles in the centralised power sector and national energy decision-making and even held more powerful positions (Allen et al. 2019; Pearl-Martinez and Stephens 2016; Resurrección et al. 2017). In the past ten years, numerous international organisations have researched women's equality in the energy sector, especially since the UN emphasised SDGs 5 and 7. Their reports state that women in leadership strengthen a country's energy sector, and women as end-users and in rural regions play a key role in framing energy transition policy.

Energy and climate issues are often linked since energy is one of the primary sectors that contribute to GHG emissions, especially fossil fuel energy (Huang et al. 2017; Lamb et al. 2021; Neagu and Teodoru 2019). Climate change has directly impacted women working in many areas, such as housewives, farmers, industry and other professions which makes ET as a feminist issue (Wilson 2018; Bell et al. 2020). Transitioning from fossil fuel to cleaner energy could benefit women in many ways. Decarbonising our energy supply could give valuable chances to foster the more socially only approaches to living that put the worries of those generally taken advantage of women at the centre of energy progress legislative issues (Ding et al. 2014; Maji et al. 2021; Wilson 2018). Bell et al (2020) state that different perspectives on energy sectors, such as women, offer an essential and recognised framework for understanding why we remain in unsustainable energy culture. They also argue that women's perspectives are crucial to designing a just energy system. Without women's participation, especially in strategic roles, renewable energy projects will be at risk and fail (Cecelski 2000). Moreover, studies demonstrate that more gender-diverse energy corporations have higher financial performance in combination with supporting women's economic empowerment, yet, energy companies have only recently begun to embrace this approach (Johnson et al. 2019; Pearl-Martinez and Stephens 2016).

The latest figure of the women employees in the renewable energy sector globally (2019) is 3.7 million, around 32% of total jobs created in this sector (IRENA 2020). This percentage is slightly higher than the shares of women in the oil and gas sector, only 22%. A survey by IRENA shows that in the renewable energy sector, women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are lower than women in non-STEM. There are several barriers for women to getting into the renewable energy sector. They are perceptions of women's roles, cultural and social norms, and prevailing hiring practices (Baruah 2017; IRENA 2020; Standal et al. 2020).

Innovation is significant for a just energy transition, and this requires diversity in general (Konadu et al. 2022; Žuk and Žuk 2022). The concerns about women's inclusion in the energy sector, such as renewable energy, were raised more than two decades ago (Cecelski 2000). According to Cecelski (2000), renewable energy producers who disregard the needs of women will miss out on a substantial market opportunity.

Another women's perspective in the energy transition is the perspective of consumers. Civil society and consumers are critical players in the energy transition because they can push the system toward renewable energy, where countries in South East Asia Region (ASEAN) still hold on to culture and traditions (Johnson et al. 2019; Seah et al. 2021). According to Akash et al (2018), cultural factors such as literacy, poverty, economic diversity, and trust in leaderships play a significant role in determining a country's energy transition. Energy and women are linked in various ways; energy technology innovation can drive cultural change; hence, appropriate policies are required to encourage technology adoption in society (Ding et al. 2014).

2.2 Three Tenets of Justice

The concept of energy justice has been used in many energy research, especially in the area of energy transition (Moniruzzaman and Day 2020; Mundaca et al. 2018). This paper applies the three elements of justice, which are distributional justice, recognition, and procedurals justice (see Table 1).

Table 1: Three Tenets of Justice in the Context of Women's Participation in ASEAN and G7 Energy Transition

Tenets	Evaluative	Normative	Context
Recognition	Who is ignored?	How should we recognise?	The fundamental concept of recognition is that an individual or a group should be acknowledged appropriately (Whyte 2011).
Distributional	Where are the injustices?	How should we solve them?	The emphasis in this entry is primarily on principles designed to cover the distribution of economic benefits and burdens among individuals in a society (Lamont and Favor 2017).
Procedural	Is there a fair process?	Which new processes?	Procedural justice is about the fairness of the decision-making process. In other words, procedural justice focuses on the quality of making a fair distributive decision (Abdelzadeh et al. 2015).

Source: Adapted from Jenkins et al (2016)

2.2.1 Recognition justice

Recognition justice is about those who are left behind and ignored in transitioning. Recognition of justice is one of the main issues we want to examine since women in energy transition are often overlooked (Mang-Benza 2021). The condition can apply to both public and private settings. Respecting and taking notice of people for who they are and the context in which they find themselves is an essential component of providing adequate appreciation. Recognition and its absence-misrecognition are prerequisites for distributive justice and critical components in and of themselves (Schlosberg 2007).

In general, recognition justice in the energy sector has focused on the effect of energy developments and activities on indigenous communities. Still, this paper focuses more on women's recognition in the energy transition process in ASEAN and G7. This includes how women in the industry or research communities are recognised and appreciated for their ideas and views on energy development.

2.2.2 Distributional Justice

The examination of where the significant impacts are located is referred to as distributional justice. Distributional justice in the energy transition is justice in economic distributions to all society, both its positive and negative impact of the transition, regardless of income, race, gender etc. The dimensions of distributive principles vary greatly. According to Lamont and Favor (2017), they differ in terms of what is considered relevant to distributive justice (income, wealth, opportunities, jobs, welfare etc.); the nature of the recipients of the distribution (individual persons or groups of people); and the basis on which the distribution should be made (equality, maximisation etc.).

The just energy transition raises the question of distributional justice, i.e., are the benefits of renewable energy development shared equally? Is anyone negatively affected by the energy transition? We look at the distribution of benefits and impact to women in transitioning from fossil fuel to cleaner energy sources. This could be benefits or impacts to those who works in the renewable energy sector or energy policy makers in a country or those who receive the benefits as consumers.

2.2.3 Procedural Justice

Procedural justice in the energy transition is attached to a policy-making process where communities have an equal say, no matter their backgrounds. Despite growing awareness of women's role in climate change and the energy transition, their engagement as decision-makers is limited (Feenstra 2020). In the early 2000, women were generally under-represented at the decision-making level in the energy sector and were rarely consulted regarding energy projects (Feenstra 2002). Hence, to formulate an energy policy that meets their energy needs, the government should consult these women and invite them to participate (Feenstra 2002). Research on this area has been evolving and more research are being done to highlight the role of women in leadership in the

energy transition (Allen et al. 2019; Weijnen et al. 2021). Instrumentalists argue that women should be involved in local and national energy sector governance and decision-making to share their knowledge and experience as energy users and to make decision-making more open and accountable (Rojas and Prebble 2020).

In this paper, we examine some policies in place in ASEAN and G7 for its energy sector and whether they have taken women's interest in these policies. In addition, we also explore how women in a leadership role can contribute to a more just energy transition policy in ASEAN and G7.

3. Methods

This paper applies strategic basic research and will look at the existing literatures on the subject (Thomas 2021). Hence, we conducted content analysis, an intensive literature review in this area to collect more evidence in the context of ASEAN and G7. We conducted an exploratory intensive literature reviews on this topic. This paper is also a semi-empirical study since we focus on evidence that is a result of experiences. We qualitatively analyse them using the three tenets of justice by Jenkins et al (2016).

This study explores existing studies in the region of the G7 and ASEAN countries, which include both academic research studies and international reports (secondary data). In addition, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with several stakeholders that we identified for this research (primary data). The interviews is to validate the findings from the content analysis and literature reviews within the three tenets of justice framework. The sample is a purposive non-probability sample, and we initially identified our prospective interviewees (Davies and Hughes 2014). The selection comprises international institutions, consulting, academics, and industry to gain a holistic perspective on gender equality in energy transitions. The qualification criteria required to be included in the above interview are participants with professional qualifications (i.e. degree level or higher). The flexibility of this approach enables the discovery or development of information that is significant to participants but may have been overlooked by previous researchers (Gill et al. 2008).

This examination of women's participation in the energy transition focuses on the following questions (1) the role of women in energy transition, (2) the gender gap and gender gap mitigation policy in place in the organisation, (3) women as consumers and leaders in the energy sector.

We have obtained consent forms from participants for this research purposes. We employed purposive sampling of women in the energy sector across the G7 and ASEAN Countries (Table 2).

Table 2: Key Informants in ASEAN and G7

ASEAN	G7
Intergovernmental Organisation (2)	Industry (3)
Industry (2)	International Institutions/Academia (3)
International Institutions/Academia (3)	

Source: Developed by Authors (2022)

The informant has an average of 10 years of experience in the energy sector in Norway, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. To obtain descriptive and evaluation data, interviews comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The authors transcribed and coded the interview data verbatim for data analysis purposes. The approach of this study is a deductive analysis where we apply the framework three tenets of justice to the data we collected (mainly secondary data and validated by primary data) (Table 1).

4. Results and Analysis: The Three Tenets of Justice Analysis

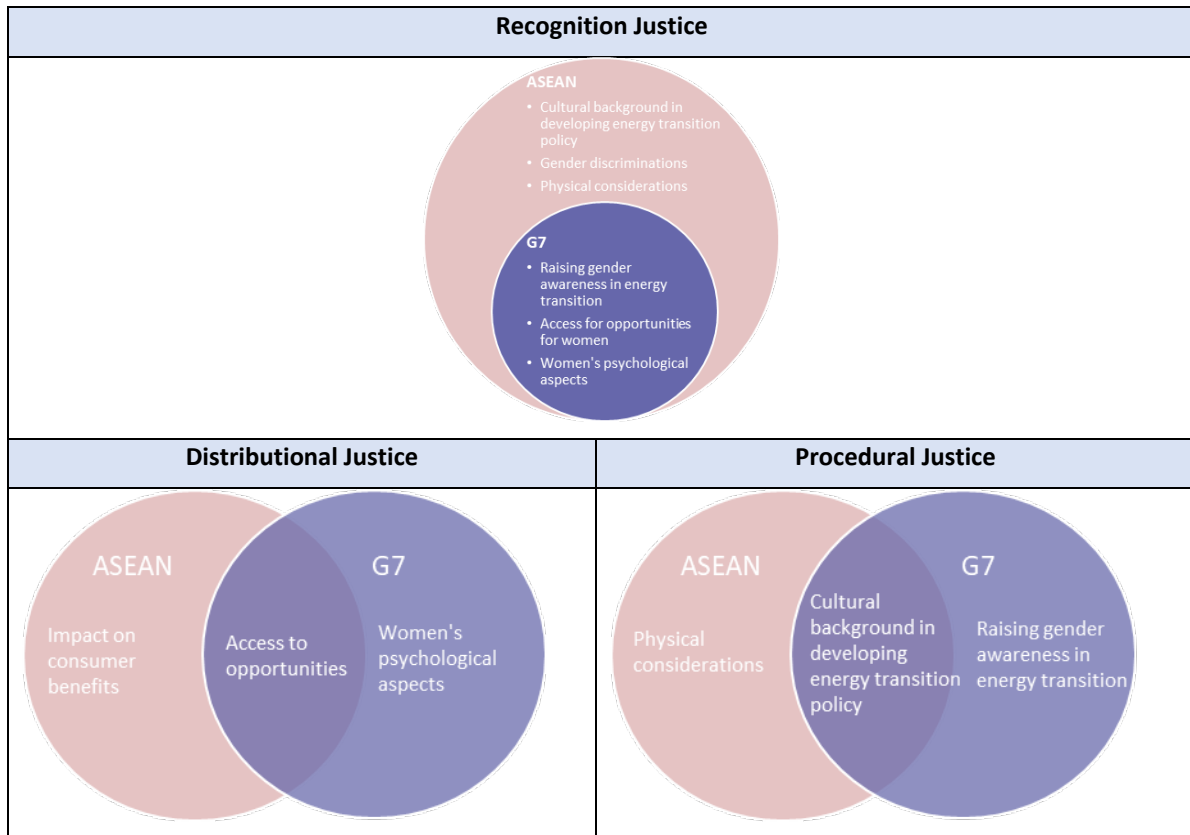
Gender diversity in the energy sector is critical for driving more innovative and inclusive solutions for global clean energy transitions. The energy sector, widely regarded as one of the least gender-diverse sectors of the economy, must shift the dial by enlisting all talents to provide a secure, affordable, and sustainable energy future for all. Hence, we identify key women's energy transition challenges as a starting point for strategic gender policy framework development.

4.1 Recognition Justice

According to Figure 1, the current position of women in the energy transition system in G7 is affected by the level of public awareness in this sector, access opportunities for women to participate in the energy transition, women's psychological aspects, cultural background and the physical nature of women. Therefor, ASEAN women

often sacrifice their career since they have to nurture their family (Chandra 2012). These factors influence the progress of energy transition in ASEAN regarding women's participation.

The following figure shows women in ASEAN and G7 in the tenet of justice perspectives.



Source: Developed by authors (2022)

Figure 1: Three Tenets of Justice Analysis

In terms of women's involvement in the just energy transition in ASEAN and G7 countries, we find that often women's participation is not seen as necessary. We find that there has been a lack of women's visibility in the renewable sector in both ASEAN and G7 countries. ASEAN and G7 should increase awareness of women in the renewable energy sector to support women facing the psychological issue. This psychological issue is due to an old paradigm where women should only be doing administrative work and working behind desks (Czako 2020; IRENA 2020). In contrast, men can work on technical (engineering, construction, technology, etc.). Despite having women prioritised in some technical job vacancies, some women may still think, "Am I hired because I have the expertise to do the job or because I am a woman?". In ASEAN, one of the main reasons is their cultural and value backgrounds, where women are often seen as second priority after men (Permana et al. 2015). This affects the women's right to give their opinions/ideas/inputs within organisational meetings or get involved in decision-making.

4.2 Distributional Justice

According to IEA (2022a), women's income in the energy sector is lower than men's. This is because women tend to underestimate their skills and expertise in the energy sector. STEM is seen as men's subject, and women in STEM with the same level of expertise often think that they deserve to be paid lower. Moreover, maternity benefits in Asia are typically limited, while provisions for protracted career breaks without pay and the concept of paternity leave are uncommon (Chandra 2012). According to Figure 1, both ASEAN and G7 countries consider that there is a lack of access for women in the energy sector. The old paradigm that women should not work in STEM fields but in administrative roles is still dominant. According to IRENA (2019), women in STEM jobs in renewable energy only accounts for 28%, while 45% works in administrative roles globally. Both ASEAN and G7 women lack access to renewable energy jobs. The underrepresentation of women in technical positions in the energy industry is closely related to the underrepresentation of female students in STEM education (Czako

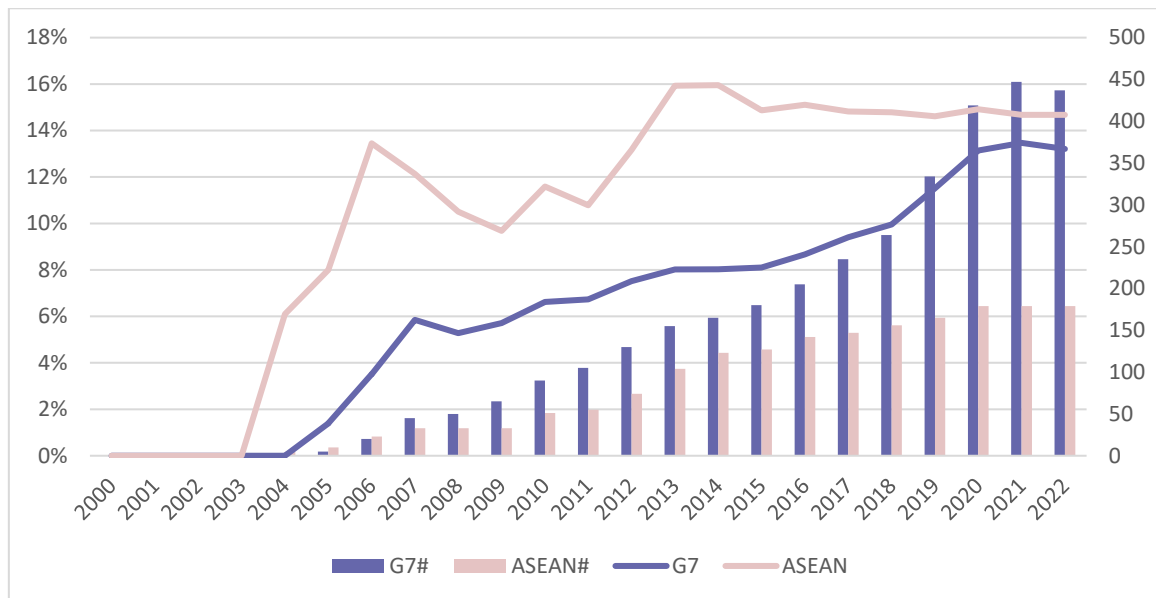
2020). Therefore, increasing women's work opportunities and STEM education is crucial. Distributional injustice can potentially be reduced by promoting STEM higher education for women (Hwang 2016).

Conversely, women's health and productivity have been affected directly by the type of energy sources they consume. For example, in ASEAN, women still use biomass (wood) or charcoal as their primary cooking fuel. Both of these types of cooking fuels emit CO₂ that affects their health. Fossil fuels cookstove is one of the biggest threats to health in developing economies (World Health Organization 2021). Additionally, women also have to spend more time collecting wood for cooking needs.

4.3 Procedural Justice

According to Figure 1 above, both ASEAN and G7 consider that cultures and beliefs have influenced employers' decisions in the renewable energy sector and in general. Women who play the role of mother and wife are considered in professional decisions, such as employability. Having more women in managerial positions can positively influence the work environment. Research has found that having women leader in a company has enhanced firm value, financial performance, economic growth, innovation, and social responsiveness (Joecks et al. 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al. 2017; Galbreath 2011). In addition, in one of the ASEAN countries, there are many women with expertise in the renewable energy sector, but it rarely happens when it comes to senior leadership positions. A gender (women) equality policy in energy sector could increase the number of women in leadership role. According to the latest ASEAN Centre for Energy (2022) gender report, there is currently an absent of gender equality policy in place in this sector. A different view from G7, One of our participants is a leader of a renewable energy project based in Asia. She stated that being a woman leader affects how others react or behave towards her. Being a woman should not stop a woman from achieving a leadership position. However, there is still a lack of women in senior leadership positions in both regions. This fact is evidenced in some studies by Feenstra (2002; 2020) on women's decision-making process in the energy sector.

The latest IEA's (2022) report focuses on the share of women in senior managerial positions in renewable energy sectors globally. Figure 2 shows the trend of women's share in senior managerial positions in renewable energy sectors from 2000-2022 in ASEAN and G7. ASEAN has more percentage of women at the senior managerial level compared to G7 despite the more significant number of samples in G7 (G7# and ASEAN#). However, both groups exhibit an increasing portion of women senior managers up to 2022.



Source: IEA (2022)

Figure 2: Share of Women in Senior Managerial Levels in the Renewable Energy Sector in G7 and ASEAN (2000 -2022)

Women in leadership positions play a significant role in accelerating the change in the energy system, such as energy transition, and advancing the principles of energy justice (Allen et al. 2019). Greater gender diversity in corporate leadership increases a firm's success through various perspectives and inventive decision-making (Belghiti-Mahut et al. 2016). Women are generally energy managers in the household and are affected by indoor

air pollution (Sovacool 2012). Managing climate change and energy transition require significant innovation in the energy system. A study by Gamser (1988) finds that energy users are significant for technology development in the energy sector. There have been many studies on social acceptance towards renewable energy development and innovation (Ek 2005; Gross 2007; Wolsink 2012). Hence, women in senior management roles can drive innovation to happen as they can also positively influence social acceptance of renewable energy development in the regions.

5. Conclusions

This article demonstrated that women's participation in ensuring a just energy transition is almost the same in ASEAN and G7 regions. G7 confronts similar issues in getting more women into the energy transition process despite having more women in renewable energy leadership roles.

The principle of recognition justice is respecting and noticing those involved and affected by some activities/projects or decisions and acknowledging where they are. Renewable energy projects risk being inappropriate or failing without women in influential positions. There is lack of women recognition in ensuring a just energy transition in ASEAN and G7, both as consumers and decision-makers/producers (as leaders).

In terms of distributional justice, there are still many women in ASEAN that are affected directly as consumers of the use of cooking fuel, especially those who are still using biomass (wood). Significant efforts are needed in ASEAN, both technical and financial. ASEAN and G7 still have to frame their gender-responsive energy policy to ensure a just energy transition in both regions. Renewable energy development has become more and more significant for women and community welfare. In a different scenario, women can save time by collecting wood to cook food and do more productive activities, such as helping their children study or starting a home-industry business. This could improve their livelihood and increase economic activities.

Energy transition must consider the aspect of procedural justice to ensure the decision-making process is fair and include all stakeholders. There is still big gap in the percentage of women in leadership in renewable energy sector in both ASEAN and G7 countries. All stakeholders (governments, industries, institutions, and communities) in both regions should take part in ensuring the energy transition is just by encouraging and promoting women to be in leadership and policy-making roles. This opens opportunity to further research on this topic.

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FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) Health Support for Non-Pregnant Women: Evaluation Findings From the NHS Pilot Programme

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Abstract: NHS England funded eight pilot Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) clinics for non-pregnant women across England from 2019 to 2021, with our evaluation exploring how best to meet the health and wellbeing needs of non-pregnant women who had experienced FGM. Prior to these clinics, there had been little progress in meeting the needs of non-pregnant women with FGM seeking medical help in England. Our evaluation commissioned Starks Consulting, Ecorys and Leeds Beckett to evaluate documented service delivery across the eight pilot sites. Within this we explored the importance of delivering clinics within community settings. The evaluation tested how effective/capable these clinics were in meeting the health and wellbeing needs of women accessing them. We also examined the effectiveness of various staff roles (lead clinician, health advocate and therapist) to understand the service delivery approach. We captured the views of a small number of service users through individual interviews, gathering their lived experiences of FGM and clinic attendance. The main aim of the evaluation was to determine whether the clinics improved the health outcomes of non-pregnant survivors of FGM. This paper presents findings from the qualitative component of the evaluation; interview data from 42 professionals and 12 service users. We detail the model of support (community service delivery, with trusted professionals, creating a safe space) and the learning gained from the pilot implementation. Positive outcomes include improved health and well-being for women (mental and physical health improvements). Challenges in service delivery included language barriers, how professionals reach into communities, the stigma associated with FGM as an experience, and mental health problems arising from FGM.

Keywords: Evaluation, FGM (non-pregnant women), Women, Health service pilot, Models of practice

1. Introduction

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is defined as the partial or total removal of the female genitalia for non-medical reasons, and is recognised as an act of violence against women and girls (WHO, 2022). FGM is performed mostly in Africa, carried out on young girls in the main. There are four different types of FGM which vary in severity. Type I usually involves the removal of the clitoral foreskin, type II is the removal of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora. Type III is more extreme type as the clitoris, labia minora and majora are removed and then the vaginal opening is sewn, leaving a tiny opening for urine and menstruation blood. Sometimes, FGM involves pricking, and/or piercing of the clitoris or vulva, and scraping of the vagina, which is defined as type IV (Utz-Billing & Kentenich 2008).

FGM is performed for a variety of reasons such as to control the moral behaviour of women and girls, to ensure beauty, as a form of birth control, and to guarantee faithfulness to husbands (Utz-Billing & Kentenich 2008, WHO, 2022). A wide range of cultural factors underpin the continuation of FGM (Waigima et al 2018), including patriarchal systems and gendered social norms, resulting in complex family relationships supporting FGM as a practice. Both men and women support FGM, which remains of social value in several countries despite increased understandings of the health issues associated with the practice (Akweongo et al, 2021). FGM has no medical benefit, is usually performed by traditional practitioners in communities and has immediate consequences such as pain, bleeding, swelling, infections, shock and death. Longer term consequences include urinary problems, infections, scar tissue, sexual problems, issues with conception and childbirth, as well as psychological trauma (WHO, 2022). Survivors suffer from gynaecological, urological and obstetric problems, as well as long-term mental health and emotional problems (Utz-Billing & Kentenich, 2008). There is emerging evidence of the profound effect of FGM on women's sense of identity, self-esteem, personal relationships and family life (O'Neill & Pallitto, 2021). Despite these complications many women are prevented from seeking treatment for FGM complications due to stigma (Waigima et al, 2018), and traditional gender roles limiting their agency (FGM Sister Study, 2020).

FGM has been made illegal in a number of countries, including the UK. However, it is estimated that over 200 million girls and women are alive today who are suffering as a result of FGM (World Health Organisation, 2022). Global migration from areas where FGM is practiced also means that FGM remains a worldwide health

concern (UNICEF 2016). Furthermore, It is estimated that treating survivors of FGM, costs the NHS approximately £100 million pounds per year (Hex et al, 2016). Therefore, minimising the costs by treating symptoms early is a major driver for the NHS. In addition, the evidence base lacks research about the successful management of FGM within primary care (Dixon et al, 2021).

2. NHS Service Specification (Pilot Clinics)

In 2019, NHS England launched a pilot scheme of eight specialist Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) clinics for non-pregnant women. These clinics provided services and support for non-pregnant women over the age of 18 who were living with the consequences of FGM. Pregnant survivors have been historically treated within maternity services, however no provision has existed in the UK, for women with FGM who are not pregnant.

The NHS service specification for the pilot clinics outlined that they should provide a form of tripartite support including basic medical treatments provided by a specialist midwife or nurse; counselling for mental health concerns, and advice from a health advocate on health and wellbeing needs for example. Clinics were to be located in community settings for ease of access. The remit of the clinics was gender-specific focusing upon treating survivors only, and the model of care was trauma-informed, with a focus on holistic support, working in patient-centred ways, as well as the prevention of re-traumatisation (Lurie et al, 2022). The service specification (NHS England, 2018) drawn up by NHS England stated that women should expect to receive the following:

- Health care including assessment of needs, FGM diagnosis, simple de-infibulation with local anaesthetic (where needed), cervical smear testing
- Access to consultant gynaecology and urology for assessment and treatment if required
- Offer of a smear test
- Safeguarding assessments and personal education about FGM, consequences and illegality, exploring attitudes and perceptions
- Access to a specialist counsellor (up to six sessions)
- Access to an FGM Health Advocate providing advice and support
- Referral to other voluntary and community sector specialist support as needed.

3. Methodology

The key aim of our evaluation was to determine whether the clinics improved the health outcomes of non-pregnant women with FGM. Within this overarching aim, key evaluation objects were identified:

- To determine whether the pilot services adhered to the original service specifications and where there may be deviations, to understand which specifications are crucial to improving the health and well-being of women
- To explore the importance of the clinics being in a community setting
- To provide an understanding of the dynamics played by having a health advocate and a counsellor involved in the service and how this benefitted service users.

Our evaluation adopted a mixed-model approach generating qualitative and quantitative data, with this paper reporting on our qualitative findings. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 42 professionals involved in the delivery of the clinics; one commissioner and two voluntary organisations. Twelve women (service-users) who accessed the support also self-selected to participate in semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Interviews With Staff

We completed a total of 42 interviews with professionals either via telephone or MS Teams. One clinic was visited by both authors. Our sample of professionals included, 3 consultants, 1 General Practitioner, 7 FGM specialist midwives/nurses, 2 clinic management/administrative staff, 8 health advocates, 7 psychotherapists/counsellors, 2 voluntary and community sector service leads involved in delivering support as well as 1 commissioner. Interview schedules were developed tailored to each professional role but similarly covered the clinic approach, service delivery (model of support), its impact upon service users, partnership experiences, learning, and suggestions for service improvements. Detailed sampling information for professionals according to organisational belonging has been deliberately omitted, due to the small scale nature of this evaluation, and the need to ensure their anonymity in the reporting.

3.2 Interviews with women using the services

A total of 12 women who had used the clinics were interviewed via the telephone, or online (via MS Teams) subject to their preferences. The evaluators were advised of suitable women to interview via clinic staff, so our sample was made up of self-selected women who agreed to participate in an interview. We sampled drawing upon the experience of staff to select appropriate service users for inclusion, ensuring that we minimised the psychological impacts from women sharing their experiences. The service user schedule focused upon access to the clinic, experiences of support, outcomes for women as well as their suggestions for future improvements. The small sample of 12 was achieved despite extensive efforts towards recruitment. In addition, detailed demographic information for survivors was not gathered, as we allowed survivors to share information on their terms, given the sensitivities surrounding their experiences.

3.3 Analysis

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The data were analysed using Framework Analysis, with the initial framework drawn from the aims of the evaluation. Framework Analysis develops a hierarchical thematic structure to classify and organise data (Ritchie et al., 2003), with patterns and connections then identified. Themes were agreed by members of the research team. Internal monitoring data was also descriptively analysed and mapped for inclusion in final reporting.

3.4 Ethics

The evaluation received ethical approval from Leeds Beckett University. The following practices were adhered to:

- Informed consent: written or verbal consent was obtained from all participants in the interviews
- Safeguarding: given the sensitive nature of the topic being researched, attention was paid to risk reduction in data collection, with sensitive handling of service user and onward referral available should further support be required
- Confidentiality and anonymity: no personal identifying information has been used in reporting the data
- Secure information management: maintained through password-protected university systems.

3.5 Limitations

No service user outcomes tool were agreed by the clinics and no permissions were in place for evaluators to contact previous service users. Data on impact was only available through a limited number of qualitative interviews. The evaluation team were unable to interview any women who had not engaged with the clinic provision, following non-attendance. Our evaluation data did not capture experiences of women unable or unwilling to engage, or those who did not have their needs fully supported by the NHS pilot clinics. Given the challenges of complex need outlined by the women that we interviewed, it is unlikely that every woman who needed support could access it. There is a gap in the evidence gathered about survivor's partners views, as these were outside of the scope of this evaluation. These factors taken together have an impact on the robustness of the findings.

4. Findings

4.1 Evaluation Objective: To Explore the Importance of the Clinics Being in a Community Setting

Despite the specification stating that clinics should be delivered in the community, three of the eight clinics operated from within a hospital, and five from within community health centres or a GP surgery. The hospital sites were led by consultants with experience in delivering FGM services. Here, the model of delivery was extended to include the counsellor and health advocate. There were no reported disadvantages to providing the clinic in a hospital setting; staff agreed it was more about providing a sensitive and welcoming environment. There was evidence that extending holistic support in a hospital allowed easy access to other gynaecology services or urology services. In addition, hospitals could build on existing referral pathways established within their settings (e.g. GP referrals and consultants). However, not all hospital settings were successful in generating referrals. There was no evidence that the experience of women was affected by their attendance at the clinics in the hospital, rather survivors needed an environment that felt welcoming and trusting relationships with staff:

"I didn't mind it being in a hospital...they understand the background I come from. They were very informed, and I would say educated about the history of the survivors." (Survivor)

4.2 Referrals

Clinics provided data which showed that in total over a two year period, from 2019-2021, 578 women were seen. A key route into the service was self-referrals with 38.7% of women self-referring. A further 33.0% were referred by their GP. The three hospital sites accounted for 60% of all GP referrals. 1 community site received no referrals from a GP and another just 2 referrals. Health advocates accounted for approximately 1 in 10 referrals.

4.3 The Model of Support

Support for each service user in the clinics took similar pathways. The health advocate was the initial point of contact and was active in supporting women. Advocates were part of the initial assessment where additional needs such as housing, welfare needs, or support with refugee status, for example, were identified. A specialist midwife/consultant completed the FGM diagnosis and performed any clinical procedure as required (e.g. de-infibulation). They also assessed for any ongoing health care needs or complications which may need a referral to a consultant.. Counsellors and/or psycho-sexual therapists supported the women further to help them understand impacts on their mental health, emotional well-being and personal relationships. The input from each professional role was not necessarily sequential; some women accessed counselling support before any clinical intervention and continued with counselling after the clinical procedure. Some women did not access any counselling. Our evaluation found that the clinics provided services flexed to the needs of individual women, on a case by case basis.

4.4 The Significance of the Specialist FGM Midwives/ Consultants or Nurses

Specially trained midwives or consultants and nurses were responsible for completing the FGM diagnosis and any further procedures such as perineal repair and de-infibulations. They provided a high level of expertise when assessing the women's health needs and agreeing on a care plan. The FGM Clinics also provide treatment for other symptoms including urinary tract infections (UTIs) menstrual problems, or thrush for example,

"We have to look at the woman in her entirety, explore all of her symptoms and make sure we give her the best care we can while she is with us." (Midwife)

The second person in the room during the medical procedures was typically another midwife or a nurse. Clinics agreed that having a second midwife supporting the procedure enabled greater opportunities for learning and knowledge transfer,

"I feel that I need an experienced person with me because it's complex... and while I feel I am skilled, I like to have someone else around when I'm doing the procedure." (Clinic Lead)

4.5 The Role of the Counsellor

Speedy access to counsellors and psychotherapists was one of the most valuable forms of support for survivors. Evidence showed how valuable this support was for their recovery,

"The trauma that many of these women have gone through in their earlier life has been buried, but it manifests itself in many different ways...in their mental health, often how they feel about their sexuality, their identity...their ability to have positive relationships". (Counsellor)

Where women needed specific help with personal relationships and spoke of difficulties with sex, psycho-sexual therapists were available (in some clinics) to work with the women around intimacy and sex. Counselling was also delivered to partners in some limited instances, with survivors full consent to help them understand intimacy issues. Group sessions were run by one counsellor in a clinic which helped to break down the barriers in talking about FGM.

4.6 The Significance of the Health Advocate Role

Health Advocates were crucial to the effective running of the clinics. They supported the clinics by raising awareness of their services within local communities, contacting each service user before their appointment, and providing advocacy. Some managed the clinic's bookings, responded to telephone and email inquiries, and helped organise the clinic diary. Where health advocates were more active, non-attendance rates were

reduced. Health advocates tended to be from similar backgrounds as the service users, bringing cultural understanding. Some advocates were themselves survivors, recognising the benefit of sharing their personal experiences with service users, to engender considerable trust,

"She was amazing, she understood me... I trusted her, she was so kind". (Mariam)

4.7 The Benefits of the Tripartite Support

The tripartite support ensured the women who accessed the services were able to move forwards more confidently. None of the women interviewed had previously spoken about their traumatic experiences and professionals agreed that they would not have accessed their clinic if the service was solely clinical,

"This is a challenge in itself to encourage them to talk to a professional about it... without this active engagement and support throughout their journey, they wouldn't be here...the clinic opens the door to that conversation for the first time." (Psychologist)

4.8 Challenges to Service Delivery

Most clinics reported challenges in establishing their service such as drafting operating protocols, purchasing suitable equipment, recruiting and retaining experienced staff, operating at capacity, gaining access to necessary medicines, collating and storing case data, and supporting women for whom English was not their first language. These challenges were not present in all clinics but were reported across several clinics. In addition, the pandemic resulted in some staff working from home, impacting the effectiveness of the tripartite support. There was a low level of management and supervision in some clinics, affecting the health advocates in particular. Key implementation lessons include ensuring that there was sufficient time allowed for the set-up of the clinics and greater consideration needed to be given to data management and information sharing across the teams to ensure that support was meeting all client needs.

4.9 Women's Experiences of the Clinic

Women's views of the support were very positive. They liked the ability to self-refer and were pleased with the timely response following initial contact. Clinics treated the women sensitively, providing a high level of emotional support. Women felt listened to and understood, which engendered trust. The diagnosis of their FGM was an important first step in their recovery,

"Now I know this, I can move forward...this is so empowering for me to understand what has happened. Now I can begin treating myself too." (Kaya)

Women who had de-infibulations spoke of a change in their physical health but also optimism for their future, in particular with their relationships and intimacy; several women had come to the clinic in preparation for marriage.

The counselling and psycho-sexual therapeutic support had a significant impact on women's self-awareness, and their understanding of how the trauma of FGM had affected them. For several women, this was the start of their journey and ongoing support was going to be needed, with some suggesting peer-to-peer support groups as helpful here, though this had not been implemented the time of the research. For most women, the memory of their FGM experience was still vivid despite the event being many years ago. Women interviewed were in their twenties, thirties and forties and were still dealing with mental, physical and emotional scars left by FGM,

"I have physical symptoms, the area is very sensitive, and I suffer from psychological trauma." (Bintu)

Women reported feeling the team provided a responsive and supportive environment,

"I felt listened to at the first appointment in [name of clinic], and able to trust staff." (Rana)

"Everything was carried out perfectly for me personally... a lot of support and greeted with a lot of understanding and care. I am very grateful." (Fazia)

Women spoke of the benefits of the holistic support and a range of positive outcomes including health improvements, increased self-confidence and feelings of empowerment, improved mental wellbeing and

improved relationships. Women reported improvements in their physical health, with reduced pain during menstruation and an end to urine infections. Women spoke about having a better experienced during

menstruation and being able to use tampons more effectively which helped them to feel cleaner. They spoke of connecting with their body for the first time instead of feeling alien to it,

"I feel like I am beginning to understand myself as a woman now." (Leila)

Although very few women opted to take a smear test, some said that they would now feel more confident in doing so. This was partly due to having had a de-infibulation, but also due to the support they had experienced from the health professionals and feeling more confident with their bodies,

"Now I know that they understand, I feel more confident talking about it with my doctor." (Mariam)

Others described how they felt empowered with the knowledge they now had about FGM and their related symptoms. They felt more able to look after themselves when they had completed their therapy sessions; they felt more positive from being heard,

"The benefit has been amazing. Very pleased with it. There are so many women out there that suffer in silence and if I can encourage them to speak about it it's been worth it..." (Sona)

Several women spoke about how the FGM clinics were a source of empowerment against the violence that had been done to them. For the first time they were felt supported by a community that was openly dealing with FGM,

"I feel like I am undoing all the wrong that was done to me, this is me beating back from all the hurt." (Leila)

Greater confidence with relationships and intimacy was frequently reported. One women spoke about how she had come to terms with her own sexuality as a result of feeling more confident with her body and her emotions,

"Having this therapy has helped me explore my emotions and to admit what I feel and to come to terms with my bi-sexuality." (Bintu)

Women reported feeling more confidence with sex and having got a sex life for the first time as a direct results of the clinical intervention, the knowledge gained about their body and the psycho-sexual therapeutic support,

"...I am now able to touch myself.. and to be aware of how my own body feels...I feel less shame about this and in a much better place". (Fazia)

"...after like a year and a few months I was able to have a normal sexual intercourse after working on my brain and you know my thoughts... I spent years and years trying and it was impossible [prior to the clinic support]." (Rana)

"[If it wasn't for this clinic] I would still be the same...I have been through a lot, and I used to be crying thinking that I would be like this for the rest of my life, but I got rid of my vaginismus." (Hadiza)

The improved sense of mental wellbeing came as the result of talking about the problems to someone and understanding the cause of their low mental wellbeing and anxiety. Many spoke about feeling a sense of weight being lifted from their shoulders,

"I had twelve sessions...the impact of this support, opened me up to my whole experience...the FGM and abuse from my family...they helped me cope with my depression." (Casho)

5. Discussion

Our evaluation data illustrates that the NHS pilot clinics treating non-pregnant women with FGM, worked to effectively support them in achieving positive outcomes for both their physical and mental health. The tripartite model of support was important to address their needs holistically in a safe, and trusted space. These findings echo evidence about other women's services designed to address complex need. Thus, offering women-centred approaches to service provision is effective in meeting their needs. Using holistic, joined-up, women-centred, models of support is the best way to achieve positive outcomes for women with complex needs (Women's Aid, 2022). Women must be at the heart of the provision and supported in a holistic and gender-specific manner (Warwick-Booth and Cross, 2020). Service user outcomes detailed in our evaluation show the value of NHS services offering holistic, women-centred support in primary care. The relational methods used by the NHS staff in the pilot clinics formed the mechanisms by which trust is promoted, an essential component when working in a trauma-informed manner (Covington, 2007; Warwick-Booth & Cross,

2020; Lurie et al, 2022). However, the timing of deinfibulation remains a complex matter for survivors, with services needing to recognise that women require agency and choice in relation to procedures and their bodies (The FGM Sister Study 2020).

Cultural barriers and stigma however remain a challenge, creating significant barriers for women accessing services and support for FGM (Akweongo et al, 2021), with health education interventions seen as a promising tool to tackle such issues (Waigima et al, 2018). Health Advocates undertook some localised awareness raising, in line with existing evidence indicating that community based organisations play an important role in facilitating women's engagement with and access to health services (Connelly et al, 2018). Our evaluation data also illustrates the value of educating survivors at an individual level to enable them to understand the implications of the procedure, and start their journey to recovery. Stevenson & Kelly (2022) highlight that women and girls are often unable to accurately recall which procedure was performed. Indeed, the survivors interviewed in this evaluation all noted that they had not disclosed their FGM to anyone until they attended health appointments, indicating the prevalence of stigma as an ongoing challenge. Therefore, health care services need to operate carefully to ensure that they do not further stigmatise survivors and communities, nor retraumatise women seeking their support (Karlsen & Mogilnicka, 2019; Lurie et al, 2022).

Despite evidence of effectiveness, the pilot clinics were funded in the short-term for two years, and tasked with becoming sustainable via integration into local commissioning arrangements. Two of the eight clinics were not successful in gaining funding to continue to offer the tripartite model of care, but are still offering FGM treatments/services. Time-limited funding does not always support sustainable service provision, and therefore the literature already notes that FGM specialist service clinics such as the ones discussed here, should be a resource priority (Dixon, et al 2020).

6. Conclusion

Our evaluation showed that the NHS pilot clinic approach for non-pregnant survivors of FGM was successful in delivering holistic, women-centred support, enabling positive outcomes for women who accessed the service. The provision was delivered in line with commissioning requirements, though this was not without challenges. Whilst the NHS pilot clinic funding enabled a new model of care to be implemented, ongoing work is needed due to the stigma surrounding FGM practices, with many non-pregnant survivors likely to be living with unmet needs as a consequence of their FGM.

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Appendices: Definition of Terms

Health Outcomes: in our evaluation we did not apply a specific definition of health outcomes from the literature, nor attempt to quantify these. Rather we qualitatively captured survivors and staff perceptions of health improvements resulting from the clinic support.

Health and wellbeing: again we had no quantifiable, nor measurable definition of health and wellbeing, intending to capture voices and views about what mattered in this area to survivors, enabling full exploration of impacts linked to the provision of holistic support.

Women Working From Home: Higher Performance and Satisfaction or More Stress?

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Abstract: As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies and organisations have introduced or expanded remote work options, thus creating new opportunities for employees to organise their day-to-day work independently. However, several studies suggest that women tend to suffer more from the double burden, as working from home often leads to a revival of traditional gender roles. Special strategies and instruments are needed to optimise the work-life balance when working from home. The aim of this study was to identify gender-specific stress and success factors for remote work design in order to derive practical recommendations for companies, women and politics to optimise work performance, work-life balance and satisfaction in remote work. To reach this objective, an online survey in Germany (n = 247) examined the perceived work design competencies, individual agreements with managers, corporate culture, perceived collegial support and the relationship with colleagues. The respective influence of these variables on the perceived satisfaction, stress as well as work performance when working from home was examined. Using a multiple regression analysis, it was shown that the three factors workplace design competencies, individual agreements with managers and the relationship with colleagues have a significant influence on all of the examined dependent variables. This means that a strong manifestation of factors has an effect on higher satisfaction, better performance and lower level of perceived stress. Work design competence has the most significant influence on study participants here. Significant gender differences were also identified: on average, women report a higher level of satisfaction and a lower level of perceived stress. Based on the identified factors, the paper discusses specific recommendations for companies, women and politicians to help employees working from home cope better with the associated burdens.

Keywords: Working from home, Gender-specific strain, Job satisfaction, Stress perception, Job performance

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated the digital transformation and flexibilisation of work and made remote work popular (Galanti et al., 2021), whereby the effects on male and female employees differ greatly due to the unequal division of tasks in the professional and private environment and the differing representation in the various sectors (DGB, 2021). In connection with the increasing introduction of remote work and the simultaneous social distancing measures, various studies were able to detect gender-specific changes in working hours. Women are disproportionately represented in those sectors that saw a higher employment decline due to the pandemic (Madgavkar et al., 2020). In addition, after the closure of day-care centres and schools, mothers more often reduced their working hours in favour of childcare, and the gender gap in working hours increased by 20–50% (Collins et al. 2021). At the same time, there was an increase in unpaid work for women (UN Women, 2020), with employees with additional burdens being not only less productive, but also more often working outside regular working hours (Fraunhofer IAO, 2020), so that the boundaries between work and leisure are blurred (Atlassian, 2020).

Contrary to the aforementioned negative effects on working hours and the performance of female professionals working from home, various studies before the COVID-19 pandemic reported that working from home was associated with greater satisfaction (Binder, 2016; Wheatley, 2017; Reuschke, 2019). However, Binder (2016) found this effect only in men and not in women. Employees' productivity, commitment and work performance, too, increase when they work from home (Vyas and Butakhieo, 2021; Delanoeije and Verbruggen, 2020). Remote work can also improve flexibility, job satisfaction, work-life balance (Grant et al., 2019) and reduce stress (KKH, 2022). However, these positive effects only occur under certain conditions (DGB, 2021).

Overall, the studies often do not differentiate by gender. Where gender-specific evaluations are carried out, there is usually a deterioration in the work-life balance and a higher burden on women. Many studies focus on

describing the situation and less on investigating conditions and relationships of different influencing variables and their effects systematically. There is a research gap here so far.

Therefore, the *aim of the present study* was to identify empirical relationships between different influencing factors and to enable a systematic comparison between genders with regard to specific stress and success factors. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1: Do men's and women's satisfaction, performance and stress perception in remote work differ?
- RQ2: What are general stress and success factors in remote work and are they gender-specific?

To answer the research questions, a questionnaire on the above factors in remote work was developed and evaluated.

The paper is structured as follows: after presenting the theoretical framework and developing the hypotheses, we describe the methodology and results. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results, recommendations for action for companies and an outlook.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

Bakker and Demerouti's (2007, 2014) "Job Demands-Resources Model" was used as a theoretical framework to narrow down the relevant factors. According to the model, both the requirements of work and general stress, as well as job and personal resources and individual qualities (e.g., skills and attitudes) have an influence on short-term and long-term stress effects such as employees' health and well-being. Requirements will only have a negative impact if there are not enough resources available to cope with their increase.

Therefore, we examine the "workplace design competence," "remote leadership," "perceived social support" and "quality of team collaboration" as possible resources when switching to remote work. Performance, satisfaction and the individual perception of stress are used as impacts.

2.1 Workplace Design Competence

Dettmers and Clauß (2018) define work design competencies as *"the knowledge about the favourable design of working conditions that enables a person to effectively cope with their own work tasks, at the same time promoting motivation and reducing burdens. The competence is based on experience and includes skills and strategies for how one's own work can be designed in the context of the specific framework conditions. Finally, work design competence includes knowledge about the leeway that employees have in their work situation."* (p. 17, translated by the authors). Work design competence thus includes the active design of the workplace, which should have advantages especially when transitioning to remote work. The introduction of remote work showed significantly more positive developments for those with a high degree of work design competence (Dettmers and Mülders, 2020). The active design of one's own workplace also has a positive effect on working from home. In studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, 92% of people who used job-crafting said their satisfaction had improved while working from home. In addition, 67% reported an improvement in team collaboration and 77% reported an improvement in productivity (Laker et al., 2020).

Therefore, we suspect a positive effect of workplace design competence in remote work on performance, satisfaction and a negative effect on stress perception (H1).

2.2 Remote Leadership

Remote leadership is the mutual influence between managers and their employees without any personal contact and predominantly through electronic media (Franken, 2022). Overall, leadership that supports employees has a positive impact on work performance (Borgmann et al., 2016). When working from home, remote leadership is the only way that management can support employees so that they can provide a resource for coping with increased requirements.

Therefore, we suspect a positive effect of remote leadership in remote work on performance, satisfaction and a negative effect on stress perception (H2).

2.3 Perceived Social Support From the Partner

The unequal allocation of household chores is connected to relationship conflicts, reduced satisfaction and a deterioration of professional performance. Furthermore, there are indications that the unequal allocation can lead to higher stress and a fragmentation of paid work and leisure time (Daminger, 2019; Schieman et al., 2018). Women assume a larger share of household chores, even if they are formally employed at the same time. In addition, the allocation of chores within a household is associated with a reduction in working hours

and a higher probability of women leaving employment (Zamara and Prados, 2021). Furthermore, it is more likely for women to be dissatisfied with the allocation of household chores (Kluwer et al., 1996).

Therefore, we suspect a positive effect of social support by the partner in remote work on performance, satisfaction and a negative effect on stress perception (*H3*).

2.4 Quality of Team Collaboration

A team or work group can be defined as a special group whose purpose it is to render work together or in a coordinated division of labour (Greif, 2021). Studies on the supportive effects of teamwork showed the positive effect on work performance (Abdolshah et al., 2018), satisfaction (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006) and corporate performance (Cizmaş et al., 2020).

Therefore, we suspect a positive effect of team collaboration in remote work on performance, satisfaction and a negative effect on stress perception (*H4*).

3. Study Design

3.1 Implementation and Sampling

In order to investigate the hypotheses, a quantitative online survey was conducted in Germany during the survey period from 8 December 2021 to 17 March 2022. With regard to the survey period, it should be noted that it coincided with a new wave of infections with the contagious Omicron variant, accompanied by harsher COVID-19 restrictions in Germany, with day-care centres and schools remaining open, however. A filter question ensured that data were only collected from people who currently worked from home or had regularly worked from home within the preceding two years since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The questionnaire was distributed to students and company contacts of the working group by e-mail and via social media.

The final data set consisted of 247 study participants, 74.1% of whom were female and 25.9% male, with ages ranging from 19 to 71 ($M = 36.04$, $SD = 9.893$). In terms of status, the largest group was non-executive employees with 63.6%, followed by executive employees with 16.6%. The remaining 19.8% were divided into the groups "students," "managing directors" and "others." 72.9% of participants worked from home for three to six days a week. Considering the survey period, this is not surprising, as a lockdown was in place in Germany at that time and employees were asked to work from home (Bundesgesundheitsministerium, 2021).

3.2 Operationalisation of Variables

The items were measured on a six-level Likert scale from "do not agree at all" (1) to "fully agree" (6).

In order to examine the effects of a person's ability to design their own work, Dettmers and Clauß's concept of *work design competencies* (2018) was used. The full scale originally comprises 11 items, with planning competence measured with five items and self-motivation and stress avoidance competence measured with three items each. For our own questionnaire, we reduced the scale to nine items and omitted two items in planning competence. Due to this change, Cronbach's alpha was recalculated, which was in the good range with $\alpha = .865$ (Taber, 2018).

The survey section *Remote leadership* includes statements that relate to agreements made in remote work ($\alpha = .836$). This includes agreeing on objectives and expectations with the manager, the perceived support from the manager and whether there is a regular exchange on successes and tasks within the team.

In the *Collaboration and exchange* section, questions were asked about the collaboration with colleagues, the communication media used, the perceived collegial support and the relationships with colleagues ($\alpha = .703$).

In order to measure the effects of working from home, satisfaction, performance and stress perception in remote work were recorded as target variables.

In terms of *performance*, one of the questions was how participants assessed their performance working from home compared to working in the office and whether they could effectively carry out their tasks and projects working from home ($\alpha = .639$).

To measure *satisfaction* working from home, the scale of the German version of the Life Satisfaction Scale by Janke and Glöckner-Rist (2014) was adapted to the situation in remote work, containing a total of five items ($\alpha = .884$).

Finally, *stress perception* in remote work was investigated through questions about the perception of stress in general and with regard to remote work as well as questions on various stress factors ($\alpha = .806$).

4. Results

4.1 Gender-Specific Differences and Influencing Factors in Remote Work

In order to measure the differences between genders in the relevant factors performance, satisfaction and stress perception (*RQ1*), a MANOVA with the factor parenthood as a covariate was performed. Prior to performing the MANOVA, the Pearson correlations between the dependent variables were calculated and an average correlation was found between all dependent variables, suggesting the appropriateness of a MANOVA.

Since the groups were different in size (females: $n = 174$, males: $n = 63$), but homogeneity of the covariance matrices was given ($F(6, 85736.241) = .1241$; $p = .282$), Pillai's trace was selected as the test. On average, female participants reported a higher level of satisfaction, performance and less perceived stress working from home compared to male participants (cf. Table 1), but there was no significant influence of the variable "gender" on the dependent variables $V = .024$, $F(3, 232) = 1.934$, $p = 0.125$. In contrast, separate univariate tests for the dependent variables showed a significant effect of the gender on performance $F(1, 243) = 4.59$, $p = .033$.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables

	Performance		Satisfaction		Stress perception	
	f	m	f	m	f	m
Mean value	4.22	3.95	4.41	4.22	2.96	3.08
Standard dev.	0.80	0.88	1.03	1.15	0.92	0.98
N	174	63	174	63	174	63

Note: *f* = female, *m* = male.

Regarding the difference between parents and people without children the covariate parenthood shows no significant influence $V = .025$, $F(3, 241) = 2.08$, $p = .104$. However, parents generally report higher performance, satisfaction and stress perception (cf. Table 2) with females reporting higher performance, satisfaction and a lower level of perceived stress than males.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables Among Parents and People Without Children

	Performance				Satisfaction				Stress perception			
	f	f*	m	m*	f	f*	m	m*	f	f*	m	m*
Mean value	3.95	4.22	3.9	4.10	4.42	4.56	4.21	4.30	3.08	2.96	2.92	3.16
Standard dev.	0.88	0.80	0.89	0.78	1.15	1.03	1.19	0.97	0.98	0.92	1.07	0.87
N	114	60	24	38	114	60	24	38	114	60	24	38

Note: *f** = female with children, *m** = male with children.

4.2 Influencing Factors for Successful Remote Work

In order to investigate the influence of the factors work design competence, remote leadership and team collaboration on the dependent variables (*RQ2*), three regression models were established and checked with separate data sets for females and males. Team collaboration was the only variable that was not significant in any of the models and was excluded with H4.

The estimation results are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Estimation Results

	Model 1: Performance		Model 2: Satisfaction		Model 3: Stress perception	
	f	m	f	m	f	m
Independent variables						
Work design competence	.206*	.756***	.325***	.528*	-.248*	-.655**
Leadership	.071	.123	.292**	.296*	-.214*	-.065
Social support	.043*	.100	.067	-.032	-.078	-.201
Model statistics						
N	174	63	174	63	174	63
F-value	8.217***	13.597***	8.181***	4.287***	9.290***	9.068***
R²	0.174	0.531	0.406	0.519	0.187	0.417
Adj. R²	0.153	0.492	0.391	0.479	0.167	0.371

Results are reported as non-standardised coefficients.

We report p-values as follows: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, p < 0.1 in italics.

Performance: The model is significant for both males ($F(3, 36) = 13.597, p < .001$) and females ($F(3, 117) = 8.217, p < .001$). For females, the model explains a high degree of performance variability (Cohan, 1992) with 53.1% for males, 17.4%. For females, the variables work design competence and perceived social support are significant, while the variable leadership ($p = .081$) is only weakly significant. For males, only the variable work design competence is significant, while leadership and social support are not.

Satisfaction: The model is significant for both males ($F(3, 36) = 4.287, p < .001$) and females ($F(3, 117) = 8.181, p < .001$). The model explains the variability of satisfaction among female participants with 40.6% and in male participants with 51.9%. The variables work design competence and leadership are significant for females, the factor social support is weakly significant ($p = .083$). The factors work design competence and leadership are also significant for males, but social support is not.

Stress perception: The model is significant for both males ($F(3, 38) = 9.068, p < .001$) and females ($F(3, 121) = 9.290, p < .001$) with a renewed high explanation of the variability (18.7% for females and 41.7% for males). For females, the variables work design competence and leadership are significant, while the variable social support is not. For males, only the variable work design competence is significant.

The results with regard to the hypotheses listed are given in Table 4:

Table 4: Summary of Results

Hypotheses	Performance		Satisfaction		Stress perception	
	Expectation	Result	Expectation	Result	Expectation	Result
H1: Work design competence	+	S	+	S	-	S
H2: Leadership	+	Ps	+	S	-	Ps
H3: Social support	+	Ps	+	Ps	-	Ns

S = Supported, Ps = Partially supported, Ns = Not supported.

5. Discussion

One aim of the study was to identify gender-specific success factors, resources and burdens in remote work. As a first step, men and women were compared in their experience working from home. That working from home can lead to more satisfaction, better performance and a lower level of perceived stress corresponds to previous studies (Grant et al., 2019; Bloom, 2015). However, the fact that women report less stress and at the same time more satisfaction and better performance is contradictory to other studies carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic (Schneider et al., 2020; Hartig et al. 2007; KKH 2022). One reason could be that women do

assume a larger share of family duties (Hank and Steinbach, 2020), but the relative share of activities in studies in the United States (Carlson et al., 2020) or Australia (Craig and Churchill, 2020) has not changed. Thus, the relative burden on women working from home remained the same, but the possibility of remote work could have made it easier for women to carry out both their professional and private tasks. This is different in Germany (DGB 2021). However, this effect has been weakened due to the survey period, which coincided with a new lockdown in Germany, whereas in contrast to the previously mentioned studies, daycare centres and schools remained open. This could be an indication that the possibility of working from home combined with adequate childcare services relieves women and especially mothers from some of their burdens. This is also supported by the fact that mothers and fathers report better performance and higher satisfaction working from home compared to people without children. Similar results for satisfaction were also found by Benzeval et al. (2020). They report that parents working from home are more likely to report an improvement in their relationship with their children during closure. For those who do not have children, the lack of social life could have a negative impact on their well-being working from home (Recchi et al., 2020). Another indication is that, compared to fathers, mothers report a lower level of perceived stress, better performance and higher satisfaction in remote work in contrast to the regular workplace. However, it must be noted that these are mostly descriptive and non-significant differences. One reason why gender in the present study had little significant influence on the dependent variables could have been the composition of the sample. Higher education and status have been associated with higher satisfaction and better performance in previous studies (Golding et al. 1983, Keyes et al., 2002). In the present study, however, women and men were homogeneously represented in all status groups, so that there was no gender-specific status difference that could influence the result.

Another aim of the study was to determine factors influencing successful remote work. In this context, work design competence turned out to be the most influential factor, as it has a statistically significant influence for all dependent variables as well as for both genders. One possible reason for this may be that working from home is a challenge for most people. It may result in problems with the reconciliation of work and the private life (Schieman et al., 2021) and obstacles to proper communication with superiors and team members (Fay and Kline, 2012). Employees may also suffer from loss of ties and feel socially isolated (Toscano and Zappalà, 2020). The organisation, which is traditionally considered a resource to promote motivation, performance and health (Dettmers and Clauß, 2018), was not available as a result of the pandemic. With a high degree of personal work design competence, greater creative leeway can be used as a resource, lead to a satisfactory design of one's own work and help avoid additional burdens and overload (ibid.).

An important resource for employees is the perceived support from their partners. However, this had a weakly significant influence on the variable satisfaction and a significant influence on performance only for women. The reason for this could be that women assume a larger share of household chores (Czymara et al., 2021) and a perceived unequal allocation of these can be associated with relationship conflicts, reduced individual well-being and even deteriorated performance in the workplace (Daminger, 2019). More support reduces the perceived unequal allocation of household chores.

For women, the factor "remote leadership" had a significant influence on stress perception and satisfaction as well as a weakly significant influence on performance; for men, only on satisfaction. This shows that even if the pandemic eliminated classic communication channels and direct contact as a tool for managers, they nevertheless had a positive impact, especially on female employees. This is also consistent with previous studies that found similar results (Borgmann et al., 2016).

5.1 Practical Implications

Overall, the results show the importance of the personal resource of work design competence in particular, which showed the greatest effect in the study by far (cf. Tables 5–7) and was relevant for both genders as well as for all dependent variables. Even before the pandemic, the world of work was characterised by an increase in flexibility and the associated increasing demands on employee agility (Dettmers and Mülder, 2020; Franken, 2022). Employees must be able to design their own way of working, especially when working from home. This illustrates the need to promote employees' work design competencies. Dettmers and Mülder (2020) propose two different options for this. On the one hand, the online-based tool EngAGE-Coach (www.engage-coach.de) developed as part of the EngAGE project, which is systematically geared towards increasing work design competence. On the other hand, they suggest "job crafting" interventions. These aim at concrete improvements in work design with regard to the respective work situation. They usually include three key steps: Analysis of the work situation, preparation of a design plan and implementation of the plan (ibid.). In

addition, it is necessary to promote employees' agile mind-sets as a prerequisite for the remote work of the future, e.g. through the implementation of agile structures and agile methods (Franken, 2022).

5.2 Future Research and Restrictions

The study has provided initial evidence that working from home has the potential to relieve employees, and women in particular, from some of their burdens, provided that appropriate management concepts and environmental factors (such as childcare) are in place. However, this study did not address differences between people with and without adequate childcare. Further research could take a closer look at these differences. The influence of a person's position and status on their perception of performance, satisfaction and stress should also be investigated in further studies. It should be noted that the reported differences between men and women were descriptive in nature. In addition, the conclusions drawn on the overall population's situation are limited by the fact that the selection of the comparatively small sample size was not random and the study participants were predominantly well educated.

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Women's Clothing Microenterprises: A Qualitative Analysis of Consumer Perception

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Abstract: In the context of the pandemic, an increase in the unemployment level originated, but on the other hand, new businesses such as microenterprises were also started, this with the purpose of generating income. The image of Peruvian entrepreneurship has changed during the pandemic, before the pandemic mainly adult men generated entrepreneurship, but now women, young people and low-income Peruvians initiate this challenge. The main research objective is to explore the consumer perception about women's clothing microenterprises in the city of Metropolitan Lima, capital of Peru. The methodological approach was qualitative with a descriptive scope and phenomenological design; the sample was selected for convenience, with a total of 12 women who buy in women's clothing micro-enterprises, who are around the age range between 18 to 35 years of socioeconomic level B and C between professionals and students; who were subsequently conducted in-depth interviews through telephone calls. The instrument consisted of 12 questions per interview divided into 3 dimensions and 4 sub-categories for each dimension. The users expressed their experiences in the use of women's clothing, which made it possible to generate a consumer profile of this type of business by analyzing the quality of information, speed of response and after-sales service. The interviews were transcribed and then the data were analyzed taking into account the most important and differential points of each response obtained. Among the main results, it was found that the users prioritize the quality of service, the veracity of the product images, the differential value of the garments and tolerance. Negative factors such as distrust and lack of attention to queries were found, elements that should be improved for a better closing of sales. In conclusion, after determining certain positive and negative factors on the perception of women's clothing micro-enterprises, users emphasize the importance of product warranty, which produces a feeling of improvement in quality and customer service.

Keywords: Clothing, Consumer perception, Customer behavior, Entrepreneurship, Microenterprise

1. Introduction

Faced with the current crisis caused by Covid 19, there was an increase in the unemployment rate and a shortage of resources around the world, leading people to reinvent themselves and show their entrepreneurial spirit, exposing their ability to face the new demands of the commercial market (Soriano and Martínez, 2007).

Consequently, a new stage began for small businesses called microenterprises, being a profitable initiative for a person or a family, despite the fact that in its initiation stage it does not generate formal profits for the participants or a fixed monthly salary (Ramaswamy and DeClerck, 2018). For this reason, small businesses look for ways to promote their products and services with few resources, social networks being the best option due to their low cost and because they are a fundamental tool for intercommunication with various markets (Carranza and Ávila, 2020).

Therefore, the present work has the following research questions: What is the consumer perception about women's clothing microenterprises in Metropolitan Lima city? And what are the determining factors for consumption in women's clothing microenterprises in Metropolitan Lima city?

1.1 Objectives

The objective of the research is to explore the perceptions of consumers about women's clothing microenterprises in Metropolitan Lima city, capital of Peru, seeking to analyze the determining factors to make a purchase in microenterprises that sell their products through social media networks, in addition, to being in

the initiation stage and not having a physical store, but with the support of customers who have already made purchases.

2. Literature Review

According to Fayolle and Basso (2010), entrepreneurships have the quality of transforming business ideas into a profitable livelihood, since it allows promoting products and opening new markets, containing leadership skills and risking innovation in the face of possible rejection by the company of the commercialized products.

Likewise, according to Rodríguez (2014), perception is the fundamental emotional cause that impacts consumer behavior, since it is related to the exploration of a person towards a certain product or service to know what are the factors that influence the end choice of one over others. Regarding the theories related to consumer perception, Schiffmann and Kanuk (2005) describe the procedures and systems that are generally used to analyze knowledge about a product and the impressions that users communicate after having made a purchase, mentioning that there are positive and interpretative approaches, the positive ones are essential for decision-making within businesses, while the interpretative ones are generally qualitative and are usually applied to small samples with unique consumption patterns.

Likewise, by Nieves and Morales (2022) the variety of perceptions and consumer satisfaction depend on the organization's assortment relationship, both internally with product suppliers and externally towards the customer, satisfying their needs with a variety of products, being more attractive, creating differential values, and becoming more competitive even in product categories unknown to some users.

Regarding the measurement of the variable "perception of consumption of microenterprises", Malo et al (2016) mentioned that the public prefers small businesses for the quality of more personalized attention, unlike large corporations that do not have that closer treatment, reaching a proportional level of trust based on the results they can offer.

According to Vergara (2021), the quality of information is extremely important for a company's decision-making, systematizing objective research in the field for the time of launching new products. Burton et al (1994) mention different ways of interacting with the information collected where the findings are considered as fundamental raw material for the identification of purchasing habitats, preferences, places where people get their products, quality, price, among other determining factors by the consumer for the purchase of a product in a certain brand. The same way, Yong et al (2021) refer that the relative knowledge of the information systems allows to quantify the data about the way of perceiving of the consumers.

Additionally, according to Farhangmehr, Marques and Silva (2000) the speed of response to a consumer's question will have a positive effect on the purchase of a product, as well as the most optimal care during the purchase process or in response to a possible complaint, in this way, the company can be differentiated from others.

In addition, Kearns and Hair (2008) mention that the after-sales service is a decisive factor before the repurchase of a customer as to whether he can provide a positive or negative opinion, which will influence the loyalty to the brand. Ramaswamy and DeClerck (2018) refer that the opinions and demands made by customers in different media such as social media, emails, etc., influence the market share and longevity of a company. "Analyzing textual reviews can provide deeper insights than exploring overall customer experiences and overall satisfaction" (Xu et al, 2017, p. 675).

Zeba and Ganguli (2019) also clarify that when the consumer is aware of the purchase, it is not only done for an emotional factor, but also evaluates and inquires about new designs and varieties of a product. Likewise, Ansari and Gupta (2021) mention that online product reviews have a great influence on the purchase decision.

In addition, Turnes (2020) refers that women's clothing has a relationship with fashion, which is a key factor for the development of products marketed for the female market, breaking down important points such as non-verbal communication through the type of clothing to be marketed and allowing to define the target audience and guidelines according to what the entrepreneur seeks to convey.

Given the lack of articles related to research on the perceptions of women's clothing consumers, it is of interest for micro-enterprises to know their impressions, in order to adopt measures that allow capturing a larger market and devising innovative strategies, not only to achieve a sale but also to generate the repurchase; therefore, this article seeks to provide useful information to the trading community and improve understanding of the scope of the problem.

3. Methods

The research has a qualitative methodological approach with a descriptive scope and phenomenological design; which is the analysis of experiences whose objective is to describe the phenomenon of study achieving a more accurate description based on the reality and manifestation of the people who lived this event previously.

The study population was the consumers of a women's clothing micro-enterprise, which has almost 2,600 followers on Facebook and approximately 5,100 followers on Instagram after its launch in early 2021. Subsequently, the sample was selected for non-probabilistic convenience. The unit of analysis is the brand's consumers, mostly women, between 18 and 35 years old. In addition to taking into account the opinion of customers who bought more than once in 2021 and excluding those who made only 1 purchase.

4. Data Collection

The data collection was carried out through the interview form, an instrument adapted from Aguirre and Acosta (2019), it also has the validation of experts who approved the proposed dimensions based on the achievement of the research objective.

In-depth interviews were conducted through telephone calls, the users could be contacted through the database provided by the company, which allowed knowing the answers about the experience they had with the women's clothing micro-enterprise and knowing the point of view they have about this type of business by analyzing the quality of information, speed of response and after-sales service.

The instrument consisted of 12 questions per interview divided into 3 dimensions and 4 sub-categories for each dimension (Table 1), where a code book was built with which the explored dimensions were analyzed, being a fundamental step for data cleaning and subsequent analysis of the findings, taking into account the data saturation criterion, which showed that after the first 12 interviewees there was a certain similarity in the ideas of the interviewees that did not allow obtaining additional elements and where the search for more data was stopped.

Table 1: Study Dimensions

Categories	Sub-Categories
Quality of the information	Product description (C1)
	Product photos (C2)
	Checking the size (C3)
	Shipping cost (C4)
Quick response	Speed in transmitting information (R1)
	Updated information (R2)
	Clear indications about the purchase process (R3)
	Product price (R4)
Post-Sale Service	Product Warranty (S1)
	Product replacement (S2)
	Money back (S3)
	Post-sale customer service (S4)

The interviews were transcribed and then the data was analyzed taking into account the most important and differential points of each response obtained and based on the differences between the possible similarities, the responses among the users were also compared according to the perspective and acceptance of the undertakings.

5. Results and Discussion

Next, the results of the research and the demographic details of the interviewees are presented, being women between 18 and 35 years of socioeconomic level B and C between professionals and students (Table 2).

Likewise, the following categories were determined: quality of information, speed of response and post-sale service; in addition, the shopping experiences in other stores with similar qualities are analyzed.

Table 2: Demographic Details of the Participants

Participants	Number	Academic level	Socioeconomic level	Love Marks Clients
Women $\geq$ 30	4	Professionals	B	1
Women $\leq$ 29	8	Students	B and C	4

5.1 On Information Quality

In the case of those interviewed over 30 years of age who were called adult customers (AC), their analysis at the time of making a purchase is different from that of the interviewees under 29 years of age who were called young customers (YC). ACs are more technical when executing a purchase, they take into account not only the image of the product but also the quality of the fabric, colors, size, price, shipping cost, and they hesitate when faced with a heavily edited photo due to their previous shopping experience. For this reason, they prefer to ask for simple, unedited photos that show the quality, type of fabric, and exact color of the garment. Likewise, they exhibit greater precision on the sizes and evaluate paying a high shipping cost. As one of the interviewees comments: "...when I go to make a purchase, I usually ask the sizes on the websites that I am interested in... knowing the sizes is important to me" (C3). Similarly, another participant mentioned: "Well, the first thing you see in a virtual store or entrepreneurship on social media is the description of the product, which is what encourages you to order or go to the store. It is important that businessmen and stores have a good description to avoid so many doubts and speed up the purchase process" (C1).

On the other hand, YCs are carried away more by the visual than by the additional information about the products; they prefer to see the product modeled on a person and thus have an idea of how it would look on them. Regarding checking sizes, they don't have much problem since the brand is aimed at a specific market and they offer standard sizes that fit most young users; but they do not neglect the shipping cost and look for alternatives before closing a purchase. As one of the interviewees mentions: "The truth is that I don't give so much importance to the description, it's more visual. I see the model and analyze if I like it a lot because of the color or model... I also see the importance of the material and the prices since as a result of this pandemic the prices have risen a lot. I check the price of what they are selling me since it must be in accordance with the quality of the fabric, I don't know much about fabric but I try to find out on google so I can verify that the cost that they are indicating is really due to the fabric that offer in their products" (C2 and C4).

The results show similarities with the studies of Yong, Lay and Wei (2021), Zeba and Ganguli (2019), Aguirre and Acosta (2019), León (2018) and Jiménez-Silva et al (2019) where there are also cases where the purchase depends more on a visual factor, the veracity with which a product or service is transmitted being decisive. On the other hand, these studies also disagree on the point that there are users who analyze a brand based on previous problems when making a purchase of a product.

5.2 Speed of Response

In the case of ACs, they are more organized and make purchases in advance, so they are more tolerant of a response, this does not mean that they would wait a week, but a few days. In addition, they know the dynamics of the purchase process, and although the store gives them confidence, they pay before receiving the product. Regarding the evaluation of the price, they go more for the differential, how unique the product can be and if the quality is in accordance with the sale price.

The YCs are more impatient but they are more attentive to the publications in case a product is out of stock, sometimes they do not trust the purchase processes of these stores and generally they pay when they receive the product. Regarding the price, they evaluate if the same products exist in other brands; and when faced with a very low price, it generates distrust, because in their previous experiences the product was not what was offered to them. As mentioned by some of the interviewees: "...as a buyer I review several brands or a very similar model that I like in several stores, so what I do is ask them all. I take into account the store that seems best to me, the price of the garment, the price of shipping and the attention when they respond, some people are very closed and don't give you a choice, but others are very kind and that builds trust" (R4).

Other participant mentioned: "Yes, I think that the issue of kindness is important, the "yes, don't worry, if it doesn't fit you we can change it as if it were face-to-face", but there are people who are very closed... and they answer "No" so sharply, then I say it is better not to ask them anything because I feel that I am making them uncomfortable" (R2 and R3).

"Of course, I take into account that a query at 11 pm at night will not be answered immediately, well I could normally wait during the day, but I think that a maximum would be 2 days, after 2 days there is already the lack of interest from the store, right?... I believe that the prompt response is according to the urgency that I have, be it that shirt or that jean, it is obvious that I will be insisting there so that they give me an answer. Yes, it is important to me" (R1).

The results related to the dimension on the speed of response coincide with the research of Farhangmehr, Marques and Silva (2000), Vergara (2021), Schiffman and Kanuk (2005), Burton et al (1994) and Bernal et al (2018) about how a brand is perceived that has the ability to respond more quickly to its users, this being a decisive factor for the choice of purchase and allowing to attract the largest number of clients; likewise, the attention and the way in which the response to the requests and doubts of the potential clients is carried out, which can make a difference in the guarantee of the purchase and in addition to future purchases.

5.3 After-Sales Service

Depending on the experience of the ACs, they are a little more demanding when faced with a problem about the sale and they make their discomfort known among their group of friends and on social media, either because of a good treatment or bad experiences, in general they do not ask guarantee for the products but they know that in the event of any damage they have complete freedom to ask for a solution, either by changing a garment, the return in the event of disagreement with the garment or that the product is not in stock that they initially bought .

While the YC expect a greeting and more concern for them after the sale of the product is finished, they generally do not ask for a product guarantee and in the event of a defect they do not think that they can ask for a change or a refund of the money, they prefer to avoid problems and prefer to leave the product aside according to the majority of interviewees.

As mentioned by some of the interviewees:

"Of course, what happens is that very few pages give you your money back, they always force you to choose one of their products as compensation since a money refund is not possible. There were times when I had to choose a model that I suddenly didn't like but I did it to avoid problems, but I've also had problems when asking to be exchanged for another product... The truth has never happened to me, but I have friends who have returned their money" (S2, S3 and S4).

"Well, I think that it does have a good after-sales service, they understand that it is important to retain customers because obviously the product arrives and perhaps it is not what you expect, the person in charge did worry about my discomfort and about the issue suddenly as a woman's whim that does not suit me, and they have really loyalized me, I always buy there, I check their pages and I have had a good experience" (S1, S2 and S3).

"I think so, I put myself in the place of the people behind it, some of whom don't have free time in the production area and the fabrics; and more or less I see that because my aunt manufactures pajamas so I see the whole process, so I put myself in the other's place and say maybe they are busy, but it is good that they follow up on an after-sales service" (S1).

The above results indicate similarities with Kearns and Hair (2008), Ma, Gu and Liu (2017), Rodríguez (2014), Vega and Bermúdez (2019) and Luis et al (2015) regarding the loyalty of the customer who expects to be served in the same way as when the sale began, analyzing the decision-making made by a small business when faced with a problem, product change or possible request for a refund of money that most of it is not offered as an initiative in micro-enterprises, being a point that could enhance the confidence determined by the clients.

In addition, the results showed the importance of informing about this type of after-sales service in terms of any inconvenience with the garment, since users are often unaware, and this can be an opportunity to build loyalty and learn more about the buyers.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research carried out determines certain positive factors about the perception in women's clothing micro-enterprises such as: quality of care, quality of the fabric, veracity of images of the products, differential value of the garments and tolerance. Among the negative factors were obtained: distrust and poor attention to queries, these incur the qualities that this type of business must meet for the final purchase of the users since the results indicated the experiences of the users both in the studied brand as previous experiences in similar businesses.

With respect to the variable on the quality of the information, having different results depending on the age difference of the interviews, it was possible to obtain that according to the age range they take much into account the descriptions of materials and at the same time they are visual; because they are not carried away only by the first image or what the product may describe, but are more analytical in making decisions when making a purchase. In addition, the knowledge of sizing could be appreciated since, according to the experiences of the users, most micro-enterprises handle standard sizes due to their low level of production, being attracted by a photo of a model with the product that has physical measurements similar to the person who wishes to acquire the garment.

Regarding the speed of response, they are more tolerant since there were participants who had acquaintances who had also started micro-enterprises and knew the work process, the time and effort it takes, which could cause a delay in responding to their inquiry. Regarding the updated information, all the interviewees prioritized this point since they have had cases where they wanted the product but could not acquire it because it was out of stock, therefore it was also important for them to know the purchase process, especially in users who did not consume much. In micro-enterprises, therefore, at the time of choosing the price, they analyzed the shipping cost and the final price of the garment in different stores. Additionally, it was evidenced that depending on the service provided, they were willing to pay as if they were buying in a retail store, feeling more comfortable buying in a microenterprise because of how warm the treatment of the saleswomen is and because it is more personalized, unlike a purchase in a large store.

Additionally, it was also possible to gather that this type of business does not offer a guarantee for its products, which would be a differential value that could generate greater confidence for the choice of users and thus be able to make more sales. As for whether the product can be exchanged or returned, there were users who mentioned that due to the small size of these stores, it did not even occur to them that they could provide this service after the sale, showing that the users who had the need to request some type of exchange or return had a positive experience in the brand and negative experiences in other small businesses.

Among the limiting factors of the investigation was the current situation of the Covid 19 pandemic, which prevented personal interviews from being carried out, so telephone calls were used; likewise, there were also refusals from prospective candidates due to the bad experience with the product and the lack of time or lack of interest in an interview.

Finally, future studies are proposed in the field of micro-enterprises that sell women's clothing and how they affect traditional trade; in this way, motivate researchers to carry out more articles about the consumer's perception of women's clothing.

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PhD Research Papers

Inside a Métis Community: Space, Collective Trauma, and the Impact of Colonialism

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Abstract: With Katherena Vermette's novel *The Break* (2016) as a case study, this paper analyses a narrative that portrays an attempt of an Indigenous Canadian community to reclaim its voice, identity, and space. The plot is centred around the reconnection with land and culture, while tackling the complicated topic of epistemic violence inside Métis Canadian communities. The novel's title already frames the narrative and the importance of space in this story and in Indigenous cultures: indeed, the 'break' is the name of the land where the sexual assault takes place. This word is used to symbolize and anticipate the 'brokenness' that will define the narration: sexual violence creates a crack inside an individual, but also in society. On a more metaphorical level, the 'break' symbolizes a fracture that Indigenous communities have experienced in their personal and cultural histories and that has led to intergenerational cycles of violence. It is a metaphor of how Indigenous spaces and cultures have been shattered and violated, both physically and symbolically, by white colonialism. Throughout the story the characters are confronting the epistemic violence consequential to colonialism that has created a division within and between them, while they try to reunite with their own identities and one another through acts of 'resurgence.' Despite *The Break* is highly characterized by trauma and 'brokenness', this paper highlights how its powerful narrative deals with the possibility of healing from intergenerational trauma and of breaking cycles of violence that have been imposed on Indigenous communities.

Keywords: Indigenous studies, Intergenerational trauma, Sexual violence, The Break, Katherena Vermette

1. Introduction

In Katherena Vermette's critically acclaimed novel *The Break* (2016) the reader encounters a layered narrative structure that depicts the current living situation of Métis people in Winnipeg, Manitoba. At the centre of the story is a Métis family (see Figure 1) rocked by the tragic rape of one of their youngest daughters, Emily, and their struggle in trying to come to terms with the event. Through an ensemble-structured storytelling composed of ten different voices that alternate with each other, the author, a Métis woman as well, weaves a harrowing and intricate narrative that recounts Emily's sexual assault and its aftermath from multiple perspectives, including the perpetrator's one.

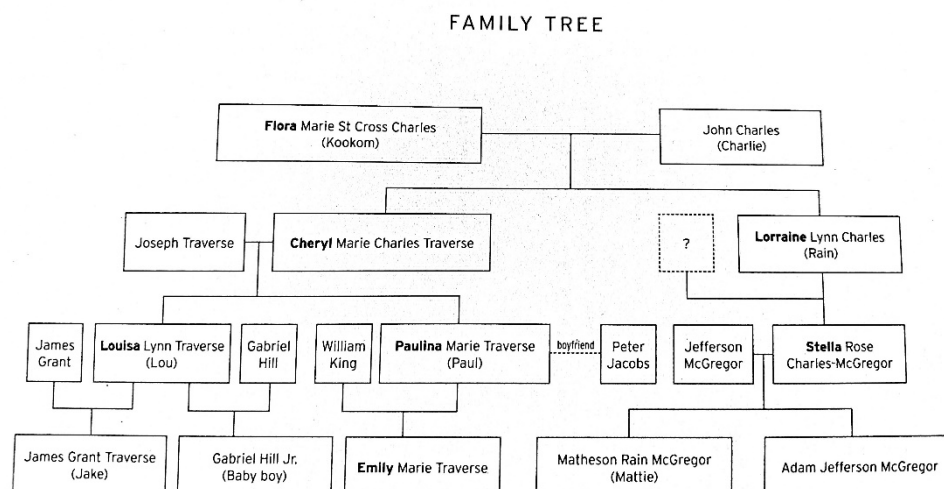


Figure 1: Family Tree, *The Break*

It is frequent in Indigenous communities and families to experience violence as a shared trauma, in which all members of the 'unit' participate, willingly or not. This form of experiencing violence doubtlessly has a stronger impact, as an event affecting one individual reverberates on entire communities. Nonetheless, it can become a strength when the main victim of the violence is trying to heal – as they have the support of the entire family/community and are helped and enabled by it. This idea of sharing a burden (but also of equally

distributing the healing aspects of it, rendering the community like a sort of ‘hive mind’) is strongly related to the Indigenous connection with space and land. This encapsulates both city and nature/reserve as spaces that today are equally inhabited by Indigenous people (Hanson, 2019). Emily’s grandmother, Cheryl, highlights this by comparing her family to a pack of wolves: “Wolves teach humility – they teach that we are all in this together, all a part of the same whole. If something happens to one of them, they all feel it. Cheryl breathes out deep and warm, breathes in Emily’s pain and gives her back all the strength she has” (Vermette, 2016). During an interview, the author points out how crucial it was to her that her story talked “about these legacies that I think many people, many Indigenous women, can relate to. And [...] [that it talked] about the capabilities, and especially the fundamental necessity, of family and community in order to keep everyone strong” (Medley and Vermette, 2016). While conversing with Métis scholar Aubrey Jean Hanson instead, Vermette discusses the significance of a person’s link to the space they come from and inhabit, which has even more value for Indigenous authors:

You understand a person based on where they come from. You understand me based on understanding how I grew up. If you don’t know how I grew up, and where I grew up, and my place in the world, you understand much less about me. So that’s what I did. I think that’s what many Indigenous artists do [i.e. discuss space and an individual’s relation with it]. Many artists of all cultures do that in some way or another. It’s the idea of defining yourself and doing that form of introducing. (Hanson and Vermette, 2020)

The author believes that space defines us culturally and that the connection we have with it shapes the way we enter society and more generally the world. This becomes especially true inside Indigenous communities, where their spirituality resides greatly in the physical spaces they inhabit. In a way, the two also mirror each other. The episode of the sexual assault itself is tightly linked to concepts of space, both physical and metaphorical, but also to the practice of renaming and reconnecting with it by the people that inhabit it. Indigenous communities have always considered nature and the environment as a sacred space, which has nonetheless been conquered, destroyed, and violated by western white imperialism. Indigenous spaces, aside from being linked to nature, have also been transferred over the bodies of their people, and especially over those that belong to women, non-binary, and Two-spirit individuals. These bodies and natural/urban spaces have become sites of conquest and violence by the hands of white imperialism in North America, with the aim to expropriate them from the Indigenous communities they belong to. In the novel there is a strong characterization of space from the beginning, quite literally in the title: the Break is in the author’s words “a piece of land just west of McPhillips Street. A narrow field about four lots wide that interrupts all the closely knit houses on either side and cuts through every avenue from Selkirk to Leila, that whole edge of the North End” (Vermette, 2016). Crucially, it acts also as the setting for the rape that opens the novel. It is then emphasized from the start that space, land, and nature play a vital part in the development of the narrative. The opening of the novel progresses with a detailed description of the Break itself, providing a socio-cultural context to its existence and location in the geography of Winnipeg. It is noticeable in the author’s choice of words how the Break divides the North End in a manner that almost feels violent, employing the terms ‘cut’ and ‘interrupts.’ It’s not depicted as a welcoming space, but as a land that is connected to a complex cultural history that belongs to the Indigenous people who live in the neighbourhood that it so drastically divides in two.

2. Reclaiming Spaces of Trauma Through Grounded Normativity

It is crucial to notice that it is Stella, Emily’s cousin, who had named this space such. Due to the location of her house on the very edge of the Break she bears witness to the aforementioned rape. This act of giving a name and an identity to an empty natural space fits within a complex postcolonial cultural wave that sees Indigenous people re-appropriating stolen land through the reversing and revising of settler-led renaming. The process of naming spaces, colonial spaces especially, is a powerful act of reassertion of control over lands that are and have always been Indigenous at heart and at the same time another way of showing how deep is the connection that their people have with any kind of space they inhabit. As Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson notes, “[e]very piece of North America is Indigenous land regardless of whether it has a city on top of it, or it is under threat, or it is coping with industrial development [...] Reserves are colonial constructs, as are urban communities” (2017).

Even though the Break is an empty space of Hydroelectrical land and as Carleigh Barker underlines “[it] is defined in settler terms – land as empty and valueless until validated by electricity” (2016), the way that Stella names it, is highly symbolic of her familial and cultural story and history of intergenerational colonial trauma. It

goes back to the terra nullius concept over which Canada was founded in the first place. Indeed, the name of the space and title of the book have a symbolical meaning which discloses what is at the centre of the plot: the physical and psychological 'brokenness' of Métis people and more generally of Indigenous populations in Canada and North America. The fact that the place where the violence at the centre of the narrative takes place is called 'the Break' is crucial to understand what the effects of rape and colonial violence on Indigenous communities have been. In every context, sexual assault is an event that has the capability of breaking an individual, but in this particular instance it also symbolizes a split, a crack in society or more specifically in a community, which takes physical shape in the real, empirical space of the Break and in Stella's resistant action of naming it as such. Therefore, the title signals from the start the strong presence in Indigenous people's lives of the history of colonialism and residential schools in Canada, bringing to the surface unwritten and untold realities of 'unspeakableness' and intergenerational trauma.

The Break creates a contrast between the natural and the urban space in Winnipeg. This stark fracture is repeated in the wider Canadian landscape, where we see a fundamental interruption between the city and the reservation. Even though the Break at first sight creates a physical division between these spaces, they are extremely connected with one another in Indigenous cultures, and chiefly in this instance for a Métis community for historical reasons. Settlers have created this divide that did not exist for Indigenous cultures before colonialism, as they lived in harmony with nature and one another. Additionally, Indigenous people have stereotypically been depicted by settlers as only living in reservations, far away from the city, rendering them inexistent or invisible in the urban space. This idea was born out of the desire of North American settlers to portray in their cultural propaganda (or quite literally make) Indigenous peoples as invisible and to ghettoize them in places distant from their new urban spaces. By doing this, settlers could avoid engaging with the Indigenous people who represented a living, breathing memory of their colonial past that comprised genocide and land appropriation/dispossession. This mentality is what then created the Canadian peacemaker myth that lives on to this day and is in dire need to be deconstructed, as for instance settler scholar Paulette Regan attempts to do in her work *Unsettling the Settler Within* (2010).

However, throughout her narrative, Vermette proves how this concept of division between the natural and the urban space is only a colonial construct, since Métis and more generally Indigenous people today equally inhabit both places and have tight links with either of social, cultural, spiritual, and historical nature. Susan Birkwood comments quite interestingly on this matter, by highlighting how

Vermette engages in a type of reclamation in the case of certain streets. A reader unfamiliar with the North End has only to take a close look at a map of the area to see that Stella Avenue and Jefferson Avenue cross McGregor Street, while Flora Avenue crosses Charles Street and runs parallel to Stella Avenue. Flora Charles is Emily's great-grandmother, and, as mentioned earlier, Stella Charles-McGregor is a witness to the assault. Stella's spouse is Jefferson McGregor, and Jefferson Avenue is one of the streets on the western edge of the Old North End. The character names derived from the grid put the Métis family on a map otherwise populated by colonial officials, settlers, and surveyors, and they have the potential to overwrite the settler names on the original map. (2019)

Vermette and her characters are re-appropriating their urban spaces as well, asserting their physical presence, since Métis people inhabit them and are an integral part of the city's socio-cultural landscape – more than colonizers. Despite it being a settler fabrication and a means of appropriating Indigenous spaces, this idea of separation between city and reservation/nature has created a more complex relationship with the land and with how Indigenous people perceive their cultural and spiritual worlds. Consequently, a topic often found in Indigenous cultural productions is the reconnection with nature and with spiritual roots that have been forcefully eradicated by settlers in Canada. Scholars Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Glen Coulthard designated as 'grounded normativity' and 'place-based solidarity' the physical and psychological movements that Indigenous people can practice to re-establish a link with nature and familial kinships. These terms refer

to the ethical frameworks provided by these Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge. Grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner. (Simpson and Coulthard, 2016)

An interesting episode where we can witness this desire to reunite and reconnect with nature is a dream sequence that Cheryl has. In this scene, she is dreaming of snowshoeing in the bush (the word they use to define wild spaces) and of following what the third-person narrator calls a "creature-woman-girl" (Vermette,

2016), as it is shapeshifting at a quick pace in her dream, from Louisa to Rain to a stranger, maybe Emily or her mother Flora – all women part of their family – to finally turn into something she cannot distinguish, a voice in the darkness that disappears in the bush. This voice continues to urge her to speed up and follow her, but Cheryl is too slow and cannot keep up. The dream creature ultimately merges with nature and fades away. This scene represents a buried desire for Cheryl to go back to the bush, to reconnect with nature, her family, and her culture. However, there is still something that prevents her from fully merging with the landscape in the same way the creature does. Even though in this passage it is expressed in a metaphorical way, Cheryl frequently voices her desire of wanting to reunite with nature and her culture in the novel. In this relationship she sees a potential for healing and rebirth – not just for herself but also for Emily.

In Indigenous narratives and in real-life the focus is often directed towards healing from violence through reconnecting with nature, culture, and the body. The potential for rebirth and cure lies in this revitalization, refuting the colonial mindset that has rendered violence endemic and intergenerational in the North End of Winnipeg. Indeed, there is a possibility for growth and redemption, for a fresh start and a way to break out of the cycle of violence – especially for those who have strong familial ties, matriarchal ones in particular. Having a well-structured safety net in the form of her family gives Emily the necessary space and support to recover from trauma. Sweat lodge ceremonies and other traditional healing methods are used by Indigenous people to re-establish sovereignty over their bodies and lands in the aftermath of colonialism and violence. Simpson mentions the use of healing circles as an example of ceremonial curative methods – especially in relation to experiences of sexual abuse. These are employed to emphasize truth-telling and accountability and to separate Indigenous people and women chiefly from concepts of victimhood that have been attributed to them. She highlights how traditional ceremony is embedded in all processes of healing and justice making:

The circle of healing involves support for all of the individuals and families involved. It involves the perpetrator witnessing the full impacts of his actions. It involves the larger community witnessing the full impacts of sexualized violence and an accounting for how we contribute to the epidemic levels of violence in our communities. It involves ceremony and Nishnaabeg practices of regeneration. It involves regenerating relationships. (Simpson, 2017)

Indeed, the final episode of the novel is set at the sweat lodge in the reservation and is crucial and symbolic for the themes and the structure of the book, as it creates a narrational full circle: on the one hand, the story begins with a detailed description of the space where trauma takes place, an area that feels like a wasteland and is associated with heavy words linked to concepts of violence; on the other hand, it ends in another natural space that is, instead, welcoming and represents a place of healing and reconnection with culture, nature, the spirit world, and family. It is quite thought-provoking that this episode's narrative is told through Cheryl's point of view, exactly when we are discussing the theme of reconnecting with nature again: "Completely soaked, she crawls out into the bright day, dirt sticking to her knees. She stands tall and stretches her back out in the sun. She's spent, refreshed, and starving" (Vermette, 2016). Even though the experience of the sweat lodge is intense and tiring, it is "refreshing" and represents a symbolical rebirth, as she "crawls out" from the darkness of the lodge "into the bright day." The process of reconnecting with culture and her roots is equally complicated, as it brings her back to her origins and is an important part of re-affirmation for Indigenous people as inhabitants of those spaces that have been stolen by settlers. The experience of the sweat lodge is extremely physical in itself and allows the people practicing it to purify, to cleanse both physically and mentally, and to re-establish a more intimate and spiritual link with their own body. This practice is traditionally used in Indigenous communities as a psychotherapeutic tool to facilitate "spiritual and psychological balance" (Smith, 2005), but also to construct cultural identity and social cohesion.

Vermette frames the novel with this circular narrative that leaves the possibility of healing open for the main characters. As Paulina, Emily's mother, bluntly puts it: "We're fucked up but not fucked [...] I'm going to give up feeling so hopeless. Or at least, I am going to try to feel hopeful as much as I can" (Vermette, 2016). The author highlights how space and indigeneity are tightly linked with one another and what is their relevance in the shaping of the narrative of Métis life in Canada. By practicing this reconnection Indigenous people rebuild their spaces and bodies, both physically and metaphorically, and heal from trauma. Even though the title of this novel is *The Break*, and the narrative is indeed highly characterized by trauma and 'brokenness,' this is regardless a powerful story of how it is still possible to heal from intergenerational trauma and to break out of cycles of violence. However, throughout the novel there is another distinct division that is constantly perceived between the women and the men inside the community. It appears that this separation is sometimes also reflected in the spaces that they inhabit – like there is an indirect 'gendering' of them. The women live in the city, but still feel a connection to the bush and want to re-embrace that space, as shown in Cheryl's desires. On

the other hand, the men live in the ‘rez’ – short for reservation – and are detached from urban life, but most importantly from the rest of the family unit that becomes mainly consisting of women. Since space has a significant cultural and spiritual value, it is crucial to pay attention to this division that has taken shape inside the communities and families, with men and women almost completely separated. Cheryl emphasizes it when thinking about her husband Joe, who has chosen to stay in the bush, separated from his family: “Yes, she should call Joe. He would want to know. He will say it’s the city, the evil city, and they should have all stayed with him in the bush. Cheryl will want to tell him he should’ve stayed with his family no matter where they were, but she won’t” (Vermette, 2016). Nonetheless, at the end of the book there is an attempt, from the women especially, to reconnect with the men of the family and recreate shared spaces for the entire unit, through the experience of the sweat lodge. From both groups there is a desire to reconnect with the space that they do not inhabit and to also reunite their families into a single unit, in order to practice resurgence together.

3. The Meanings of ‘Resurgence’ and ‘Reconciliation’

I have been careful with using the terms resurgence and reconciliation so far, as they both hold stratified connotations for Indigenous people and settler Canadians, having been respectively coined by the two. Since the findings and the 94 ‘calls to action’ of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) were presented in 2015, the critical and academic discussion on these terms has become more and more convoluted and controversial. The TRC was established as part of the IRS Settlement Agreement,¹ with a mandate to inform settler Canadians about what had happened in these government-sanctioned institutions. The Commission travelled around Canada and documented over a span of six years (2008 to 2015) the stories and truths of survivors or of other people who had been in some way affected by the IRS. The final report determined that residential schools had had an apocalyptic impact on Indigenous lives and had participated in a prolonged attempt to physically and culturally wipe out indigeneity from Canada, causing genocide and erasure on several levels.

Even so, the work of the TRC has been highly criticized and it is not believed to have made up for all the damage done, as it was too concerned with the reconciliation of Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians. Scholar Keavy Martin argues that the concept of reconciliation itself relies upon a form of amnesia that entails “a fixation upon *resolution* that is not only premature but problematic in its correlation with *forgetting*” (2009) and therefore places an excessive focus on the desire of the settler to atone for its mistakes. The word reconciliation – picked by settler Canadians – places excessive emphasis on a desired harmony between dominant and minority cultures, setting aside the Indigenous need for re-empowerment and self-representation. Therefore, Indigenous people and critics have begun to employ the more appropriate term ‘resurgence,’ which

unlike reconciliation, is a socio-cultural movement and theoretical framework that concentrates on regeneration within Indigenous communities. It validates Indigenous knowledges, cultures, histories, ingenuity, and continuity. Resurgence is an Indigenizing impulse; it acknowledges colonialism and domination through resistance but it does not focus solely on colonialism as the most important concern. Instead, [...] [it] focuses on Indigenous communities as sites of power and regeneration. [...] [it] does not focus primarily on relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. (Hanson, 2017)

Hanson stresses how important it is to distinguish resurgence from decolonization, since the former focuses on “the process of nurturing Indigenous communities and revitalizing Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing” (2020), whereas the latter entails understanding and then taking apart the whole concept of colonialism itself. Resurgence becomes a way for Indigenous people to not be defined by their colonial trauma and histories, instead it develops into a revitalization of their cultural and spiritual values through artistic

¹ “The largest class action settlement in Canadian history to date, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) recognized the damage inflicted on Indigenous peoples by residential schools in Canada and established a multi-billion-dollar fund to help former students in their recovery. The IRSSA, which came into effect in September 2007, has five main components: the Common Experience Payment, Independent Assessment Process, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Commemoration, and Health and Healing Services.” (Tabitha de Bruin, “Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement,” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified January 16, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-residential-schools-settlement-agreement#:~:text=Schools%20Settlement%20Agreement-,The%20largest%20class%20action%20settlement%20in%20Canadian%20history%20to%20date,former%20students%20in%20their%20recovery>)

expression. Simpson adds the adjective 'radical' to resurgence, however with the meaning of 'root' and not 'extremist,' aiming to embody her ancestral Nishnaabeg energy this way. To her,

[r]adical resurgence requires a deeply critical reading of settler colonialism and Indigenous response to the current relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state. Radical requires us to critically and thoroughly look at the roots of the settler colonial present—capitalism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and anti-Blackness. Radical requires us to name dispossession as the meta-dominating force in our relationship to the Canadian state, and settler colonialism as the system that maintains this expansive dispossession. (Simpson, 2017)

At the foundation of the concept of resurgence she situates a strong intersectional and interdisciplinary approach, which intends to dismantle western colonialism both critically and in practice. Above all, resurgence must concern itself with generating grounded normativity, the reattachment of Indigenous bodies to the land and its spirituality – whether these lands are urban or natural does not matter – by creating non-hierarchical relationships with them (Simpson, 2017). Inside the concept of radical resurgence is enclosed the notion of self-determination of Indigenous people, which is about “a vision and struggle for restructuring relations of domination” (Kuokkanen, 2019) especially in the political discourse with the state, which has always been characterized by deep inequalities. Indigenous self-determination is then a practice that aims to rebuild “the fundamental structural relation of settler colonialism as violent dispossession that extends to Indigenous lands and (women’s) bodies” (Kuokkanen, 2019).

Meanwhile, there is a need for settler Canadians to dismantle the peacemaker myth they have been hiding behind. This has become an epitomizing characteristic of settler Canadian culture, a much preferable choice to acknowledging the damage done and the trauma stemmed from colonialism in North America. Regan underlines how Canadians have been retreating to the peacemaker myth to cast themselves “as heroes on a mythical quest to save Indians” (2010), a move that denies the collective responsibility behind the treatment reserved to Indigenous peoples. According to Regan, there is a need for the descendants of settler Canadians to indeed ‘unsettle the settler within,’ to dismantle all the colonial beliefs at the core of western cultures that have created injustices. This would enable not only Indigenous people, but also settler Canadians to finally break free of intergenerational cycles of colonial violence.

4. Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this paper, the concepts of resurgence and grounded normativity are at the basis of Vermette’s novel, even though they are never directly mentioned. The Charles-Traverse family embarks on a healing path that is characterized by the theoretical frame that sustains the concept of resurgence. The sweat lodge episode that closes the story epitomizes the idea and employment of grounded normativity in order to regain the connection with the land and heal from colonial trauma, symbolized by the collective trauma that Emily’s assault generates. The characters progress toward a reconnection not only with the physicality of their bodies and of nature, but with the cultural and spiritual spaces they inhabit in the city and in the bush. Cheryl and her daughters Lou and Paul represent this resilient attitude more than anyone else in the novel: the manner in which they are characterized emphasizes their strength and persistence in enduring trauma, as they bend but not break under its pressure. This can be noticed in one of Paul’s chapters, when she learns about her daughter’s hospitalization: “When Paul hangs up the phone, she doesn’t think, just starts moving. That’s what Paul does when something happens, she just goes. That’s what they all do [...]. They just go, figure out what needs doing and do it, don’t think too much, don’t feel anything, and don’t freak out, just go. Take care of your family. Go” (Vermette, 2016). Lou uses similar words to express resilience, by saying “I turn off my brain. Don’t let myself feel, don’t let myself cry. I just go” (Vermette, 2016). Their endurance is what ultimately enables them to dismantle the oppressor’s rule since, in Audre Lorde’s words, the master’s tools would never dismantle the master’s house. By practicing grounded normativity, they set themselves on a healing path to recover their power and identities as Métis women, not in relation (or opposition) to the heteropatriarchy imposed by colonialism, but to non-hierarchical kinships with the land.

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The Decades-Long Struggle of 'Comfort Women' for Justice

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Abstract: During World War II, several thousands of women were forced into sexual slavery, known as 'comfort women', by the Imperial Japanese Army in comfort stations throughout Asia. After the war, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East was established in 1946 to prosecute the Japanese war criminals, however, it was the 'victor's justice' and failed to adequately prosecute crimes related to the 'comfort women'. The truth of 'comfort women' remained untold in public until the victims started to speak about their experiences at the establishment of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Kim Hak-soon, a Korean 'comfort women', was testified about her experiences, and it resulted in encouraging other 'comfort women' to share their own experiences in 1990s. On the other hand, the Japanese government has continuously denied state responsibility for the 'comfort women'. In addition, between 1991 and 2001, the 'comfort women' from South Korea, China, the Philippines, Taiwan and the Netherlands filed 10 trials against the Japanese government in Japanese courts, however, all the cases were eventually dismissed. In 1996, the Japanese government established an Asian Women's Fund to provide compensation, medical welfare and letters of apology to the 'comfort women', however, the Fund has been criticised by the United Nations due to the lack of the admission of state responsibility. The debate over the 'comfort women' lasting to date has shown the complexity of the legal and political issues, causing continuing sufferings to the 'comfort women'. This research will analyse the historical context of the 'comfort women' to identify the reason why these victims are still not able to obtain their rights to reparation and an effective remedy. It will also examine to what extent the development of international law on sexual slavery can contribute to enhance the right to justice and the right to reparation of the 'comfort women'. I argue that the Japan's acknowledgement of violations of international law and the inclusion of a victim-oriented and gendered approach into the reparations are crucial.

Keywords: Sexual slavery, Sexual violence, Comfort women, Victims' rights, Right to reparation

1. Introduction

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (1998) reported that the Japanese Imperial Army forced over 200,000 women into sexual slavery in 'comfort stations' during World War II across Asia. It was estimated that 80% of whom were from Korea and the rest were from China, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, Japan, Taiwan, East Timor and other territories occupied by Imperial Japan. Within the 'comfort women' system, these victims were deprived of freedom and control over their autonomy, and subjected to rules on their reproductive health. After World War II, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) was established in 1946, however, Henry (2013) argued that it failed to sufficiently prosecute crimes related to 'comfort women' since the Tribunal resulted in the 'victor's justice'.

It was not until 1990s that the 'comfort women' begun to speak about their experiences in public. According to Soh (1996), along with the increasing concern over the issue on the sexual violence in international law due to the prosecutions of sexual offenders in the *ad hoc* International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, there emerged a group of progressive Korean women who started questioning on the 'comfort women'. At the creation of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (Korean Council) in 1990, Kim Hak-Sun officially testified and revealed the personal experience as 'comfort women' for the first time. The 'comfort women' redress movement can be seen in international terrains. For instance, the 'comfort women' has been put on agenda of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (1996 and 1998) and the United Nations General Assembly (2022).

On the other hand, the Japanese government has constantly denied state responsibility. Japan has argued that the victims' right to claim has been expired in pursuit of the post-war peace treaties and international agreements based on the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty (Furuya, 2018). Furthermore, from 1991 to 2001, the 'comfort women' filed 10 lawsuits against Japan before the domestic tribunals, but all the cases were eventually dismissed. In 1996, the Japanese government established the Asian Women's Fund to provide reparation to the 'comfort women', however, the Fund has been criticised by the United Nations (UN) due to the lack of the admission of state responsibility (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1996 and 1998). More recently, although 34th Civil Division of the Seoul Central District Court of South Korea (2021) provided the judgment granting human rights exceptions to sovereign immunity, 15th Civil Division Seoul Central District Court of South Korea (2021) reversed the judgement in April 2021, granting sovereign immunity to Japan based on the traditional view of international law.

McDougall (2013) criticises that the 'comfort women' system is the crime of sexual slavery, involving both chattel slavery and forced labour, which violated international law. Besides, although Shin (2016) asserted that international human rights law helped the 'comfort women' with promoting the reparation demands at the UN, the redress movement of 'comfort women' over 70 years has showed the complexity of the legal and political issues, causing additional harm to the 'comfort women'. This research will analyse the historical context of the 'comfort women' to identify what have been preventing the 'comfort women' from justice to be delivered. It will also examine to what extent the development of international law can contribute to enhance the right to justice and the right to reparation of the 'comfort women'.

I argue that Japan has completely ignored a peremptory norm of prohibition of slavery and should acknowledge that it bears state responsibility for the systematic sexual slavery of the 'comfort women'. Japan must incorporate a victim-oriented and gendered approach in reparation measures for the 'comfort women' considering the evolving principle in international law regarding a remedy and a reparation for victims of serious human rights violations.

2. 'Comfort Women' in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East

During World War II, numerous women were taken to the comfort stations across Asia by the Japanese Imperial Army, military and civilian police and their private agents. These victims were abducted, falsely recruited, or otherwise coerced or deceived into the 'comfort women' (Dolgopol and Paranjape, 1994). Argibay (2003) and McDougall (2013) held that the 'comfort women' were sexually enslaved under threat of severe abuse, as a result, these victims suffered the deprivation of freedom and loss of their autonomy. Most of the comfort stations were managed by private owners, however, effectively controlled by the Imperial Japanese Army and used particularly by the military officers and its civilian employees (Dolgopol and Paranjape, 1994).

After World War II, the IMTFE was created in 1946 to prosecute Japanese war criminals, being conferred jurisdiction to try perpetrators committed crimes against peace, crimes against humanity and crimes against the laws and customs of war. In the IMTFE, only 28 major Japanese 'A' class war criminals who were charged with crimes against peace were prosecuted. On the other hand, 'B' and 'C' class Japanese war criminals were prosecuted in the Asia-Pacific region by the Allied Powers (Piccigallo, 1979). The indictments of the IMTFE illustrated that sexual and gender-based crimes were committed by the Japanese soldiers, including the 1937 'Rape of Nanking' which several thousands of local people were raped during the Nanking invasion by the Imperial Japanese Army (Brook, 2001). However, sexual and gender-based crimes were not clearly stipulated as a separated crime in the Tokyo Charter and included in 'inhumane treatments' or 'failure to respect family honour and rights' (International Military Tribunal for the Far East, 1981). Under the laws of war, the sexual and gender-based crimes have been recognised as crimes against honour, hence, the victims' actual physical and psychological damage caused by violence were generally disregarded.

Contrary to the 1937 'Rape of Nanking,' the issue of 'comfort women' was fully removed from the IMTFE's agenda. Henry (2013) points out that the IMTFE mainly focused on the responsibility of Japan for waging a war against Allied Powers. In this regard, I contend that it was because not only the focus on the charge of waging a war, but also the 'comfort women' were recognised and tolerated as 'military prostitutes' as if there were victims' voluntary participation in the name of the army. Originally, the establishment of comfort stations corresponded to the order of the Japanese military authorities, aiming at reducing anti-Japanese sentiment stem from the outrage at mass rape committed against local people by the Japanese military and preventing the Japanese military personnel from venereal diseases (Yoshimi, 1995). This motivation well represents a conventional military culture existed anywhere in wars, in which sexual and gender-based crimes were often tolerated and women were generally seen as being inferior to men. In the 'comfort women' case, this culture was reinforced by institutionalising the 'comfort women' system as a favoured policy of the Imperial Japanese Army, calling them as 'military prostitutes.'

On the other hand, regarding the 'B' and 'C' class Japanese war criminals, the judgements of the Batavia war crimes tribunals held in the Dutch East Indies are quite significant because the Japanese military officers were found guilty of rape and/or forcing the Dutch 'comfort women' into prostitution (Orentlicher, 2020). However, I argue that these trials showed the existence of discrimination between the victims in the colonial era in which colonial powers prioritised the protection of their nationals. Consequently, these trials failed to address many cases involving Indonesian 'comfort women' who had suffered as the Dutch 'comfort women' did.

3. 'Comfort Women' Lawsuits Filed in the Domestic Courts in Japan

Since the 'comfort women' broke the silence in 1990s, 10 'comfort women' lawsuits were filed by the 'comfort women' from South Korea, China, the Philippines, Taiwan, the Netherlands in the domestic courts in Japan. Through the series of lawsuits, these victims have sought to demand compensation and an apology from Japan, however, all the cases were finally dismissed by the courts based on statute of limitations and the expiration of the individual right to claim against Japan in accordance with the post-war peace treaties and bilateral agreements adopted by Japan. Nonetheless, fact-findings were recognised by the courts in 8 of these lawsuits (Tsubokawa and Omori, 2011). For instance, in *Asia-Pacific War Korean Victims' Compensation Claims* case, the first 'comfort women' lawsuit filed by Kim Hak-sun and 24 other victims and 15 family members of deceased victims, the court found that the Japanese military involved and controlled all aspects of the acquisition and transportation of the 'comfort women' and the establishment and management of comfort stations. As a result, numerous women were taken away against their will by fraud or intimidation. Even comfort stations managed by private owners were effectively controlled by the Imperial Japanese Army as they set terms of services and conducted the hygiene management (*Asia-Pacific War Korean Victims' Compensation Claims Case*, 2001).

On the other hand, the domestic courts continued to deny the claims of the 'comfort women' under Article 3 of the Hague Convention as well as customary international law and other conventions such as the 1930 Forced Labour Convention and the 1910 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children. The courts constantly remarked that, in order for international law to serve as the basis of individual claims, it should be clearly stipulated in the convention, and that the intention of the State Parties to establish such right should be confirmed (*Asia-Pacific War Korean Victims' Compensation Claims Case*, 2001, *Philippine Sexual Slavery Case*, 1998, and *Dutch Ex-Prisoners of War and Civilian Detainees Case*, 1998).

In comparison, the ruling of the district court in *Kampu* case is the only judgement that the Japanese court found in favour of the 'comfort women'. This case was brought before the Yamaguchi Prefectural Court in 1992 by Korean war victims including 3 'comfort women'. The 'comfort women' plaintiffs demanded an official apology and compensation from Japan (*Kampu Case*, 1998). Significance of this trial was that the Court found a cause of action in tort based on the failure of Japan's legislative duty, namely, the absence of the necessary law to compensate the victims suffered during the aggression of Imperial Japanese Army in pursuant to the Japanese State Liability Act (*Kampu Case*, 1998 and Hanafusa, 2021).

Regarding the fact-finding, the Court concluded that, although the credible evidence showing how the plaintiffs became 'comfort women' nor the details of the location of comfort stations were not presented, the testimonies were reliable enough considering their poverty-stricken origin, advanced age, and the fact that they had to hide their experiences until this proceeding. Therefore, the Court admitted that the 'comfort women' plaintiffs were taken away by means of deception and violence, and forced to have sexual intercourse with Japanese soldiers in the comfort stations which was controlled by the Imperial Japanese Army (*Kampu Case*, 1998).

Kampu case is notable because the district court focused on the continuing suffering of the 'comfort women' and demonstrated that the lack of specificity in their testimonies in relation to sexual and gender-based violence did not undermine its credibility (Tsubokawa and Omori, 2011). Besides, the court considered the 'comfort women' as severe human rights violations left behind for decades and attempted to deliver the ruling as close as a legislative order with the prospect that a necessary legislation would be enacted (*Kampu Case*, 1998). Nevertheless, it can be argued that this judgement showed minimum endorsement of human rights, since legal responsibility of Japan for the human trafficking were not adequately addressed. This case was eventually dismissed at the Supreme Court in 2001 (Tsubokawa and Omori, 2011).

Given that all the cases were eventually dismissed by the domestic courts based on statute of limitations and the expiration of the individual right to claim against Japan under the peace treaties and bilateral agreements, I argue that the courts should have considered the continuing suffering of the 'comfort women' and the principle of non-application of statute of limitations for serious human rights violations which has been increasingly present in human rights treaties (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). Furthermore, serious violations of the prohibition of slavery, a peremptory norm of international law, entail state responsibility, cannot be derogated by such peace treaties and agreements with economic nature that human rights violations of the 'comfort women' were not particularly addressed (McDougall, 2013).

4. 'Comfort Women' as Sexual Slavery

Slavery has prohibited prior to World War II, since the 1926 Slavery Convention was established, defining slavery in Article 1(1) as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised' (League of Nations, 1926). This definition has become authoritative in international law, as evidenced by its reproduction in Article 7(a) of the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery as well as in Article 7(2)(c) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Economic and Social Council, 1956 and International Criminal Court, 1998). As a result, the prohibition of slavery constitutes a principle of customary international law and has attained *jus cogens* status (Rassam, 1999). Namely, the violation of prohibition of slavery constitutes a breach of *erga omnes* obligation, which legally binds international community (Rassam, 1999).

Considering the developments in international law, the 'comfort women' can constitute crimes against humanity of sexual slavery. Bellows (1999) stated that the widespread or systematic enslavement of civilians has been recognised as a crime against humanity over decades as Article 5 of the IMTFC's Tokyo Charter and Article 6 of the Nurnberg Charter of the International Military Tribunal contained enslavement and deportation to slave labour as crimes against humanity. Moreover, sexual slavery has clearly stipulated as a separated crime against humanity in Article 7(g) of the Rome Statute of the ICC (International Criminal Court, 1998). According to the Elements of Crimes, there are 4 elements of a crime against humanity of sexual slavery; 1) 'deprivation of liberty' by the perpetrator, 'exercising any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership' over a person or persons; 2) 'a sexual nature' of acts which deprive victims' autonomy; 3) 'a widespread or systematic' nature of the attack; 4) *mens rea*, which is the intention or the state of mind of the perpetrator that the act was likely to occur (International Criminal Court, 2011). In the 'comfort women' case, these victims were taken away against their own will and deprived their liberty and their bodily and sexual autonomy due to the continuing offences by the Japanese soldiers within the 'comfort women' system across Asia under the control of the Imperial Japanese Army. Consequently, these acts constitute a crime against humanity of sexual slavery, thus, not only the military and politicians who are the conductors of these crimes, but also the Japanese government bears state responsibility.

5. State Responsibility of Japan for the 'Comfort Women' in International Law

Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts reads that a State is responsible at the international level for internationally wrongful act and has a duty to provide 'full reparation' for the damage caused by its acts (International Law Commission, 2001). This principle can already be found in the decision of the Permanent Court of International Justice in the 1927 *Chorzów Factory* case (*Germany v. Poland*, 1927).

While the Japanese government has constantly denied state responsibility, it established the Asian Women's Fund in 1995 to express the acceptance of moral responsibility. Through the projects of the Fund, *tsugunai kin* (atonement money), medical welfare and/or an apology letter from the then Japanese Minister were planned to provide to the 'comfort women' in South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia and the Netherlands (Asian Peace National Fund for Women, 2004). However, the Fund failed to offer satisfactory and comprehensive reparation for the 'comfort women', ignoring the needs of these victims. For instance, these projects caused the internal struggle of the 'comfort women', splitting into the supporters and the opponents of the Fund, particularly in South Korean and Taiwan. Precisely, although it was established as a fund led by the Japanese government, the purpose was to raise *tsugunai kin* from the private sector and the projects were provided without the admission of the state responsibility. As a result, the 'comfort women' who received *tsugunai kin* resulted in being difficult position surrounded by the pressure and criticism from the public who demanded the state compensation (Soh, 2003).

Moreover, although the reparation programme should be provided directly to the victims, in Indonesia, for instance, the medical welfare programme was implemented not for the 'comfort women', but for the elderly in general (Ministry of Social Affairs Republic of Indonesia, 2006). Besides, the apology letters from the then Japanese Prime Minister were delivered only to the 'comfort women' who received *tsugunai kin*. In fact, the project in Indonesia largely reflected the consideration of the Indonesian government that the investigation and registration of the huge number of the 'comfort women' would be difficult and the dignity of the 'comfort women' and their families should be secured from the religious (Islamic) perspective (Asian Peace National Fund for Women, 2004). Additionally, it should be noted that the 'comfort women' in East Timor were excluded from the Fund's agenda. The compensation for the victims in East Timor has been ignored to date, because East Timor was not recognised as 'belligerent', but as a territory of a neutral country, in accordance with the 1951 San

Francisco Peace Treaty, since it returned to Portugal after Japan's defeat in World War II (Women's Active Museum on War and Peace, 2007). Consequently, a large number of 'comfort women' did not receive satisfactory reparation from Japan due to the lack of a victim-oriented approach in the negotiation process and the narrow scope of the reparation programme. The Fund symbolised how inter-state reparation programme can easily leave victims' needs behind.

6. The Need for Reparations With a Victim-Oriented and Gendered Approach

According to the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation, the full reparation must contain restitution, compensation, satisfaction, rehabilitation and guarantees of non-repetition (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). In order to provide the full reparation to the victims of wide-reaching violations, collective reparations, including moral reparation, can play a significant role to deliver restorative justice. Furthermore, considering the ideology underpinning the 'comfort women', namely the gender inequality that unfortunately exists in many societies, including Japan, the reparation for the 'comfort women' should go beyond compensation and includes transformative reparation together with structural changes. In a broad sense, merely compensating women according to their harm and restoring their pre-violence status may serve as the most limited option for material reparations, because there exists inequality between women's legal status and opportunities and those of men's in many societies (Rubio-Marin and Greiff, 2007). From this perspective, structural changes of societies such as legal and institutional reforms and establishing a prohibition of discrimination can contribute to excluding sex oppression.

As a result, a national reparation programme should be established by Japan through a special mechanism to address reparation for the 'comfort women', containing not only monetary compensation, but also symbolic and transformative reparation. In this regard, the participation of the 'comfort women' in the negotiation process of the reparation programme is crucial. Otherwise, it would not end up achieving the needs of the 'comfort women'. Furthermore, given the barriers that many societies place in the way of women's participation, the involvement of the victims in the negotiation process has a reparative impact, in addition to provide the insights to design more efficient reparation programme (Couillard, 2007). Moreover, implementing reparation measures which directly aim at individual victims should be primal, therefore, such measures are a prerequisite for transformative reparations (Greiff, 2006).

Consequently, rehabilitation programme should come first on the consideration of the continuing suffering caused to the 'comfort women' and their families as well as the actual damage they suffered. Especially, in the male-dominated societies to which the vast majority of the 'comfort women' belonged, these victims have tended to be rejected by their communities on their return. Furthermore, their families also suffered loss of loved ones, the stability of the family, and the ability to determine one's way of life (Rubio-Martin, 2009). By providing services and social benefits sensitive to the needs of the victims and their families, rehabilitation programme can be a future-oriented reparation. Moreover, symbolic reparation must include the verification of the fact in relation to the 'comfort women' together with the Japan's acknowledgement of state responsibility and the meaningful apology to the individual victims. The disclosure of relevant information is also important if it does not cause further harm to the victims and their families. Additionally, the memory preservation can assist in psychological healing of the 'comfort women' and their families by enhancing respect for them in their societies. In order to prevent the re-occurrence of further atrocities, the education for future generations regarding the 'comfort women' should be provided. Finally, Japan must recognise the underpinning ideas of the 'comfort women and girls' and address the challenges that exist in social structures that justify gender inequality.

7. Conclusion

I argue that Japan must consider the development of international law and acknowledge that it bears state responsibility for the systematic sexual slavery of the 'comfort women'. Japan should provide not only material reparation, but also symbolic and transformative reparation, involving the victims in the negotiation process, which have lacked to date. A certain restraint will be that the initial step to implement the satisfactory reparations will be Japan's acknowledgement of the crimes. Hence, international community will be required to support the victims by keeping demanding Japan to deliver justice and reparations to the 'comfort women', complying with the development of international law. The justice for the 'comfort women', which they have sought for nearly 80 years, can thus be achieved.

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Softboys in the age of Millennial Masculinity

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Abstract: The last decade has witnessed the rise of a new type of Hollywood film star: the softboy. Actors including Timothée Chalamet and Harry Styles all appeal to the stereotypical characteristics of this type—young, skinny, fashionable, clean-shaven, quirky, gentle and emotionally intelligent. By analysing a sample of mainstream media articles on the softboy published between 2015 and 2023, the following paper seeks to deepen our understanding of this influential internet type and the dominant stereotype of masculinity he undermines—what R. W. Connell termed hegemonic masculinity. More specifically, this paper explores the extent to which the softboy can be understood as the product of an overlapping matrix of demand from gay male and straight female film and television audiences. Within this matrix, the softboy emerges as the result of a delicate balancing act in which he avoids presenting either as too straight, too gay or too masculine. He achieves this balance through a range of strategies involving clothing choices, film role choices, choices about sharing his personal life with the public and a carefully curated public persona. Considering the softboy from a cultural materialist perspective, this paper argues that the affected personality traits and designed sexual ambivalence of the softboy can be understood as a response not of men themselves but of the entertainment industry to both the increased demand for this type from straight female audiences in the wake of the #MeToo movement and the increasingly recognised demand for this type from gay male audiences. For straight women, the softboy appears to have superseded the stereotype of the muscled, bearded, deep-voiced or emotionally unavailable man in the hierarchy of desire precisely because he resists being easily framed as an aggressor. Meanwhile, either by playing gay roles in films or pandering to a stereotypically gay aesthetic or set of behaviours, these actors appeal simultaneously to the gay male audience. This analysis therefore attempts to construe contemporary changes in the nature of masculinity as it is represented by the rise of the softboy film star in terms of fundamental changes in the market of desire.

Keywords: Softboy, #MeToo, Masculinity, Gay men, Women, Film and television

1. Introduction: Defining ‘Softboy’

The term softboy (or softboi) entered internet parlance almost a decade ago, yet has still not garnered any real attention within academia. It belongs to a broader internet diction which includes the pick-me girl, the hypebeast, the e-boy, the sad girl, the Tumblr boy, and the soy boy. In regard to their tone, these terms exist on the same plane as memes: while they may point to a truth about the world, they do so primarily for the purposes of amusement (hence, they are usually said tongue-in-cheek). Although the precise origin of the term softboy is difficult to trace, there is a general consensus that it was coined in 2015 to denote a variation on the fuckboy (Hanson 2015, Rowe 2015). In contrast with the fuckboy (typically a man with many sexual partners and little respect for women; similar to a player), the softboy purported to be caring, cultured and emotionally intelligent. However, implicit in this early use of the term was the expectation that he too would end up behaving like a fuckboy. This wolf in sheep’s clothing connotation lent early uses of the term a nefarious and deceptive undertone: one would be dismissed or mocked as a softboy, rather than lauded as one.

The use of the term softboy in this sense has been most famously deployed by Iona David, creator of the Instagram page @beam_me_up_softboi which has around 680,000 followers and is largely responsible for the proliferation of thousands of softboy memes (David 2019, Smith 2022). The page functions by posting anonymously submitted screenshots of women’s online encounters with softboys, the butt of the joke typically being the softboys’ embarrassing attempts to flirt by name-dropping indie bands, declaring themselves to be a feminist or attesting to their own emotional depth and maturity. For David, the softboy can be distilled into three characteristics: possessing a superiority complex, being emotionally exploitative and having alternative taste (Benwell 2019). This assessment is echoed by Ross (2017) who describes him as sinister, McMeekin and Morgan (2021) who describe him as prone to gaslighting, manipulation and coercion, and Strapagiel, in whose words the softboy “is, and always was, a fuckboy. The only difference is that he had a soft exterior and just enough of a hint of depth that you got tricked” (2019).

Despite these connotations of the term lingering on, recent years have seen the softboy largely ameliorated in the public consciousness. As Holt notes, “Now that the term is being tied to real celebrities, the concept has been redefined, dropping the whole idea that softboys are just disguised fuckboys. Instead they’ve been reclassified as guys with good intentions and a lucid understanding of their emotions” (2019). Holt is right to suggest a relation between this shift in the connotations of the term and the increased association of the softboy with specific celebrity figures (as opposed to the generalised stereotype it was initially coined to describe). The

most recent uses of the term are indeed often accompanied by an expansive cataloguing of softboy popstars or film stars. Alongside Timothée Chalamet and Harry Styles, those male celebrities now associated with the tag include Asa Butterfield, Alex Lawther, Zayn Malik, Evan Peters, Ross Lynch, Jaden Smith, Noah Centineo, Lucas Hedges, Frank Ocean, Steve Lacy, Cole Sprouse, Tom Holland, Ansel Elgort and Joe Keery, and in a peculiar sort of hagiography of the softboy, actors of a slightly older generation (including Paul Rudd, Michael Cera, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Jesse Eisenberg) are being invoked retrospectively as examples of softboys *avant la lettre*.

In terms of these actors' classification as softboys, their onscreen personas matter just as much as, and perhaps even more than, their real selves. For instance, in her discussion of Chalamet, Holt almost entirely avoids distinguishing between these two seemingly different representations of the actor, first observing how Chalamet displays vulnerability on social media platforms and in interviews, and then discussing how his "resume of soft and atypical performances has redefined the Hollywood male sex symbol as a cisgender guy coded in stereotypically female characteristics" (2019). The softboy characters Chalamet plays in *Call Me By Your Name* (2017), *Lady Bird* (2017), *Beautiful Boy* (2018), *Little Women* (2019) and *Bones and All* (2022) are indeed difficult to separate from his own celebrity persona, at least in the public's perception. Onscreen softboys are very rarely detestable and tend not to fit with the wolf in sheep's clothing use of the term. The softboy's morphing from online everyman to specific celebrity has undoubtedly informed this public amelioration of the term.

If a conclusive definition were to be offered of the softboy today, it would likely include five fundamental aspects: fashion sense, physicality, cultural interests, personality and attitude to women. According to media news sources, softboy fashion ranges from the cute to the gender-bending but has in common the feeling of being in some sense feminine. For Frantz, the typical softboy wears a cardigan and vintage tee, paints his nails and has a "floppy haircut" (2020) while for Strapagiel, it is "pastels, fluffy sweaters, florals" (2019). Yotka notes in a *Vogue* article on "softboy style" that velvet suits and black turtlenecks are typical softboy attire for red carpet appearances, and names Haider Ackermann as the most significant designer for the softboy aesthetic (2018). Largely in keeping with this aesthetic, the softboy's build is typically one that de-emphasises masculinity. He tends to be skinny, gaunt and waif-like and almost always clean-shaven. As Adamec notes, no longer are "six-pack abs and a grizzled beard the subject of teenage girls' adoration, but instead it's the tall, skinny gender-bending, dark-haired boys who steal their hearts" (2021). The softboy's cultural interests tend towards the alternative; according to McMeekin and Morgan he listens to Sufjan Stevens (2021). His personality is quirky, cringy, artsy or sweet (Frantz 2020, Holt 2019) and, perhaps most significantly, and in the largest pivot away from David's early definition of him, he is respectful of women.

The remainder of this paper explores how the softboy might be viewed as a response both to the #MeToo movement and the increasing recognition of gay male audiences within the entertainment industry. As above, this analysis is informed by mainstream media articles on the subject. In total, nineteen different new sources are referenced: *Buzzfeed News*, *Dazed*, *The Telegraph*, *Babe*, *Politico*, *Glamour*, *Vulture*, *The Guardian*, *Evie*, *Quartz*, *Into*, *Medium*, *The Irish Times*, *Hollywood Insider*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Out*, *L'Officiel*, *Gay Times* and *Vice*). The value of surveying such sources lies in the fact of their huge readerships: their engagement with the concept of the softboy both testifies to its prevalence in contemporary digital culture, and clarifies the various ways in which the softboy is actually considered. While the content of these articles may not be produced with longevity in mind (they are often written in the sensationalising tone of clickbait), they are nonetheless invaluable in providing a snapshot of ephemeral internet concepts like the softboy, which emerge rapidly into social media discourse and disappear just as quickly. Finally, while the focus here is predominantly on US and UK media sources, it should be noted that the softboy is by no means specific to these cultural spheres. For instance Tabanera (2019) identifies five softboy characters from recent Filipino cinema, while Darnige (2019) discusses the concept as it has emerged in French internet culture.

2. The Softboy's Dual Appeal

The history of different expressions of masculinity is immensely complex, and the historical uniqueness of the softboy's reckoning with masculinity ought not to be overstated—yet it seems that he is in many ways specific to our current moment. For instance, consider his generational specificity: the majority of the aforementioned actors are millennials, and the term softboy is most closely associated with and used by Gen Z. As Strapagiel reports, the softboy represents "a rejection of the traditional toxic masculinity by the younger generation" (2019). That is not to say the *effect* of the phenomenon does not go beyond these age groups. On the contrary, the impact of the softboy seems to have been much more widely felt. In one of the earliest accounts of the softboy, Rowe describes him as "the most rounded example of 21st century masculinity yet" (2015). Meanwhile Robertson, articulating a general disgruntlement about the prevalence of softboys for *Politico*, states that the

“rise of the softboy might have been easier for some American men to digest if it were contained to one corner of pop culture, but they’ve mounted a stunningly complete takeover” (2021). In this peculiarly fear-mongering analysis of the softboy, Robertson is referring mainly to the Billboard Hot 100’s Top 10, where he was dismayed to find Lil Nas X, Ed Sheeran and a collaboration between BTS and Coldplay. But he also suggests that even the US senator Jon Ossoff’s “boy-next-door charm and general visage itself recall Styles and Chalamet” (2021).

According to another commentator, “the softboy is just a new twist on a familiar type: the manicure-loving ‘metrosexuals’ of the early 2000s, or the alternative slackers played by Ethan Hawke in Gen X classics like *Reality Bites* and *Before Sunrise*” (Quartz 2021). But to consider the softboy as a 21st century echo of the metrosexual, the alternative slacker or even as comparable to gender-bending or sexually ambiguous pop stars like Kurt Cobain, David Bowie or Prince would be to neglect the crucial fact that the softboy, despite the cultural content he consumes, is not himself an expression of the alternative or marginal but rather of the mainstream. What renders the softboy specific to our contemporary moment is not only the basic fact of him being a less stereotypically masculine man, but rather the very extent of his visibility and cultural influence, and the way in which this is perceived as a major disruption to gender roles and the social order.

Taken together, the primary characteristics of the softboy seem almost specifically designed to appeal to straight women living in the post #MeToo era and to gay men living in the post liberation era. Today, sexual harassment is increasingly being named for what it is, becoming more frequently frowned upon by mainstream media and society, and resulting more often in penalisation or conviction. Articulating the widespreadness of sexual harassment has been central to the movement. As Srinivasan notes, the “most recent inflection point of American feminism, the #MeToo campaign of 2017, gained its motive force from the simple fact that all working women, or near enough, have experienced sexual harassment: lewd remarks, humiliation, groping, sexual threats, sabotage” (2021). It therefore makes sense at an intuitive level that the type of man being increasingly represented onscreen is physically unimposing and lacking in musculature, and is celebrated for being sweet, tender and respectful to women. A more sophisticated psychoanalytic reading of the post #MeToo woman is not necessary to see that this constitutes a paradigm shift in the perceived power dynamics between genders. The fact that traditional expressions of masculinity have gone out of favour today is not surprising. As Gannon puts it, following “the revelations of the #MeToo movement, it’s no wonder the idea of ‘traditional masculinity’ is being slowly crushed by its own toxicity” (2019). Likewise, for Strapagiel, “part of the point [of the softboy] seems to be to separate manhood from toxic masculinity, and things like aggression, violence, misogyny, and an anti-gay attitude” (2019).

Most mainstream media accounts of the softboy remain vague on the possible mechanisms through which this shift (from toxic to non-toxic) might actually occur. This paper proposes to consider the rise of the softboy not in terms of men’s individual or collective decision to alter their own behaviour (or at least how it is perceived) but rather as a change in the film industry’s awareness of the market for desire and its response to that. It is this change which might in turn be said to partly impact men’s behaviour more broadly. Building on this cultural materialist contention, Section 3 of this paper outlines a theoretical model through which we might conceive of society-wide changes or crises in masculinity as responses to changes in the status or perception of women in society. The resultant explanation of the rise of the softboy thus stands in contrast with important recent work on wokeness and virtue signalling in digital culture which explores the way individuals are compelled to conform to the most current political paradigms—sometimes in a way that obfuscates ‘real’ action or activism (Sobande et al. 2022).

The global film industry is now responding en masse to a long-neglected demand amongst viewers for more queer representation in mainstream cinema. In fact, in recent years, it has been hard to miss the sheer proliferation of new queer films (Lodge 2018). It is noteworthy that a similar cohort of actors has been offered up by the film industry to cater to the recently engendered gay male audience as to the post #MeToo straight female audience: consider Harry Styles’ almost simultaneous appearance in *My Policeman* (2022) and *Don’t Worry Darling* (2022), Lucas Hedges’ in *Boy Erased* (2018) and *Manchester by the Sea* (2016), and Timothée Chalamet’s in *Call Me By Your Name* (2017) and *Lady Bird* (2017). The connotations of sexual ambiguity, however fantastical, lent to these actors by their playing gay roles (and, in Styles’ case, releasing songs with sexually ambiguous lyrics) combines with their other softboy qualities to result in a personal brand tailored perfectly for a gay male fandom. Seemingly in spite of Chalamet’s acknowledged heterosexuality, one can deduce a clear sense of the gay demographic of his fandom from the frequency with which he appears in gay media publications like *Gay Times* (Damshenas 2019) and *Out* magazine (Dommu 2019).

This is certainly not the first time that this audience has been taken into account in film production; there is a rich history of film acknowledging it, overtly or covertly, stretching from *Ben Hur* (1959) to *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). But in a certain sense these new films stand apart from the lineage of gay cinema culminating in *Brokeback Mountain* because, unlike their predecessors, they are marketed to an enormous audience that is highly visible, vocal, culturally influential and politically active—and no longer in the truly marginal sense. Given the context of its release, *Brokeback Mountain* was still considered to be a film that pushed boundaries by telling a relatively untold story of love between two men. It also offered Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal what was then a relatively unique opportunity to obtain a new type of acting accolade through playing gay characters convincingly. In contrast, the contemporary context of the release of a film like *My Policeman* (2022) prevents it from doing either of these things. Furthermore, and especially considering the critical consensus on Styles' unfortunate performance both in *My Policeman* and *Don't Worry Darling*, indicators such as an actor's ability to act seem increasingly irrelevant for a film's perceived success. What instead becomes centrally important is the very fact of Styles—and all that he stands for—having appeared in the film.

In this regard, such examples of contemporary gay cinema tend towards the cultural logic of K-pop, with its highly engineered fandoms so deeply invested in the personal lives of the stars. (Incidentally, a significant number of the media articles surveyed here cite the influence of K-pop as an important factor in the rise of the softboy in the US and UK (Strapagiel 2019, Frantz 2020, Holmes 2021, Robertson 2021, Quartz 2021)). Some K-pop stars are famously prevented from having relationships by their record labels in order for them to be perceived as 'available' in the eyes of their fans (Griffiths 2018). A similar obsession with Styles' own sexual interests could be said to have fueled the maelstrom of accusations of queerbaiting that have been levelled against him—as well as other actors playing queer roles such as Kit Connor—in the past year. The difference between gay cinema today and in the *Brokeback Mountain* era becomes apparent when one considers that the same frenetic speculation about Ledger's sexual orientation did not accompany the release of *Brokeback Mountain* as that which did of Styles' upon the release of *My Policeman*. All of which is to say that casting decisions in contemporary film are so fundamentally entangled with an understanding of the film star as an object of desire that it becomes necessary to consider these types of films as a product of what audiences want to see as much as what directors want to show.

It could be argued further that it is not even necessary for a character to be gay for it to be evident that the casting decision has been made with a gay audience in mind. (In fact, the hallmark of 20th century American queer cinema has been its depiction of queer life through deeply coded scripts and performances that simultaneously avoid the censorship that shaped so much of mid 20th century Hollywood and communicate directly with an acknowledged queer audience). The same goes for the deployment of the softboy onscreen today. As McHenry puts it, "though many of these types of characters are coded as queer, as many twinklike characters are, that's usually not explicit" (McHenry 2019). The point here is not that there is something about the softboy that is inherently attractive to a gay male audience; gay desire is far from homogenous. There is, however, a clear sense in which the softboy's version of masculinity caters for a gay male audience in a way that paragons of late-twentieth century Hollywood masculinity like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger did not.

Interestingly, the casting of softboys in gay roles seems to have little impact on their perceived desirability in the eyes of a straight female audience. As Holt notes, in the advent of the softboy, for "the first time, I witnessed many of my straight female friends falling head over heels for a character whose interest lied [sic] in men" (Holt). McHenry is one of the few commentators who pick up on this dual appeal. He states that the softboy is "often coded as queer, but in a way that associates queerness with approachability to both straight women and gay men" (2019). The same point is implicit in Gannon's suggestion that the 2019 line-up of *Love Island* (which reportedly included three softboys) marked "a mainstream acceptance of a cultural phenomenon that has seen heterosexual women and gay men grow weary of the empty macho archetype constantly sold to them. Instead, they were fantasising about swooning into the arms of someone more sensitive" (2019). The emergence of the softboy, then, appears to respond to an intersecting demand from gay male and straight female audiences.

3. Softboys and Masculinity's History of Crises

As in many discussions within the humanities today, a presentist bias lends the impression that society is currently experiencing a historic reckoning with masculinity. While there may indeed be something unique about the social evaluation of masculinity in our contemporary moment, deducing precisely what this is requires some consideration of the history of various different 'crises' in masculinity, and of what exactly this term means.

“That men are today confused about what it means to be a ‘real man’—that masculinity is in ‘crisis’—has become a cultural commonplace, staring down at us from every magazine rack and television talk show in the country” (Kimmel 1987). Given how current the sentiment of this passage feels, it might be surprising to note that it dates from an essay published over thirty-five years ago. Here, its author, the sociologist Michael Kimmel, models an even longer history of crises in masculinity, identifying comparable crises in early-eighteenth century England and in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States. Based on these case studies, he proposes that “definitions of masculinity are historically reactive to changing definitions of femininity” (1987). In both of the contexts Kimmel surveys, large structural changes set in motion various processes that lead women to redefine their roles in society. It is this economic restructuring and the subsequent revaluation of women’s place in society that Kimmel suggests provoke these periods’ crises of masculinity. Kimmel’s thesis provides an interesting theoretical precedent for considering the widespread revaluation of social and sexual dynamics between men and women in the wake of the #MeToo movement—for in this context there also appears to be a causal relation between the changing status of women in society and the contemporary crisis in masculinity.

Today, the term ‘crisis in masculinity’ typically refers to the “situation in which the traditional cultural touchstones of ‘masculinity’ are under real or perceived threat, of men struggling to adjust to a world in which they are being outcompeted academically by women, and of so-called ‘blue collar’ jobs, once largely held by men, being displaced” (Bush 2022). Most of the recent discourse on the crisis of masculinity, then, is concerned either with the resurgence of machoism and ‘traditional’ forms of masculinity as a reaction to the perceived decline in men’s status and role in society, or with the various sociological symptoms of this decline. Pankaj Mishra, for instance, points to influential figures like Jordan Peterson, Donald Trump and Narendra Modi in arguing that today’s crisis of masculinity is characterised by “luridly retro ideas of what it means to be a strong man” (2018), while Godwin cites various statistics from the Men’s Health Forum, according to whom “men make up 76% of all suicides, 95% of the prison population, 73% of adults who go missing and 87% of rough sleepers” (2018). Similar to Kimmel’s assessment of the crisis of masculinity in the late 1980s, Mishra sees today’s crisis as just the latest manifestation of a long historical shift in gender dynamics which

began in the 19th century, with the most radical shift in human history: the replacement of agrarian and rural societies by a volatile socio-economic order, which, defined by industrial capitalism, came to be rigidly organised through new sexual and racial divisions of labour. And the crisis seems universal today because a web of restrictive gender norms, spun in modernising western Europe and America, has come to cover the remotest corners of the earth as they undergo their own socio-economic revolutions (2018).

It is indicative of the scale of this situation and the attention being paid to it that a such a host of books have been published in the last year that grapple with the changing role of men in the 21st century in an attempt to address this crisis of masculinity (Reinicke 2022, Jablonka 2022, Reeves 2022, Power 2022, Srinivasan 2021). Almost all of these books are concerned with the subject of sexual harassment and view the #MeToo movement as the tipping point in society’s coming to full awareness of the extent of this problem.

These texts are also acutely aware that #MeToo has spawned its own wave of problems and on many counts can be said to have further contributed to masculinity’s crisis. This is in keeping with de Maricourt and Burrell’s (2022) qualitative analysis of the politicisation of masculinity in the wake of the #MeToo movement which surveys expressions of backlash against feminism. Srinivasan also considers the #MeToo with reference to the consequences for men, albeit within a broader abolitionist framework and with particular attention to the racialised outcomes of carceral solutions to harassment. As she puts it: “a feminist politics which sees the punishment of bad men as its primary purpose will never be a feminism that liberates all women, for it obscures what makes most women unfree” (2021). Srinivasan’s argument is that

once you have started up the carceral machine, you cannot pick and choose whom it will mow down. Feminism’s embrace of carceralism, like it or not, gives progressive cover to a system whose function is to prevent a political reckoning with material inequality [...] feminists must ask what it is they set in motion, and against whom, when they demand more policing and more prisons (2021).

Anticipating some of these reactions, both Jablonka and Reinicke advocate a reparative politics that works towards the idea that the current crisis can only be solved by approaching an understanding that a ‘good’ man is an ally in the feminist struggle rather than a politics which simply frames men as inherently implicated in the perpetration of systematic harm against women. It is within, and largely as a result of, this fraught political context that the softboy is best understood. As has already been suggested, it is no coincidence that the softboy reached its zenith in the years following the worldwide movement to end sexual harassment and violence against women and the period witnessing the meteoric rise in gay cultural production.

Does it make sense to view the softboy as part of a long term remedy for toxic masculinity? One concern with such an optimistic outlook would be that the widespread uptake of the softboy within society amounts only to a superfluous new form of self-representation that, at best, masquerades as meaningful action—this is the same worry has been considered by Sobande et al. in the context of woke politics more broadly (2022). Another concern would be that the emergence of the softboy—rather like the #MeToo movement itself—might exacerbate the current crisis of masculinity. At the same time, one cannot help but anticipate that the softboy represents a fundamental shift in the relationship between different forms of masculinities that seems to have structured society at least for the past few hundred years. R. W. Connell’s canonical model of a dominant or hegemonic masculinity maintaining its status through the subordination of other forms of masculinity seems less able to capture the nature of the various masculinities defining our contemporary moment. Admittedly, the very question of how to assess such a hierarchy becomes more complicated when society is splintered into different spheres of influence, as it is today. In certain spheres, traditional expressions of masculinity undoubtedly still dominate, yet in other spheres—typically online ones populated mostly with younger people—it is arguably the case that softboy masculinity is currently vying for the dominant position. Yet even this comparison seems only to highlight the limitations of Connell’s model in thinking about how masculinity exists in reality. By analysing the softboy’s initial emergence in online discourse through to his uptake by the celebrity class, this paper has sought to illustrate how, as with so many things, lasting change in the nature of masculinity in society does not always come from individuals enacting change themselves but rather from a more complicated system of capital (in this case the entertainment industry) anticipating demand for certain onscreen content from previously unacknowledged markets; and in turn, this celebrity uptake filtering back down and influential societal trends more broadly. There remains a great deal to consider in the relation between the softboy and contemporary masculinity. For example, the question of the softboy’s being predominantly white must be reckoned with at length.

4. Conclusion

Despite a noticeable turn towards the subject of masculinities within academia, work on understanding the complexities of how it is both fashioned and challenged in contemporary culture is still extremely limited. This paper advocates the softboy as a powerful site of deepening our understanding of masculinities in the contemporary political climate within the context of desires. Whether the emergence of the softboy heralds ‘real change’ in the place of masculinity in the broader social terrain, or whether it is a matter of mere visibility’ will require further analysis.

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Masters Research Papers

Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence in Greece During the COVID – 19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during lockdown periods, there has been an increase in cases of Gender-based Violence (GBV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and Domestic Violence (DV) globally. This increase has been characterised as a “shadow pandemic” or a “second pandemic”. While previous research has shown a correlation between Violence against Women and times of crisis, little attention has been paid to the Greek context, which revealed a worrying increase in femicides in 2021. In particular, the significant response of civil organisations, women’s rights activists, and the #metooGR social movement in 2021 brought several GBV cases to public attention, triggering social mobilisation towards the fight for gender equality, elimination of GBV, and social justice. This research investigates Greece as a case study, focusing on GBV in the form of IPV in Greece since 2020, particularly during the first and second lockdown. To theoretically ground this investigation, a literature review on the topic has been conducted, complemented with statistics from annual reports on Violence against Women from 2019, 2020, and 2021, which were conducted by the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, a governmental actor dedicated to these matters. These annual reports are a newly formed initiative in Greece. Furthermore, through expert interviews with members of civil society and women’s rights activists, the discussion will move forward to the unique protection challenges faced during the pandemic, combined with newly invented ways to fight GBV and IPV, while giving survivors a possible way out even during this unique occasion. Based on the secondary data analysis and interviews, an increase in IPV is observed, accompanied by a lack of alignment between legal provisions and law enforcement, and a lack of an established action plan that can assure prevention and protection for women from the moment they experience violence until the closure of their case.

Keywords: GBV, IPV, Violence against women, Covid-19, Greece, Gender rights

1. Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate how gender-based violence (GBV), specifically intimate partner violence (IPV), was affected during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on lockdown periods in Greece in 2020 and 2021. Additionally, it aims to identify possible challenges and alternatives for women's protection under these circumstances.

The COVID-19 pandemic was referred to as a “shadow pandemic” or a “second pandemic” in relation to GBV and IPV by the international community, academic circles, and civil society (UN Women; Donato, 2020). These notions were used to emphasise the increase of related incidents during the lockdown periods and call for immediate action (Donato, 2020; Al-Ali, 2020).

This paper compares the increase of GBV and IPV during the pandemic with literature about violence against women (VaW) in times of crisis (Al Gasseer et al., 2004; Keller, 2008; Peterman et al., 2020). The literature shows that there is always an interconnection between the increase of GBV, IPV, and domestic violence in situations characterised as public crises (Donato, 2020). This is supported by data from UN Women reports, which highlight the alarming reality around VaW. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 out of 3 women had experienced some kind of violence, with most violent acts being perpetrated by an intimate partner.

To explore the link between public crisis and the increase of VaW, taking Greece as a case study, three research questions are formulated:

RQ1: What are the insights provided by International Law and National Law in Greece related to women's rights, their protection, and the positive obligations of states in times of crisis?

RQ2: What was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the relevant restrictions imposed for protecting public health on GBV/IPV in Greece during national lockdowns, and how does this link to the existing literature related to VaW in times of crisis?

RQ2: What were the protection challenges and realities faced during national lockdowns in Greece, what was lacking, and what could be other possible solutions?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Contextualising Violence Against Women (VaW) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Violence against Women (VaW) is a phenomenon that affects public health and represents an important risk factor for the physical and psychological health of women. It contributes to the regular violation of their rights (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Frequently, we come across the term Gender-based Violence to describe violent expressions towards women, highlighting that the violence expressed is linked to women's gender identity. There can be a variety of violent expressions used to harm women in different contexts, cultures, and religions. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002) distinguishes three main categories of Violence against Women: a) self-directed, b) interpersonal violence, and c) collective violence. In this paper, the focus is shifted towards interpersonal violence and more specifically, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against adult women, exercised by a male partner (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). IPV is referred to as the most common type of VaW that exists regardless of culture, context, religion, and social status (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; WHO, 2002). WHO (2002) underlines that 1 out of 3 women globally will experience, or they have already experienced, some kind of violence coming from an intimate partner. IPV entails partnerships such as husband/wife, cohabiting partners, partners who do not share the same living space, as well as former partners and ex-husbands (Dawson et al., 2019; Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). The type of violence used in the cases of IPV can have different manifestations, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological violence - deprivation or neglect (Donato, 2020; Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Mittal & Singh, 2020; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Deprivation and neglect frequently are accompanying forms of violence, although they can be employed alone (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Mittal & Singh, 2020). They refer to controlling behaviours over the actions of women, with emotionally abusive characteristics, that mainly imply and establish the subordination of women in a relationship through violent means, enforcing at the same time the position of the man in the household as dominant (Donato, 2020; Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002).

2.2 Crises as Contributing Factors to GBV in the Form of IPV

Previous research highlights the significant role of crises as potential risk factors contributing to the increase, exacerbation, and perpetuation of different forms of gender-based violence (Al Gasseer et al., 2004; IOM, 2018; John et al., 2020; Keller, 2008; Mittal & Singh, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020). The interconnection between crises and VaW has been repeatedly observed, and their consequences seem to affect a large number of women annually (Donato, 2020). Keller (2008) argues that in situations of crisis, sexualised forms of violence are highly employed and account for one of the most common human rights violations. Historically, rape, as an example, has been found to be a systematic means of warfare used to affect the enemy in multiple ways (IOM, 2018; Keller, 2008; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). The same applies to other types of crises, such as economic crises, public health crises, cases of natural hazards, civil unrest, and broadly public emergencies (John et al., 2020; IOM, 2018; Mittal & Singh, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020).

Research has investigated how pandemics are found to affect women's rights and the violence performed against them (Mittal & Singh, 2020). The results of these works confirm the allegations of the relation between public health crises and the rise of numbers in the incidents of violence against women. Similarly, HIV has been found to affect the violence perceived by women in multiple contexts, both Western and non-Western (Dawson, Kates & Ramaswamy, 2018; Sikira & Urassa, 2015). Based on Dawson et al. (2019), HIV-positive women are more likely to experience IPV in the US, while based on Sikira & Urassa (2015), the HIV crisis caused an increase in the incidents of IPV in Tanzania in the form of wife battering. The main underlying cause in the context of Tanzania was the suspicion of extramarital affairs (Sikira & Urassa, 2015). Similar findings present research related to Ebola and Zika, where the public health crisis led to extreme violence against women (Davies & Bennett, 2016; John et al., 2020; Onyango et al., 2019). Especially in the case of IPV, the situation was particularly critical since due to the isolation and the restrictions, women could not escape the abusive environments, putting their health into even higher risk (Davies & Bennett, 2016; Onyango et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic is recognised as one of the biggest public health crises in current history (UNDP), having affected our lives significantly since 2020, while specifically challenging the lives of women across the globe. Since the early beginning of the pandemic and the related restrictions imposed for the protection of public health, there have been increased concerns related to the safety of women, especially of those who experience forms of intimate partner violence (Al Ali, 2020; Jenyo, 2020; Luna, 2020; Mittal & Singh, 2020).

Historically, pandemics have been confronted using quarantine as an effective measure to control the spread of highly contagious diseases (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Pentaraki & Speake, 2020). Quarantine for this purpose dates

back to the 14th century, according to Mittal & Singh (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic was also addressed using the same approach (Donato, 2020; John et al., 2020). The imposition of local movement restrictions and lockdowns was a commonly adopted practice to protect people at the state level (Al Ali, 2020; Donato, 2020; John et al., 2020). As a result, people spent most of their time at home. However, this was not the safest option for everyone, including women (Al Ali, 2020).

From the beginning of the first COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, it became obvious that the pandemic would negatively impact women's rights in various ways. There was a worrying increase in the numbers of gender-based violence (GBV), intimate partner violence (IPV), and domestic violence (DV) reported (Al Ali, 2020; Donato, 2020; EIGE, 2021; Jenyo, 2020; Luna, 2020). Local lockdowns put women facing IPV/DV at even greater risk, threatening not only their physical health but also their mental well-being (Mittal & Singh, 2020).

2.3 National Legal Framework

Greece fully respects and aligns with the legal requirements provided by International Law related to women's rights, violence against women, as well as the position of women in society. Therefore, the Greek state has taken legal actions at the domestic level to ensure that women enjoy their rights safely. Greece ratified CEDAW in 1983 (OHCHR) and was also among the first countries to sign the Istanbul Convention, which was ratified under state law 4531/2018. Additionally, the Greek state recently put into force the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2025 through the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality (GSFPGGE) (GSFPGGE 2nd annual report). The above demonstrates the commitment of the Greek state, at the legal level, since the early 1980s to fulfill and protect women's rights.

3. Sociopolitical and Economic Context of Greece in 2020 – 2021

During the pandemic, the Greek government took measures aimed at preventing and controlling the spread of the virus, such as the use of medical masks, social distancing, and locally imposed movement restrictions that entailed kilometre regulation accompanied by the use of written certificates or SMS providing valid justification for movement.

At the same time, Greece, like many other countries, started facing a new wave of economic crisis as a result of the pandemic, while still recovering from the great economic crisis that lasted around ten years, from early 2009 to late 2018, with the public healthcare system (PHC) being one of the most affected public sectors (Tzanis, 2021). To put this into perspective, it is enough to check the numbers of the expenditure dedicated to the public health sector, which is equivalent to 5% of the GDP, lower than the EU average, which is 7.2%. This translates into weak primary healthcare and other inefficiencies. Hence, the pandemic found the PHC system already in a vulnerable position, bringing it to the edge of fully collapsing from the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak (Giannopoulou & Tsobanoglou, 2020).

During the years 2020 and 2021, Greece faced a series of conservative propositions compromising women's rights, such as the family bill, which threatened the rights of women facing IPV, the fertility conference, which opened the space for counter-abortion dialogues, as well as the high number of femicides in accordance with the Law of Domestic Violence (Gill, 2021; GSFPGGE, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021). These concerning situations, coupled with the increase in violence against women from the beginning of the pandemic, resulted in considerable societal mobilisation, triggering the #metoo movement in Greece, known as #metooGR.

4. Method

For this research, a combination of methods was employed. The literature review provides the necessary context to respond to RQ1. Next, a comparison of existing statistics regarding IPV in Greece in the years 2019, 2020, and 2021 is presented and discussed to respond to the needs of RQ2. Finally, the discourse of experts/members of organizations that support women, members of civil society, and women's rights activists contributes to this dialogue through individual interviews to support RQ3.

Secondary Data Analysis is employed to answer RQ2 (Trzesniewski, Donnellan & Lucas, 2011), borrowing statistical data produced by the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, as presented in the Annual Reports on Violence against Women, with a focus on the national helpline SOS 15900, the most approachable output for help during local movement restrictions. Thematic analysis is used to analyze the interview data, since the main aim of the research at this stage was to focus on the quality of the experiences in relation to the phenomenon examined (Willig, 2013). This research employs thematic analysis in the frame of social constructionism to respond to RQ3.

4.1 Participants and Data Collection Method

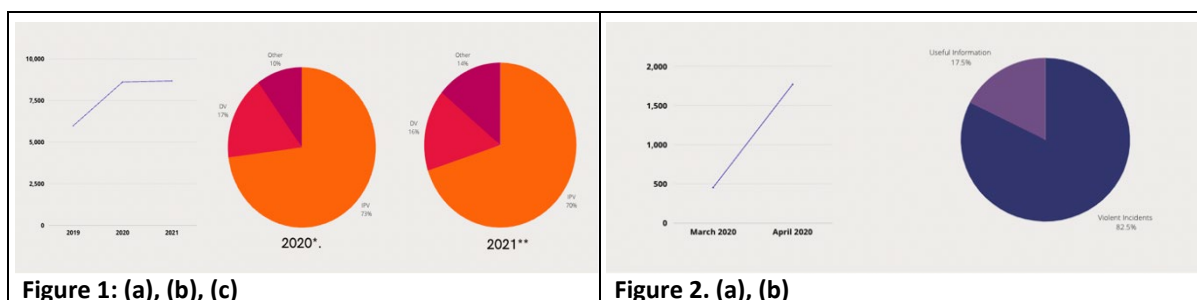
For the qualitative research part, three women were recruited using the convenience sampling method (Tsiolis, 2014), which means that interviewees were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the research. Online semi-structured interviews lasting an average of 30 minutes were conducted. The interview guide consisted of 11 questions and explored four main thematic areas:

- The participants' general knowledge of Violence against Women and Intimate Partner Violence
- The participants' beliefs and knowledge about Times of Crisis
- The participants' opinions about Times of Crisis and their relationship with GBV and IPV
- The participants' opinions regarding GBV & IPV in Greece during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

5. Results

5.1 Secondary Data Analysis

In 2019, the helpline SOS 15900 received 5984 calls whereas in 2020 and 2021 the calls were 8609 and 8669 accordingly (Figure 1a). These numbers demonstrate a progressive increase in calls during the COVID-19 restrictions, with the majority of the calls referring to IPV incidents (Figures 1b and 1c). The rest of the calls either referred to Domestic Violence or other non-signified reasons (Figures 1b and 1c). The first annual report also includes a dedicated section to the lockdown period concerning the calls received by the helpline. A major increase during the period of the 1st national lockdown compared to the pre-COVID-19 period is observed. In March 2020, a month before the imposed restrictions 454 calls were received (Figure 2a) whilst in April 2020 when Greece was under national lockdown 1769 calls were received (Figure 2a) 82.5% of which reported violent incidents and were seeking support (Figure 2b). Unfortunately, there is no relevant data in the second annual report to allow further comparisons for the second year of the pandemic.



F1: In these diagrams we see (a) the number of the calls received by the help line (b) the percentage of IPV in the calls received in 2020 (c) the percentage of IPV in the calls received in 2021.

F2. In these diagrams we see (a) the numbers of the calls received in March 2020 and April 2020 (b) the percentage of reporting violent incidents in April 2020.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

Through the thematic analysis, three main themes emerged from the participants' discourse. These themes are:

- COVID-19 as a Social Crisis affecting IPV.
- Gap between the legal provisions and law enforcement.
- The lack of a well-established action plan for the protection of Women.

5.2.1 COVID-19 as a social crisis affecting IPV

At the domestic level, the participants' beliefs are in accordance with literature that connects the phenomenon of the increase of IPV with situations of crisis (IOM, 2018; Keller 2008). Translating this belief to Greek society during 2020 and 2021, under the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the movement restrictions, the participants comment that any claims about the increase in violence perpetrated in the domestic sphere are believed to be true. The participants' knowledge on the matter comes from both their profession/activist action, but also from their social experiences. Another important aspect discussed in the interviews is the expected character of this increase considering the nature of the COVID-19 imposed restrictions. Based on the participants' reasoning, people in different types of intimate relationships were forced to spend most of their time at home with zero or very limited opportunities for social activities and decongestion. Therefore, the

survivors found themselves spending all their time with their perpetrators in a closed environment, which put them under serious threat.

Worker in the protection of survivors of Gender- based violence and their children

[...] I definitely consider Covid as a social crisis which for sure influenced much more vulnerable groups of our society. It didn't influence the same ways all the people neither regarding the gender nor in matter of class, nor in matter of status eg., refugees. Therefore it is definitely a social crisis with great social impact, mostly in poverty and violence. [...] Therefore I would put it as a great crisis which according to the research we know that affect women disproportionately [...] we see it everywhere, in war and in a situation like that [...] From the experience from the organisation and my personal experience there is increase and it is somehow expected when we speak about domestic violence or intimate partner violence [...] it is expected since the relations are more tensed when people are forced to spend more time together and they don't have any social alternative [...] according to the organisation we had an increase at least of 10% of people approaching the organisation comparing to previous years

5.2.2 Gap between the legal provisions and law enforcement

All three participants demonstrated knowledge about the commitments of the Greek state and its obligations under international human rights law related to women's rights. As a result, they all had comments about law enforcement when it comes to women's rights, especially concerning intimate partner violence. The participants made specific claims about the lack of efficient law enforcement that actually responds to the needs of women in Greece. According to the participants, the current procedures are demotivating and make survivors hesitant to report their cases. Even if survivors do report their cases, a long and complicated process awaits them, full of challenges and obstacles, without any reassurance that their case will be resolved and justice will be served. For these reasons, all three participants emphasised the need to readjust practices and action plans to better respond to survivors' needs and ensure substantial protection for them.

Member of association for the rights of women

[...] The challenges for every woman is the day after. Well I spoke now, I have to leave and go home (participant speaking about the reporting). In terms of work, in terms of housing etc. [...] The point we face a lot of bureaucracy and quite a delay is when women try to enter the safe shelters. It is required for women to do some medical exams etc and it takes at least 15 days, the best case scenario, in order for her to enter (a shelter meaning), these 15 days her husband will have killed her 15 times. [...]

5.2.3 The lack of a well-established action plan for the protection of Women

This theme reflects the participants' concern about the lack of a holistic, well-organised, and tailored action plan that establishes a protocol of actions to enable the full and efficient protection of women in such periods. The participants recognise the state's effort to enhance the work of the helpline SOS 15900 by advertising it on Greek TV. However, based on the participants, these efforts were not enough to respond to the broad character and the dimensions that IPV received during the lockdowns. Despite the helpline's importance, the participants believe that there should have been an action plan that would involve various ways for women to seek help. Consequently, it is highlighted that although communication, either via phone or email, during movement restrictions is a smart approach for assistance, such actions entail risks for women living in abusive environments. If revealed to the perpetrator, such actions could potentially exacerbate the violence, putting women in a worse position than before. This relates to Pentaraki & Speake's (2020) argument that women living in controlling abusive environments might face deprivation of means of communication, or the means available in the household might be controlled. Consequently, even if there are protection paths like that, it does not necessarily mean that they are accessible by the survivors without any risk.

Member of association for the rights of women

[...] The General Secretariat has ensured us that there will be more actions during the crisis. [...] There are only a few as we saw. Take as an example the reasons justifying movements (referring to the SMS that was required for all movements outside home), it was saying I will go to the doctor, I will go to the supermarket. We have asked from the state in the reasons one related to domestic violence that should be included. They did not include it. [...]

6. In Conclusion

Based on both the secondary data analysis and the data derived from the thematic analysis, it is found that in Greece, there has been an increase in IPV due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions, which is an expected phenomenon based on the literature review. The literature supports that crises are high-risk factors for the health of women and the violence they experience (Donato, 2020; IOM, 2018; Keller, 2008; Mittal & Singh, 2020). Although quarantine is proven as an adequate measure to encounter public health emergencies, it has been proven to affect Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Pentaraki & Speake, 2020). As a result, the nature of the restrictions negatively impacted women's rights in Greece, while exacerbating the life conditions in domestic environments where violence was prevalent.

Situations of a public health crisis such as COVID-19 provide an enabling environment for existing inequalities and violence deriving from them to flourish. The International Legal Instruments provide all the necessary input for the states to protect and fulfill women's rights. Particularly about Violence against Women, the Istanbul Convention and the four main pillars provided, give a clear perspective on the issue of violence against women and ways to combat it. In Greece, despite the legal framework being present, a gap between the provisions and practices is noticed. This gap between legislation and practice seems to put women in more danger since it functions as a demotivating factor for women to act in favour of their rights. Therefore, actions need to be taken to ensure the full implementation of the ratified provisions. Additionally, training of actors involved in cases of violence against women seems necessary in conjunction with an allocation of funds that will respond to the real needs of Greek society regarding violence against women (IOM, 2018).

Drawing from the above, Greek society and the recent experiences in 2020 and 2021 appear to be quite vulnerable in such terms. To conclude, considering that pandemics might be present regularly in the future, there is an emerging need to address past and potential GBV concerns, as well as their capacity to challenge discriminatory social and gender norms. Thus, the immediate transformation of systems that perpetuate gender inequality is of crucial importance to positively impact women's and girls' health, safety, and well-being on a long-term basis.

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The Establishment of Gender Quotas for Leadership Positions in Cooperatives to Promote the Principle of Voluntary and Open Membership

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Abstract: The present work aims to understand whether the establishment of gender quotas for the composition of management positions in Brazilian and Portuguese cooperatives would have the power to fully promote the principle of voluntary and open membership. Therefore, an approach to the roles imposed by society on men and women and propagated by patriarchy is essential to understand why women created the feminist movement and how important it is to achieve equality. In addition, it is essential to understand the characteristics of cooperatives, as well as its first principle - voluntary and open membership - in order to verify the reasons why cooperatives become an ideal model for promoting gender equality. Despite this, in the Brazilian and Portuguese cases, the data show that there is a disparity between men and women from entry, but that it is more relevant when observing the managerial positions. Thus, based on this information and in view of the barriers that keep women away from leadership positions, understanding the conditions for implementing affirmative action such as quotas is essential to verify the possibility of its implementation in the case of cooperatives, in respect for the principles that govern them. In this way, the use of the focus-group methodology seeks to fill in the information collected by the doctrinal, legal and statistical study, based on the empirical analysis of the opinions of jurists and directors of cooperatives on the feasibility of the implementation and of alternatives capable of leading to parity.

Keywords: Gender inclusion, Quotas, Cooperatives, Leadership positions, Voluntary and open membership principle, Feminism

1. Introduction

Although women make up for just over half of the world's population, they are considered a minority group in society because they have a reduced degree of power compared to men, especially in political representation, being constantly discriminated in labour market due to their biological and social conditions (Ferreira, 2021; Calil, 2007).

This condition originates from the roles imposed on women by the patriarchy, which have made them struggle to achieve equal rights. Despite the great advances made by the feminist movement, there is still a long path for equal opportunities to be effectively achieved, especially with regard to leadership positions.

In this search, cooperatives is shown to be a viable alternative for women to climb up these positions, due to the values and principles that govern that movement.

However, current reality shows that even in cooperatives there are barriers for women to reach top positions, which is why the implementation of gender quotas is a possibility to change the current situation, once laws that ensure equal treatment at this ambience can be a capable measure to modify realities and cultures. Thus, the aim of this study is to glimpse whether the imposition of quotas is in accordance with the principle of voluntary and open membership.

2. The Search for Women's Rights

Gender concept began to be studied by feminists in the early 1970s from the perspective that the word sex refers to the biological differences between male and female according to their sexual organs and their reproductive functions, while gender is considered a cultural issue, as it refers to male and female social classification (Levet, 2014).

Gender ideas are maintained by social and political structures, defining behaviours considered appropriate for the sexes, imposing roles to be followed by men and women. Through these roles, discrimination based on ideal archetypes of women emerges (Delap, 2022; Ghodsee, 2018; Lerner, 2019).

As the historical-cultural configuration of female roles in societies gives a partial record of history, usually told by men, the marginalization of women's participation in historical construction generates their segregation and, even though they are the majority of the population, they are considered a minority social group (Lerner, 2019). As a consequence, the arbitrary division of the sexes becomes naturalized, legitimizing the social division

through the use of symbolic representations that create an artificial nature for women, the result of forced repression or unnatural simulation (Bourdieu, 2021; Stuart Mill & Taylor, 2021)

This female subjection in societies is called patriarchy or institutionalized sexism, a system that maintains and sustains male domination, based on institutions such as family, religion, school and laws. It is an ideology that teaches that women are naturally inferior due to biological determinism, prioritising men and sustaining their power. As an historical imposition, it can be extinguished by the same historical process that created it by changing consciousness and actions to feminist thoughts and actions (Lerner, 2019; Tiburi, 2019; Hooks, 2018).

It appears, therefore, that male domination, despite being built from a biological factor, became a structure forged and culturally reinforced over time, consequently being a historical phenomenon that curtailed rights and guarantees that would allow women to live on equal terms with men.

The search for rights that were restricted to them gave rise to the feminist movement, which, in the words of bell hooks (2018) must be understood as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression, allowing women to acquire equal rights with men.

Lucy Delap (2022) corroborates this understanding by pointing out that feminism can be considered as the set of actions, questions and intertwined and internally complex demands that have been formulated since the 18th century, or even before, allowing the awareness that women occupy a disadvantageous position in relation to men, demanding struggles to reach equivalence.

However, the challenges faced by the female audience depend on the historical moment, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, nationality and age divisions, stating that the use of the term feminism is a gateway to understanding how issues involving this group have common points of connection (Delap, 2022).

That is why the intersectionality theory must be taken into account, because systems of domination, such as patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, colonialism, affect personal identity in ways that go beyond these systems, due to their interactions and impacts caused by reciprocal relationships, facilitating the recognition and understanding that experiences are intersectional and identifying the invisible experiences of subordination and privilege, or even the resistance and oppression that intrinsically affect a given location (Crenshaw, 1989; Cabrera, Belloso, & Prieto, 2020).

As the legal subordination between the sexes is a mistake and one of the main obstacles to human development, in order to achieve the material equality between men and women, it is necessary to develop a cultural change, redefining their possible roles, either through inclusive public policies, or through social movements that provide equal treatment (Araújo, 2018; Stuart Mill & Taylor, 2021; Siqueira, 2020).

In this sense, mechanisms have been created to promote gender equality at the global, national, regional and local levels, in order to insert women in the labour market, raise awareness about acts of violence and prejudice against women, empowering them to take control of their bodies and their careers. They have been promoted especially by international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), which require the commitment of governments around the world to engage and create local means to achieve the proposed global goals.

3. The Observance of the Principle of Voluntary and Open Membership in Cooperative Boards

Cooperatives emerged as a reaction against the deplorable conditions perpetrated by the Industrial Revolution, proving to be an important tool for granting freedom and independence to man, by combining common work and solidarity in the pursuit of social well-being (Miranda, 2017)

As its structuring value is solidarity (Meira, 2020), cooperatives embodies a superior ideal of justice, which can be translated into respect for the human person, fair remuneration for the work performed, valuing property, love of freedom and the abolition of pursuit of profit-making, as long as they are guided by responsibility and mutual help to improve the economic situation of its members, who become owners of the business and obtain independence, ownership and free disposal of the fruits of their work (Franke, 1973; Gide, 2008).

Deolinda Meira (2022) states that cooperatives are organizations of an atypical business nature, evidenced by the primacy of the individual and social objectives over capital, for democratic governance by members, combining the interests of the members and the general interest; for the defence and application of the values of solidarity and responsibility, as well as the reinvestment of surplus funds in long-term development objectives

or in the provision of services of interest to members or services of general interest, voluntary and free membership; autonomous and independent management.

In this sense, ICA defines cooperatives as an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Values and principles have guided cooperatives activity since its landmark in 1844 and, over time, the ICA promotes a review of these guidelines, in order to maintain the essence of cooperatives, aiming to help co-operators run their cooperatives more efficiently and effectively. It becomes as well a worldwide resource to understand how the principles are to be applied in practice (ICA, 2017), as the principles are more than commandments of greater value for the legal system, they are guidelines for disciplined conduct to judge behaviours and take decisions (Becho, 2002; MacPherson, 1996).

The first cooperative principle is voluntary and open membership, as cooperatives are voluntary organizations open to anyone interested in participating and who is able to use the services, accepting, therefore, the associative responsibilities, without any gender, racial, social, political or religious discrimination.

Ian MacPherson (1996) explains that this principle reaffirms a fundamental commitment of cooperatives by recognizing the fundamental dignity of individuals, without propagating any type of discrimination. In this way, these entities must promote affirmative actions to ensure that there are no impediments to affiliation for gender reasons, as well as that there is participation in equal numbers of women and men in education and leadership programs.

This occurs because the cooperatives dogma is centred on the idea that cooperation cannot be governed by ideologies of any kind, nor should it lose its character as a voluntary movement or, even, forget the recognition of the fundamental dignity of individuals, allowing all population groups and minorities to benefit from the constituted society. It is a principle closely linked to the principles of education and democratic member control, as the participation of members is only possible based on the degree of information given to them (Miranda, 2017).

As cooperatives are legal entities, by means of democratic control, representatives are elected to conduct their activities. However, despite the need to observe the principles, women represent around 40% of the members of Brazilian and Portuguese cooperatives, while in leadership positions, about 24% of Portuguese cooperative female members held management positions, against 20% of Brazilian women in positions of president and vice president (Pedroso, 2019; Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras, 2022).

4. The Establishment of Gender Quotas

The difficulty for women to gain access to positions of authority is due to the fact that the concept of these positions includes all types of training and aptitudes linked to male virility and, for women to conquer this position, they must, in addition to possessing all the requirements described explicitly by the position, present physical structure, voice and aptitudes such as aggressiveness, assertiveness, typically masculine natural authority, which generates a situation called double bind: if they present these characteristics, women lose the attributes of femininity and threaten the natural right of men in positions of power and if they act like women, they will be seen as incapable and unfit for the position (Bourdieu, 2021).

Therefore, stereotypes rooted in society configure a challenging position for women, who will have to break through these invisible barriers, despite having behavioural patterns that stand out more for the position than men, in addition to high levels of education and experience. Kristen Ghodsee (2018) points out that despite female activism in the last forty years, in the corporate and political environment little has been done to break male hegemony.

Across the globe, the proportion of men accessing positions of power is ten times greater than that of women, resulting in what Lucy Delap calls “patriarchal dividends” (Delap, 2022), which are nothing more than the advantages granted and enjoyed by men, fulfilling the pillar of contemporary gender policy, which makes it difficult to organize everyday life in an equitable way between men and women and is intrinsically related to issues not only of gender, but also of class and race (Marques & Oliveira, 2017).

Although it is essential that women participate in decision-making on an equal basis with men, according to UN data, this reality is still far from happening, since women represent 26.4% of members in the national parliaments, 34.3% of local governments and 28.3% of managerial positions (United Nations, 2022). These

percentages are a reflection of the glass ceiling, which, in the words of Monica Machado (2016, p. 29), “is a metaphor that seeks to elucidate the prohibition of women’s access to the highest positions in the occupational pyramid”, demonstrating the existence of a rigidity in the organizational hierarchy.

For Kristen Ghodsee (2018), discrimination against women in leadership positions is related to social attitudes towards women in positions of power and not to skills, which represents the unconscious gender stereotype that men lead and women follow them.

According to the UN, gender discrimination allows the subordination of women and girls to men at work, in politics and at home and, to eradicate it, it is necessary to create laws and frameworks to promote, enforce and monitor equality sought in all areas, including to ensure equal rights to competition and occupation of public and economic positions (United Nations, 2022).

As the social function of laws is to ensure fundamental rights, guaranteeing the inclusion of minority groups, it is essential to promote affirmative actions to assure the equality between men and women.

The function of affirmative action is to achieve the equality desired by historically underprivileged minority groups, based on the implementation of state social policies that seek to compensate and balance rights, allowing everyone to have the same starting point. Therefore, in addition to being temporary and exceptional, they must be committed to justice, so that they do not create unjustified forms of discrimination (Araújo, 2018).

Affirmative actions, such as quotas, seek to provide equal opportunities to minority groups in the enjoyment of human rights and individual freedoms, accelerating the process of equality between genders to condition gender proportionality in the election of representatives, at the same time that promotes social awareness of this need (Araújo, 2018; Macedo, 2014).

Legislative change that brings devices that force or strongly encourage gender parity in leadership positions is, for Kristen Ghodsee (2018), the only way to change the reality of male domination in this area and, in places where quotas were legally implemented, as in Iceland, Norway and France, studies show that this was an extremely effective measure, as there was a significant increase in women in positions of authority.

For the UN (2022), the implementation of gender quotas to reduce disparities in political and managerial positions is the way to meet the deadline stipulated by SDG No.5 regarding leadership, because without this type of public policy, gender parity in parliaments will only be achieved in 2062, while in managerial positions it will take 140 years for it to be achieved.

With regard to cooperatives, in a survey jointly promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the ICA, it was found that female representation in management positions is less than fifty percent, with a quarter of respondents pointing out that this participation is less than ten percent, although female members represent a higher proportion than these (ILO, 2016), coinciding with data obtained from Brazilian and Portuguese cooperatives. Then, it is imperative that cooperatives work to increase female participation in governance and management roles in society.

Although women have reached managerial positions, this process has been extremely slow, since female participation in cooperatives reflects social reality, with women facing difficulties in reaching positions of greater corporate representation, despite being members, demonstrating the existence of a vertical segregation despite the entity having inclusive characteristics (Senent Vidal, 2019).

This reality demonstrates one of the greatest contradictions between cooperative theory and practice, because female participation in governing bodies is an important milestone in achieving equal opportunities and, if cooperatives do not meet one of their main objectives, their credibility is lost, since the lack of female representation in these positions ceases to take into account their interests and needs when taking decisions, making them illegitimate, since they were not proposed and debated on equal footing (Cemborian, 2006).

In line with this position, Itziar Villafañez Pérez (2017) points out that gender equality is a fundamental legal obligation and an integral part of the cooperative values and principles and, therefore, closely linked to the social interest of the cooperative. Thus, if in practice such entities do not respect the principles and do not apply them correctly on a daily basis, seeking gender equality in all dimensions of the cooperative, there will be no adequate governance.

Hence, for inequalities to be eliminated within the scope of cooperatives, concretely applying their principles, it is imperative that these entities promote concrete measures to combat discrimination through internal public policies that encourage female participation in management positions, promoting the principle of voluntary and

open membership to eliminate discrimination in the governing bodies of cooperatives, generating reflections on democratic management.

That is why the imposition of rules that stipulate quotas to achieve gender parity in management positions is a promotion of the principle of equality, so valued by the cooperative movement, in order to balance representation in leadership positions, in fact promoting the interests of its members.

5. Empirical Analysis

By means of a focus group study carried out with two mixed groups of men and women, one of five lawyers and the other of five directors, it sought to understand whether quotas would be viable in cooperatives, in view of the data on female participation in the management positions in Brazilian and Portuguese cooperatives.

After discussing the data, the possibility of implementing quotas, the relationship established between quotas and the principle of voluntary and open membership, and more effective and faster ways to achieve parity in leadership positions in cooperatives, it was possible to reach the following conclusions:

The concern with gender inclusion is real and essential, as well as mechanisms that encourage greater female participation in cooperative leadership positions, since this difficulty in accessing these positions stems from a structural problem rooted in patriarchal social culture, corroborating what was envisioned by the literature review.

To overcome the barriers imposed on women in the professional sphere by cultural impositions, the promotion of education so that there is awareness and training of women and men, showing the importance of diversity for the growth of the organization in order to allow women to feel empowered to taking on the burden of leadership is the most effective and lasting path to achieving parity.

The debate on the imposition of quotas was a controversial topic in both groups and positions were obtained both in favour and against. Those who expressed themselves unfavourably pointed out that it is a limitation, whose application tends not to be something permanent, which can lead to discriminatory situations and questions regarding the capacity of the beneficiaries of the measure. On the other hand, those who favoured the institution stated that, in the short term, there would be no other way to change the very disparate reality of female representation in leadership positions, as it would encourage the participation and entry of more women into these positions.

It should be noted that questioning the capacity of women who entered by quotas and the use of the maxim that it is enough to show interest to reach such positions demonstrates that institutionalized sexism is not widely perceived, in addition to disregarding that Brazilian and Portuguese women have a higher level of professional training than men, or that these women are not members of cooperatives.

Despite the controversy, everyone agrees that there would be no impediment or violation of the principle of voluntary and open membership, since, in the first place, women would already be members and, therefore, there would be an encouragement to the participation of all members, in addition to being a change in the will of society, with respect for decision-making autonomy and democracy, emphasizing that respect for the characteristics of cooperatives should prevail, so that there is no male exclusion or an imposition for female participation of facade.

In view of this, it can be said, even in the face of the divergence of opinions established in the groups, that the statutory implementation of gender quotas has the power to give these qualified women the opportunity to exercise an activity for which they were formed over the years, being an important driver to promote equity, in addition to providing visibility for other women to consider this possibility in the future.

6. Conclusion

Although cooperatives have at their core all the conditions for promoting equality and non-discrimination, the disparity between men and women is notorious, especially when it comes to leadership positions.

This stems from the fact that the establishment of female and male roles is defined by the patriarchal structure rooted in the most diverse societies and worshipped for centuries around the world, imposing the submission of women in relation to men in the most diverse spheres of public and private life, demonstrating that cooperatives also suffer the effects of institutionalized sexism over many centuries of world population formation.

For this reason, the promotion of affirmative actions, as provided by the principle of voluntary and open membership, is a way of ensuring that cooperatives respect the values of equality and equity in their activity and in the actions promoted in relation to members.

In this sense, the implementation of quotas is a plausible way to achieve gender parity in management positions, as it is an affirmative action capable of generating female inclusion in leadership positions in a shorter period of time than if equity were achieved naturally, thus fulfilling one of the objectives proposed by the principle of voluntary and open membership.

However, for them to be temporary, it is essential that, together with the implementation of quotas, an educational program be created to promote awareness among all members of the need to achieve parity at all levels of the organization.

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Work in Progress Papers

Visibility of Innovative Female Founders in Germany

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Abstract: The current state of research in Germany shows that women are significantly underrepresented in innovative start-ups. The important potential of female founders for the innovation culture in Germany is thus not being exploited. The visibility of innovative female founders has an impact on their success, as it facilitates their access to capital, networks and markets. In addition, visible role models can motivate young women to contribute their own innovative potential to a start-up. This work-in-progress paper provides insight into the conception and the methodical approach within the project “Visibility of Innovative Female Founders in Germany” which examines the mechanisms and structures that influence the visibility of innovative female founders. On the one hand, the activity/passivity of female founders with regard to public visibility is investigated. On the other hand, the project examines selection mechanisms of media professionals as well as venture capitalists and identifies the success factors for the public visibility of (female and male) start-up founders in high-tech companies. By comparing the results of these two sub-surveys, best practices will be identified and measures to improve the visibility of innovative female founders will be developed.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Innovative Women Founders, Importance of visibility for success, Role models

1. Objective of the Project

The project presented here investigates innovative female founders in high-tech companies. This includes companies that develop product or process innovations, carry out innovation projects, or invest in research and development activities (Berger et al. 2019, p. 8). Female founders are currently not very visible to the public, but they have significant potential for the innovation culture in Germany. This potential needs to be exploited by supporting female founders to promote their success and encouraging young women by providing visible role models to take advantage of their career opportunities as founders of start-ups.

2. State of Knowledge

The current state of research in Germany shows that women are significantly underrepresented in innovative start-ups. Between 2016 and 2021, the share of start-ups in which women were involved increased from 13.9 to 20.3 % (German Start-up Monitor 2022, p. 7) but remains at a low level. In comparison, the general share of company formations with women involved was at 42 % (Metzger 2022, p. 4).

The reasons for this underrepresentation are manifold. The few publications and studies that specifically address the causes of the underrepresentation of women in start-ups cite a lack of role models and the lack of visibility of female founders in addition to reasons based on stereotypical role models, such as differences in business models, risk aversion and self-underestimation (Malmström et al. 2017, p. 851 f.; Klaus & von der Bey 2019, p. 16).

There are also clear differences in the mind set between men and women. Female start-up founders are characterised by a strong orientation towards predefined requirements, which is reflected in a good professional education but little experience in dealing with failures and setbacks. This is shown by the fact that they are less likely to found again in case of failure (Hirschfeld et al. 2020, p. 25).

Whether role models contribute to increasing motivation for founding and thus the share of females has not yet been specifically investigated for innovative start-ups. Role models in general can have positive or negative effects for female founders. The decisive factor for a positive effect is that the potential female founders can identify with the respective role models and share their values (Steffen & Ebert 2016, p. 156 f.). This is also proven by a study on female business angels, which concludes that more female role models among business angels lead to an increase in the number of both female business angels and female founders (Wuttig & Weber 2020, p. 9).

Networks and cooperation are also success factors for start-ups both in terms of financing and market establishment. Here, again, there are clear gender-specific differences. Female start-up teams cooperate less often with established companies (Hirschfeld et al. 2020, p. 48 ff.). They also use regional networks less often, although their positive benefits are rated higher by them than by male founders (Hirschfeld et al. 2019, p. 45 f.).

In addition, gender-specific differences exist both in the offer and in the use of coaching and advisory services (Elven et al. 2008, p. 16 ff.).

Furthermore, female start-up founders are at a disadvantage when it comes to fundraising, especially venture capital. All-female start-ups have an 18 % lower chance of successful funding and a 25 % lower chance of finding a main investor in the first phase of founding. In the second phase of start-up financing, the chances deteriorate to 40 %, and in the third round, the chance of receiving outside capital is even 90 % lower. The effective size of the investment is also lower by a third on average for all investments in female-led start-ups (Blazekovic 2019), as they are rated lower on average by investors. This is partially based on differences in the industries or business models, especially the lower presence in digital and internet-based business ideas (Burel 2020, p. 48 f.; Hirschfeld et al. 2019, p. 35 ff.; Blazekovic 2019). However, the lower ratings are largely based on traditional role models that attribute lower economic, innovation and leadership skills to women (Malmström et al. 2017, p. 851 ff.). It is assumed that these disadvantages in raising capital deter innovative female start-up founders in particular.

Although there are a large number of specific calls for proposals and funding measures aimed specifically at female founders, these do not usually cover the financial needs of innovative start-ups in particular. Innovative female founders are dependent on investments from venture capitalists (business angels, venture capital or private equity companies), whose financing decisions are based, among other criteria, on the visibility of the founders, as this is not only decisive for their own opinion, but also for successful market development. Thus, significant gender-specific differences can be identified with regard to financing: 25.7 % of male but only 7.7 % of female start-ups were funded by business angels. The situation is even worse for venture capital with 17.6 % funding for male and only 1.6 % funding for female start-ups (Hirschfeld 2020, p. 41).

In addition to the "gender bias" described above and the resulting different standards by which the start-up projects are measured, women are hindered by their different communication behaviour, their lower tendency to present themselves and their lack of networks (Hirschfeld, 2020, p. 40 and p. 49). Based on the study by Malmström et al. (2017, p. 855), a target group-oriented presentation and visibility with the aim of breaking through the existing gender-typical stereotypes could lead to significant improvements in access to venture capital and thus also to an increase in the numbers of female founders.

3. Research Design

The central research objectives are to uncover the mechanisms and structures that influence the visibility of innovative female founders and, based on this, to develop measures to improve the visibility of this target group.

To this end, the following research questions will need to be answered:

What hinders and what promotes the visibility of innovative female founders?

- How do media professionals inform themselves and make their decision who to report on and how?
- How do investors become aware of start-ups that are interesting to them and which media do they use to obtain information?
- What importance do (female and male) founders attach to visibility and what effort do they make to be visible?
- What do (female and male) founders do with regard to their visibility in public and/or towards relevant stakeholders (e.g. investors)?
- What significance do gender-typical role models have in this context?

Which measures are suitable to increase the visibility of female founders?

- What are best practices of female start-up founders?
- What are best practices of male founders that can be adopted?
- What other measures are suitable for increasing the visibility of female start-up founders?

The complexity of the research questions requires a mix of methods.

The first survey of the project serves to explore the research field. One aim is to gain initial insights into which media selection mechanisms are effective and which sources of information media professionals use and, according to which criteria they decide, who to report on and who to offer a platform to. Since access to venture capital plays a key role in the success of female entrepreneurs, the second aim is to investigate how investors become aware of start-ups that are of interest for them. Interview guidelines will be used for the discussions with these experts.

The second survey focuses on the analysis of 30 innovative start-ups. These have to meet the following criteria: The foundation took place within the previous seven years, and the companies must be based on an innovative technology or an innovative business model and strive for significant employee and/or revenue growth (Bundesverband Deutsche Startups 2022, p. 11). The cases are distributed as follows: 10 start-ups founded either by a single woman or an exclusively female team, 10 start-ups founded by single men or exclusively male teams, and 10 start-ups founded by a mixed-gender team. These samples should be as similar as possible in terms of key parameters such as industries, number of employees, etc. Socio-economic characteristics of the founders (e.g. age, educational background) which could have an influence on visibility should also be controlled for.

The analysis of the 30 cases describes the perspective of the founders, which is collected through intensive interviews. The focus is on the importance attached to visibility and the effort made to achieve it. In addition, questions on biography and the importance of role models are taken into account. An interview guide is also used here to collect the data. In the last phase of the research project, the findings from the collected empirical material will be used to derive best practices for expanding visibility and to develop guidelines for action.

4. Benefits of the Project

Targeted visibility with respect to investors, promoters and customers can help start-up founders effectively address challenges in sales/customer acquisition, product development, capital raising, and cash flow/liquidity management. Accordingly, barriers to entry for potential female start-up founders could be lowered. Better visibility with regard to investors, promoters and customers can thus contribute overall to increase the proportion of innovative female founders and the success rate of innovative female start-ups. At the same time, better visibility makes it possible to increase the acceptance of women as (potential) start-up founders in business and society. Furthermore, our approach promotes innovative female founders to become visible as role models to potential female founders and to increase their start-up motivation.

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Sexual Identity in the Workplace: Reasons for (not) Coming out

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Abstract: Extant research on non-normative sexual identity and non-heterosexual people exposes the various forms of discrimination and oppressive practices and behaviors from peers, supervisors and subordinates, clients and organizations in general. This situation creates a dilemma to those workers regarding the self-disclosure of their sexual identity. Most studies shows that the majority usually prefer not to reveal their sexual orientation and or sexual identity in their organizational settings. In the Portuguese context, investigation in this area of research is still scarce. The present paper aims to contribute to this debate by extending knowledge on the reasons underlying the decision to share with others the sexual orientation and/or gender identity at work. To examine the reasons non-heterosexual workers and with non-normative sexual identity offer for disclosing or not to those with whom they interact at work, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants with different socio-professional profiles and geographical locations. Women and man were recruited from the personal network of one of the researchers using a convenience and snowball sampling approach. The study findings provide insight into the main reasons why the interviewees choose to disclose or not to disclose. Participants reported as main reasons for disclosure: friendship relationships in the workplace and an inclusive working environment. On the other hand, the decision for non-disclosure results from the anticipated sexual discrimination, the perception of a hostile environment and the lack of friendship relationships. The main results are in line with other studies conducted in international contexts. The study highlights the heteronormativity of Portuguese work settings and the persistence of sexual discrimination of workers with non-normative sexual identity despite the development of Portuguese legislation regarding sexual equality.

Keywords: Sexual identity, Workplace discrimination, Disclosure/non-disclosure, Heteronormativity, Portugal

1. Introduction

Discrimination and prejudice based on sexual orientation and identity is one of the most prevailing and persistent forms of workplace discrimination. According to the literature, LGBTQIA+ employees report negative experiences in different career stages and several organizational practices, such as recruitment and selection, access to training, promotion opportunities, and work-life balance. They also face impaired treatment from the supervisors and coworkers, workplace bullying, sexual harassment, and tend to show higher levels of psychological distress and poor mental health (Beatriz & Pereira, 2022; Moya & Moya-Garófano, 2020).

This context of constant oppressing behaviors in the workplace creates a dilemma to LGBTQIA+ workers regarding the self-disclosure of their sexual identity at work. According to existing studies, the main reasons for disclosure include the existence of friendship relationships, an inclusive working environment, and senior LGBTQIA+ coworkers in the workplace. On the other hand, the key motives underlying non-disclosure are the anticipated discrimination, fear of isolation, violence, sexual harassment, and lack of promotion opportunities.

In Portugal, legislation has evolved in order to promote equality in the workplace regardless of the employee sexual orientation and identity. However, the few studies that analyze the workplace experiences of this minority group show a high presence of homophobic and transphobic behaviors and attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ employees (Beatriz & Pereira, 2022).

The present paper aims to shed light on the reasons underlying the decision that prompt LGBTQIA+ employees to share or hide their sexual orientation and/or gender identity at work.

2. Literature Review: To Disclose or not to Disclose

The expression “coming out” is commonly used to describe the process through which sexual minorities decide to assume and reveal their sexual orientation, either in the workplace (coworkers and supervisors) or to those with whom they have intimate or close relationships, namely family and close friends (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Wax et al., 2017).

The decision to disclosure or not in the workplace depends on several factors, such as the anticipation of discrimination experiences (Beals et al., 2009). Other factors have been identified as facilitators of disclosure, namely: friendships in the workplace, inclusive social environments, gender equality and diversity policies, the

need to guarantee a cohesive identity by linking the private and professional domains, the presence of other LGBTQIA+ coworkers, particularly senior colleagues with sexual minority identities already known by others in the organization, the existence of representative movements of LGBTQIA+ with active participation in the daily life of organizations, unions and support networks of sexual minority coworkers, and the willingness of LGBTQIA+ employees to use their sexual orientation as a political tool to change mentalities and to defy the heteronormativity of their organizations (Clair et al., 2005, Colgan et al., 2007; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Tejeda, 2006).

The main reasons for non-disclosure are anticipated discrimination, fear of being isolated by coworkers and their supervisors, moral and sexual harassment, the devaluation of their skills and work experiences due to their sexual orientation (Beals et al., 2009; Levine & Leonard, 1984).

3. Methodology

A qualitative study was conducted with 21 interviewees (12 gay men and nine lesbian women) from different Portuguese work settings.

A convenience sample was defined using snowball sampling and semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author. The interviewees have different socio-professional profiles and live or work in various geographical locations.

Content analysis was used to create the thematic categories and interpret the collected data. The categories were firstly defined by the first author and then discussed with the other two researchers to reach a consensus.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Disclosure in the Workplace

As found in previous studies, one of the first reasons to come out is the presence of supportive coworkers (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Trust and honesty in social interactions are considered two important organizational values that increase the willingness to disclosure. The following quote illustrates this viewpoint: “there was openness and complicity in the relationship” (Int. 11). Interviewee 5 said that affinity with other colleagues allowed her to share her sexual orientation. However, the decision to come out only took place after a rigorous evaluation of the working environment, its openness, and the anticipation that they would not be rejected. For example, Interviewee 4 argued that “we need to take the pulse of other people”.

Another reason presented by the interviewees to disclosure their sexual orientation is the perception of an inclusive environment. Interviewee 2 stated that “I had a lesbian colleague of mine who worked there and that made me feel comfortable to come out”. Interviewee 20 argues that the field of arts, in which he works, is an area far more inclusive compared to other work settings. This opinion was also expressed by Interviewee 15, who works in the audiovisual sector. Extant research shows that acceptance of minority sexual orientation is strongly related to the sector. Beauty, art and fashion areas are considered more accepting of non-normative sexual orientation and employ a higher percentage of LGBTQIA+ workers. The less tolerant sectors are education, justice and army (Colgan et al., 2007; Drydakis, 2019).

A third motive to disclosure has to do with the willingness of the interviewees to promote social change in their working environments using their sexual orientation to increase their coworkers’ awareness and educate them on this matter. One participant argues that “I think that coming out in small networks can make a difference. It is a political duty” (Int. 13). This is in line with other studies where sexual minority identity is perceived as a political tool to produce change towards equality and increased acceptance of diversity (Creed & Scully, 2012).

The feeling of acceptance from those in intimate relationships and networks (relatives and friends) facilitates the decision to disclosure in the workplace. Interviewee 17 said that “once I revealed to my parents, I felt that I had no need to justify to others”. Portugal remains a very traditional and patriarchal society where family is still at the center of affective and social relationships, and plays a central role in the construction of an individual’s identity.

4.2 Non-Disclosure in the Workplace

One of the major reasons for not coming out referred by interviewees is the anticipated discrimination. Interviewee 8 said “the fear of reprisals and bad working environment” prevented him from revealing his sexual orientation. Ragins et al. (2007) mentioned that the fear of negative consequences (e.g. losing the job, being subjected to bullying) results in concealment of non-normative sexual orientation.

Other interviewees separate their private from professional lives as they consider that such kind of information belongs to the personal sphere. The perception of a homophobic working environment reinforces this need to maintain concealed their sexual orientation (Garcia & Souza, 2010). Interviewee 9 said that he heard several homophobic comments from colleagues, his boss, clients, and such negative remarks refrained him from revealing his sexual orientation.

The lack of friendship relationships and perceived lack of support in the workplace aggravates the feeling of not being accepted. Interviewee 19 says: "I do not feel motivated to talk about my sexual orientation since people I work with are very different from me".

Finally, some participants fear that their professional competence can be questioned by their coworkers if they decide to reveal. Some studies show that professional competence is defined by heteronormativity leading to the devaluation of LGBTQIA+ performance at work (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009).

5. Conclusion

The empirical evidences found out in this study are similar to those presented in previous studies developed in other geographies. This means that the reasons for disclosure or non-disclosure apply to different cultures and societies, which shows that heteronormativity prevails in the labor market and contributes to the persistence of several forms of discrimination at work. Nevertheless, more research is needed to untap the LGBTQIA+ experiences of discrimination in the workplace, particularly in a Catholic country with strong traditional family values.

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It's all About Priorities: Tips for Successfully Implementing Gender Equality Actions

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Abstract: The adoption of an inclusive Gender Equality Plan (iGEP) in Research Performing Organisations (RPO) and Research Funding Organisations (RFO) is a dynamic process that mobilises knowledge and skills, and at the same time creates challenges in each step. The Horizon 2020 CALIPER project supports seven RPOs and two RFOs across Europe in implementing iGEPs, focusing on the STEM fields. At this stage, CALIPER partners completed the first iteration phase of their iGEP implementation lasting 12 months. This work-in-progress paper presents practical examples from their GEP experience so far, focusing on the activities/steps an institution can put in place to adopt an inclusive approach to the GEP process. The “tips” are grounded in the formative evaluation reports, drafted by the CALIPER RPOs/RFOs after the end of the first implementation iteration. This action-oriented paper targets practitioners, active in Gender Equality (GE) in Research and Innovation (R&I).

Keywords: Gender equality, STEM, Research, Innovation, iGEP

1. Introduction

Since 2015, the EU actively promotes and supports, the implementation of GEPs in research organisations as a tool for structural change (Clavero & Galligan, 2021). The adoption of a GEP may contribute to removing obstacles to GE (Ljubljana Declaration, 2021) and changing knowledge production by integrating a gender+ perspective into the entire research cycle. However, GE is a long-term process and thus GEPs often face steep challenges that may result in a throwback to former practices and behaviour (EIGE, n.d). In this context, what kind of approaches can support a successful iGEP implementation? This work-in-progress paper is focused on exploring this question via the analysis of nine GEPs implemented within the frame of the Horizon 2020 CALIPER project in the first 12-month iteration period. It provides practice-based guidance in the form of “empirical tips” as recommendations.

The CALIPER project adopted an innovative approach for setting up/implementing the GEPs in its participating RPOs/RFO* aligning with the ERA “inclusive” GEP dimensions: intersectional, intersectoral, and geographic inclusiveness (European Commission, 2021), adding an “internal” dimension (internal engagement via participatory approaches).

After an outline of the CALIPER methodological approach, the paper proceeds with the recommendations. The main limitation is that it is an in-progress work, presenting interim results based on desk research of the formative evaluation reports provided by the CALIPER partners from the partial implementation of the GEPs. Although the formative evaluation methodology was sound and thorough and implemented by using a variety of research tools (surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups), the overall assessment of the outcomes and impacts is not finalised yet.

2. CALIPER iGEP Methodology

The CALIPER methodology relied on the baseline approach from the GEAR tool (EIGE, 2022), and the five interlinked phases including analysis of the state of play analysis of inequalities, GEP design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and sustainability. The four inclusiveness dimensions have been embedded in each one of the above-mentioned methodological phases.

Geographic inclusiveness is sought in view of overcoming the significant gap among countries in the level of adoption and execution of GE measures (ERAC SWG, 2021). European policies on Gender in R&I take such gaps into account and address heterogeneity, facilitating knowledge circulation between “advanced” and less advanced countries.

CALIPER has adopted a geographically inclusive approach from its conception phase engaging with organisations from nine countries across Europe spanning from Southern, Central, Eastern, and Western Europe, Georgia, and Turkey, all on different levels of GE uptake.

Intersectionality addresses gender inequalities along with other structural inequalities and discrimination grounds, such as social class, race/migration/religious background, etc. While analytically powerful for overcoming a binary definition of gender (Verloo, 2006), it is considered challenging to translate intersectionality into policies (Showunmi, 2020).

The CALIPER internal assessment methodology (Sangiuliano & Cescon, 2020) has fostered a cross-cutting intersectional approach to data collection to feed into the iGEP design phase: improvements in internal data collection methods and tools became specific measures within the partners' iGEP. An intersectional approach has been followed in the implementation of specific actions (engaging girls with migrant background in STEM events) and/or has led to dedicated iGEP measures (promoting so-called 'alias careers' for Transgender students in a transition process).

iGEPs can only achieve limited outcomes if universities, RPOs, RFOs, government bodies, professional associations, civil society, and the industry operate in silos (EC, 2019). Existing networks between each implementing partner and the external innovation ecosystem have been analysed from a gender perspective (Sangiuliano, Cescon & Nason, 2021). Dedicated indicators designed to identify GE gaps in R&I ecosystems and synergies have been established with external stakeholders activating CALIPER R&I Hubs at each participating institution adopting a multistakeholder/quadruple helix approach to promote active collaboration in the implementation of some of the GEPs measures.

Internal inclusiveness responds to the need for engaging internal stakeholders through participatory methods in change management and when pursuing institutional change for GE (Dahmen-Adkins, Karner & Tahler, 2019). iGEP design has been conducted in parallel with the creation of the CALIPER internal GEP working groups involving personnel from all levels of the hierarchy. A co-creation methodology was adopted for engaging internal and external actors in the iGEP process.

The CALIPER Monitoring and Evaluation methodology was designed and throughout the process revised to include indicators to track and classify the inclusive dimensions of each GEP measure. Sustainability is going to be achieved by leveraging intersectoral and internal inclusiveness and seeking external stakeholders as potential partners and co-funders of continued iGEPs.

3. CALIPER Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

The preliminary empirical findings and recommendations presented below are based on desk research of the Formative Evaluation Reports of the first 12 months iteration phase conducted by each partner and summarised in D.4.2 v.1 (Cescon & Sangiuliano, 2022).

3.1 Geographic Inclusiveness

Some CALIPER organisations were more advanced and already had in place some GE provisions backed by corresponding national legislation, while the majority were "beginners". Knowledge transfer from more advanced to less advanced institutions is often suggested in the adoption of GE measures, and the CALIPER project itself has built on the knowledge generated by multiple research institutions involved in previous similar EU-funded projects, besides having its own internal knowledge transfer mechanisms among partners. However, it is important to acknowledge that the transfer of actions from one institution to another is beneficial when customised and adapted to the national legislative context.

4. Intersectional Inclusiveness

In CALIPER many efforts were made to introduce the concept of intersectionality and to point out how adopting a binary approach to GE creates barriers for minorities. In this vein, a CALIPER RPO revised its annual staff and students' surveys to gather intersectional disaggregated data allowing us to understand better existing intersectional inequalities. Collaboration with relevant NGOs proved to be insightful, supporting the institution for the optimal use and demonstration of these data.

The topic of intersectionality can potentially cause internal and external resistance also fostered by regressive discourses that reflect the spread of anti-gender ideologies (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). CALIPER partners are experiencing how these dynamics are also affecting academic/research environments. In such contexts,

introducing measures that target women with different gender identities/sexual orientations/ethnicities can provoke resistance and calls to go back to a “binary-business-as-usual”. Ad-hoc strategic considerations can lead to identifying the right “windows of opportunities” to gradually promote an intersectional approach to GE. CALIPER partners often found themselves negotiating on including one or few inequalities other than gender to expand their intersectional approach, without jeopardising the implementation of the GEP measures. When resistance was stronger, the trade-off was either going for a binary gender approach or no action at all.

4.1 Intersectoral Inclusiveness

CALIPER has strived to position RPOs and RFOs as reference points for GE in their ecosystems by setting up awareness-raising actions organised in collaboration with external stakeholders. A successful example was the establishment of an annual award for women working in the field of information technologies to disseminate their research work, acknowledge their efforts, and provide them with networking opportunities; another was the organisation of “innovation cafès” that have made RFOs visible towards external stakeholders as promoters of GE creating ties with the local innovation ecosystem.

Engaging key external stakeholders in the GEP processes through the R&I Hubs has led to considering gender balance and gender sensitiveness in transfer to market of scientific research results, and in actions to motivate young girls to embrace STEM studies. These broad collaborations are proving to facilitate institutional change internally, but also to initiate a conversation among the regional and national stakeholders, to adopt and implement gender policies in their organisations.

In CALIPER, Women in INnovation (WIN) events have been organised by all partners, to highlight women-led innovations, and gender-sensitive product development/design, while raising awareness to attract more girls to STEM research. The nine WIN events took different forms, attracting and being co-organised with a variety of stakeholders from academia, industry, CSOs, public bodies, and schools. WIN events aspire to be a sustained iGEP action.

4.2 Internal Inclusiveness

Internal inclusiveness is crucial for the success and longevity of GE actions (LERU, 2018) which require the active involvement and commitment of the top management to be successful. In CALIPER, top management representatives were part of the change process from the design and development phase of the iGEPs; the partners have created dedicated GEP working groups whose members come from the top and middle managerial levels and are responsible for the development, implementation, monitoring and eventually sustainability of the GEP actions.

Also, adopting a bottom-up approach proved to be highly effective. Setting up co-creation processes using participatory techniques from the design phase to engage internal stakeholders was found to be a useful approach (Aguirre, Licata & Menotte, 2020). In case of resistance from the top management, the mobilisation from middle management and administrative/academic staff is functioning as a ‘pressure point’ on the top management. In this vein, the CALIPER partners have included in their action plan a series of internal raising awareness sessions to support the GEP Working Groups and increase engagement throughout the different steps of the structural change process.

*CALIPER partners can be found here: [Gender Equality Actions – Caliper Project \(caliper-project.eu\)](https://gender-equality-actions.eu/)

(All documents accessed October 2022. CALIPER deliverables accessible at Zenodo)

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Late Submission

Gender Equity in Hospitals: An Italian case study

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Abstract: The topic of gender equity is increasingly cited as a goal of health policy despite the rise in the number of female doctors around the world, and attempts to enhance gender awareness have gained prominence. Recently, initiatives to increase gender awareness have been numerous nevertheless, the topic of gender equity in the medical profession has not been adequately assessed. In order to fill this gap, this paper examines the current state of gender equity literature in hospitals, with a systematic literature review on Scopus, and, then, it focuses on an Italian case study to identify the characteristics that obstacle or support gender equity in terms of salary, career, and professionalism. The finding highlighted some reflections regarding the roles in the Italian hospitals and obstacles to gender equity, such as the stereotyped judgments, as well as shed light on new considerations regarding the actions aimed at managing gender disparity in such working environments. This has important implications for practice in health care organizations and human resource management, which are highlighted in conclusion, together with the limitations and future research avenues.

Keywords: gender equity, pay equity, career equity, Hospitals, Health system

1. Introduction

Daily, women in medicine face barriers that hinder progress toward top roles, facing emerging the grand challenge of gender inequality all over the world (Shannon et al., 2019; Hempenstall et al., 2019). The topic of gender equity is increasingly cited as a goal of health policy (Levy et al., 2020), despite the rise in the number of female doctors around the world (OECD, 2021). As defined by PAHO (2023), gender equity refers to “fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits, power, resources, and responsibilities between women and men. Women and men have different needs, access to, and control over resources. These differences should be addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalance between the sexes.”. Attempts to enhance gender awareness have gained prominence in the healthcare sector, albeit still today, subtle and overt gender biases affect women physicians (Barnes et al., 2019) and physician leaders (Herzke et al., 2020).

Recently, initiatives to increase gender awareness have been numerous nevertheless, the topic of gender equity in the medical profession has not been adequately assessed (Tricco et al., 2021).

Starting from these considerations, the purpose of this study is to first examine the current state of the literature about gender equity in hospitals in the literature through a systematic literature review on Scopus. Albeit the relevant literature highlighted the relevance of this topic, most of the studies follow a quantitative approach. To fill this gap, this paper focuses on an Italian case study to identify the characteristics that hinder or support gender equity in terms of salary, career, and professionalism. This study, thus, follows a qualitative approach (Yin, 2003, 2012), interviewing a selected number of women medical doctors from a list of hospitals in the South, Central, and North of Italy. Interviews with women medical doctors allow readers to ‘hear’ the ‘voices’ of the women who participated in the study regarding gender equity in Italian hospitals. The finding highlighted some reflections regarding the roles in Italian hospitals and some obstacles to gender equity, such as stereotyped judgments, and shed light on new considerations regarding actions to manage gender disparity in the hospitals.

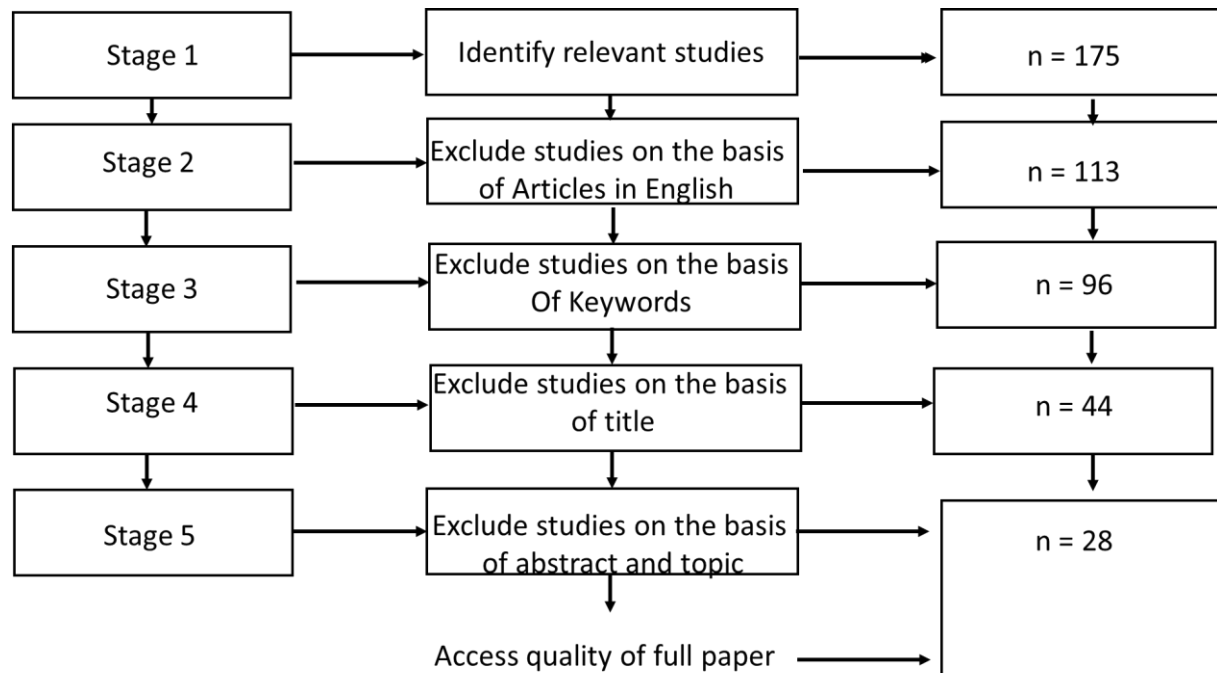
The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: “Literature review: a systematic approach to gender equity in health care” provides a brief overview of the theoretical background based on a systematic approach to examine the current state of the relevant literature regarding the gender equity in the hospitals; “Research design: a qualitative approach” describes the research methodology based on the case study regarding the Italian hospitals’ context; “Results and discussion” provides a synthesis of results and shed light on the obstacles as well opportunities related to the gender equity within hospitals; “Implications, limitations, and future directions for research” finally lists main implications of reflections herein and it also draws main conclusions and directions for future research.

2. Literature review: a systematic approach to gender equity in the medical sector

A systematic examination of the available literature has been developed to comprehend the status of the art of gender equity in the medical sector. The research has been conducted adhering to the guidelines by Ngai and Wat (2002), Kitchenham (2004), Brereton et al. (2007), and Kitchenham et al. (2009) for systematic literature review. Accordingly, a revision protocol has been followed. Then, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to reveal significant research for the analyzed topic, followed by the critical evaluation, the

extraction of the data, and the synthesis of the results. The following figure describes in detail the process (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Steps of literature review for analyzing gender equity in the medical sector



Source: Authors' elaboration

The descriptors selected for search are "gender equity" AND "Hospitals" by titles, key words and abstracts without restricting by date or review the entire literature on the topic.

From the initially screening results yielded 175 papers. The articles published in non-academic peer review journals, books, conferences papers, conference proceedings were excluded.

Investigation showed that the scientific production started in 2001 and has totalled 113 papers, all written in "English". Following this classification, all papers were examined and those that were out of the scope of our study were excluded. This second screening process was based on the analysis of "Keywords", and the result gave 96 relevant articles using a combination of the following keywords: "Gender equity", "Gender bias", "Gender gap", "Sex Difference", "Organization and Management", "Sex Factors", "Career Mobility", "Career", "Physicians", "Women", "Workforce", "Medical Society", "Medicine", "Equity", "Health Care Personnel", "Gender Identity", "Health Workforce", "Decision Making", "Educational Status", "Gender Inequality", "Skill", "Work-life Balance", "Health Equity".

The third phase of the process, assessed on the basis of title, consisted in identifying suitable articles allowing to focus only on 44 papers. In the fourth screening phase, all the papers were read and only 27 papers were included.

2.1 Descriptive considerations about publications on gender equity in health care

Figure 2 shows the year of journal publication. The first article was published in 2001 by Heru, an American author which studied how promoting gender equity and fair treatment for medical students in Hospitals. In 22 years the number of articles gradually increased: 1 in 2007, 1 in 2010, 1 in 2015, 1 in 2016, 2 in 2017, 1 in 2018, 3 in 2019, 5 in 2020, 5 in 2021, 5 in 2022, 2 in 2023. From 2019 to 2023 the researches in this field are increasing: the 74% of all papers were published during this period.

American (USA), English (UK), and Australian authors mainly focused on research areas such as Medicine, social science, Nursing and Multidisciplinary, even though other areas were concerned. In addition, we classified the articles by research approach in six categories: Conceptual, Historical study, Survey, Experimental, Index analysis, and Qualitative Analysis (see Figure 3). As emerged, the investigation revealed a lot of publications on the gender gap in hospitals but there is a gap in the qualitative research of this topic.

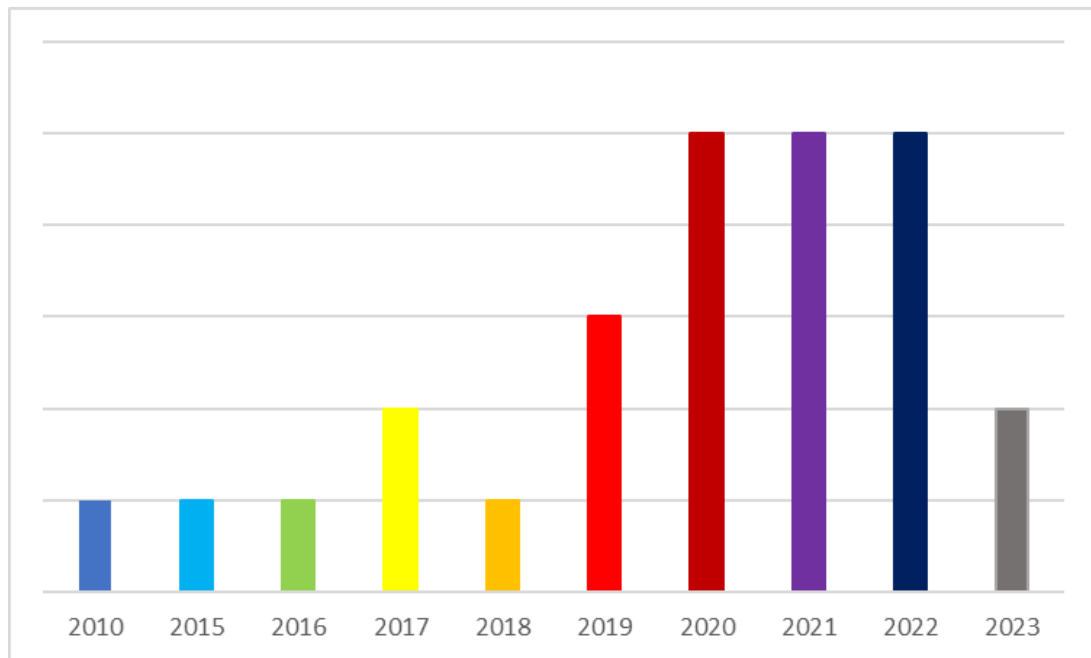


Figure 2: Description of the years sample analysis

Source: Authors' elaboration

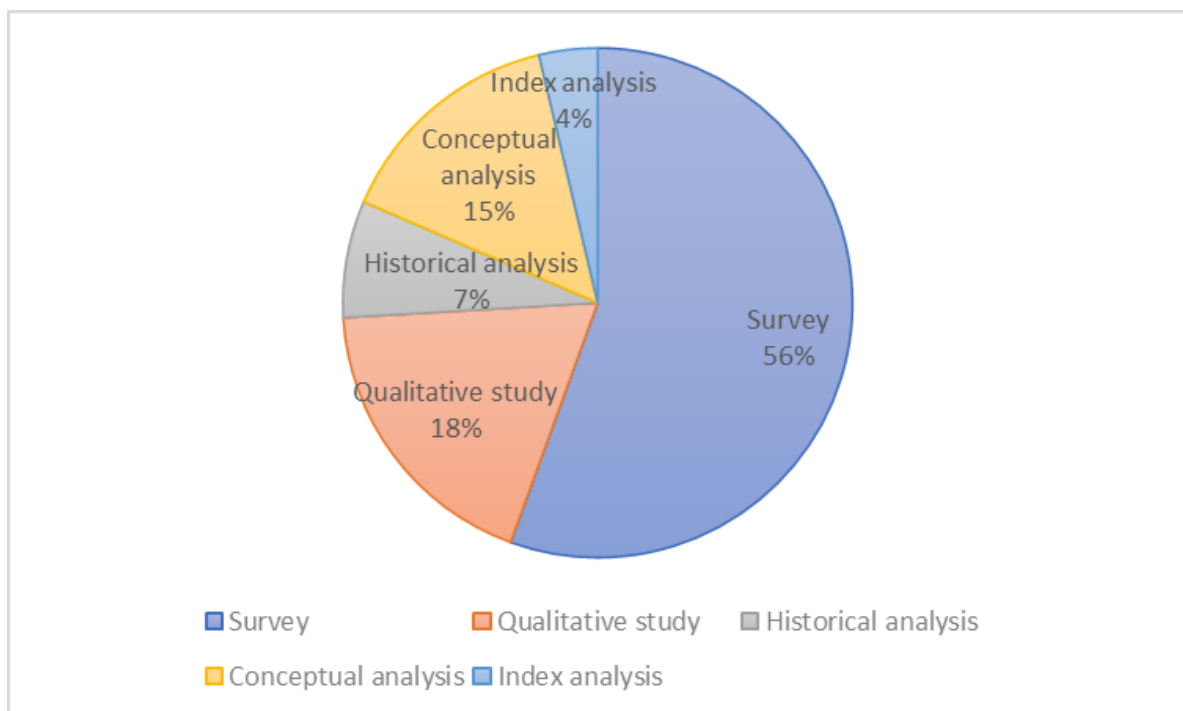


Figure 3: Classification of articles by research approach

Source: Authors' elaboration

2.2 Gender equity in hospitals: still a long way to go

The relevant literature confirmed that, although there has been progress for women in medicine (Joseph et al., 2021), the gender gap is still present in healthcare sector and is rooted in gender biases and gender norms that date back thousands of years (Newman et al. 2020). In such a direction, several authors shed light on the fact that different fields of medicine, including paediatrics (Spector et al., 2019), emergency medicine (Ravioli et al., 2022), and plastic surgery (Moeller et al., 2021), is not leading the way in gender equity.

In particular, several authors highlight an academic gender gap in private and public hospitals (Altin et al., 2023; Le Boedec et al., 2021; Herzke et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020).

More recent contributions highlight that the majority of women in academic medical centres reported experiencing gender discrimination in the past year (Hennein et al., 2023).

Thus, gender impacts careers and advancements due to gender discrimination and microaggressions (Hong et al., 2022). Imbalances in female career promotion are a key obstacle of gender disparities at the workplace – especially in the academic context (Newman et al., 2019). They may lead to stress and stress-related diseases, including burnout, depression or cardiovascular diseases (Brüggmann and Groneberg, 2017). Also, there have been potential disparities in salary between females and males in the healthcare sector (Wright et al., 2007).

In such a direction, extra effort is required for women for succeeding (Farruggia et al., 2020) and women are more likely to face barriers to career advancement than men do in their workplace (Khader et al., 2022). A major obstacle to gender equity is women doctors with children, who work reduced hours, mainly to enable them to fit in domestic responsibilities, and have difficulty finding an appropriate work-life balance. In the past, women physicians were often not married or, if they were, tended to have fewer children than their male counterparts. If they had families, they often did not specialize, reducing their professional careers or opting for a career break of potentially several years. (Buddeberg-Fischer et al., 2010). In addition, male culture, lack of sponsorship, and lack of mentoring are other key obstacles that women face in hospitals, which highlight the detrimental nature of gender bias in medicine (Hefner et al., 2021).

Women in hospitals often hold proportionately fewer leadership positions than men (Das et al., 2022; Forster et al., 2021; Marshall et al., 2020). Das et al. (2022) pointed out, specifically, that women leaders in hospitals were more likely to have received additional academic degrees (e.g. MBA, MPH) than their male counterparts.

However, academic medicine should foster and reward rather than dismiss women leaders' sense of purpose or commitment to make positive changes in their departments (Hobgood and Draucker, 2022).

Thus, it is fundamental to create, maintain, and support physician women's groups which can be useful to advance women physicians in academic medicine worldwide (Ibrahim et al., 2018), create programs for supporting gender equity already in medical schools (Carr et al., 2017), in order to improve the climate of academic medicine for women which is modest (Carr et al., 2015). Accordingly, gender equity can be achieved with special career-support measures, such as mentoring programs, role models, flexitime, and flexible career structures in academic medical centres (Buddeberg-Fischer et al., 2010). New opportunities lie in the leaders' planification for an intentional path forward, using a systematic process, metrics, and strategies unique to their own organizations to overcome barriers to an equitable and safe work environment for women, focusing on ethical principles and behavior when it comes to addressing workforce gender disparities for women in medicine (Silver, 2019). In this sense, career development programs, concurrent with strategic, intentional support of institutional leaders, are necessary to achieve gender equity and diversity inclusion (Helitzer et al., 2016).

3. Research design: a qualitative approach

In order to investigate gender equity within hospitals, this study aims to conduct a preliminary investigation that follows the case study approach.

According to Yin (2003), the case study is an empirical investigation that places real phenomena at the centre of analysis and seeks to observe them in their uniqueness. Case studies have many strengths represented by the depth of analysis, high conceptual validity, understanding of context and process, and finally, the possibility of promoting new hypotheses and new research questions (Yin, 2012). A case study approach, in fact, can help in investigating in-depth the dynamics in a complex context from a particular standpoint (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; Tellis, 1997). This methodology can be particularly suitable for investigating, as in this case, the phenomena which refer to multi-dimensional constructs that are not well defined semantically in all their shades of meaning in the extant research. This method, thus, was selected as the most appropriate to understand the 'lived experience' of women within hospitals and to appreciate what these women understood of their own work and career development. Other researchers have noted that this method of data collection is particularly appropriate to elicit rich data from female interview subjects (Cooper, 2012; Maynes et al., 2008; Reinharz, 1992).

The Italian context concerning the hospitals has been selected for the analysis due to the particular complexity. Notably, Italy is still far behind other European countries in female employability, and the gender gap is very

marked (Rome Business School, 2023). Specifically, in Italian hospitals persist – with the exception of some notable realities (HSR, 2022) – gender disparities in retributions and career advancement (Gaiaschi, 2018).

It was performed a qualitative approach, drawing from a sample of 8 individual interviews. This work seeks to allow readers to ‘hear’ the ‘voices’ of the women who participated in the study, via direct quotation from (anonymized) interviews. The basic scheme of the interviews administered has been defined by enucleating and adapting the key concepts related to gender equity that emerged from the literature by means of three blocks of open-ended questions (Table 1).

In detail, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with medical doctors from the Italian hospital territory. Specifically, the selected medical doctors are part of hospitals, respectively 3 in the northern area, 3 in the southern area, and 2 in the central area of the Italian territory. Table 2 synthesizes the data related to the respondents’ socio-demographic features.

We obtained a list of full-time female medical doctors, and a member of the research team sent email invitations describing the study to potential participants. To maximize the response rate, an email reminder was sent. We also employed a snowball sampling strategy, wherein participating doctors were asked to support recruitment by identifying other members, related to other hospitals, who might be willing to be interviewed (Pattani et al., 2018). In a time span of six months (from February 2022 to July 2022), two researchers examined the key informants through online meetings due to the pandemic limitations and geographic distances. The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and were composed of open-ended questions. The interview protocols were sent in advance to the respondents to support the respondents to better collect their thoughts. During every interview, the main aims of the research projects were presented and discussed with each key informant. Secondly, the researchers proposed questions regarding the research topic. However, albeit the researcher followed the established guide of the interviews, the experts have been encouraged to interact. *The interviews were transcribed by notes and recorded to guarantee a more consistent transcription (Creswell, 2012).* The interviews protocols were transcribed and two-pass process were adopted for data verification. Additional data from the websites of the hospitals and reports were used in order to form a concrete view about the issue of gender gap within Italian hospitals in recent years (Flick, 2018).

After, the collected data were analysed by the two authors, who, at first, to avoid a possible mutual influence, acted separately, interpreting the answers based on their knowledge and experience background. Subsequently, the comparison between the authors became necessary, as well as appropriate, to better investigate the gender equity within hospitals. The comparison revealed uniformity in the interpretation of the information extrapolated from the interviews, and this aspect underlines the coherence of the research design concerning the link between the objective pursued and the results obtained.

Table 1: Semi-structured interview protocol

Questions	Concept
- Do you think that although women are increasingly present within healthcare, are they concentrated in specific departments? If so, which ones? - Do you think that a gender pay gap is present for the same jobs or for jobs of the same level?	Composition of the structure and the pay gap
- What obstacles, if any, did you encounter during your career path, and what resources did you use to make it to the present? - Did the choice to "get ahead" affect the family aspect? - Do you think there is a "glass ceiling," that is, a barrier that women encounter when they try to reach leadership positions? - Do you think stereotypes are still present in women's leadership roles? For example, do you think women receive more scrutiny than men in equal role?	Gender obstacles and stereotyped judgments

Questions	Concept
- Believes that companies with more women employed in roles management or with a greater female presence on the board, have better performance? - What do you think are the skills of female leadership? - What do you think are the obstacles to the advancement of women in healthcare? - Finally, could you suggest actions that could be implemented to eliminate the gender disparity?	Performance considerations and actions aimed at managing gender disparity

Source: Authors' elaboration

Table 2: Respondents' socio-demographic features

Category	Feature	Numerosity	Percentage
Role	<i>Resident</i>	2	25%
	<i>Specialized</i>	5	62,5%
	<i>Consultant</i>	1	12,5%
Age	<i>26 – 35</i>	2	25%
	<i>36 – 45</i>	2	25%
	<i>46 – 55</i>	3	37,5%
	<i>55 +</i>	1	12,5%
Education	<i>Master degree</i>	5	62,5%
	<i>Master's degree and PhD</i>	1	12,5%
	<i>Master's degree and other</i>	2	25%

Source: Authors' elaboration

4. Results and discussion

The respondents highlighted several aspects related to gender equity within hospitals, including the composition of the structure and pay gap, gender obstacles and stereotyped judgments, and performance considerations and actions aimed at managing gender disparity.

4.1 Composition of the structure and the pay gap

Regarding the greater presence of women in specific departments, most respondents believe that there are differences in the role covered by women or men. According to the interviews, women are employed more in patient care, nursing, and educator jobs. In addition, two respondents believe there are not enough women in administration and particularly managers in hospitals. This is in line with the literature which highlighted that women in hospitals hold proportionately fewer leadership positions compared to men (Das et al., 2022; Forster et al., 2021; Marshall et al., 2020).

Surprisingly from what has emerged from the literature (Wright et al., 2007), all respondents answered negatively regarding the pay gap, at least in their administration.

4.2 Gender obstacles and stereotyped judgments

The second block regards the obstacles encountered, and the presence or absence of stereotypical perceived judgments. All interviewees reported that they encountered obstacles, not necessarily due to gender differences. Only one of the interviewees perceived a different treatment in the workplace compared to men. In addition, all respondents report overcoming obstacles through study, dedication, and constant commitment.

Regarding the following question about the impact of the family on the career, five out of eight respondents answer positively. One of the participants, in particular, highlights the difficulty in balancing the work aspect with caring for the family by citing the mental burden, i.e., that feeling of oppression that leads us to perceive upon ourselves the excessive weight of the daily responsibilities. According to an interviewee, "*I returned early from maternity leave not taking advantage of all the concessions I could have had, having little time to devote to family had repercussions on my choice not to have more children.*"

Concerning the presence or absence of the glass ceiling, seven women affirm its existence. They believe precisely, as stated earlier, that the first choice in filling roles at the top falls to men, whether or not they are ready for these responsibilities, and that women must necessarily demonstrate more. This is in line with the

literature which shed light on the fact that women leaders often in hospitals were more likely to have received additional academic degrees (e.g. MBA, MPH) than their male counterparts (Das et al., 2022).

One of the interviewees elaborates on this topic by stating that very often, the presence of the glass ceiling is due to the woman herself feeling unable to fulfil a specific role, or, again, due to other women, which refers to other women as being unable to fill important roles.

Regarding the question about the existence of stereotypes toward leadership, we still obtain a majority in affirmative answer. In fact, the characteristics traditionally associated with the concept of leadership repurpose traits that are more related to males, and, therefore, difficult to associate with a woman. This is in line with the literature which underlines the fact that the gender gap is still present in healthcare sector and is rooted in gender biases and gender norms that date back thousands of years (Newman et al. 2020). As previously stated, extra effort is required for women for succeeding (Farruggia et al., 2020), and women are more likely to face barriers to career advancement than men do in their workplace (Khader et al., 2022).

4.3 Performance considerations and actions aimed at managing gender disparity

The last block focuses on performance considerations and suggestions for decreasing the existing gender gap. Regarding improving performance with female leadership or a greater female presence on the board, the minority of respondents state that they do not believe to the potential related to gender equity in leadership roles. However, the majority of participants consider that the improved business performance could improve due to female leadership because of particular skills such as organizational and multitasking ability, problem-solving, empathetic approach, mediation, and listening skills. These skills are part of emotional intelligence, which as mentioned before, is a quality recognized more by woman. This is in line with the literature which pointed out that women leaders' sense of purpose or commitment of women leaders' can affect positively their medical departments (Hobgood and Draucker, 2022).

The last two questions are aimed at finding solutions or actions aimed at reducing the obstacles towards women in the healthcare sector. Some of the respondents reiterate the notion that the greatest obstacles to progress in healthcare for women are also due to poor social support. In addition, some of the respondents oppose gender quotas because they can exacerbate the gender gap and especially the prejudice that women are not capable of achieving a certain role except through actions and not through their own abilities.

In this regard, the concrete suggestions that have been proposed are several.

An interviewee highlights that *"career development interventions for women are fundamentals. They can provide support to young female professionals, for example, through the presence of company crèches"*.

According to another respondent: *"In the hospitals, it is crucial building a culture of "diversity leadership" based on the goal is to change the organizational culture by changing the composition of the workforce. This would lead to the fact that new employees would conform to existing practices, and no additional intervention will be necessary. The mere presence of an increasing number of employees from diverse backgrounds will lead to a cultural change."*

Another interview highlights the critical aspect of generational change: *"It is critical the focus on generational change through awareness and information in schools, universities, and businesses activities. The main goal of these initiatives should be to eliminate stereotypes for both sexes; how? By showing role models of women in non-traditional occupations and organizing training sessions or providing men with more experience working with women. If the implementation of these initiatives is successful, women in such an organization will have more freedom to act, without worrying about the expectations and prejudices of others."*

This is in line with the literature which underlines the importance to improve the climate for women in hospitals (Carr et al., 2015), creating programs for supporting gender equity, already in medical schools (Carr et al., 2017), developing career-support measures, such as mentoring programs, role models, flexitime and flexible career structures in hospitals (Buddeberg-Fischer et al., 2010).

5. Conclusion, limitations, and future streams of research

The issue of gender equity is increasingly cited as a goal in healthcare as, at present, women still face barriers to progress toward top roles in hospitals. Indeed, although the number of female physicians in the world is steadily increasing, unfortunately, the great challenge of gender inequality is still to be solved worldwide. Gender equity, understood as justice in the distribution of benefits, power, resources, and responsibilities between women and men, in healthcare, is gaining increasing attention, although subtle and blatant gender

biases still affect women physicians and physician leaders. Recently, initiatives to raise gender awareness have been numerous, yet the issue of gender equity in the medical profession has not been adequately evaluated, especially from a qualitative perspective.

This work aims to carry out a preliminary investigation that follows the case study approach based on an Italian case study in order to identify the characteristics that obstacle to or support gender equity in terms of salary, career, and professionalism. Interviews with women medical doctors allow readers to 'hear' the 'voices' of the women who participated in the study regarding gender equity in Italian hospitals. In particular, the analysis shows that, although the issue of salary appears to be resolved in terms of gender equity, further efforts are needed from a social policy perspective to address social biases inherent in the gender issue. Specifically, career development interventions for women are fundamentals for providing support to young female professionals, for example, through the presence of company crèches. In addition, it has emerged the relevance of building a culture of "diversity leadership" based on the goal to change the organizational culture in favor of a different composition of the workforce. In such a direction, programs for supporting gender equity, already in the medical schools, appear fundamental to thrive the cultural change. Accordingly, gender equity can be achieved with special career-support measures, such as mentoring programs, role models, flexitime, and flexible career programs in the hospitals.

This contribution provides preliminary insights that pave the way for further investigation, for a deeper understanding of gender equity in hospitals. In fact, the field of investigation should be broadened, as it is limited to a restricted number of interviews. In this sense, the purely qualitative nature of the research does not allow us to generalize the findings, although the insights that emerged from this study can provide a foundation and useful stimulus for future theoretical and empirical studies, both qualitative and quantitative. Future lines of research could concern, for example, a qualitative study based on another national context or a bigger sample of interviewees. In addition, big data analysis on a social network to frame the collective perception of this issue, which deeply impacts society, could be an e stream of research. Moreover, due to the relative scarcity of specific literature, it might be of interest to carry out a systematic review regarding gender equity in the medical sector. Thanks to such an analysis, it would be possible to synthesize the diverse concepts related to this issue and develop a possible framework for organizational reflections in terms of human resource management related to gender equity in hospitals.

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