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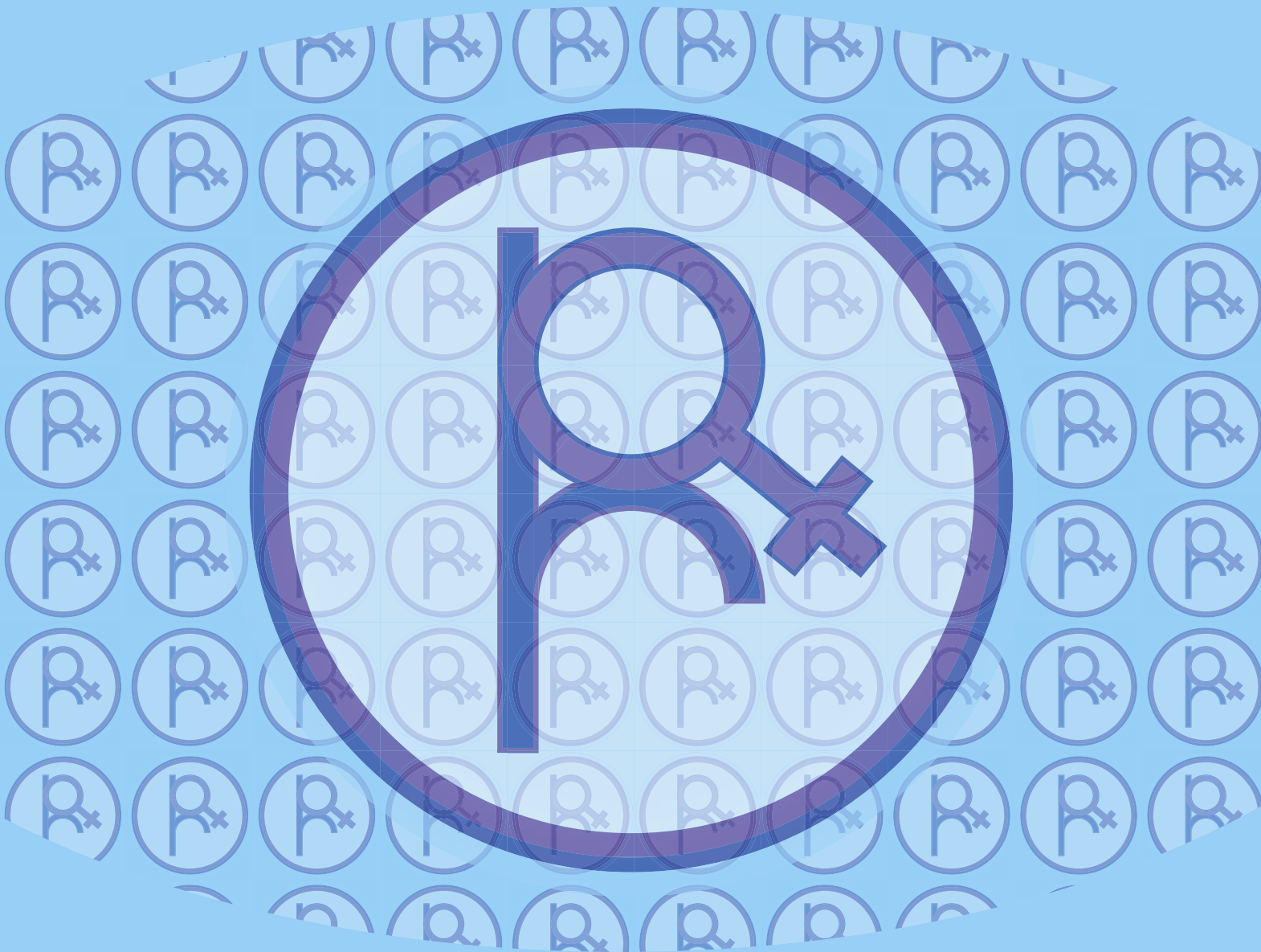
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Women in Public Relations in England



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Summary

This study is based on 26 interviews with women working in the public relations industry in England. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 16 managers and 10 employees without managerial responsibilities to explore lived experiences of women working in public relations, as well as the office culture and socialisation and leadership.

Results show that women face exclusions and discrimination in their daily experiences and that the office culture and its friendliness towards women depend on gender balance. Women who work in offices dominated by men report masculine banter and social interactions, exclusions from business decisions, and women generally report the lack of recognition of public relations as a discipline. Women also report expectations that can be seen as culturally masculine, thus disadvantaging women. In that, it appears that cultural masculinity, or 'blokishness', is expected of women, however, women express negative feelings towards women who embrace masculine behaviour. This applies to both women who were socialised with girls (and who tend to show more feminine characteristics) and women who were socialised with boys (and who tend to show more masculine characteristics). Women leaders are thus expected to be softer than men who are praised for their directness, however, when they show softness, research shows that women are then seen as inadequate for leaders, thus facing a 'catch 22' and double expectations of women they work with who hold them to a different (higher) standard than male managers.

Besides, women show a strong link between early socialisation and later experiences in work and leadership styles (managers) and leadership preferences (employees). Thus, women who were socialised with girls tend to prefer feminine leadership styles and women managers who were socialised with girls also show more feminine leadership characteristics. Women who were socialised with boys tend to demonstrate more masculine characteristics in leading and prefer to work with and for men.

Results also suggest that BAME women face additional difficulties and prioritise their race in explaining the challenges they face in the public relations industry.

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Introduction

Women in public relations is a field of interest that has started to gain prominence in the 1980s and, in the last decade, there has been a proliferation of academic research on experiences of women working in the public relations industry albeit the number of research outputs on this issue is nowhere near to those produced in fields of crisis communications and media relations, for example (Topić et al, 2019; Jelen-Sanchez, 2018).

As part of the EUPRERA project ‘Women in Public Relations,’¹ we have already produced a comprehensive literature review analysing 223 articles on women in public relations in a period between 1982 and (mid) 2019 (Topić et al, 2019; Topić et al, 2020). The findings have shown that the position of women in public relations has reached a full circle. In other words, while in the 1980s women were facing work discrimination (glass ceiling, pay gap, women being confined to technician positions even though they were better educated) and bias (covert discrimination in promotions, chauvinism, stereotypes and decrease in prestige and wages due to feminization of public relations), this unfavourable position has come to the surface in the period between 2010 and 2019 with women reporting again work discrimination (being confined to technician positions, glass ceiling, pay gap, masculine work culture) and bias (stereotypes about organisational skills, lack of power, stereotypes about communication skills and intersectional discrimination) (Topić et al, 2019). In other words, while bias against women in the 1980s was centred on views that women will, for example, leave work if husband’s job takes him elsewhere and not being good team players, in the last decade women faced prejudice of not having good organisational skills (and thus not being a manager material) and having good communication skills (and thus continue to be confined to technician positions).

Following the extensive literature review, it became apparent that there is a gap in the literature in regards to the office culture and leadership in public relations and that the existing research is predominantly produced in the United States. Therefore, for the second part of the project, we carried out original interviews with women working in the public relations industry in all participating countries of the project. The research aims to explore the general position of women in the industry (with which we add to the existing knowledge on this problem from national perspectives) and to capture the office culture and leadership skills and experiences of women working in the industry. What is central to this research is also an exploration of the concept of blokishness and cultural masculinities in public relations organisations. The research designed

¹ <http://euprera.org/what-we-do/projects/women-in-public-relations/>

for this stage of the EUPRERA project is, therefore, underpinned by the sociological theory of habitus (Bourdieu, 2007), organisational studies with particular focus on cultural masculinity and the office culture (Acker, 1990; 2009; Alvesson, 1998; 2013; Saval, 2015) and also on the notion of differences between men and women in regards to communication and behaviour or blokishness (North, 2009; 2009b; Mills, 2014) and its impact on work culture.

The latter focus of the research stems from my work on women in journalism where I have identified literature that tackles this issue and I have also done some research myself. For example, it is a common knowledge that journalism remains a masculine profession where standards of work such as newsgathering techniques and the way newsrooms operate have not changed even with a significant arrival of women to journalism (Lofgren-Nilsson, 2010; Ross, 2001; Lobo et al, 2017; Sieghart & Henry, 1998; Franks, 2013). Therefore, scholars warn about an expectation that a journalist is a man with no family commitments and long work hours and lack of free time are the norm, which has not changed much since the early days (Franks, 2013). Gallagher (2002) warned about laddish culture in newsrooms which makes women uncomfortable whereas Mills (2014) stated that senior women who manage to progress in journalism “become so bloke-ified by the macho water in which they swim that many younger women looking up don’t see them as role models for the kind of women they might want to become” (p.19). In a study I conducted in 2019, women working in journalism also reported unfavourable work conditions, masculine culture in the newsrooms, having to be like men to succeed and inherent sexism (Topić & Bruegmann, 2020). Besides, in my study of bylines in the British press on health reporting (Topić, 2018) I asked whether women from health sections are not bloke-ified enough to write on health in the news section. In other words, women have historically brought topics such as health, food and lifestyle to newspapers (Christmas, 1997; Delano, 2003; Janes, 2011; Franks, 2013), however, once health came to the agenda and joined the news, it appears that women have not moved to news section along with their traditional topic but that this became the realm of men (Topić, 2018). Nevertheless, North (2009; 2009b) argued that men in journalism do not join the newsroom culture but rather, they constitute the culture.

These debates fit into the radical feminist paradigm that argues that women fundamentally have different interests than men and do things differently (Rakow & Nastasia, 2009; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Yule, 2006). These studies have so far been conducted in communication where Tannen (1995; 1990; 1986) argued that men and women communicate differently. For example, women are seen to have a supportive communication style that builds relationships whereas men are seen to have a dominant style marked by interruptions and dominance in conversations. These

differences then influence gender relations, leadership styles and often result with a situation that women face obstacles at work due to the dominance of men in managerial positions (Merchant, 2012; Vukoičić, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Tannen, 1990; Christopher, 2008; de la Rey, 2005; van der Boon, 2003; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Crawford, 1995; Stanford et al, 1995; Alimo Metcalfe, 1995). Leadership literature shows differences between men and women in leadership styles (e.g. Christopher, 2008; de la Rey, 2005; van der Boon, 2003; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Crawford, 1995; Stanford et al, 1995; Alimo Metcalfe, 1995), however, studies in leadership also show that women and men, despite differences in leadership styles, do not achieve different results, and this means that evidence does not show that men achieve higher results because of their leadership style (e.g. Anderson et al., 2006; Morgan, 2004; Chemers et al., 2000).

To explore why women do not progress in their careers, in organisational studies, Acker (1990) wrote about gendered organisations, which are constructed of “divisions along lines of gender – divisions of labor, of allowed behaviours, of locations in physical space, of power, including the institutionalized means of maintaining the divisions in the structures of labor markets, the family, the state” (p. 146). Gender-neutral organizations then employ workers who are perceived as “the abstract, bodiless worker, who occupies the abstract, gender-neutral job has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate. The absence of sexuality, emotionality, and procreation in organizational logic and organizational theory is an additional element that both obscures and helps to reproduce the underlying gender relations” (Acker, 1990, p. 151). Feminists working in organisational studies also criticised oppression of women that comes as a result of bureaucracy and hierarchy (Acker, 1990) and some authors also argued that women have historically obtained lower positions in organisations and “there was never a question that women would be able to move up the company ladder in the way men could, since it remained unfathomable for male executives to place women alongside them in managerial jobs (...) Men were allowed to think of themselves as middle-class so long as women, from their perspective, remained something like the office proletariat, took office jobs to help their families until they married” (Saval, 2015, p. 77-78). Alvesson (2013) also argued that organisations operate under culturally masculine patterns or meanings that come more naturally to men than women, and thus women continue to remain lower positions. Nevertheless, Alvesson (2013) argues that technical jobs (which would include managerial positions) are culturally constructed as masculine because the cultural assumption is that these positions require aggression in the approach, determination, toughness

and persistence, and thus these roles are seen as an anti-thesis to women. Thus, higher positions remain associated with masculinity and associated positions with femininity.

In public relations scholarship, Aldoory (1998) found that women tend to use “participative management, attempts to energize staff, and empathy” (p. 97), however, data continually shows that higher positions in organisations are still dominated by men (Dubrowski et al, 2019; Place & Varderman Winter, 2013; Tench et al, 2017; Soria & Gomez, 2017; Fitch & Third, 2010) and that the pay gap is still a problem (Moreno et al, 2018a; Moreno et al, 2017; Moreno et al, 2015; Tench et al, 2017; Varderman-Winer & Place, 2017). The fact there is still a pay gap is often linked with women being confined to technical roles (Pulido Polo, 2012), or roles that require skills usually associated with femininity. However, the research on differences between men and women has not been extensively conducted in public relations scholarship and especially not on the office culture and the link between early socialisation and work experiences in public relations, which is the research gap this report series aims to fill. In that, we are particularly looking at organisational culture and cultural masculinities (Alvesson, 1998; 2013) and masculine habitus (Bourdieu, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and we explore the concept of blokishness (North, 2009; 2009b; Mills, 2014; Topić, 2018). This report, therefore, analyses data on the position of women in public relations industry in England, and further reports are being produced by researchers in Croatia, Slovenia, Spain, Portugal, France and Georgia.

In the subsequent part of this report, the position of women in public relations in England is analysed. In that, a particular emphasis is placed on work experiences of women working in the public relations industry in England, the office culture, leadership styles and masculinities in organisations.

Method and Conceptual Framework

In total, 26 interviews were conducted with women working in public relations in England. Of 26 interviewees, 16 hold managerial roles whereas 10 are employees without managerial responsibilities. All interviews were done via phone due to the fact they were conducted in April 2020, during a COVID-19 lockdown, and the recruitment was not difficult as there was lots of willingness to participate in the project and lots of interest in research on the position of women in public relations in England.

Interviewed women work both in-house (16) and in agencies (10) and they work in a variety of industries, such as public service, higher education, fashion and beauty, health, caring, retail,

finance, banking, logistics, communications, events, nuclear sector, professional services, technology and the media. Also, some interviewees changed jobs and moved between industries, with which they were able to reflect on how things are across different sectors. Some interviewees are now working as freelance practitioners whereas previously they also had full-time jobs in large organisations and/or agencies, which also provided good ground for reflecting on the position of women in the industry. This diversity in sampling provided a good overview of the situation in the public relations field.

Nevertheless, the sample is diverse in regards to locations, and thus interviewees are based in Manchester, Leeds, Channel Islands, Durham, London, Huddersfield, Chester, Birmingham, Nottingham and Newcastle upon Tyne. Interviewees have between one and 32 years of experience, thus providing a good overview of the situation and development in the field of public relations when the position of women is in stake. The age of women ranges from 22 to 56 years old and encompasses both junior and senior women. All interviewees work in public relations industry in England, and the majority of interviewees are British (two of BAME origin), however, interviewees with origin from Poland, Germany and Croatia were also recruited. Since this project is part of my large programme exploring the position of women in the communications industry and I have failed to recruit women outside of England for projects on women in advertising and women in journalism, in this research study I did not attempt to approach women based in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as I want to compare data I have across industries and focus on England.

Table 1 gives information on interviewees. In cases of two interviewees, six and 16, they are based in Yorkshire and for anonymisation, the term Yorkshire has been used for these two interviewees rather than a full name of the place where they are based. This is because attaching the place to responses of these two interviewees would potentially make clearer who was interviewed. Besides, in the case of interviewee 10 based in the south of England, the reference to the place has been removed at the request of the interviewee and the data from this interviewee has not been used in the analysis below.

Table 1. Interviewee’ demographics

INTERVIEW NO.	TYPE OF COMPANY	In-house or agency	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	EMPLOYEE OR MANAGER	PLACE
1	Public service	In-house	25	manager	Manchester
2	PR agency	Agency	25	manager	Leeds

3	Health company	In-house	3.5	employee	Channel Islands
4	Caring company	In-house	1.8	employee	Leeds
5	Retail company	In-house	4	manager	Durham
6	Building society	In-house	10	employee	Yorkshire (place redacted for anonymity)
7	PR agency	Agency	13	manager	Manchester
8	PR agency	Agency	2	employee	London
9	PR agency	Agency	17	manager	Huddersfield
10	Large corporation	In-house	20	manager	South of England (place redacted for anonymity)
11	Freelance (before that in-house, nuclear sector)	In-house	15	manager	Manchester
12	Freelance (before that in-house, fashion sector)	In-house	5	employee	Chester
13	Health corporation	In-house	24	manager	Channel Islands
14	Banking industry (now runs her agency)	In-house	19	manager	London
15	The logistics industry	In-house	20	employee	Chester
16	Education	In-house	20	manager	Yorkshire (place redacted for anonymity)
17	PR agency	Agency	10	manager	London
18	Finance corporation	In-house	6	manager	London
19	Professional services	In-house	4	employee	Birmingham
20	Agency (technology)/freelance	Agency	20	manager	London
21	Freelance	Agency	6	employee	Manchester
22	Freelance	Agency	22	employee	Leeds
23	Education	In-house	32	manager	Nottingham
24	Agency	Agency	12	manager	Manchester
25	Agency	Agency	11	manager	Newcastle upon Tyne

26	Media organisation	In-house	5	employee	Manchester
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Interviewees were asked questions, which were structured around three areas,

- **lived experiences of women** working in public relations where women were asked questions on work hours, work-life balance, working and raising a family, career progression opportunities, expectations on women's behaviour and attitudes women need to demonstrate to progress, experiences of direct discrimination such as disapproval, different treatment based on gender, sexist comments and practices, having to behave differently to be taken seriously and equality of opportunities;
- **office culture** where women were asked questions on networking, dress codes, chats and banter in the office, gender differences in office banter and social interactions, exclusion from business decisions and expectations of women, such as having to work harder to prove themselves because of their gender;
- **leadership** where women were asked questions on socialisation process and early social interactions, communication style, and experiences with their bosses with a distinction on how women and men lead and experiences with male and female bosses (for employees) and leadership styles (self-assessment of own leadership style for managers and leadership preferences for employees).

What is central to all questions is an exploration of *blokishness* in public relations industry, and thus whether women have to be like men to succeed, or whether women have to embrace what is commonly understood as cultural masculinity in behaviour and communication and thus become part of masculine habitus (Bourdieu, 2007; Alvesson, 1998; 2013). For example, in the first group of questions *blokishness* is conceptualised through questions on expectations and attitudes that women should demonstrate to succeed, with which I was assessing whether women are outlining what is usually understood as masculine characteristics in work (e.g. assertiveness, aggression, etc.), and which would furthermore show that women are socialised in a masculine habitus (Bourdieu, 2007).

In the second group of questions, *blokishness* was conceptualised through an exploration of laddy or *blokish* cultures in offices by asking questions on banter and daily social interactions to explore whether women and men interact and banter differently, which is linked to both

Bourdieu's (2007) habitus and the Difference Approach in feminism (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986; Vukoičić, 2013; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Yule, 2006).

In the final group of questions, blokishness is conceptualised through socialisation and leadership styles and a link is made between early experiences and leadership and preferences later in life where I was exploring whether women who were socialised with boys are more likely to embrace masculine characteristics later in life. In the same way, I was also exploring role models and whether women generally better respond to the so-called feminine or masculine leadership styles. This group of questions is then directly exploring the formation of habitus and how women and men who are socialised, in what is understood as cultural masculinity (Bourdieu, 2007; Alvesson, 1998; 2013), progress later in life.

The research was, therefore, underpinned by sociological theory and organisational theory. In that, organisational research has been arguing for decades that men monopolise higher positions and dominate in organisations (Alvesson, 1998; 2013) and some researchers have also argued that organisations are gendered and thus understand them as masculine and feminine (Acker, 1990). This leads to the concept of cultural masculinity, which is central to this research project, because organisational structures, processes and behaviours are often understood as culturally masculine, or meanings are constructed in a way that comes naturally to men and not women (Alvesson, 1998). Bourdieu (2007) constructed cultural masculinity through the notion of habitus by arguing that social norms are embedded in the society through the socialisation process, which is fundamentally gendered (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), which means that individuals do not often challenge the usual order of things because the division between genders is deeply engrained into the social order that women do not challenge it as they do not always recognise oppression, injustice and sexism (Bourdieu, 2007; Chambers, 2005). Therefore, masculine domination becomes "acceptable and even natural" and Bourdieu (2007) calls it "symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims" (p. 1), and what makes it possible is "arbitrary division which underlines both reality and the representation of reality" (ibid, p. 3). Thus, Bourdieu (2007) states that "we have embodied the historical structures of the masculine order in the form of unconscious schemes of perceptions and appreciation" (p. 5) and this feeds into daily interactions because women fail to observe mechanisms of domination due to them being deeply rooted in everyday practice.

Alvesson (2013) also outlines that many jobs are constructed as feminine and masculine and thus jobs that require persistence, toughness, determination and aggressive approach are constructed as masculine, and all higher positions (which are often seen as requiring these characteristics) are

seen as masculine whereas associate positions are seen as feminine. Translating this to public relations, it would appear that managerial positions are associated with masculinity whereas technical positions that require writing skills and relationship-building with clients would be associated with femininity. Scholars have been reporting for decades that women in public relations are confined to technical positions (Cline et al, 1986, Grunig, 1991; 1999; Toth & Grunig, 1993; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Grunig, 2006; Dozier et al, 2007; Creedon, 2009; Beurer-Zuellig et al, 2009; Pulido Polo, 2012; Topić et al, 2019; 2020), the question is, however, whether this stems from a large culturally masculine culture of public relations industry despite the rise of women in the industry and public relations becoming the so-called feminised industry? Bourdieu (2007) also argues that women need to demonstrate masculine characteristics to succeed, such as “a physical stature, a voice, or disposition such as aggressiveness, self-assurance, ‘role distance’, what is called natural authority, etc., for which men have been tacitly prepared and trained as men” (p. 62, emphasis in the original), which is also relevant for public relations research as not much work has been done taking this perspective.

According to Acker (1990), organisations operate under the culturally masculine understanding of alleged gender neutrality where workers are seen as bodiless or those who do not procreate and have no emotions, which is also a masculine characteristic as sociological research on socialisation processes has been demonstrating since early days. In the communications industry, as already emphasised, Tannen (1995; 1990; 1986) has demonstrated how women and men communicate differently due to different socialisation process, and many studies have demonstrated that leadership styles between men and women also differ (Tench et al, 2017; Christopher, 2008; de la Rey, 2005; van der Boon, 2003; Grove & Montgomery, 2000; Crawford, 1995; Stanford et al, 1995; Alimo Metcalfe, 1995). Following organisational theories, the long work hours and work-first culture have historically benefited men and disadvantaged women due to the expectation that women will care for the family (Saval, 2015) and this has created an ‘inequality regime’ because “the persons at the top of most organisations are likely to be white men; they are very privileged and have great class power compared with most other people in the organisation. The processes of exclusion that constitute a glass ceiling are class and race processes as well as gender processes” (Acker, 2009, p. 3).

These two frameworks, organisational studies on cultural masculinity (Alvesson, 1998; 2013) and Bourdieu’s (2007) concept of habitus were seen as particularly useful for this research as this enabled deconstruction of experiences of women and analysing them against these theories to

explore whether women have to be *blokish* to succeed and whether public relations industry operates in a masculine habitus despite being one of the most feminised industries.

Interviewees were recruited via personal contacts and LinkedIn. Of 26 interviewees, eight were personal contacts (of which five are former Leeds Beckett students I worked with during their studies in UG and PG programmes in public relations and public relations with journalism). Other interviewees were recruited via LinkedIn. In that, a short message was sent with a request for connecting to make clear the connection is a research request and avoid any deception to the connection intention. Upon connection acceptance, a longer email was sent explaining the aim of the research and providing the link to the project and the first project report, along with information pack and the consent form. The information pack and the consent form explained voluntary participation, right to withdraw, anonymity, confidentiality and data protection, in line with ethics policy of the Leeds Beckett University. The research has been approved by the local research ethics coordinator in the Leeds Business School.

Several interviewees were also recruited through recommendations from public relations practitioners who supported the project by asking their contacts to participate in the research. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes with a few exceptions that lasted for 45 minutes. All interviews were transcribed for the analysis, which was carried out per sections, lived experiences of women working in public relations, the office culture, and the socialisation and leadership styles. In that, responses to the group of interview questions from each section were copied to the Word document and these documents were then analysed separately. In the case of the third section, on socialisation and leadership, the answers were also cross-references against the socialisation answers.

The data was continually compared and contrasted using the coding approach of Morse and Richards (2002) and open coding was done first. This helped in identifying critical themes that emerge from the data, and then axial coding helped in analysing data against different sections of data, e.g. data on leadership against the data on socialisation to establish links between socialisation and leadership styles/preferences. Selective coding (ibid) helped in identifying and capturing the most relevant themes that emerge from data, and these themes are then related across data from all three sections of the report to provide an overall thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is “a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data, usually textual, according to themes; and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities,

relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles” (Lapadat 2010, p. 926). In the presentation of findings, I followed the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) where I am first presenting thematic analysis for each section of the report (lived experiences, the office culture and socialisation and leadership) and then I am outlining a final thematic analysis that emerges from all data. As per usual practice with thematic analysis, the writing of the results has plenty of direct quotes, which also enables interviewees to “speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings” (Berg, 2007, p. 96) and this is a common practice in qualitative research.

Thematic analysis is not linked to any specific theory because the thematic analysis is a sense-making approach and is a very helpful method when working with large data sets (Rohwer & Topić, 2018), such as transcripts from 26 qualitative interviews. Whilst thematic analysis is normally used for identifying research gaps rather than theory building, it was deemed as useful for this project, as it enabled detailed coding and identifying trends in the data, as well as analysing the position of women in public relations in details by conducting a triple thematic analysis and then extracting the conclusion from analysing three areas, lived experiences, the office culture and socialisation and leadership.

The questions guiding this study were, is blokishness manifested in public relations organisations? If so, how and in what areas? Are public relations organisations operating under cultural masculinity patterns? Are offices operating under cultural masculinity patterns? Are there differences in social interactions and banter between women and men? Is the office culture in advertising industry operating under masculine cultural patterns? Is leadership culturally constructed using masculine characteristics? Is there a link between socialisation and work experiences and leadership?

The results below provide an analysis of the position of women in public relations in England using the method and concepts from the theory outlined above. The results will be further explored in line with academic literature and the theoretical framework in subsequent academic publications stemming from this report.

Findings

As already emphasised, the interview questionnaire had three sections, lived experiences of women working in public relations, the office culture, and socialisation and leadership. Each of these sections is analysed separately below, and the conclusion draws an overall picture emerging from the data and links conclusions with available literature and the conceptual framework used in this study.

Lived Experiences of Women in Public Relations

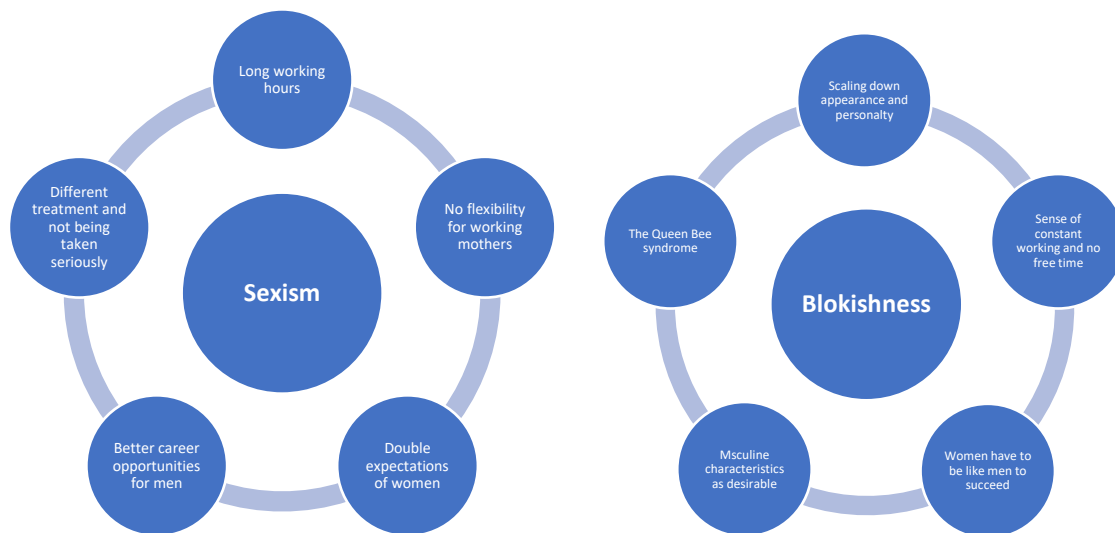
A total of 12 themes were identified when analysing data from this part of the questionnaire (graph 1), and the initial themes capture feelings of women working in public relations industry and lived experiences they reported.

Graph 1. Initial Thematic Analysis



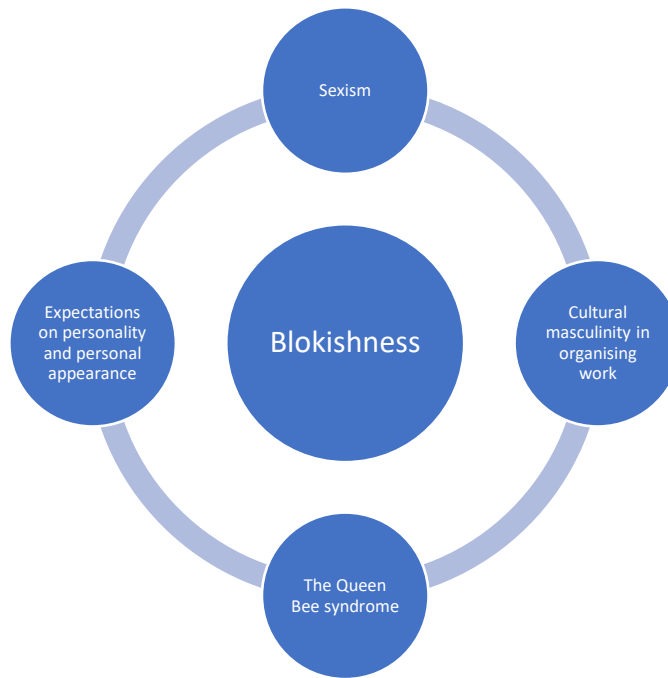
When these themes are analysed and contrasted against the literature and the conceptual framework used in this study, it appears that there are two main themes, **sexism** (with sub-themes of long working hours, no flexibility for working mothers, double expectations of women, better career opportunities for men and different treatment, and not being taken seriously) and **blokishness** (manifested in sub-themes the Queen Bee syndrome, masculine characteristics as desirable, women having to be like men to succeed, sense of constant working and no free time, and scaling down appearance and personality) (graph 2).

Graph 2. Second Thematic Analysis



However, what appears from the data is that blokishness runs through all sub-themes since women report expectations that normally come naturally to men (Bourdieu, 2007; Alvesson, 1998; 2013). For example, while long working hours and sense of constant working can be seen as sexism, as there is a historical recognition of organisations being man’s world and thus working under the assumption that there are no caring and family responsibilities (Acker, 1990; 2009; Saval, 2015), but the sense of constant working and having no free time also fit into blokishness and cultural masculinities frameworks because constantly working and having a work-first attitude is also something that is commonly ascribed to cultural masculinity and come more naturally to men than women (Bourdieu, 2007; Alvesson, 1998; 2013). Therefore, the final thematic map has one central theme, blokishness and the sub-themes above are grouped into sexism, cultural masculinity in organising work, the Queen Bee syndrome and expectations on personality and appearance (graph 3). The sub-themes are intertwined and run together, therefore the presentation of findings with direct quotes from interviewees are presented together and analysed against the literature and concepts analysed earlier in this study.

Graph 3. The Final Thematic Map



The majority of women reported long working hours and the sense of constant working, which puts them in a situation that they cannot switch off. For example, some women reported they work from 9 am to 6 pm with lots of “evening and weekend work as well” (interviewee 2, Leeds), others said they “sometimes work through lunch (interviewee 3, Channel Islands), and many have reported unpaid overtime. What runs across responses is the fact overtime is not ordered but expected, and thus women find themselves pressured to put unpaid hours in, even though they noticed that other departments in the same company leave on time. For example,

“8.30 in the morning until 5.30 (...)I don’t get paid for any overtime, but if work isn’t finished, my boss would expect me to stay and complete that work. We do find ourselves staying a lot later than other departments that finish bang on five o’clock, but I do think that that stems from the fact that our manager likes to stay a little bit later. There is almost a feeling of, if she is staying until 7, 8, 9 o’clock sometimes, you feel a bit of pressure to also stay behind, even if it is just for ten minutes, just to show that you are happy to stay a little bit later. Obviously, there are other times where my manager is not in on an evening, and me and my co-worker will leave directly at 5 because the expectation is not there” (interviewee 4, Leeds).

Some women also mentioned that they work very long days and weekends, and compensate for an exercise they take. For example, interviewee 18 said that she gets to “the office at 7, I leave at 7 or 8 but I am on my phone 24/7 (...) Yes. When I am not sleeping, I have my work phone right next to me. The emails are coming in”, thus showing the sense of non-stop working and heavy workloads, which fits into organisational literature that argues organisations are still man’s world (Acker, 1990; 2009; Alvesson, 1998; 2013; Bourdieu, 2007) where women are expected

to develop the work-first attitude, which has historically been a masculine characteristic due to the fact women stayed at home and looked after children (Saval, 2015). This also signals a masculine habitus and internalisation of work practices that are set out by men (Bourdieu, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), due to the fact no woman called out these practices as masculine and benefiting men.

Besides, some women also mentioned they work events and thus have to work after hours, until 10 or 11 pm. Therefore, their work was “as soon as I wake up in the morning till I go to bed”, which then leads to the situation that it is impossible to switch off so they end up working until three am and writing notes, and then letting clients know in the morning (interviewee 12, Chester). Women who work for themselves, either as freelance or as small agency owners, mention flexibility they found when they left the industry and started to work for themselves. For example, interviewee 14 stated that going freelance has given her flexibility to have children and to avoid the commute, which takes too much time. However, she also emphasised that she only left the industry due to the lack of flexibility from the new boss who was a young man who replaced her female boss during the six months off she took to look after her child. When she returned, she faced lack of flexibility and the company “got even more male-dominated and I had a male boss who was so uncompromising of my situation and he expected me to turn up in London at 8 o’clock every mornign and basically work a lot of hours”, which ultimately led this interviewee to accept redundancy when she was offered and start working on her own. She, however, emphasised that,

“it’s amazing how a female leader just completely inspired me and then taking six months off I came back into someone who was much younger than me and wanted to make a name for himself, and he went the wrong way about it (...) had no time for mums or part-time working. It just didn’t come in to his thinking. He was very unflexible. It’s a shame, really, because 10 and a half years was a brilliant time and then the last six months was just really not very nice at all going into work. I hated it. I absolutely hated it” (interviewee 14, London).

The view above shows expectations on women and lack of understanding expressed, in this case, by a male boss who disregarded family responsibility and expected a work-first attitude, which is often seen as a masculine pattern in organisational behaviour (Saval, 2015). Bourdieu (2007) argued that this practice presents sexual domination as women “who attain very high positions (...) have to ‘pay’ in a sense for this professional success with less ‘success’ in the domestic realm (divorce, late marriage or no marriage, difficulties or failures with children, etc.) (...) and the success of the domestic undertaking is often achieved at the price of partial or total renunciation of major professional success” (p. 107, emphasis in the original). In the same way, many women

face a choice of either being successful career women or being successful mothers because of lack of flexibility. However, flexibility in itself is a problem because Bourdieu (2007) argues that women are often forced to accept flexibility in the form of part-time jobs, which are paid less and prevent career progression and participation in decision-making processes, and thus leaves women vulnerable to lower pay and redundancies even when they are equally or more qualified than men. Bourdieu (2007) links this practice with masculine habitus in which women who want to combine career and motherhood are seen as those who should move away to the private sphere (or domestic sphere) whereas men remain in the public sphere and thus hold the power, with which masculine habitus remains intact. Nevertheless, Bourdieu (2007) also argues that flexible policies and working part-time keep women out of power and perpetuate masculine habitus where the work is structured around masculine values. He calls this situation a social differentiation where genders are differentiated in regards to their bodies, thus male is differentiated from non-male or female, which means that female cannot be part of male habitus. This leads to the question of workloads, which can be seen as unnecessarily high and thus also part of masculine habitus where masculine work-first attitude dominates the way organisations operate. For example, in European Communications Monitor survey, women reported high stress due to heavy workloads and the lack of resources to do the work and the data suggests that workloads are particularly heavy at the middle-management level which is occupied by women as opposed to more senior positions occupied by men (ECM, 2018).

This view is further exacerbated by interviewee 22 (Leeds) who also went freelance to bring up a family and while she likes the opportunity to fix her work hours and have more freedom in choosing clients, she also feels that to a certain extent, she did not “fulfil her potential”. She carried on by saying, “I probably could have given a lot more if I had been employed rather than self-employed, but it has worked for me and my lifestyle” (ibid). This issue is linked to raising a family whilst working and many women state that it is possible to work and raise a family but they strongly emphasise that this depends on the organisation because not every organisation has policies in place that enable working and raising a family. However, some women recognised that it depends on “how far we want to climb the ladder” because they say women have to “step back from some of my responsibilities” and it will “never again be as easy for me to go back in” (interviewee 8, London), thus recognising that the industry still operates in a way that makes motherhood and career inconceivable. Interviewee 8 also made an interesting observation by stating that she noticed that many highly successful women do not have a family, thus showing that women have to be like men and dedicate to work 100% to succeed, or they have to find a

partner willing to work part-time, which has historically always been difficult due to the expectation that women will look after children and decrease their involvement with work after they marry (Saval, 2015; Acker, 1990). The experiences of women in public relations, therefore, echo literature in journalism studies where scholars have already recognised masculine culture and masculine way of understanding work (Mills, 2014; 2017; North, 2009; 2009b), and it also echoes Bourdieu's (2007) observation that this practice presents sexual domination as women "who attain very high positions (...) have to 'pay' in a sense for this professional success with less 'success' in the domestic realm (divorce, late marriage or no marriage, difficulties or failures with children, etc.) (...) and the success of the domestic undertaking is often achieved at the price of partial or total renunciation of major professional success" (p. 107, emphasis in the original).

The lack of possibilities to combine motherhood and work also comes from previously mentioned long working hours and events that happen outside of work. For example, interviewee 9 (Huddersfield) commented that "PR is all around people and relationships, and often those are outside of office hours and work", and thus she stated that because of issues with childcare that many women face "you can progress more quickly as a male". This view was echoed by interviewee 12 (Chester) who said that "there has to be a certain element of dedication you give to it on your way up because PR is about making time for people, connecting and nurturing those relationships". However, some interviewees mentioned that lack of flexibility and long work hours are linked to the type of PR one does. For example, interviewee 17 argued that if a woman works in media relations, that lacks flexibility because of deadlines journalists work with and the similar issue is with crisis management and business development, which requires lots of out of hours networking. This interviewee, therefore, feels that only strategy is flexible, however, this rarely seems to be a woman's role,

"I think if you're doing work like PR strategies, that's much easier because basically, it requires research which you can slot into times that suit you; it's not dramatic deadlines. And strategy reports, often you can do after a month or two or three, and it's a much slower pace; you've got more control, and you can plan a project where there are some milestones, and you can plan your work-life balance around that. But the fact is that very few women do strategy. It's one of the highest levels of public relations, and most of the women that I've come across, they tend to work much more in the tactical areas, not in the strategy. Often a man walks in, he tends to have a beard and glasses, and funny looking socks, and he's the strategy person. And the women are the ones who are all running round who often get a fraction of what he gets paid, and they do a lot of the heavy lifting (...) Because he's a strategist, and women often don't question what does a strategist do or mean, and they just listen and do what they're told. That's what I see happening a lot, actually" (interviewee 17, London).

Other women also mentioned a problem when a woman is doing the strategy because clients “didn’t respect my strategic input as much as male colleagues” and clients also often tend to get

“quite flirty (...) if there is a guy there, they understand why they are there, but if it is a woman, occasionally they can simply misunderstand that you are not there just for their company on a friendly or romantic level (...) I don’t think men would have that experience” (interviewee 24, Manchester).

In other words, when networking women often feel they have to be careful when trying to build relationships with other men because if “he gets an idea of something, that relationship completely changes and I think men often get the wrong idea when it comes to these things” (interviewee 18, London). These issues show cultural masculinities in organisations where men decide what is the appropriate way of doing things and where women are treated as interlopers and objects of harassment, which does not always have to be physical sexual harassment. Bourdieu (2007) called this practice sexual domination, which does not always involve sexual advances, but still presents sexism because “faced with men’s sexual jokes, women often have no other choice than to exclude themselves or participate, at least passively, in order to try to integrate themselves, but then running the risk of no longer being able to protest if they are victims of sexism or sexual harassment” (p. 68).

Interviewee 17 also mentioned that it is difficult for a woman to do strategy because men will try to bring the woman down, which means that women have to be forceful too, thus bringing the notion of blokishness and embracing masculine ways of doing things (Mills, 2014; 2017; North, 2009, 2009b),

“Because I actually do quite a lot of strategy work, and so I think there was a really big company I was working for, and I was doing the strategy, and there were about ten agencies involved in this project, and they brought me in for strategy, and the other agencies would have been tactical. And because it was a big client, the other agencies were all middle-aged white men, and basically, I think they were shocked that a skinny brown woman was doing the strategy. And so, they collectively tried to call me out on my strategy all the time, but I was actually quite forceful back, and then they backed down. So, I feel that sometimes when you’re in an environment, men are more aggressive and wanting to play office politics and bring you down, but you just have to be forceful back and then they back down” (Interviewee 17, London).

In other words, being domineering and aggressive are characteristics normally recognised as masculine (Alvesson, 1998; 2013). Women are commonly expected to be ‘feminine’, which means “smiling, friendly, attentive, submissive, demure, restrained, self-effacing” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 66), and this comes from the socialisation process where women learn submission, relationship building and working in groups whilst men learn individualism and dominance (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Merchant, 2012), thus when a woman

comes to the position of power it comes naturally that men feel uncomfortable with being dominated by a woman.

Women who reached higher positions and who do not have children mention that they would probably not be able to go as high (above office manager to the board level, for example) had they had children because it is very difficult. Women who hold higher positions noted that it is near impossible to have flexibility if on a position as senior as that one because the expectations are higher and having “a senior job on the board means that I do a lot of evening events” (interviewee 23, Nottingham). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that many women in public relations get stuck at middle-level managerial roles, for those that can progress at all, as very senior positions have time-consuming work demands, which are linked to masculine habitus where men can put the hours in as they are not normally caregivers (Bourdieu, 2007; Saval, 2015; Acker, 1990).

Interestingly, some women who work very long hours mention that the work hours were very poor when they were going up the career ladder but they, in some case, tend to get better later in the career. Interviewee 11 (Manchester), for example, mentioned that her work-life balance is better now when she is senior but she still does lots of work in her free time because she likes her job and sees it also as a hobby. This interviewee also mentioned that there should not be a distinction between work and life because people should love what they do and work should be a part of their identity, thus also demonstrating what is usually known as a masculine way of seeing work as part of the identity and a work-first attitude (Acker, 1990; Alvesson, 1998; 2013; Saval, 2015),

“It is better now but when I was going up the career ladder it was poor. It was very much work-orientated. When I came home I logged on and did some work. I spoke about work. The thing with me is that I am really passionate about PR and comms and I don't tend to see it as work. It's part of who I am and what I do (...) To be honest, it's a passion, and it's my hobby, it's my interest, it's my job, it's my career. So it's kind of part of who I am. So I'll read books about PR, I'll do work on comms, I'll be on Twitter tweeting about comms. I'll be writing blogs about comms, but to me it's not a hindrance, if you see what I mean. So it's part of me (...) but in this day and age I don't think there is any such thing as work-life anyway, it's just life, right? And it should be. That's the way I look at it. It's life and if you hate your job and you're not liking it and whatnot then I think it's something that you may need to do different because life is short and you should really spend time doing stuff for enjoyment. It's a bit controversial but I don't believe in work-life balance, as such. It's just a life and you choose. As long as you're in control of how you're managing your time then that's the most important thing” (interviewee 11, Manchester).

However, despite hindrances emphasised above with women having to choose between career and motherhood, long working hours and little free time, women stated that women can progress in their careers in public relations, thus showing the internalisation of masculine habitus and values of the industry without challenging patriarchal (or capitalist) structures that brought about the situation one has to work non-stop and have trouble in combining work and parenting. The sense of work satisfaction and the sense of equality seems to come, however, from the fact that many senior women in public relations industry are women, as well as many co-workers, thus showing that working in a female environment might have an impact on work satisfaction and optimism. For example, in a study on women journalists in the UK, women who work in magazines, which are female environments in the UK's media system, report less dissatisfaction and discrimination than women who work in newspapers, which have historically always been a domain of men (Topić and Bruegmann, 2020).

In this study, some women reported that this positive view applies to public relations environments only, as some women reported that working in other roles was not always supportive, but “anti-women” in the case of, for example, the construction industry (interviewee 12, Chester), which is historically known as one of the masculine industries where men form the majority of the workforce. Some women do recognise the difference. For example, several women mentioned that women are expected to do it all and somehow manage both career and family. Interviewee 21 also mentioned that women sacrifice more than men and that men are praised for the family work they do, when they do it, whereas there is an expectation of women to just get on with it, thus demonstrating sexism and unrealistic expectations of women, as well as cultural masculinities that have historically played against the women who were seen as belonging to the private domain (Saval, 2015; Van Zoonen, 1994; Bourdieu, 2007),

“Yes. I think they can, but the sacrifice is potentially greater than for men. There is an expectation on women to be everything (...) There should be on men and there probably is, but not to the same extent. We are probably seeing it quite interestingly now as everyone is stuck at home in lockdown trying to juggle family and work. I know a lot of people that that is just life. Basically mum is always on and their work is always on and they have to try and find this weird balance with both of them being a priority. There is still that imbalance. An example would be my former MD left a meeting early because he had to pick his kid up at 4:00 and the room practically applauded him. I know half the women I work with do that every day, then they get home and finish their work. While that imbalance is there, it is always going to be difficult to progress because unconscious bias is in the way” (interviewee 21, Manchester).

While women state they have chances to progress in the career, when directly asked whether their chances are equal to those available to men, some women expressed reservations by arguing

that women juggle too many things, and thus lack confidence and “hold ourselves back quite a lot as women; we’ll see a role and think, ‘Oh, I can do 60% of that, but 40% I’m not sure about, so I won’t apply for it’” (interviewee 15, Chester). However, an interesting observation came from interviewee 4 who stated she sees mostly male managers in organisations and she linked this experience with her experience of studying for a public relations degree where there were hardly any male students, thus leaving her wondering where did men come from,

“I think in my particular organisation that I am with now, the answer would be yes, but I do think that that is because it is quite female-dominated in this particular organisation. However, I do find and I have noticed, and this is just a personal observation, that while I was at my university and attended all of my lectures, the ratio of female students to male students was quite evident. I don’t think we ever, in any year group, in my classrooms at the time, had more than 2 or 3 boys per seminar, that I personally attended, which would suggest that you would see more female management. But then when I went into agency, started applying for jobs, started taking interviews with people, a lot of the agencies and in-house management were men. So, it stresses the point of, where have these men come from, as such, when they are not present in the university observation that I have? (...) Have they not had to achieve the degree? Have they managed to surpass female co-workers? (...) Yes. So, it has been something that I have noticed. I think in that instance, that might then hinder my progression opportunities” (interviewee 4, Leeds).

The fact men form the majority in leadership positions is not new in public relations scholarship where scholars and practitioners have been reporting inequality since the 1980s. According to available research, women remain confined to technical positions and face prejudices such as not being team players and having poor organisations skills (Cline et al, 1986, Grunig, 1991; 1999; Toth & Grunig, 1993; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Grunig, 2006; Dozier et al, 2007; Creedon, 2009; Beurer-Zuellig et al, 2009; Pulido Polo, 2012; Topić et al, 2019; 2020). Besides, public relations is a feminised industry with the majority of the workforce being female, however, as the majority of senior managers are male, this brings back Bourdieu’s (2007) observation of masculine domination and masculine habitus where men hold on to higher positions, and this creates the “constancy of habitus” (p. 95). As Bourdieu (2007) argued, “at each level, despite the effects of hyper-selection, the formal equality between men and women tends to disguise the fact that, other things being equal, women always occupy less favoured positions” (p. 92).

However, a major issue that came up in interviews is the lack of recognition of public relations as a discipline. Therefore, interviewees mentioned that they, for example, did not face disapproval because of being women but because they work in public relations as communications, in general, are not often taken seriously,

“I think, again, it comes down to people not taking PR or communications seriously as a major asset to business in a way that there isn’t ever for, say, to the finance director or to the operations director. So I think for some people they still don’t always see the value in PR. Well, not just the value but how important it is for an organisation that your communications have to be joined-up with every other part of your business (...) Yes, definitely. I don’t think some people get it. You need to educate them about what it is and what it means and why it’s important” (interviewee 2, Leeds).

“I think I felt the most disapproval from men. It is from people who don’t understand PR. Often from the people in the business I work in think they can do things better. Then you see what they produce when they try to produce something (...) and it is rubbish (...) It is full of jargon that you have to decode before you can go any further. It is mainly from men” (interviewee 19, Birmingham).

Some other women mentioned disapproval from older colleagues, for example, with comments on their tattoos, or older male managers who expressed dissatisfaction about everything and show micro-managerial tendencies. Nevertheless, some women also mentioned the problem of older women who “like things more precise (...) their way” (interviewee 5, Durham). Besides, one woman mentioned that it was other women who told her to “tone it down if you want to be taken more seriously” (interviewee 15, Chester) because she likes to wear bright pink colours so she was often compared with “Penelope Pitstop or Legally Blonde” because she had pink portfolio briefcase so she noticed that she knows men “who like the colour pink and it’s not an issue” (interviewee 15, Chester). Interviewee 18 (London) also mentioned that older women were disapproving of the way she dressed, especially from finance departments, and they would make comment such as “Have you spray painted your jeans on?” These experiences lead towards the Queen Bee syndrome, which explains a situation in which a very few women manage to succeed in man’s world and then fail to support other women. In some literature, there are discussions on how senior women pull the ladder up and fail to support other women. The Velvet Ghetto study on women in public relations recognised the problem of older women who often show the ‘Queen Bee’ syndrome and refuse “to help other women achieve the same success they worked so hard to achieve” (Cline et al, 1986, p. III-13). In this research, it appeared that some women had a negative experience with senior women imposing expectations that they faced upon joining the industry.

The interviewee 17, however, reflected on her communication manners with other women and mentioned that she faced disapproval from younger women when she was their boss because they thought she was too blunt for telling them everything they did wrong without ever praising the good work they did, so she emphasised the generational difference and outlined she replaced her employees with more senior staff members because she “doesn’t really have the headspace

for giving compliments when I just don't think they're deserving of it (...) and I got rid of all the juniors" (interviewee 17, London). Therefore, it seems that there is a generational issue between women working in public relations where young women perceive older women as demanding and being non-supportive, or what is in the literature recognised as the Queen Bee syndrome (Cline et al, 1986), whereas older women tend to disagree with working styles of the younger generation as they perceive them as needy and thus not always suitable for the role. However, women of BAME origin reported additional issues and intersectional disadvantage. For example, interviewee 11 stated that she felt disprivileged because she is a woman of colour and also from Manchester, which both had an impact on her treatment in the industry. This interviewee also noted that women face discrimination on several levels and that this is the reason why so many go freelance,

"The data doesn't lie, and the data quite obviously shows that (...) it's men who tend to have the more senior positions and it's women who stay below a certain level, whereas if you look at the lower levels, the middle-manager level, there are more women than men. So it's interesting. It could be a variety of factors: family and not having the opportunity to progress and whatever. There is a problem in the PR industry, there is, and people kept telling me there isn't. I think that's why you'll get many women who decide to set their own companies and businesses up because they can't progress within their own organisation. If you did research on that, it would show how many women have their own consultancy business compared to men, I can guarantee there would be more women than men" (interviewee 11, Manchester).

That race is an issue in public relations is also echoed by interviewee 17 (London) who stated that in 10 years since she has run her public relations agency she never had a white English client except for one, but then she finds out later her grandmother was Indian. Therefore, she sees disadvantage in her BAME origin and her surname, which discloses her ethnicity so her clients are Europeans, Israelis, Middle Eastern, African, Chinese and Indian. These comments warrant further exploration of race in public relations and possibly opening a question about whether habitus (Bourdieu, 2007) in public relations is not just masculine but also white?

Other interviewed women echoed views from the 1930s when women first joined the office and were expected to do menial jobs (Saval, 2015), such as interviewee 13 (Channel Islands) who stated that she is 47 and still faces this discrimination where men, particularly from the UK office, come and ask her "to print something for him or treat me like a secretary", and she links this with the lack of recognition of public relations, which was mentioned by other interviewees. The same experience was expressed by interviewee 20 (London) who was asked by a client to go and make some tea and coffee in the middle of the press briefing where "there were a lot of journalists there and reporters" and the male client interrupted her in the middle of the press briefing when

she was giving a media brief with a menial job. Therefore, women report signs of a masculine habitus and cultural masculinity where women and femininity are associated with assistant and supportive roles (Alvesson, 2013) and where men dominate in higher positions and constitute the work culture themselves (North, 2009; 2009b; Acker, 1990; 2009).

Interviewees also note that women get different treatment when presenting as opposed to men. In other words, “when one of the guys would speak, they would seem to sit up and take more notice” (interviewee 14, London), and this does not come as a surprise given that many women report being treated differently or asked to do menial stuff, which is a form of sexism (Saval, 2015). Sexism is, however, directly recognised by interviewee 23 (Nottingham) who said that as soon as she was in her 30s and single she “became automatic mistress material” and when she refused some of her senior managers have cut her “out of a professional body” even though she was doing lots of work for them and was very active in the field. This sexual harassment is accompanied with many women reporting sexism and sexist remarks in public relations offices such as stereotypical views that “women are good at cooking and shopping and painting their nails” (interviewee 8, London), and these comments were heard by interviewees in several different industries such as “health sector, within nuclear sector, within aviation, education” (interviewee 11, Manchester), which means that even industries with large numbers of women (e.g. health) are prone to masculine domination and sexism (Bourdieu, 2007).

Women also reported having to scale down their appearance at job interviews and generally facing expectations on their professional appearance. The expectation imposed on women is not a patriarchal one where they are expected to look like Barbies and be very smiley and friendly, as Bourdieu (2007) recognised when discussing the need for women to satisfy male egos by being friendly, smiley and cheerful. Quite the contrary, in this study, women report having to scale down on make-up, hair extensions, and one woman reported an issue with Yorkshire accent, however, there seems to be a recognition that women struggle in getting their voice heard and being taken seriously,

“Yes, I think so. I think in my job interviews, and things like that, when I was going into agencies and taking interviews initially, I would scale back my appearance. So, for example, I have really long blonde extensions. In my interviews, I would always wear them in a ponytail to hide them back. I always like to have nice make-up, have my eyelashes and nails done, but at that period, I felt like my appearance, to have long blonde hair, pretty nails, eyelashes and lots of make-up, made me seem like a ditzy blonde type, even though that is not the case. So, when I was going for interviews, I was definitely scaling back how I looked, so I did change that” (interviewee 4, Leeds).

“Yes. I am quite measured about that now because I have got on quite quickly, but was very young and I was acutely aware that I had this very strong Yorkshire accent. People would assume I am thick. That is the Yorkshire term for it. I was quite aware of that so I tried initially to moderate that, and all that happened was that I would try and speak and people wouldn’t be able to hear me because I would be not speaking at the usual level. I was embarrassed about that, and also the fact that you were often the only woman in the room. What I have learnt is that is actually a strength now. The other thing is I will choose things to wear for work. I like most of the things I wear, but if I was given a level where I could do what I wanted, it is not what I would wear at all. I would be way less formal, but work dictates some of that. There is an expectation. I think the other thing is you have to be much more mindful of how you conduct yourself, particularly if it is an evening event or a dinner, because people can get the wrong idea. Especially if there is alcohol involved you have to be careful. I am really quite mindful of that. The other thing is I have got very good at South of England the dynamics in the room and knowing when to speak and different styles of tackling difficult people. The very bullish, aggressive, alpha type male way of dealing with those people in the same way as there is with the slightly passive-aggressive, let’s leave it hanging in the air as a veiled kick but not go any further types, you get good at manoeuvring that. You have to or your voice isn’t heard” (interviewee 23, Nottingham).

“I suppose, at these very masculine board meetings, you felt like you had to try harder and get your presentation and your messaging that much more slick because I just felt like sometimes I was losing their attention, it was almost like, ‘Here we are, the little PR marketing coming in.’ If the accountant came in next or the business development manager, or I guess A Man would come in then they would sit up a bit more. So, yes” (interviewee 14, London).

Other women also noted they were asked to tone down on their personality and not always be cheerful to be taken seriously (interviewee 15, Chester), or to tone down on jokes (interviewee 16, Yorkshire). Besides, women also mention that they are cautious of being misunderstood so they often mention their husbands to make sure they signal they are not available (interviewee 17, London), thus again bringing back the argument of women having to be careful not to send the wrong message, previously mentioned by other interviewees, which signals a masculine habitus in organisations (Bourdieu, 2007).

Women also mention boys clubs in organisations that bring about a situation that they feel treated differently because of their gender, which echoes literature where this issue has been recognised. For example, in advertising industry, there are reports on boys clubs and the effect to promotions of women (Gregory, 2009; Weisberg and Robbs, 1997; Broyles and Grow, 2008; Crewe and Wang, 2018) and in journalism scholars reported that there is a “deeply entrenched bloke culture” (Mills, 2014, p. 22) and historically men have helped each other by organising “old boys’ networks, golf club buddies, corporate hospitality built round boxes at Twickenham and Chelsea, drinks at the club, pints in the bar after work” (Nicolotti Squires, 2016, p. 7). In this study, women

mentioned boys clubs as an obstacle because men help each other up the ladder and then women in other positions, or those who join later, have very little voice (interviewee 6, Yorkshire), thus showing male habitus in place and men creating an atmosphere where women feel like interlopers (Bourdieu, 2007).

When it comes to expectations of women in regards to their behaviour to succeed, women reported issues by saying, for example, that they “really struggle not to come across as bitchy if you are trying to be authoritative, which isn’t generally the case across men” (interviewee 3, Channel Islands). Therefore, women have to be “a lot more soft-spoken when you’re trying to get things done, which makes it more difficult when you’re trying to be authoritative” (ibid). This shows that women face ‘catch 22’ because they have to balance authoritativeness with softness and find themselves in the position they cannot enforce decisions, thus bringing back the argument from Bourdieu (2007) who argued that in a masculine habitus men decide how women should behave, which normally leads to blokishness, as reported in journalism studies where some scholars reported that men constitute the newsroom culture and that women have to be bloke-ified to succeed (North 2009; 2009b; Mills, 2014). However, in public relations, it seems that women are expected to be in between men and women so they are supposed to tone down on their femininity but when it comes to being in the position of power, the expectation is often to be “empathetic (...) and business-focused, very politically correct” (interviewee 4, Leeds) and women feel they need to plan a lot to be prepared to all eventualities (ibid), which is in line with the previous point on not being taken seriously. Bourdieu (2007) recognised this view as masculine habitus by arguing that women face ‘double bind’ in their access to power because “if they behave like men, they risk losing the obligatory attributes of ‘femininity’ and call into question the natural right of men to the position of power; if they behave like women, they appear incapable and unfit for the job” (p. 67-68).

Finally, there are some signs that women have internalised masculine habitus and embraced the masculine way of thinking. Therefore, some women argued that women have to be present and cannot put restrictions on employment because of family, which is typically seen as a masculine view. Besides, some women also mentioned confidence, not being walkovers and being as good as any men, thus showing that organisations are man’s world and women have to be like men to succeed, since toughness is seen as a masculine trait due to socialisation differences between boys and girls (Alvesson, 2013; Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986; Bourdieu, 2007),

“I still think that there is this expectation that you have to be present. I think if you’re trying to build your career, it’s difficult on the rise to then start a family and to be putting in restrictions, say “Oh, I want part-

time hours,” or do less days per week. I think to be considered and to be taken seriously with that first priority candidate, then I think you have to be present. I also think it’s a lot about time management as well, to be able to structure your day. As we know, a lot of the time it isn’t a set day Monday to Friday. You have to be responsive and reactive a lot of the time when it’s changing, so adaptability, I would say for core strength is needed” (interviewee 7, Manchester).

“They need to show they are not a walkover. They need to demonstrate their knowledge, their experience and what they can bring to the table. They don’t need to be aggressive, but they need to show they have real drive and that they are driven towards a goal and won’t tolerate fools easily” (interviewee 19, Birmingham).

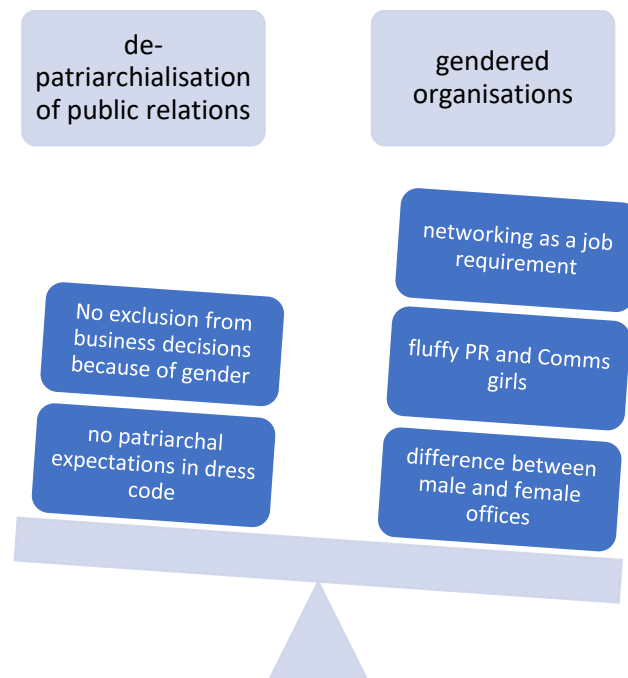
“They just need to be good at whatever they are doing in the same way that a man does. I don’t think there’s any different expectations on women from a business point of view. There probably are some sectors or roles where it is very difficult, undoubtedly, but if you are talking about PR, I think the expectation is you need to be good at PR” (interviewee 22, Leeds).

Nevertheless, these expectations are not just relevant from the point of socialisation, but also from the point of cultural masculinity, which some authors recognise as the problem in organisations. As Alvesson (1998; 2013) argued, cultural masculinity means behaving in a way that feels more natural to men than women, and many technical and managerial jobs are constructed as masculine in so far as they are expected to demonstrate persistence, toughness, determination and aggression, which are characteristics that come naturally to men rather than women. Therefore, Alvesson (2013) argued that all higher positions are associated with masculinity whereas associate positions are associated with femininity, which is what this study shows with some women reporting masculine characteristics as desirable for leadership and linking these expectations with men. In other words, in this study, some women demonstrate that they internalised masculine habitus and fail to recognise injustice and oppression and challenge it because masculinity is deeply ingrained in the way organisations operate (Chambers, 2005; Bourdieu, 2007; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

The Office Culture

In this section, some positive progress is notable, such as that women do not report exclusion from business decisions because of their gender and senior women reported that patriarchal expectations have changed in regards to the dress code. However, women still report networking and after-hours work as an essential job requirement, which fits into cultural masculinity in organisations as reported in organisational and feminist works (Acker, 1990; 2009; Alvesson, 1998; 2013; Bourdieu, 2007; Saval, 2015). Besides, women also report the lack of recognition of public relations, which is seen as fluffy and women who work in public relations are often called ‘Comms girls’, which minimises their influence in the department, and potentially result with lack of presence in boards (as the majority of interviewed women reported), however, women also report a difference between male-dominated and female-dominated offices. Therefore, whilst the situation has changed since the early days, the issues still outweigh the positives, and the two central themes that are present in this section are ‘**de-patriarchalisation**’ of public relations and **gendered organisations**, as per graph 4.

Graph 4. Thematic Analysis of the Office Culture in Public Relations



Office interactions in the public relations industry tend to be female-dominated due to a high number of women in public relations offices and approximately half of interviewees commented on this. The interactions in female-dominated environments are largely centred on family,

popular culture, weekend activities and travel, thus showing the link with what is perceived as traditional women's interest, that also, for example, changed the nature of newspapers with the arrival of women who brought especially these topics to the news coverage (Christmas, 1997; Van Zoonen, 1994; Topić, 2018),

“At the moment all the team are female so I guess that dictates conversation to a certain extent. It revolves around family, children. With people that don't have children, I guess it's more what they watched on Netflix or TV, what they did at the weekend. Maybe half the team have children so it tends to revolve around that” (interviewee 9, Huddersfield).

“The work that I have done over the last few years, I would say the office environment was mostly female, mostly women. I've sat within HR, which traditionally has always been mostly women that work in HR. So, in terms of office conversation, it ranged from what's going on in their family life, their personal life, to what they watched on television the night before. So it was a very light conversation. The ones who I was probably more formed a friendship with, in my own department, we probably spoke a little bit more intimately about more personal issues, about relationships and how they are feeling and mental health and wellbeing and having that trust between us so we could trust each other. So I would say it was definitely more women than men. Obviously, I've always had good relationships with men in the office and stuff, but there were more women, so it was definitely very much women dominated the conversations” (interviewee 11, Manchester).

For in-house women, this was also sometimes out of necessity due to the proximity of human resources, which tends to attract more women, and this then has an impact on daily interactions. Besides, women from human resources seem to be appealing office contacts in traditionally male-dominated industries such as logistics,

“Mainly women, I would say. I suppose my last job being in the logistics was more difficult because there were fewer women, but it's always been... Mainly the people that I've worked with have been more of a HR side, so very much communications and HR obviously attract more women, yes” (interviewee 15, Chester).

On the other hand, those interviewees who work in a more diverse office comment on having good working relationships with both men and women, however, there seems to be a difference in conversations in offices with more men. For example, interviewee 2 (Leeds) stated they talk about “art, literature, music, bars, clubs, restaurants” whereas interviewee 24 (Manchester) mentioned that in offices with men current affairs come up a lot in conversations, thus showing some skewing of office interactions in a different direction when men are involved,

“Like most agencies, it has always been a female-dominated environment. Some agencies I have worked at have had more males than others. It could be anything. Current affairs tends to come up more with men. I don't know why. The men I have worked with tend to be more interested than the women. B2B tends to

be male-dominated in my experience. Not male-dominated, there tend to be more men in B2B and they naturally have more interest in current affairs so they are more likely to talk about it in the office because that is the nature of their job” (interviewee 24, Manchester).

This again goes in line with traditional male interest in current affairs, or what is in journalism known as hard news (Lofgren-Nilsson, 2010; Ross, 2001; Lobo et al, 2017) and in radical feminism used as an argument that women and men have different interests (Rakow & Nastasia, 2009; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Yule, 2006).

Some women who work in male-dominated environments report making an effort to talk about topics that are of interest to men and a large gendering in communications expectations that runs in offices, such as, for example, following sports to be able to talk to men and fashion to talk to women, thus showing the internalisation of habitus and conforming to masculine expectations in social interactions and masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2007),

“Most of the colleagues in the team that I lead at the moment are women. I sit on the board and the majority there are men so it depends on who the person is. I usually pick on something that is to do with... if they mention their children a lot, I ask how the kids are or what they managed to do over Easter. I show a bit of interest if they are telling me they are moving house, going on holiday or whatever it happens to be. Men, it usually tends to be sport that I will ask them about. I usually try and find out if they have a team that they follow of some description. That is usually a good opener. That probably sounds incredibly sexist, but I have often found that if I keep an eye on the sports teams particularly of those immediately above me, I can gauge what mood they are going to be in, come the board meeting or on a Monday morning. If you start a conversation with that, it feels more neutral. I very rarely start a question to a male colleague with, ‘How is the family?’ I usually start somewhere else whereas with women it usually starts with their family (...) It is an opener for a conversation that allows you to build a bond whereas men tend to look a little freaked out if you went straight in with a question about family. Very rarely would you say to a man, ‘Nice shoes,’ but quite often you say that to a woman” (interviewee 23, Nottingham).

The differences in social interactions are translated to banter, and women report that men and women tend to banter differently, thus showing that humour in an office setting is gendered, and leaning towards the argument from radical feminism and ecofeminism that has been arguing for decades that women and men are different and have different interests, largely also because of the socialisation process and that women face oppression in work environments because of these differences (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1986; 1990; 1995; Yule, 2006),

“Yes, definitely, definitely. Yes; the men generally tend to joke more about sports and things and take the mick out of each other a bit more, and I just find the women are just a bit less jokily nasty, whereas men just tend to dig at each other as a joke and everyone just laughs, so that tends to be the case (...) It is a bit odd; I find it a little bit uncomfortable, but it’s the way that they act with each other, and they don’t do

anything to actually be offensive to anyone. So, I just leave them to it. If I thought someone was actually being offended or getting hurt, I would comment, so I would say something, but because everyone thinks it's acceptable in the culture, I don't tend to say anything" (interviewee 3, Channel Islands).

"I think the girls, we can chat more girly, and have more consideration for each other's feelings. We will talk more about intimate things. I will always ask my boss how her children are, and how things are getting on, and what she is doing for holidays, things like that. We do nice things like that. Obviously, when we have a joke, it is never too personal. We never banter each other. We are always quite supportive. Whereas, the men will banter with us, joke about, and be a bit more... I don't want to say playful, and make that sound seedy, because it is never seedy. It is just, they are more likely to make a joke out of things, and more horseplay with them, and do stuff like that. It is still equally nice. I don't know. I think there is a difference, but I don't think it's massively extreme on either side" (interviewee 4, Leeds).

This leads to comments that "men are more blunt" and "less considerate with their jokes" (interviewee 8, London), thus echoing socialisation research that reports about girls and boys being socialised differently and therefore banter differently, and women often find themselves in a position they do not belong due to the dominance of masculine behavioural patterns (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Yule, 2006).

Other interviewees echoed this view and stated that when they first started their career, women working in public relations were called 'comms girls' and the banter was offensive towards women. While some women mention early days, some mention this situation as a reality in the present day or question whether men who were sexist towards them in the past are still in the industry,

"Yes, there was, especially in the earlier days. When I first started out in comms, the reference points were very much like, 'you're girls, what are you doing, comms girls' (...) The banter, they classed it as banter but it was still offensive. Internal comms, which is the area that I specialise in, was very much female-orientated, and it was very much seen, in the earlier days, as very much a tactical role and the leaders in the business were male. We were seen as the girls and the poster girls, and, 'Can you go and do this?' The respect was a little bit not there in comparison to the male-dominated teams. As time went on, obviously people become a little bit more conscious of how they are referencing gender stereotypes in the business. So I saw a shift in behaviours but there's still the odd comment like, 'Are you having a mother's meeting? What are you gossiping about?' those terminologies that you associate to a woman. Or, 'Oh, don't get emotional.' 'Oh, is it that time of the month?' (...) I called it out. When I said to you fairness is a big value for me. When I feel that someone is being unfair because of my gender I will call it out there and then, whereas I know some of my colleagues and peers wouldn't, in the fear of ruffling feathers or in the fear of being ostracised from the organisation, or not getting a promotion, and not being seen as a team player. For me, it wasn't. My thing is I'm alright with banter if you want to call it that" (interviewee 11, Manchester).

“The senior management team, it’s insults covered in humour (...) Yes, banter. And that’s the males, certainly, and there’s a lot of football and sports from the men. I think we women, we’re kind of more a bit black humour, if that lends to a situation (...)I think that we’ve had to make the senior managers aware that there’s a boys’ club, and if they are a senior person and they are using belittling language in a guise of humour because that’s how they can relate to a man, but if they do that to somebody more junior or a woman, we’ve had to let people know that’s not okay (...) And if somebody does it to me, you kind of laugh, okay, partly out of shock that they’ve said it, or partly that you know that it’s humorous, but it also makes you feel quite uncomfortable, and then afterwards myself and other people in situations, you second-guess yourself and think, “Does he mean that? Was it true?” So, yes, and the division, sometimes you feel in some ways, I don’t know, not necessarily second-class. Yes, I’ve never thought there should be a glass ceiling, but yes it does present a barrier” (interviewee 13, Channel Islands).

“I guess you could get away with a little bit more than you would now. I do remember vividly going into one board meeting, which was completely and utterly male-dominated, and I came down probably about once a month to attend their board meeting, and I would have a 20-minute slot and I would update them on our marketing. I do remember this one guy when I finished my talk and my presentation his first response was, ‘that’s very nice, but why are you not in the kitchen?’ He said something like, ‘Oh, that’s very nice but you need to get back in the kitchen now.’ (...) That would have been say 13 years ago maybe (...)In banking, people like that probably still exist now because they’ve been in the bank for 30-35 years, and they’re just in that culture, unfortunately” (interviewee 14, London).

Echoing views of women working in magazines in the UK (Topić & Bruegmann, 2020), some women said they never saw any difficulties because they “only worked with women really” and they “haven’t found any negativity, anything like that at all. I have found it quite healthy” (interviewee 12, Chester), thus showing that when women are in the position of power the situation changes for employees as women have historically not been encouraged to form girls clubs and bond amongst ourselves to the exclusion of men.

In line with views presented in radical feminist theory (Rakow & Nastasia, 2009; Vukoičić, 2013) and communication and socialisation work of Tannen (1995; 1990; 1986), some women noted that “men usually talk about the football and sport, and the women tend to talk about clothes and what we wear” (interviewee 15, Chester). Some women add that men “are a bit more crude” whereas women “talk about their boyfriends, holidays, babies” (interviewee 18, London). However, some women mention that the #metoo movement has had a positive impact in reducing sexual harassment and changing banter in offices, thus commenting on a positive impact of feminist activism on the quality of life for women,

“I have noticed such a big change. Since the #metoo campaign, I have noticed a big change in guys who perhaps used to touch you on the shoulder or put an arm around you in the office. Now when you are all

joking, you have a few drinks after work, it doesn't happen. If anything, they are... It has definitely changed. I have certainly noticed it" (interviewee 20, London).

Interestingly, some women report that they work in a mixed organisation and link this with no sexism, thus signalling that equal organisations are better to work at and less prone to sexism, which goes in line with Wilkinson and Pickett's (2009) and Djerf-Pierre's (2011) research that already established that equal societies are better for everyone,

"No. I don't think I did. There were a few men. I am thinking of one particular organisation I worked for that the balance was fairly equal between men and women. It was a good team. It was a good mix of people. There wasn't any sexism" (interviewee 22, Leeds).

As opposed to some other communications industries, where networking after hours is not required (e.g. journalism, Topić & Bruegmann, 2020) or it seems to be fading away as a work requirement at least outside of London (e.g. advertising, Topić, 2019), networking in public relations seems to be a job requirement, and many interviewees reported having to network in events after work in events such as lifestyle events, drinks with clients after work, participation in conferences and social events after, networking with journalists, travelling in the UK and abroad for trade shows, etc. Many, however, saw this requirement as "nature of the work we do" (interviewee 2, Leeds), and these relationships built outside of work are seen as a way of enhancing relationships to instigate career development because if one wants to progress or they are a job requirement,

"Yes. That is probably as much the nature of the work that people in my team do and that we do in our sector, but I have been quite senior for a decent period of time now. The networking thing comes in. I am connected to lots of people because that is expected in terms of being able to get hold of information before it is public domain, to be on the front foot in terms of what policymakers are thinking, know the right people to open doors for, whether that is fundraising or a deal to be done" (interviewee 23, Nottingham).

In some cases, managers encourage networking and attending social events after work (interviewee 13, Channel Islands) whereas in the banking industry there is a rota to work weekends and answer queries from journalists around the globe, which also includes from other countries and working in the middle of the night (interviewee 14, London). The nature of networking, according to some interviewees, depends on where one is based and also on the type of job, e.g. agency or in-house. For example, interviewee 12 (Chester) argued that networking is a job requirement in London and Manchester but not so much in Chester, whereas interviewee 21 (Manchester) stated she was expected to network when she was working in an agency but not so much when she was in-house due to agencies being much younger in terms of workforce.

Work culture in regards to dress code seems to be relatively relaxed but some interesting generational and industry-related differences emerge. So, for example, women working in caring, building societies, banking, logistics, nuclear, professional services, technology, retail and some agencies, report having to have a smart dress code and one woman reflected on her experience in the industry and sexism that used to be present in regards to woman's attire, however, she also stated that there is a positive change when it comes to dressing codes,

"That is very interesting. Yes, there was. We were definitely expected in our roles to wear suits, high heels, nice blouses. I remember one of my clients - this was maybe in my 40s. I remember wearing trousers into the office and he took me to one side and said, 'I like women to be women.' He said, 'You are not a man. I like you to wear a dress,' which I never got over. I thought it is very odd. Now I notice that I see all the time on the tube in London, women are in black jeans and trainers, still looking smart. Definitely no more huge high heels or power dressing. I think that has really relaxed. I am so pleased to see it. A couple of months ago I was in a big presentation and mainly they were men presenting. That hasn't changed, but there was a woman who stood up and just wore trainers. I thought that is good. That is definitely changing. There is more casual dress now" (interviewee 20, London).

This view is echoed by several interviewees who said they are only expected to dress up for events but in offices they can be relaxed, however, there is some difference in fashion public relations where some interviewees said their office culture is relaxed except when they attend events, but even in the office some staff members are dressed up because of their interest in fashion,

"Only related to events. People are expected to be clean. That's it. We don't really have a dress code, only if we were going to certain events. If it was black tie they'd expect us to dress up. There are certain clients where we are more suited and booted but within the office as long as everybody's clean and tidy. We work in fashion so whatever's fashionable, I suppose. Probably people who have an interest in their appearance, you know, or have an interest in fashion and beauty but I don't think they'd work for us otherwise anyway" (interviewee 2, Leeds).

Interviewee 17 mentioned generational differences in dressing for work and she mentioned she was forced to enforce a dress code because she did not feel it is appropriate to look as if one is going to a gym, but then she ended up compromising with younger staff members,

"Obviously, we expect everyone to be professional. Just because when I had a lot of twenty-somethings working for us in the first nine years, I had to enforce that dress code because they would sometimes turn up wearing leggings. And the ones in their twenties would often blend gym and work, or they'd go running before and after work, so they would sometimes just come up in their gym stuff. And they didn't have meetings with clients, but I would say to them, "We could have an impromptu meeting with a client, and you can't show yourself," so I would say, "Please do that." And then they would say, "Okay, fine," and then actually they would then say, "Okay, I'll bring an extra pair of smart clothes in case we have to meet a client." So, then I said, "Okay, fair enough." For me, I don't really care if they turn up in their gym gear,

as long as they've got access to clothes if a client does walk in. But generally, we just said, "Be professional." I think a few times some girls came with these tank tops with cleavage, and a bit excessive; I just felt it was just not professional. And I think we just made a comment. But it was also gym, it was very tight leggings and a crop top, literally as if she was doing yoga. So, we just said, "Listen, just try and dress appropriately if you can; it just sends the right signal." But not a lot. Our culture's never been so strict. We're more rational; not a dress code for the sake of a dress code, just make sure you've got access to decent professional clothes, as in the case that a client wants to meet. Whether they put it in their bag, or they wear it, I don't really care" (interviewee 17, London).

This reads as a positive change in the public relations industry that does not require women to "be women" anymore and dress in a feminine style. However, if these findings are juxtaposed with experiences of women reported in the previous section, where they reported criticism for the way they look like, there seems to be a question whether offices have moved towards standardization in the way one looks like and whether this can potentially be linked with masculine expectations that have reversed due to feminist activism? Organisations have historically been a masculine world where many women were there as eye candy and were harassed (Saval, 2015) and women were expected to be very feminine (Bourdieu, 2007), however, the answers from the public relations industry seem to paint a different picture with women saying they do not have a dress code or it is a smart dress code, and many reported having to scale down their appearance. Therefore, it seems as if public relations industry leans towards corporatisation and blandness in approach, which some women see as problematic, however, no woman said she is expected to dress in a feminine way anymore and play at her attributes, which is a sign of more positive office culture even if blandness if approach might be a sign of a different form of cultural masculinity and expectations set out by men.

Finally, women also commented on exclusion from business decisions, which was asked to explore to what extent women are equal in organisations or whether they could be seen as tokens to demonstrate that all battles have been one and feed into a post-feminist argument. As opposed to other communication industries, e.g. advertising (Topić, 2019) and journalism (Mills, 2014; 2017; Topić & Bruegmann, 2020), in public relations, many women report they have not been excluded from business decisions because they are women but because of the lack of recognition of public relations. Therefore, women say that "PR or communications wasn't seen as it should be at board level" (interviewee 2, Leeds), and this is seen as a problem in being able to effectively carry out the role. For example, some interviewees reported they are excluded from business decisions "all the time" and in many cases this is because senior management did not perceive she can add any value so she had to educate herself on business as much as on communications

to prove her worth, thus placing extra workload on herself to succeed in a man's world (Bourdieu, 2007, Acker, 1990; 2009; Alvesson, 1998; 2013),

“Excluded? Yes, God yes, all the time. It was very common to be excluded from important decisions, especially when they didn't think I was capable or I didn't have anything of value to add. So, again, another value of mine is credibility. So to prove my worth I would educate myself in certain areas. So when I worked in the aviation industry, I did courses and programmes on business and tried to understand what the aviation industry was about so I could speak at the level that the leaders understood and I could bring in then the comms element once they respected me enough to know that I knew business as well as comms. I think a lot of leaders mistake you just for being that tactical sending-out-stuff person. So I wanted to prove my point. So I spent a long time building relationships with leaders to make sure I wasn't excluded because it's frustrating when the last thing you want to do is not let you be part of that conversation and just be told what to do. You want to add value. You want to have your own opinion and you've got your own views. So when I started recognising that I wasn't being included in the conversations, I made a point of going out and finding out why, sort of thing. What is it? Why am I not in that room? What is it that you think I can't add? Getting that feedback and then using that feedback to educate myself further so I could be part of that conversation, and showing my worth and keep track of places where I wasn't invited and where it went wrong and how I could have made that situation not go wrong if they had included me earlier on. So it was just being smart about the way you address it, but, yes, I definitely faced exclusion at times” (interviewee 11, Manchester).

Other women also reported that public relations are seen as fluffy and are expected to get the message out without being on the board, taking any part in the decision-making or even sitting on the board and knowing what is being agreed, which echoes comments from the previous section where women reported that public relations are often seen as fluffy,

“I think communications is seen as a bit fluffy and not necessary, but I had to make a case every time to have a seat at the table. But I do think in the organisation that I was in as my final Director of Comms role, that was largely because I was a woman. The HR Director was a woman, I was a woman as the Communications Director, and we would be excluded from certain things. And you'd think, from my perspective, I'd be thinking “That doesn't bode well,” but then obviously, the consequence of that is you're not able to do your job as well, because you're not on the ball and you're not involved, and you'd come to the party late and get information late” (interviewee 15, Chester).

“All the time, but that is what happens in PR. We are not given a seat at the board table (...) I think in a lot of organisations it isn't. The client I am working with at the moment does recognise it. I have a much better input to the top-level now at this particular business, although it is still hard as an external consultant to completely affect the way the business is operating. I certainly feel I have the ear and the confidence of the top person, but I think that is unusual in my experience. A lot of people still see PR as an add-on, a nice to have. Especially given what has happened in the last few months, three of my clients have just dropped me because they see it as not a business-critical function whereas the other client has said - and I quote -

at the commercial meeting yesterday, communication is at the top of her priority list at the moment, which is really good to hear” (interviewee 22, Leeds).

“Particularly with comms, the Covid-19 thing might start to really change things. Comms is sometimes seen as a bit fluffy, marketing and comms. You are on the list, but you are on the list in terms of pushing it out, doing the messaging or engaging. I think people are getting smarter at realising you need to be at the heart of a conversation” (interviewee 23, Nottingham).

This view causes problems with being able to communicate messages effectively and women report it would have been more helpful to know information from the planning stage rather than being expected to make things look pretty as some interviewees report,

“Yes, absolutely. We’re excluded from the decisions but then asked to communicate it, and it’s very rare, but even when we’ve said “That doesn’t feel right, we don’t agree with the decision, that it’s a good decision,” that in some respects it’s okay for us to say “We won’t communicate about that,” but it still remains that the decision happened, or the business action still went ahead” (interviewee 13, Channel Islands).

“Yes. Yes, occasionally, where we’re told something afterwards, and you think, “That would have actually been really helpful if I was sat there in the planning stages” (interviewee 16, Yorkshire).

“Yes (...) In my current job as an exec, there’s people above me and we have our head of corporate communications. There are lots of things that happen at that level we are not able to get involved in. Sometimes one of the things I really dislike about my current job is when I applied for it I thought I would be very much involved not in perhaps making those decisions, but in communicating those decisions. For me, a lot of the time it is more about making things look pretty is what I am doing at the moment, which I very much dislike because I mentioned I did a master’s degree in PR (...) I think a lot of people misunderstand it and the importance of it. Sometimes I have spoken to internal stakeholders, some completely understand what it is, they get it, they know it has an important role. Some people have said, ‘No, I don’t want to do PR because I think it is a waste of time’” (interviewee 19, Birmingham).

While this exclusion is not necessarily linked to gender and interviewees say this is because of the lack of recognition of public relations, the question remains whether public relations would be dismissed by senior management (the majority of whom are men) had public relations not become a feminised industry? Scholars have been reporting since the 1980s of the danger of feminisation of public relations, and feminisation as a process generally brings the profession down and reduces benefits and wages (Theus, 1985; Cline et al, 1986; Lance Toth, 1988). The fact public relations are not recognised, therefore, begs a question whether it would be the same had public relations been a male-dominated industry or if the majority of board members are women? Bourdieu (2007) also observed that “positions which become feminized are either already devalued (the majority of semi-skilled workers are women or immigrants) or declining,

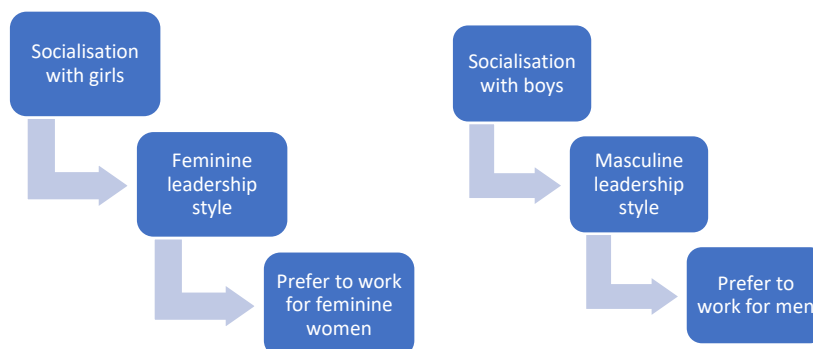
their devaluation being intensified, in a snowball effect, by the desertion of the men which it helped to induce” (p. 91), and this remains an unanswered question that invites further exploration.

The majority of women managers, however, stated they feel they had to work harder to succeed because they are women, and BAME women emphasised they had to work harder because they are women but also because they are of ethnic minority origin. Nevertheless, BAME women emphasise race as more relevant than gender, which goes in line with other equality research in the field where, for example, it has been reported that Black women in the United States voted for Barack Obama in Democratic nomination race in 2008 because they perceived race as a bigger issue for them albeit saying they would want a woman president too (Pew Research, 2009; Kaye, 2008). In the same way, BAME women in this research mentioned that “the woman thing for me is less. It seems very much a minor area for me” (interviewee 17, London).

The Socialisation and Leadership

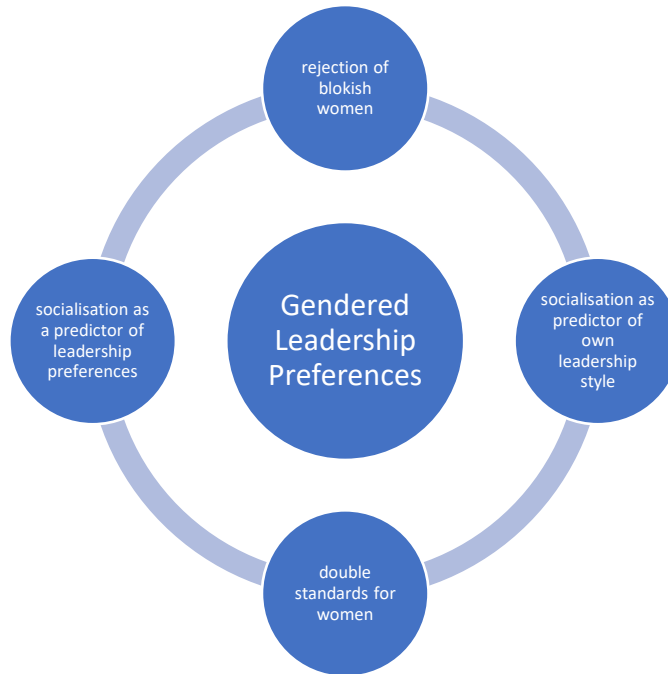
Women describe their leadership styles in two ways. One group of interviewees described their leadership style as open, inclusive and relaxed whereas another group said they are direct. These findings were cross-referenced with the early socialisation process, and it appears that there are differences that can be linked with socialisation, and in particular whether women played with boys or girls when they were growing up. In that, an overall sentiment that derives from data is that women who were socialised with girls in early childhood develop feminine leadership styles and prefer to work for feminine women leaders, but not the once that embrace masculine style (or blokish ones) whereas women who were socialised with boys develop masculine leadership styles and tend to prefer to work for men, however, they also express negative sentiments of women who embrace masculine leadership patterns and tend to label them as ‘bitchy’ (graph 5).

Graph 5. The Pattern of Socialisation and Leadership



This leads to the main theme of this section being gendered leadership preferences, with sub-themes of socialisation as a predictor of own leadership style, socialisation as a predictor of leadership preferences, rejection of blokish women and double standards for women (graph 6).

Graph 6. Thematic Analysis of Socialisation and Leadership



Therefore, women who grew up playing with girls report their leadership style as relaxed, understanding, open-door, supportive, considerate and motivating, which goes in line with the socialisation theory that emphasises that girls are socialised in a way that builds relationships, shows empathy and working well in groups (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986) as well as with leadership literature that shows differences between men and women in leadership (Christopher, 2008; de la Rey, 2005; van der Boon, 2003; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Crawford, 1995; Stanford et al, 1995; Alimo Metcalfe, 1995). For example, an interviewee who grew up spending time with her mom and playing mostly with girls stated that her leadership style is “probably more relaxed than it should be” because she wants “the best in people”, which means using different approaches in managing different people (interviewee 2, Leeds). A similar view is echoed by interviewee 8 (London) who grew up spending time with both parents and playing with girls, and who stated she would probably “need to be a bit more assertive because I am the sort of person that wants to make sure that the person I would manage feels comfortable, gets everything they need”. However, she feels that she needs to “be a bit more assertive and maybe a bit more blunt about what I want them to do in order to achieve certain results” (interviewee 8, London). Many women also expressed a view that their leadership style is understanding and that they try to build trust

with staff by letting them do their job and deliver results without micro-managing and pressure, and they express that they have an approachable and open-door style of management. However, what seems to dominate in responses is a sense of understanding shown to staff members and considerate approach. For example,

“I would say certainly supportive and understanding. Door is always open policy, type thing. Always there to listen, understand, support, and encourage, as well as line-managing people as well and getting the best out of them, I worked on my own sort of leadership skills to be taken seriously in the industry that I operated in” (interviewee 14, London).

“I am very direct, but I am also very considerate. I like to work with my clients, I like to work with my staff and I like to make everyone feel included and like their opinion matters. Also, I don’t like to get things confused. I don’t like to say things for the sake of it. Everything has to be relevant, but I like everyone to have their input and their opinion” (interviewee 12, Chester).

When it comes to women who grew up playing with boys, they also often say they think of themselves as supportive but they demonstrate more masculine patterns in the way they do the work. For example, interviewee 4 (Leeds) stated she is “quite relaxed” but then she also emphasised she can be “not bossy, but sometimes I will get onto people more, and push people more because I am panicking about deadlines and things like that”. Other women also mentioned they are “very direct, very open, very honest” and that they “set the bar high”, however, they also mention supportiveness accompanied with no tolerance policy for fools, thus showing a combination of leadership styles that ranges between, what is usually perceived, as masculine and feminine (Alvesson, 2013; Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986),

“I am very direct, very open, very honest. I set the bar high. I believe that knowledge is power and therefore you have to share that. If I have information that is going to help my colleagues, assuming it is not uber-confidential, they get that in real-time because they need to know to be able to make good decisions. My colleagues generally would say I always get good rapport from my teams. I set the bar, but I am really supportive. I don’t tolerate fools gladly either. I will help and help, but you also have to help yourself. I do quite a lot around career development and training, and make as much of that available to colleagues as I possibly can because that is important. Sometimes I will really nudge them to do formal qualifications when they didn’t particularly initially think they wanted to do them. Quite often if you don’t have them, you can’t progress. That becomes another deal-breaker, especially for women” (interviewee 23, Nottingham).

Socialisation also plays a role in communication and leadership styles because some interviewees state that early experience directly influenced their communication and leadership style, which derived from parenting and early social experiences, however, some interviewees also mentioned they are trying to be the direct opposite of what they have experienced when growing up. For example, interviewee 3 (Channel Islands) said that she is trying to be “the opposite of how I was

brought up because I saw not always that things go appreciated, so you want to make sure that everyone feels appreciated” whereas interviewee 8 (London) said that she was “on the receiving end of people being quite forceful and not very kind” so she tries to do things in a way that cannot be seen as “catty”.

On the other hand, interviewee 11 (Manchester) stated that her parents always encouraged her to be independent, which translated into her leadership style as now she wants to “empower my team to perform well and I want them to feel good about themselves when they do it, which is why I don’t like people who are dishonest”. Therefore, early socialisation has an influence not just on acceptance of the habitus and masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2007) but also how we lead and behave later in life. This furthermore shows why women struggle in finding a way forward because research shows that girls and boys are socialised differently and this then leads to differences in behaviour, and since the organisational world is still a man’s world, this naturally poses difficulties to many women (Bourdieu, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, and as emphasised earlier in this report, boys are socialised to dominate and develop independence whereas girls are socialised in groups where sharing, showing emotions and building relationships is encouraged (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986). Women who participated in this study show that the socialisation translates into how they lead, and thus many of women who were socialised with other women show the more feminine style of leadership as opposed to women who were socialised with boys. As outlined above, women who were socialised with boys tend to praise qualities like directness more than empathy and not always saying what is on one’s mind, whereas women who were socialised with other women tend to praise empathy and building relationships, and also show a certain level of resentment of women who do not show this care and support other women.

These differences are seen in answers on which characteristics are necessary for effective leadership, thus continuing the influence of socialisation on later experiences. In this, women who spent time with girls during early socialisation emphasise values such as confidence, understanding, authenticity, social skills, inspiring and empowering people, good communication skills, being able to listen, which are all characteristics traditionally considered as feminine (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986), which also explains the prominence of women in public relations, since the major part of public relations work is centred on relationship building. For example, interviewee 11 mentioned authenticity and honesty, thus linking these characteristics with emotional intelligence,

“Necessary in leadership characteristics, I would say authenticity. I would say honesty, which kind of links in with authenticity. I would say you’ve got to be emotionally intelligent. You’ve got to understand people. I’ve seen directors and leaders get promoted because of their technical expertise but they’re not very good with people but I think the more senior you become in an organisation it has to be more about the people than the technical because you’re normally surrounded by technical experts. So you need those people skills and you’ve got to be able to just be emotionally aware of what's happening around you. I think those leaders that are not emotionally aware or emotionally intelligent can fail badly. Also, on the other side, directors have to be direct. I don’t think you can be a leader if you are very indecisive. You’ve got to be decisive as a leader. You can’t be changing your mind like a hot dinner. You’ve got to be able to lead. You’ve got to lead well and lead by example. You’ve got to be able to own it but be authentic with it at the same time” (interviewee 11, Manchester).

Other interviewees also place a heavy emphasis on understanding and flexibility, as well as motivating and inspiring others, listening and communication skills, or what is usually perceived as the feminine way of leadership (Alvesson, 2013; Merchant, 2012; Vukoičić, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Tannen, 1990; Christopher, 2008; de la Rey, 2005; van der Boon, 2003; Grove & Montgomery, 2000; Crawford, 1995; Stanford et al, 1995; Alimo Metcalfe, 1995),

“You have got to be willing to be flexible, you have got to want to listen to people, you have got to be considerate of people’s feelings, the fact that everyone needs to learn, everyone needs to develop. Being a good mentor so you can always be trustworthy as well. Making sure your staff can confide in you is so important. One of the reasons why I left my job to go freelance was because the management I had above me was shocking. Anything I would have told them or anything I did tell them went other places. When I went to hand my notice in, I told one of the directors and before I knew it, he told three of the others. You need to make people understand what your reasons are. I think that is so important to have trust” (interviewee 12, Chester).

“Oh, characteristics; which are really important for leadership? I think some of the characteristics I display are important for leadership. I think someone who is characteristic to leadership is someone who inspires you, motivates you, is honest as well, and real. And is open, and say they don’t know all the answers, and look to others for expertise. Bringing people along, along the way, and not being autocratic and a dictator; I don’t think they’re good styles of leadership or characteristics, but different leaders display different characteristics” (interviewee 16, Yorkshire).

“Having a clear vision and being able to communicate that vision. Being a people person, being able to lead people in that way. Having a plan, sticking to it, understanding that sometimes you will make mistakes and apologise for your mistakes, how you can change those things round” (interviewee 19, Birmingham).

“Good listening. I don’t know, but a lot of people have said about me that I am quite good at seeing the bigger picture, taking a step back and looking at everything that is required, then being quite organised and inspiring confidence in other people so they can get on with the jobs you need them to do. It is leading by

example but also having the courage to get people to do the things they might not think they can do” (interviewee 22, Leeds).

However, women who spent more time with boys during early socialisation, mention characteristics such as patience, organisational skills, firmness, goal setting, planning, focusing, clarity and adaptability, or mostly characteristics associated with masculinity since it is boys who learn to be assertive and firm, for example (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986; Merchant, 2012; Vukoičić, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1983). Therefore, interviewee 3 (Channel Islands) stated that leaders need to be stern but they also need to be understanding of certain work situations when deadlines cannot be met. Interviewee 4 (Leeds), however, emphasises good organisational skills, planning, working against targets and delivering without issues, and this view is also echoed by interviewee 13 (Channel Islands) who said an effective leader is someone who does “goal-setting, planning, listening, strategic focus so you can see the bigger picture”. Besides, other interviewees also mentioned masculine characteristics of leadership such as being firm and fair, adaptable in leadership style and are understanding when possible but also being autocratic when necessary,

“I think you need a balance. I always reflect on people that made the biggest impact with me back in my school days. With the teachers that were the ones that were complete pushovers and let you get away with murder, everybody mocked them in the background, but similarly the ones that were overly strict. I remember we had a chemistry teacher and he was horrible. He ruled with an iron fist and he was not a nice man. I would absolutely dread his lessons and as a result, I hate chemistry. I switched off from it completely (...) teachers were the ones that were firm but fair so you knew what you could get away with and when to draw the line. You had respect for them because they didn’t let you get away with absolute murder. They are the qualities I often look for in leadership and try to model myself on” (interviewee 6, Yorkshire).

“That depends on the circumstances. You have to be able to move your leadership style. I laughingly have described my style to colleagues previously as in many ways benign dictatorship because I have stuff that I have to achieve so I have to be able to take people with me and get them to buy into a way of doing things, but ultimately I am paid to take those decisions and I am also paid to carry the can if it goes wrong. If success comes, that belongs to the team. If there is a cock-up, it is my fault. I will try and be inclusive, but I can’t be inclusive to a point that slows down the pace we have to work at to stay ahead. I will value ideas and contributions. I do a lot of please and thank you, but ultimately if we had a very difficult crisis situation and we needed instant decisions and action, I would have no issue being quite autocratic. Equally, on other things where I am not so fussed or it is not so time-sensitive, we can be as democratic as we like. If it is something about what kind of team away day do they want to do at the end of year, I don’t particularly mind. As long as we cover X, they can do what they want. It is about judging it and how you can personalise that for individuals because not everybody responds to things in the same way. You have to be able to understand that. You can nuance it for different individuals” (interviewee 23, Nottingham).

Women do not say they have to behave in a particular way to be taken seriously by their bosses, but they point towards women bosses being more serious about work and not inclined to engage with banter. For example, interviewee 4 (Leeds) mentioned how her female boss was very business-minded and while she did engage with chatting, there was always a reservation and no banter, which led this interviewee to be careful how she behaves in the office,

“Every now and again, yes. I think she can be very business-minded. So, sometimes, with other members that are less senior, we will talk a little bit longer, we will talk more personally. We might have more jokes between us. We might swear a little bit; not out loud, super in everybody’s face, but with my boss, I wouldn’t swear. She doesn’t like swearing. I wouldn’t want to joke around or banter her too much, because she is not that kind of person. We talk, and we have nice chats, but there is also a line. I know that when we are chatting, she likes to have a little chat, but it is very condensed compared to the chats that I have with other people because I know that she wants to get on with work and she wants me to get on with work. So, sometimes I act more enthusiastic about the role, the job and what tasks we are doing, to maybe what I am feeling inside” (interviewee 4, Leeds).

However, when it comes to preferences between men and women as managers, the opinions are divided and some women state they prefer to work for men due to experiences in leadership and directness of men as bosses. For example, interviewee 6 (Yorkshire) stated she prefers to work for men because her female boss has adapted her behaviour to the new business strategy when senior management changed, and she did not feel this was done fairly. The interviewee draws from experiences of working with men when going through a period of changes and expresses an opinion that men are more direct, thus showing preference towards masculine ways of doing things and internalisation of masculine habitus (Bourdieu, 2007),

“Yes, men (...) It is maybe an unfortunate series of experiences. When I have worked for women... My most recent experience of working for a female, (...) I absolutely loved my job, was progressing well, everything was fine. My relationship with my boss at the time was strong and she was appreciative of the work I was doing. She spoke highly of me etc. When the new CEO came in, he had a very different view of how he wanted the business to run. Previously it was very people-focused. It was all about promoting from within and building people’s confidence, getting people on board and culture was very strong. The new CEO was all about the numbers. It was all about KPIs and measurement etc. My role changed as a result of that and my line manager, who was female, basically turned very quickly. I felt that although I knew she would have liked my way of thinking and she felt it was the right thing from a communications perspective, that you have to be responsible in communication, do the right thing by people and be open, transparent and honest. Although she thought that previously, when it came to the crunch and the new CEO was trying to change things, she totally turned. Rather than speaking to me openly about that, she started criticising me and saying she didn’t really know what I did and didn’t really understand what value I was bringing. It was such a turn in her behaviour and I felt really let down. The trust was completely broken and I couldn’t understand how she had gone from one to the other. In other situations where I

have had male line managers and have had to change situations or circumstances, it has been an honest and open conversation and we have been able to address that and talk honestly about our feelings towards that and adapt to work to accommodate those changes (...) I found that men have been more trusting of my experience and ability to carry out the role whereas women have been less so” (interviewee 6, Yorkshire).

This leads to interviewee 19 and the observation that both men and women can be difficult bosses, but some women show ‘bitchiness’,

“I prefer a man (...) I don’t know if it is just me, but I have found with women I have had some really good female bosses, but a lot of them can get quite bitchy. I find with a man we can sit down, you can talk to them and they will take you seriously. Not always. There have been some awful male bosses I have had, but generally, there isn’t the bitchiness. You can talk to them and you don’t feel like you are being judged” (interviewee 19, Birmingham).

It seems that women link preference in regards to leadership experience from the past, and if the previous experience of working with a woman is bad they tend to prefer men as bosses. However, it is also obvious that some form of misogyny is internalised because research shows that when men complain to their staff members they get perceived as tough leaders whereas women often get a label of a ‘bitch’. That is why, for example, LeanIn (an organisation founded by Sheryl Sandberg, CEO of Facebook) launched a campaign entitled ‘Ban Bossy’, in recognition that girls get labelled as bossy during growing up if they show leadership skills². However, this comment also shows that women do not prefer blockish women in leadership positions but tend to seek traditional feminine characteristics such as empathy and support, which is again linked with the socialisation. Nevertheless, there is a link with socialisation again because women who were socialised with boys tend to show preferences towards working with other men as well as being managed by men.

Of those who prefer to work with women, they seem them as role models or very supportive and helpful, which further signals that women are expected to demonstrate feminine characteristics to succeed in winning hearts of their employees albeit research also shows that women who demonstrate feminine styles often face issues in promotions (Mills, 2014; 2017),

“I did in my placement; I sat next to my Account Director, and she was just really great to work for. I think while I don’t necessarily have a preference, I like working under women in my industry, just so I can see where I could be in the future. And almost a different attitude as well. In my company, there’s a lot of male

² <https://banbossy.com/>

directors and a lot of male line managers. There are very few women, so it's nice to see a woman succeeding in a higher role because it's nice to see that I can get there" (interviewee 3, Channel Islands).

"Yes, I think I would prefer to work for a woman than a man, but it's not necessarily always a bad thing, in my opinion, to work for a man, but I do think I have had some pretty bad experiences working for men. So, I think I would prefer a woman" (interviewee 4, Leeds).

This then leads to the question of role models where women again expressed criticism of work-first attitude and a strong dedication to work, which is in the literature recognised as a masculine characteristic and argued that they "don't want to only ever do my work. I want to come home and do my own home life as well. I think her work-life balance is a bit more on the work side to what I would like in my future" (interviewee 4, Leeds). Nevertheless, women expressed criticism of women who end up embracing masculine characteristics when appointed to lead, thus again showing the rejection of *blokishness* as a way of leading,

"I think unfortunately some females who end up in a role of power feel that they have to be aggressive and cutthroat to be successful. I don't understand why that is the case. I think you can still be empathetic and honest and treat people openly. You are not a pushover just because you are being empathetic with somebody. In my experience, I haven't felt that sense from a female. It is not impossible. I have worked closely with women who haven't been my line managers who have a position of power and they have been great. I would have loved to have worked with them, but in my own personal experiences that has not been the same. They have adopted quite a negative reaction when put under pressures" (interviewee 6, Yorkshire).

Besides, some women managers were criticised for not promoting other women and giving them opportunities (interviewee 15, Chester), and it generally seems as if female managers are held to higher standards with women expecting them to be empathetic and help other women, which can be linked with the framework of *blokishness* and masculinity according to which many women to succeed have to become like men (Mills, 2014; 2017) and whilst interviewees appreciate directness from male managers, the same does not seem to be the case with female managers who get labelled as 'bitchy'. Thus, it seems as if women face 'catch 22' in so far as they can face obstacles in progressing if they are seen as soft in what is traditionally man's world (Bourdieu, 2007; Acker, 1990), however, when they do show strength then they face criticism from both women who prefer to work with other women and from those who naturally lean toward working with men. In other words, women who were socialised with both boys and girls tend to express negative views of *blokish* women or women who embrace masculine characteristics in behaviour and communication albeit for different reasons.

Women managers mentioned they changed jobs to get promoted, thus showing lack of opportunities to progress within organisations,

“No, pretty much wherever I’ve been, I’ve had to move elsewhere for promotion. Yes, it’s never been, “Oh gosh, this is a possible step-up.” Yes, but I’ve always moved elsewhere” (interviewee 16, Yorkshire).

However, despite these experiences and the fact some women recognise inequality with men, the majority of women state they will hire the right person for the job and will not pay attention to gender. While this demonstrates that the majority of women are more inclined towards equality and will not be forming girls clubs, some have preferences in working with people of two genders. For example, some women said they prefer to work with men because they need less care in communication as women tend to hold grudges, however, a link with socialisation emerges again because it is women who were socialised with boys that tend to prefer to work with men and deal with masculine manners,

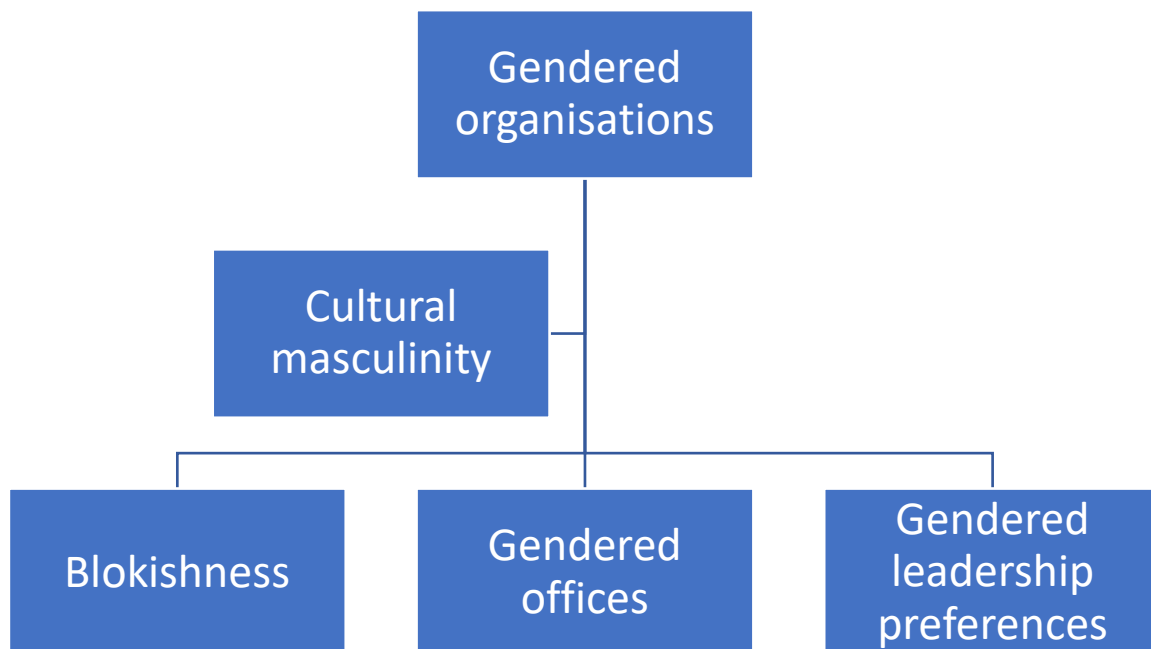
“Male (...) Not so much to work for me, but if I am looking for clients or for new work I often prefer to work with men. I find it less complex. I think they are more direct. They know what they want. The women I have worked for, I have found they are very emotional and it has not been a great experience” (interviewee 20, London).

However, a few women also argued they prefer to work with other women because “feel like they are a little bit more understanding” (interviewee 11, Manchester), or because they think “the chances of a woman being better at a job like PR (...) and better at multitasking” (interviewee 18, London), thus showing a preference for a feminine style of doing the work. Finally, the majority of women managers believe they are good role models and that other women can identify with them. In that, they mention they are being called ‘work mum’ (interviewee 2, Leeds), or that they can show other women it is possible to “have a career whilst having a family” (interviewee 9, Huddersfield).

Conclusion and Further Research

In conclusion, it seems as if public relations departments or organisations fit into gendered organisations, which still largely operate under gendered rules grounded in cultural masculinity (Alvesson, 1998; 2013; Bourdieu, 2007). The final thematic map deriving from research in all three sections of this report would then encompass gendered organisations as the main theme identified from the data with the gendering of organisations grounded in cultural masculinity, and blokishness, gendered offices and gendered leadership preferences constituting cultural masculinity in gendered organisations (graph 7).

Graph 7. The Final Thematic Analysis of the Position of Women in Public Relations in England



Therefore, public relations organisations show signs of gendering and can be seen, to a large extent, as gendered organisations and public relations organisations as operating under cultural masculinity patterns (Alvesson, 1998; 2013; Bourdieu, 2007). In that, blokishness seems to be present among women who rise in ranks or this is expected, however, women reject this type of behaviour and communication and express criticism of women who embrace masculine characteristics. This applies to both women who were socialised with boys and who themselves demonstrate more masculine characteristics of doing things, as well as more feminine women who grew up with other girls and who demonstrate feminine characteristics. Women leaders,

therefore, face a 'catch 22' because if they are soft and empathetic they face a risk of not being seen as strong and tough enough to be effective leaders (Bourdieu, 2007), however, when they do embrace masculine characteristics of directness and toughness, then they get labelled as 'bitchy'.

Gendering has an impact on the office culture where women who work in an office with lots of men, report social interactions and banter being more on the masculine side, and sometimes this ends up in sexism and inappropriate situations. However, women who work in equal offices or offices with women only do not report major issues, thus further showing the impact of masculine culture on women and the boys club problem, which has also been recognised by some interviewees. One of the major issues in organisations is also in the lack of recognition of public relations and communications, where women who work in public relations are often called 'Comms girls', and public relations is seen as 'fluffy' and thus not relevant or beneficial to the business. The question remains whether it would be the same had public relations not feminized and whether men who are in senior public relations positions face the same issue with the lack of recognition?

Socialisation, however, has an impact on work experiences and leadership style and there is a very clear link between leadership style (managers) and leadership preferences (employees), which can be linked to the socialisation and whether one has grown up with boys or girls. Thus, the discrimination that women often face does not always have to be conditioned by being a woman but by demonstrating culturally feminine characteristics such as empathy, supportiveness and friendliness, for example (Bourdieu, 2007; Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986; Vukoičić, 2013; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Yule, 2006), however, feminine leadership styles showing support towards staff, and other women, in particular, are seen positively by women who were socialised with girls where women socialised with boys tend to label strong women as 'bitchy' and say they prefer to work with and for men, thus showing a certain internalisation of misogyny and embracing masculine values and patterns like the ones that are needed and desirable, and organisations as a man's world. Nevertheless, the Queen Bee syndrome, recognised since early public relations research (Cline et al, 1986, p. III-13), has also been recognised in this study as some women mentioned facing expectations and judgements of women in senior positions, thus pointing towards the direction that many senior women potentially embraced cultural masculinity and impose expectations on junior women instead of helping them change things. This is clearly linked to Bourdieu's habitus (Bourdieu, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Chambers, 2005)

where oppressed women do not always challenge structures of power and try to change things because cultural practices are deeply ingrained into society.

What also emerges from the data is that public relations organisations often work under culturally masculine understanding, which is seen in long working hours and networking, which are practices that historically benefited men and disadvantaged women due to a social expectation that a woman will care for the family (Saval, 2015; Acker, 1990). However, some positive aspects in the organisational culture also emerge, such as the demise of patriarchal expectations on how a woman should dress and demands for women to play on their feminine attributes, which interviewees report as a thing of the past. However, there is still lots of judgement and emphasis placed on woman's appearance where several interviewees reported they had to scale down their appearance, and it remains unclear what the process that can be labelled as corporatisation and blandness in approach means and where did it come from, which warrants further research. Besides, what warrants further research are observations of interviewees on freelance work where some women stated they did not meet their full potential for having to go freelance to successfully combine parenting and work. One interviewee explicitly claimed that the majority of the workforce that does freelance work will be women, which warrants further research, especially in the context of major turbulences in an economy such as at the time of recession or a global pandemic. The question inevitably opens up whether women are the first to take the hit due to their precarious freelance status? Nevertheless, one interviewee also asked where do male managers come from when she, as a public relations student, barely interacted with boys during her public relations studies. This comment echoes early public relations research conducted in the US which recognised that women often come to the public relations industry with degrees in public relations whereas men come with degrees in journalism and progress faster whilst women remain confined to technical positions (Theus, 1985). This warrants further research in the English context to explore who are the men who work in public relations and whether the experience reported in this study is unique or whether there is a problem with recruitment of women managers.

While the sample of BAME women is low, both interviewed women expressed some serious concerns about their status in the industry. While works are pointing towards the direction that public relations is a white industry lacking diversity, it seems that those women of minority origin who join the industry face racism such as not being able to have white clients or they face specific challenges that are not addressed in general equality policies, which also warrants further

research. The question that can be explored is whether the habitus in the public relations industry is both masculine and white?

Finally, and if going back to central questions guiding this study, it does seem as if blokishness in public relations is manifested in all three studies areas. In the case of lived experiences, women report expectations that come naturally to men, whereas in the office culture they report differences in banter and social interactions, as well as exclusion from business decisions due to the lack of recognition of public relations. In the case of socialisation and leadership, the data points towards links between socialisation and preferences in regards to leadership and leadership styles, however, data also shows that blokishness is seen negatively by both blokish and feminine women, thus also pointing towards the direction that women leaders face double standards and a 'catch 22', recognised in other works which already reported that women will be seen as inadequate for the role if they are soft due to association of managerial roles with men (Alvesson, 1998; 2013; Acker, 1990; 2009; Bourdieu, 2007), however, when they do embrace masculine characteristics then they face criticism of being too much like men or 'bitchy'. Public relations organisations, based on data collected in this study, can thus be seen as culturally masculine and gendered, and thus impeding progress for women.

The future research should, thus, explore the issues identified in this study (race, education, freelancing) further to shed light on the position of women in public relations in England in more details.

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