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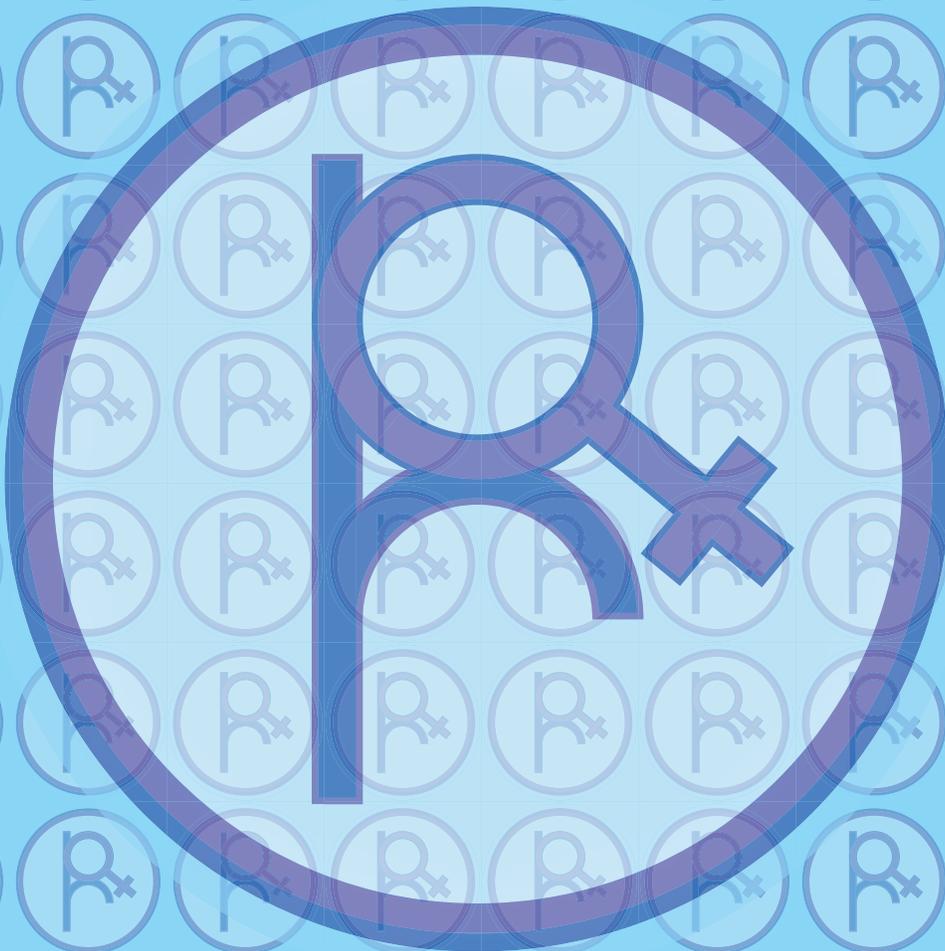
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EUPRERA REPORT Vol.2, N°2
Women in Public Relations in Croatia



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Summary

This study is based on 21 interviews with women working in the public relations industry in Croatia. Qualitative interviews were conducted with eight managers and 13 employees without managerial responsibilities to explore lived experiences of women working in public relations, as well as the office culture and socialisation and leadership. The average age of employees is 36 and of managers 43,5. Five employees work in-house, three employees work in a PR agency, two in high education, one is a civil servant, one works in Croatian PR professional association, and one employee works in the delegation. Four managers work in a PR agency and four in-house.

Although the PR industry in Croatia is dominated by female employees (76,84%) in the so-called masculine patterns still prevail in the sector. Results show that women in the Croatian PR industry have long working hours, weighted work-life balance and difficult and unequal career progression opportunities. Women are often exposed to direct or indirect gender discrimination (sexist comments and practices, they need to behave differently to be taken seriously). However, some improvements are visible because some elements of office culture (dress code, banter) is not so patriarchal and gender-biased as before. Majority of participants, on the other hand, still report exclusion from the important business decisions. The research confirmed that women who spent more time with fathers and blokish mothers internalised so-called masculine leadership patterns and have direct communication style whilst women who spent more time with mothers or with both mothers and fathers equally internalised so-called feminine leadership patterns and their communication is a combination of so-called masculine and feminine communication styles. All participants claim that the combination of what is usually perceived as masculine and feminine characteristics are needed for an effective leader. Research also showed that the majority of participants do not recognize women in senior positions as role models. The research confirmed the deep-rooted patriarchal gender stereotypes about the so-called female and male characteristics, in particular on the desirability of some of the characteristics specific to gender roles.

Keywords: PR industry, Croatia, gender equality, discrimination, stereotypes, bloke-ification, habitus

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Introduction

Although the gender inequality on the labour market, especially the possibilities of career advancement to high management positions, is relatively well researched in Croatia, there is no research about the position of women in Croatian public relations industry. In addition to the regular annual reports of the Gender Equality Ombudswoman, in which one section with several chapters is dedicated to employment and work,¹ ie. the position of women in the labour market, numerous studies have been conducted on the position of women in a number of different sectors, for example in the judicial and legal profession (Keller, 2013), in the science system (Nedović, Ivanković and Mišćević, 2015; Prijić-Samaržija, Avelini Holjevac and Turk, 2009), companies (Jergovski, 2010), parliament (Šinko, 2016), management (Nidogon Višnjčić, Begičević Ređep and Vidaček-Hainš, 2018), etc. However, the position of women in the Croatian public relations industry is an unexplored area in terms of the lived experience of women in public relations, the office culture and the socialization and leadership. This research is, therefore, the first research conducted in Croatia that addresses these segments of gender equality in the public relations industry.

According to the Gender Equality Ombudswoman Report for 2019, Croatia is facing extremely unbalanced representation of women and men in high hierarchical positions within different occupations. The analysis of the data presented in the Survey of the workforce in 2018 shows that there is approximately 33% of women legislators, officials and directors (p. 36).² Gender Equality Ombudswoman has also analysed data of the Croatian Financial Services Supervisory Agency (Hanfa) regarding access to economic decision-making positions. Data show that the share of women in the management boards of joint-stock companies whose shares at the end of 2018 were listed on the Zagreb Stock Exchange was 14.4%, while the share of women in the supervisory boards of these companies was 21.4%. With very slight oscillations, this negative trend has been constant since the Ombudswoman monitored it (p. 37). Given the fact that one of the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) is to ensure equal gender opportunities for participation in leading positions at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, and that indicator of monitoring the

¹ The Gender Equality Ombudswoman Report for 2019 in the first part “EMPLOYMENT AND WORK” deals with the following topics: unemployment and work (in) activity; gender-based labor market segregation; the gap in salaries and pensions; unemployment and employment - situation and trends according to the data of the Croatian Employment Service; female unemployment; female employment; discrimination in employment; maternity and parental benefits; sexual harassment in the workplace.

² This is assessment of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics

achievement of this goal is, among other things, the share of women in managerial positions, in 2015 Ombudswoman has launched the project "Business Women's Database" in cooperation with the Croatian Employers' Association (p. 37).

It is important to emphasise that on the basis of discrimination gender discrimination complaints still dominate in the total number of complaints (85.8%) that the Croatian Ombudswoman obtained in 2019. Most of them were violations of women's rights (73.4%). By areas of discrimination, most often complaints relate to the area of social security and care, pensions, health insurance and labour rights.³

According to Ombudswoman, there is also inequality in salaries between men and women in Croatia. According to available data for 2018 (the Croatian Bureau of Statistics) regarding average gross salaries of employees in legal entities men earned an average of HRK 8,837 per month, and women HRK 7,711. Listed data indicate an average wage gap of 12.74%, which is 0.45% lower than in the previous period (2016). Analyzing the wage gap by activity, it can be concluded that women have a lower average gross salary in 16 out of 19 areas or sectors. Particularly pronounced wage gaps are present in health care and social welfare (27.8%), financial and insurance activities (27.6%) and activities wholesale and retail trade (21.7%). In all previously mentioned sectors, women are more represented. Consequently, there are obvious indications that the so-called glass ceiling effect in these areas manifests itself in the most extreme form. The causes of such a high gap in salaries should be sought in the greater representation of men in better-paid positions in the organizational hierarchy (p. 37). The long-term consequence of the wage gap is a widening pension gap. The average pension in the Republic of Croatia (2018) amounted to HRK 2,618.81. Observed by sex, the average pension of men was HRK 2,964.87, while the average pension of women was HRK 2,326.14 (p. 39). When we look at gender equality in the field of labour and employment from the comparative perspective, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Republic of Croatia (2019) has a gender equality index of 55.6. This means that Croatia was on the 22 position among the 28 member states of the European Union (p. 40).

As public relations are often compared with the legal profession, more precisely with attorneys, because in both cases, PR agencies and attorneys offices, are consulting offices, as well as accounting

³ Pravobraniteljica za ravnopravnost spolova predala Hrvatskom saboru Izješće o radu za 2019. (31.03.2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.prs.hr/index.php/izvjescia/2019> (23rd July 2020)

consultants or management consultants (Tkalac Verčić, 2015, p. 94), it was interesting to analyse results of research of the position of women in the judicial and legal profession (Keller, 2013). According to Keller (2013) feminisation is present in the judicial and legal profession in Croatia, but the judicial profession is more feminised as female judges make up a majority of 67%. As far as the legal profession in Croatia is concerned, men are still the majority among lawyers, but women are the majority among legal trainees. In 2013, women made up 46% of the legal profession in Croatia and, according to the author, in ten years they could be more numerous than men in the legal profession. When it comes to the existence of a glass ceiling in the judiciary profession, research has shown that it exists because the higher the court, the lower is the percentage of female judges in it. The higher the court rank, the greater is the difference between the percentage of female judges and the percentage of female presidents in that type of court. When it comes to the glass ceiling in the Croatian Bar, the research showed that it exists because women are not represented and have never been represented in the position of the President of the Croatian Bar Association, and women are underrepresented three to four times in the executive bodies of the Croatian Bar Association. The Croatian legal profession is feminising, but the glass ceiling remains. The author assumes that women will become the majority among Croatian lawyers in the next ten years. However, this is not a guarantee of weakening the glass ceiling in the Croatian Bar Association (Keller, 2013, p. 41-60).

In 2018, Nidogon Višnjić, Begičević Ređep and Vidaček-Hainš researched employment (in)equality and opportunities for women and men in Croatia. Their research focused on promotion opportunities, the challenges that women are faced with when they try to reach managerial positions in business organisations. The results based on the perception of 112 Croatian female respondents on managerial positions clearly indicate gender inequality in Croatian business organisations. Half of the respondents in managerial positions preferred a rational style of decision making and a consultative and constructive leadership style. Those respondents that were evaluated as open collaborators were considered self-critical, with good communication skills, and they were considered to be more likely to be honest in business and to show empathy. It is interesting that the majority of respondents believe that there are no differences in salaries between them and their male colleagues in the same positions (70.5%). Almost half of the respondents point out that they managed their careers on their own, while the rest had a mentor, male or female. Most of them believe that the ability of strategic planning is an important feature of managers regardless of gender (80.4%). Furthermore, respondents emphasise that the most important characteristics of managers are team

leadership (87.5%) and the ability to delegate authority (76.8%). They estimate that knowledge and communication skills (83%), work and commitment (73.2%) and education (lifelong education 64.3% and formally educated 43.8%) are important for progress. Respondents estimate that the benefits for employed women, such as flexible working hours, the availability of kindergartens and nurseries in business organisations, part-time work, financial and legal benefits and the like, enabled career advancement (p. 287-313).

Trajanovski (2018) in her dissertation *Gender Basis of Discrimination of Women in Progress at Work - The Problem of the Glass Ceiling* presented a number of data from the research regarding the glass ceiling effect in Croatia, but she also presented the results of her own research. She points out how it is much harder for women in Croatia to advance in their career than for men. For example, degradation or dismissal during maternity is not uncommon, women are underpaid, in front of employees their superiors often comment about other female candidates and so discriminate women, the advancement process for women is slow and inert and the chance for advancement women gain because of their hard work and sacrifice, not because of networking. Trajanovski (2018) concludes that most of the respondents share the opinion that women and men in Croatia do not have the same status and opportunities for advancement. One of the most interesting findings of the study is that female bosses discriminate equally (if not to a greater extent) their female employees. Namely, the respondents claim that directors or members of management boards take male forms of behaviour in order to survive in these positions or to prove themselves (p. 50-54).

When it comes to the Croatian public relations industry, according to the list of members of the Croatian Public Relations Association, women make up 76,84% of employees in the industry.⁴ In this sense, the Croatian public relations industry can be compared with the judicial profession in Croatia where, according to Keller (2013) in 2013, 67% were female judges. However, there is no data according to which conclusions could be drawn as to whether this data reflects also on the number of women in management positions in the PR industry. Also, given the fact that so far no research has been conducted regarding attitudes and opinions of women working in the Croatian PR industry, in the theoretical phase of the research, it was not possible to compare the attitudes of women in managerial positions with those of women employed in the Croatian PR industry.

⁴ Članstvo HUOJ (n.d). Retrived from: <https://www.huoj.hr/clanstvo/>

Method and Conceptual Framework

As many research studies show that women face many obstacles in their work (lack of professional and private support, the glass ceiling effect, unequal pay, etc.), the aim of this study was to research all those issues, but also to explore attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry regarding working culture (networking, interaction at work, dress codes, etc.), gender-biased leadership, as well as their ability to see other senior women as role models. In accordance with the foregoing, problems of this research were unexplored attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about their personal professional experience in the PR industry, office culture and leadership through gender equality lenses.

The subjects of the research were, accordingly, attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about their personal professional experience in the PR industry, office culture and leadership through gender equality lenses.

The objectives of the research were as follows:

RO1)

To research the attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about their personal professional experience in the PR industry.

RO2)

To research the attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about office culture.

RO3)

To research the attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about leadership through gender equality lenses.

The research questions were the following:

RQ1)

What are the attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about their personal professional experience in the PR industry?

RQ2)

What are the attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about office culture?

RQ3)

What are the attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry about leadership through gender equality lenses?

The research was conducted by the qualitative method of in-depth interviews which, due to the social distancing caused by the COVID-19 virus pandemic, were conducted by a combined technique of telephone conversation and e-mail communication. The survey was conducted in the period from April 16 and May 15, 2020.

Interviewees were asked questions, which were structured around three areas in direct relation with research objectives and research questions:

- **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).

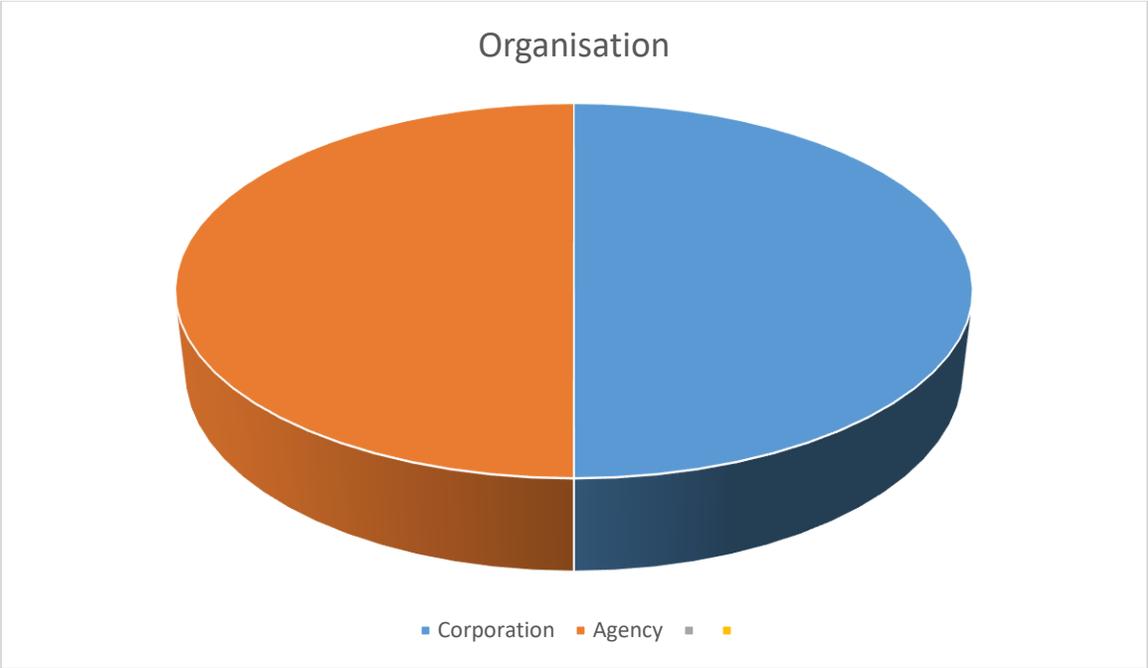
In total, 21 interviews were conducted with women working in public relations in Croatia. Of 21 interviewees, eight hold managerial roles whereas 13 are employees without managerial responsibilities. The average age of employees is 36 and of managers 43,5. Five employees work in-house (38%), three employees work in PR agency (23%), two in high education (15%), one is a civil servant (8%), one work in Croatian PR professional association (8%), and one employee works in the delegation (8%). Four managers work in a PR agency and four in-house. The interviewees work in Zagreb, capital of Croatia, and thus the research is limited to the experiences of women in Zagreb. In the following table and graphs are presented data regarding the structure of the interviewees.

Table 1. Interviewee' demographics

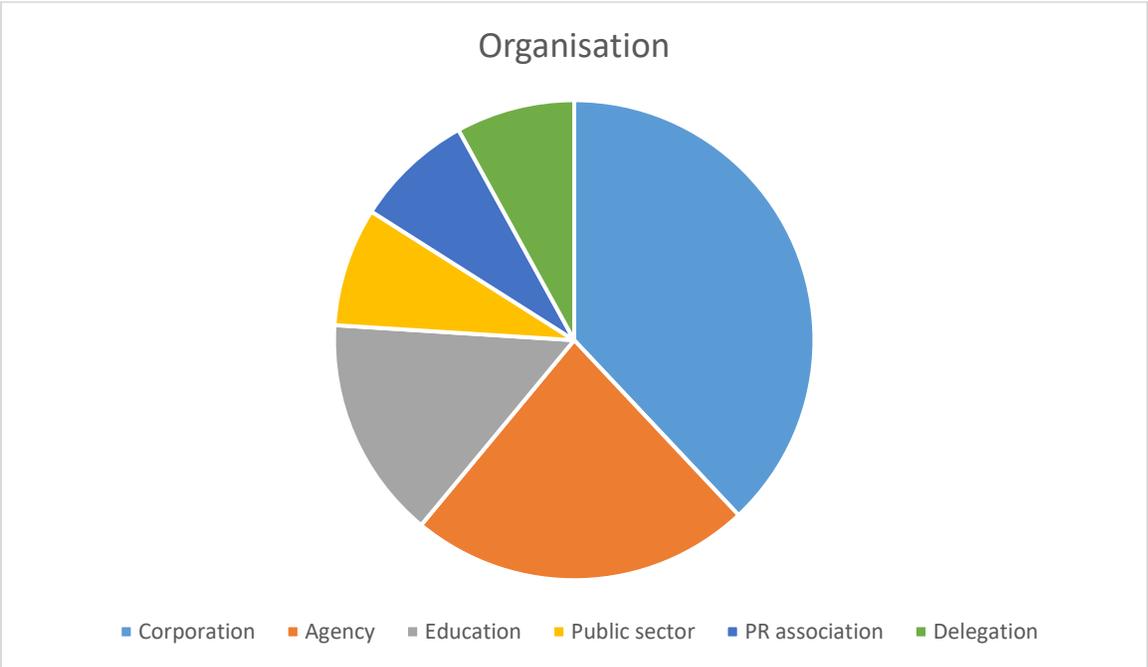
NO.	Type of organisation	Age	Position in organisation	Degree	Place
1	Corporation	54	Head of Corporate and Internal Communication Department	MA Communication	Zagreb
2	Corporation	30	Head of Communications	MA Journalism	Zagreb
3	PR Agency	46	Managing Director for South-East Europe	MA from the Faculty of Humanities	Zagreb
4	PR Agency	30	Junior Public Relations Specialist	MA Media Culture	Zagreb
5	Corporation	35	Corporate Communications and Marketing Specialist	MA Journalism	Zagreb
6	Corporation	61	Editor in Chief of Corporate Magazine	PhD in Information and Communication Science	Zagreb
7	PR Agency	29	PR Assistant	MA Public Relations	Zagreb
8	Political body	34	Communication officer	MA Linguistics	Zagreb
9	University	32	Communication expert and teaching assistant	MA Political Science, MSc specialization in Public Relations	Zagreb
10	State body	37	Head of Customer Support	MBA Public Relations	Zagreb
11	PR Agency	28	Director/Manager	MA Political Science	Zagreb
12	Corporation	44	PR expert/Employee	BA Sociology	Zagreb
13	PR Agency	48	Managing Partner/Manager	MA Communication	Zagreb
14	Corporation	45	Corporate Communications Advisor/Manager	MA Journalism	Zagreb
15	Corporation	29	Leading PR specialist/Employee	MA Communication	Zagreb
16	Professional association	39	Secretary-general/Employee	MA Communication	Zagreb
17	PR Agency	51	Senior advisor / partner /Manager	MA Journalism	Zagreb
18	PR Agency	26	Account Assistant/Employee	BA Public Relations	Zagreb
19	Corporation	48	Head of Communication/Manager	BA Philosophy	Zagreb
20	Corporation	28	PR specialist/Employee	BA Social Sciences	Zagreb
21	University	44	Head of the Quality Office/Employee	PhD in Communication Sciences	Zagreb

As per graphs below, the same was diverse in regards to the structure of organisations for managers (graph 1) and the structure of organisation for employees (graph 2).

Graph 1. Structure of organisation for managers



Graph 2. Structure of organisation for employees



The unequal treatment between women and men in public relations has been drawing attention since 1986 when the Velvet Ghetto study showed that women were relegated to the technician role due to the social expectations that women were poor managers (Cline et al., 1986). In addition to that, Velvet Ghetto study reported that women self-selected themselves into a technician role and thus expect to be paid less than men which were echoed as well in the second report 'Beyond the Velvet Ghetto' (Toth and Cline, 1989). Although the position of women has improved a lot in comparison to how it was at the time of the Velvet Ghetto study the issues with a pay gap, glass ceiling and mentoring still exist (Topić et al., 2019). In an attempt to deconstruct the reasons that women in public relations are still facing the before mentioned issues albeit the gendered nature of public relations industry (Aldoory & Toth, 2002, 2004; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000), this research was underpinned by Bourdieu's (2007) concept of organisations functioning as male habitus.

Organisations are still cherishing the work-first culture which is culture ascribed to men, thus showing that organisations are still functioning as male habitus. Work-first culture has historically benefited men and disadvantaged women due to the expectation that women will care for the family (Saval, 2015) and those women who attain very high positions have to pay in a sense for this professional success with less success in the domestic realm (Bourdieu, 2007). This leads to the concept of cultural masculinity which is the focal point of the research due to the fact that organisations have traditionally been male habitus were women's work is impoverished and men's maintained the superior value (Bourdieu, 2007). According to Saval (2015), organisations have always been a masculine world in which women were eye candy and expected to be feminine (Bourdieu, 2007). In addition to that, Bourdieu (2007) claims that positions which become feminised 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), that can be related to the gendered nature of public relations industry in which women, although being the major workforce, are still not equal to their male counterparts.

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, we followed the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) where we first presenting thematic analysis for each section of the report (lived experiences, the office culture and socialisation and leadership) and then we 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.

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 Croatia 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.

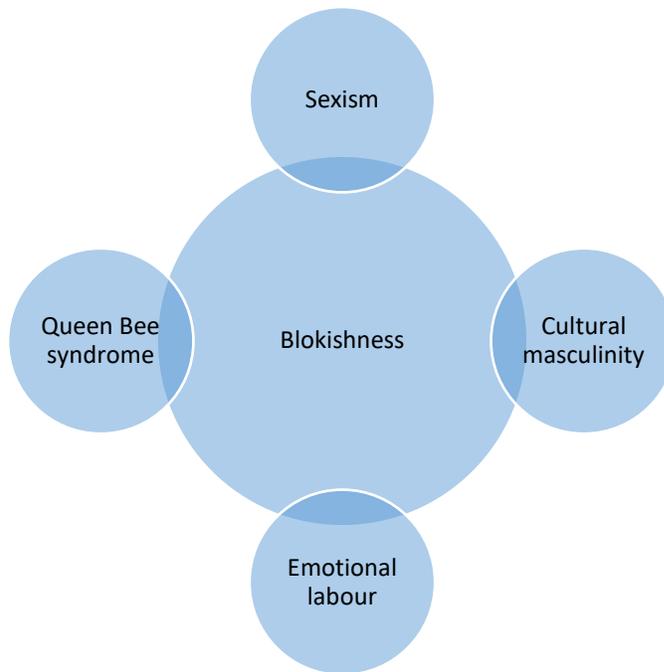
Findings

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 Experience of Women in Public Relations

A total of six themes emerged from the lived experience of women in public relations industry - (1) long working hours, (2) double burden, (3) emotional labour, (4) different treatment, (5) queen bee syndrome and (6) women's' need to be as good as men or even better than them. When analyzing these themes and contrasting them to the literature and the conceptual framework of this study it can be concluded that blockiness runs through all of the mentioned themes since women reported working in organisations where masculine patterns are still prevailing (graph 1). The majority of participants reported working long hours and having to implement work-first culture, facing obstacles when having a child which is in line with historical recognition of organisations being man's world and thus working under the assumption that there are no caring and family responsibilities (Topić, 2020; Topić et al, 2020; Topić et al, 2019). Women reported being forced to translate emotions into the everyday business thus showing the prevalence of emotional labour in the public relations industry as well as being blocked by other women (queen bee syndrome). In addition to that, sexism is evident through the different treatment of women and the need for women to be as good as men or even better than them.

Graph 1 Thematic map



All women reported working long hours which supports that the “work is organized on the image of an unencumbered worker who is totally dedicated to the work and who has no responsibilities for children and family demands other than earning a living” (Acker, 2009, p. 206). Acker implicitly calls this men’s work describing it as “at least eight hours of continuous work away from the living space, arrival on time, total attention to the work and long hours if necessary” (ibid, p. 206). For example, interviewee 11 even claims that in public relations "there are actually no working hours" and that several times after work she had situations "that I work until 9 pm or until midnight, and weekends are mostly working for me". She also believes that it is "difficult... very difficult" to reconcile business and private life in the PR industry because "one area must suffer... to progress in the PR sector it is necessary to be 100 per cent committed, answering phones 0-24, seven days a week.... theoretically, you can progress in PR and have a family, but I'm not sure how good a parent you would be with a job like that", she concludes.

Working long hours supports the work-first culture ascribed to men thus showing that organisations are still functioning as male habitus. Work-first culture has historically benefited men and disadvantaged women due to the expectation that women will care for the family (Saval, 2015) and those women who attain very high positions have to pay in a sense for this professional success with less success in the domestic realm (Bourdieu, 2007). This view is echoed by interviewee two saying that “It is almost impossible to work and progress in the public relations sector and have time to

raise a family. If you are working all day long, trying to be focused on your job, team and tasks there is no enough time to be dedicated to your family and family needs”.

Researchers have pointed at the significance of work-family as the major problem preventing women from advancing (Kumra, Simpson, and Burke, 2014). The majority of participants stated that the possibility of working and progressing in public relations sector and raising a family is conditional on “good organisation and family support” (interviewee 1), “support at home and good business environment” (interviewee 3), “support of a partner” (interviewee 5), “good organisation and a lot of sacrifices” (interviewee 7), “a lot of sacrifices, dedication and support of husband, family” (interviewee 9) and “readiness to renunciation” (interviewee 10).

Some women face double burden (Hochschild, 2012) and because of working what amounts to a double shift at home and the office, women have little opportunity for the outside activities (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2009). Double burden affects how much they can socialize with colleagues and invest in social capital (Eagly and Carli, 2007) and be able to prove their commitment to the organisation. In addition to that, children are sometimes considered as stumbling block hence women have to strive harder (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2009). For example,

“I have a hard time balancing work and private life because of the motherhood. Caring for a small child requires a lot of time and sacrifice. Work and motherhood are currently only activities during the day. Hanging out with friends, having free time and training are very rare. Women due to a certain life milestones (motherhood) progress later than men” (interviewee 9)

Some participants stated that their work-home balance is largely determined by clients’ demands thus showing what Yeomans’ (2007) calls “learning to please” (p. 218). This can be linked to the emotional labour where personal attributes are folded into labour relations (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labour is of relevance in public relations industry due to the “key role that emotions play in day-to-day public relations activities and thus its connection with both individual and organizational success” (Yeomans, 2007, p. 217). Delivering a personal service to journalists and clients plays a pivotal role in the pursuit of success (Piecicka, 2006b). For example, in our study, interviewee 7 stated that she cannot find an ideal work-home balance whereas interviewee 7 argued that works take up most of her time,

“I can’t always have an ideal work-home balance. It depends on the number of work and clients’ demands. I have to always be available and fulfil clients’ demands.” (interviewee 4)

“Work takes up most of my time so I have very little time left for my private life. Clients can have their demands after 5 PM and I have to answer their inquiries and deliver what they need.” (interviewee 7)

It is interesting that only one interviewee (14) claims that at the moment her "private life is dominant (small child, elderly parents who are ill), even though my job used to come first".

Emotion management enables women to more effectively (than men) instil and maintain confidence in their key relationships with clients, journalists and other stakeholders (Yeomans, 2007) and since public relations industry became feminised emotional labour becomes one of the components in everyday delivery of different tasks. In line with that, public relations itself has been considered a speciality within the broader field of communication – a speciality that invites women because it is a staff rather than a line function and being a member of support staff is consistent with society’s expectations of the working woman (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2009). As a result, many women find themselves in what has been called the “pink-collar ghettos” of service fields (ibid, 2009).

The majority of participants reported they had been treated differently because of their gender and some of them take this for granted the different treatment thus showing the internalisation of masculine habitus and values of the industry without challenging patriarchal (or capitalist) structures (Topić, 2020),

“I have sometimes been treated differently because I am a woman. I consider this as a part of the social paradigm, nothing personal.” (interviewee 1)

“I think it’s generally harder for women than for men because they have to prove themselves more and work harder, be business-oriented (not family-oriented) and not act too emotionally.” (interviewee 15)

“Advancement for women is easier to a certain position, and for high positions, it is not easy to get the opportunity, and the criteria are not always or rarely are expertise, but a "male blessing" for progress.” (interviewee 21)

“Since I mostly work with men, and older than myself, I often feel some subtle underestimation because I am young and because I am a woman. I always need a lot of energy to fight to get to the word etc. Or if I suggest something they won’t consider it so seriously but if an older colleague suggests the same thing they will be thrilled with it.” (interviewee 11)

However, some of them reported being treated differently because of their physical appearance and hearing sexist comments which can be linked to the stereotypes usually placed on women working in public relations such as “PR bunnies” (Fröhlich and Peters, 2007, p. 242), “PR girly” and “PR

slut” (Yeomans, 2014, p. 91). Women in public relations face lookism or physical appearance-based discrimination and men, focusing on women’s physical attributes, is the ultimate power play by men to demean women’s professionalism (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2009),

“When I dress attractive my colleagues, especially men do not get me serious and look me through sexist lenses.” (interviewee 4)

“I feel different treatment on a daily basis. For example, when I show up in the office with more makeup or wearing high heels men immediately comment it” (interviewee 2)

In line with the different treatment, participants reported being disapproved as well. The majority of participants reported that they were disapproved by both, superiors and their colleagues. Three participants stated they had been disapproved by their female superior thus confirming the existence of “queen-bee syndrome” (Cline et al., 1986). Because of increased competition, and the reality that most women do not advance, Queen Bees do not want other women to have it easier, maintain the status quo, which means adjusting to the glass ceiling model (Wrigley, 2005),

“The only time I was treated unfairly at the work was performed by a female boss.” (interviewee 3)

“Women disapproved me because of their jealousy which was very irrational and they tried to kick me out from the playground.” (interviewee 4)

“They were bothered by my expertise because I stood them in their way of pursuing their personal interests.” (interviewee 6)

“I would never want to become the kind of woman my current boss is. I think it has more negative traits than positive ones.” (interviewee 12)

On the other hand, interviewee 21, emphasises: "I noticed that men are more prone to (un)conscious manipulation, while women build their relationship with colleagues on expertise and focus on achieving common goals, rather than self-proof, as may be more often the case with men, at least according to my impression."

Gender is the greatest determinant of progression in public relations. According to the majority of participants, women have the possibility to progress in public relations industry, however, when it comes to equal chances of progression to the male counterparts, they agree that men have better chances of progression. This is in line with Ragins and Sundstrom’s (1989) claim that women and men traverse different paths to power as they develop professionally and women’s path can be described as an “obstacle course” (p. 81) fraught with many impediments and barriers (Gruning,

Toth, and Hon, 2009). Due to the preconceptions, stereotypes and other expectations men have concerning women, they have to prove themselves because others are too quick to assume women's inferiority (ibid, 2009). Therefore, women have to develop masculine-stereotyped patterns of on-the-job behaviour (Acker, 2009).

"Women have to be proactive and dominant. They have to push the limits. They have to have better knowledge than in comparison to men. Only in this way they can be successful in the public relations industry" (interviewee 4).

"I think women should have the same characteristics as men, but a little bit more than that so they can have the same position" (interviewee 5).

"Women have to be self-confident, determined, professional, but in order to progress they need to know how to self-promote themselves and adapt to their bosses, especially if the boss is men" (interviewee 6).

"They need to bite for the job, to prove themselves and give up a lot of their private lives" (interviewee 7).

"In order to progress, women must develop managerial skills and be more confident in order to break the glass ceiling" (interviewee 9).

"Women need to be confident, focused of work and in most cases it is still more difficult for those who want to have a family in addition to work" (interviewee 10).

"In my industry, which is specifically male, women are expected to have masculine traits and their job always comes first" (interviewee 12).

Although participants state that there is a difference between women and men, thus echoing radical feminism, when it comes to the adaptations needed in order to progress in public relations industry, participants embrace liberal feminist strategies which suggest that women should adopt masculine behaviours (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2009). In that way, women must make adaptations to expectations since organisations have been traditionally men's world. Acker (2009) states that "women had invented ways to cope with this work culture, which they experienced as alien to their usual way of working; they felt that they were partly outsiders who did not belong (p. 210). Participants' view on the attitudes women have to demonstrate in order to progress show that "masculine principle is posited as the measure of all things" (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 14). They reiterate what Bourdieu (2007) explained as masculine order or regularity of social order according to which organisations have traditionally been male habitus. Although participants recognize the need to struggle against women's discrimination, they do not bring the restructuring of the system and consequently organisations that produce and reproduce gender asymmetry into the question.

The Office Culture

In this section, the positive progress is notable regarding the office interactions, banter and dress code. The majority of participants reported not experiencing gendered differences in office interactions and banter. When it comes to the dress code, it seems that the positive progress has been done towards erasing gender stereotypes, however, the existence of informal expectations on how should women dress is still present. Moreover, most participants take for granted these expectations, treat them as something natural, thus showing the internalisation of masculine habitus (Bourdieu, 2007). The importance of being dressed in “appropriate way” can be linked to the concept of organisational image building which is one of the central functions of public relations (Bernstein, 1984). However, women still report being excluded from the important business decisions and lacking networking groups which reinforce Bourdieu’s (2007) masculine habitus in which women’s work is impoverished and men’s maintained the superior value.

When it comes to the office interactions in the public relations industry, only one participant referred to the existence of gendered differences in daily interactions,

“Women talk more about family and men more about sports. I feel good with both male and female topics“
(interviewee 6).

This evidence goes in line with radical feminism perspective according to which women and men have different interests (Rakow & Nastasia, 2009). In addition to that, the parallel can be drawn with the gendered differences in journalism which has traditionally been seen as a male domain (Strong, 2007) in which men are predestined for hard news and women for soft news (Chambers et al., 2004). This is especially true when it comes to sports journalism which remains a predominantly male-dominated speciality (ibid, 2004). In an overall perspective, the office interactions can be divided into two main themes – personal themes including family, friends, leisure activities (interviewee 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20) and themes related to work including tasks, clients, current media themes, progression (interviewee 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). Since only one participant stated that there are gendered differences in office interactions leads to Krefting’s (2003) claim that the interaction practices that recreate gender are often subtle and difficult to document.

Evidence is similar when it comes to the banter in the office. Only five out of 21 participants stated that the humour in an office setting is gendered. Banter is a double-edged sword (Malone, 1980) and

what is funny to one person may be considered rude and offensive to the other person. This is especially true when using humour in the organisational context where men use jokes to express and reinforce the power (Gherardi, 1995). For example,

“There are differences between genders. Men have their humour talks and sometimes it is embarrassing to be part of it. I always say my opinion about whether they like it or not.” (interviewee 2)

“My colleagues usually defame employees from other agencies on a physical basis. They use sexist jokes about women. Men comment on women’s tits and asses. Female colleagues usually participate in joking. I don’t feel good when they talk about women in that way.” (interviewee 4)

“In jokes, there is a difference between the sexes and sometimes it is not pleasant to listen to distasteful jokes at the expense of women.” (interview 14)

Interviewee 19 claims that there is “a difference in the type of humour, however, I accidentally found out on one occasion that male colleagues "refrain" in my presence of inappropriate speech (they are not free to communicate)”. Similarly, interviewee 18 believes that “in general, there are differences in the type of humour between the sexes, and in this regard, I sometimes feel a little uncomfortable but it does not apply exclusively to one gender. My female colleagues from the agency I worked before talked about many "female" topics, but also politics, society ... I did not approve of some of their jokes related to politics or sexual prejudices, considering them excessively exclusive. In other words, male colleagues may sometimes have an inappropriate sense of humour compared to female colleagues, but I have also personally heard comments from women which sometimes seemed exclusive and sounded a bit mocking."

Some participants who stated that there are no gendered differences in banter, stated that they either “have no problem with more casual communication which suits me to some extent” (interviewee 1), “have no problems with jokes from colleagues if they are friends” (interviewee 5) or “personally do not have a problem with someone joking about me because I am a woman” thus showing to some extent the internalisation of male habitus. According to Bourdieu (2007), when it comes to 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” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 68).

In addition to the office interactions and banter, de-patriarchalisation of public relations is evident regarding the dress code. A few participants stated that there is a “prescribed code of conduct which

includes the dress code – business style of dressing” (interviewee 1), “yes, we have dress code, it's called smart casual. Several companies have problems with colleagues who dress "too loosely" which is why, among other things, a "dress code" has been introduced” (interviewee 12), “there is a rule of business dress code, except as a rule on Fridays when casual attire is allowed” (interviewee 17), “there are instructions on how to dress - we cannot wear too short or too open dresses and skirts, torn clothes (such as torn jeans or T-shirts) or tracksuits are not recommended. That’s okay with me because I think at work you should dress appropriately” (interviewee 15). In addition to that one participant stated that there are “no official rules regarding the dress code. I would categorise them more as guidelines for decent dressing and they are more strict for the management staff” (interviewee 5). The rest of participants stated that the dress code is not prescribed in the organisation they work and interviewee 6 mentioned that “in the first years after the company had been found, dress code used to exist. Dress code used to be formal and the management introduced informal Friday dressing. Now there is no specific rule”.

Although most organisations do not have prescribed dress codes, for there are informal expectations about women’s dressing. Most participants take for granted these expectations, treat them as something natural, thus showing the internalisation of masculine habitus (Bourdieu, 2007),

“It is known that it should be nice, decent, business dressing.” (interviewee 2)

“It is expected that people follow business casual code and I fully accept this code.” (interviewee 3)

“Informal expectation refers to the fact that not too casual dressing is expected. Personally, I am comfortable with it, although I think that in some situation more attention should be devoted to the dressing.” (interviewee 6)

“There are no dress codes, but as we work with students, we all generally adhere to some of the business casual style versions.” (interviewee 21)

“There were no dress codes in the agency, I inquired about it when I first had an appointment with a client. However, from one situation I realized that, although there are no defined rules, the director has her own rules, when it came to official photos. A businesslike, strict look is required, that is, a shirt or jacket, so I had to repeat the photoshoot for a business presentation because of my dark sweater.” (interview 18)

By taking for granted informal expectations regarding the dress code, women recreate the notion that organisations have always been a masculine world in which women were eye candy (Saval, 2015) and expected to be feminine (Bourdieu, 2007). The importance of being dressed in “appropriate way” can be linked to the concept of organisational image building which is one of the central

functions of public relations. Bernstein (1984) believed that the organisational image is an expression of the corporate personality and that co-ordinated and consistent communication to external and internal publics is fundamental to the management of the corporate image. This view is echoed by Bourdieu (2007) who states that since “women see and look after the décor of everyday life, the house and its internal decoration”, it is quite logical that women are “called upon to transport this role into the company, which almost always asks them to provide the functions of presentation and representation and hospitality” (p. 100) which has been claimed by interviewee 4 stating the following:

“There is a code of practice which says that if you are not dressed properly for the upcoming meeting, you have to have in your office wardrobe clothing that is appropriate for the meeting. When talking about appropriate clothing, it includes blouses, business trousers, skirts, dresses etc. I feel well with that kind of clothing and I always dress in accordance with these informal expectations when I have a meeting. However, when I do not have a meeting, I wear what I want.“

Although the majority of participants stated there is no official dress code for women, there is a question whether office culture has progressed towards loosening gender-stereotypical expectations on how women are expected to dress since informal expectation regarding the dress code prevail in the majority organisations. In addition to that, progression is questionable due to the fact that these expectations are embedded in the minds of participants who take for granted thus reinforcing lookism, the concept which refers to “other’s tendency to focus more either positively or negatively on women’s appearance than on their job performance” (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2018, p. 312). For example,

“Due to the nature of the job, there are informal expectations of how should we dress. Personally, I have no problem with that, in fact, I like to dress nicely for work because somehow I consider it part of my personal culture. I like to look clean and decent with a dose of elegance. I think I leave a better impression in that way.”
(interviewee 7)

Public relations is service work and according to Alvesson (1998) service work is personality intensive which means that “the personal image of the service worker is important” (p. 980). In modern society, the success of organizations “depends on the ability to produce the right image”, hence “attractive (subordinated) female staff can symbolize power, prestige and success both for the superior person who employs and heads the staff as well as for the organisation as a whole” (ibid, p. 980). However, men often focus on women’s physical attributes which can be described as “the

ultimate power play by men to demean women's professionalism" (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2018, p. 313).

Lookism is not the only tool used to demonstrate men's ultimate power play, thus affecting women's professionalism in the public relations industry. Exclusion from the important business decisions and networking can as well isolate women from career-advancing, thus supporting the glass ceiling phenomenon which refers to the gender barriers that affect women moving up the organisational ladders (Acker, 2009). Acker calls these practices inequality regimes defining them as "interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintaining class, gender and racial inequalities within the particular organizations" (ibid, 2009, p.201).

Women are isolated "from the inner circle where important business gets done" (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2018, p.293) and men act as elites in organisations. Elites tend to reproduce themselves through the inclusion of those like themselves and exclusion of others (Reskin, 2003; Smith, 2002) which goes in line with Bourdieu's (2007) masculine habitus in which women's work is impoverished and men's maintained the superior value. Twelve out of 21 participants stated that they were excluded from the important business decisions, however, two participants stated the following:

"I have been excluded from important business decisions but not because I am a woman." (interviewee 3 and 16)

Two participants who stated that they were not excluded from the important business decision hold the position of communication manager. In further elaboration of being excluded from a business decision, interviewee 1 stated: "I always make independent decisions in the processes for which I am responsible". However, since the majority of women are excluded from the business decision it can be concluded that the public relations organisations and departments in Croatia still reflect patriarchal value system where "masculine values are predominant and gender oppression pronounces" (Alvesson, 1998, p. 984). As Bryant (1984) put it, "there is women's work and men's work, and men's is better" (p. 47). Moreover, all participants agreed that networking is extremely important for two reasons - career advancement and job requirement in public relations industry which is similar from the findings in England where women as well reported that networking is job requirement (Topić, 2020). This view is echoed by interviewee 4 who stated:

"Every time we organise or go to the events we have to network, mingle and share our visit cards in order to acquire new clients. I would say networking is a prerequisite."

“Networking is one of the core capitals in our business, although I would put the emphasis on relationships first and foremost.” (interviewee 17)

“Networking is very important, it makes work easier and faster when you know in advance from whom you can get some information.” (interviewee 15)

However, women do not often feel they have equal chances in networking as their counterparts do since social networks are “usually composed of people with similar characteristics and interests” (Acker, 2009, p.209) and women do not belong to the “old boys club” (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2018). For example,

“When it comes to networking, women are often excluded from the table. Networking is, however, a key component in climbing up the ladder and women do not recognise it as men do. Women should spend more time connecting with each other because this is the only way women can stop men’s hegemony in the business world.” (interviewee 4).

In addition to that, participants stated that women in Croatia lack female business networking groups aimed at sharing experiences between women in the public relations industry,

“There are not enough networking groups where women could express their ideas, share their experiences and best practices. Men recognise the importance of networking more than women do. That’s why they are so successful.” (interviewee 2)

“I often want to get my voice heard, to tell women who work in public relations how I often feel, to share my point of views but the networking groups aimed for female public relations practitioners in Croatia do not exist.” (interviewee 7)

These results can be linked to the results of the latest *European Communication Monitor (2020)* according to which lacking specific networks and development programmes for women is one of the main reasons for a glass ceiling in the communication profession. When it comes to Croatia, this is the third reason that hinders women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations. Lacking specific networks for women in public relations reinforces the ongoing gender asymmetry and hierarchy where men are greatly overrepresented in higher posts while women to a larger extent are found in the lower posts. In addition to that, lacking networks for female public relations practitioners can additionally lower professionalism in the industry which is already seen as not enough professionals due to the feminisation which brings the profession down and reduces benefits and wages (Cline et al, 1986; Lance Toth, 1988).

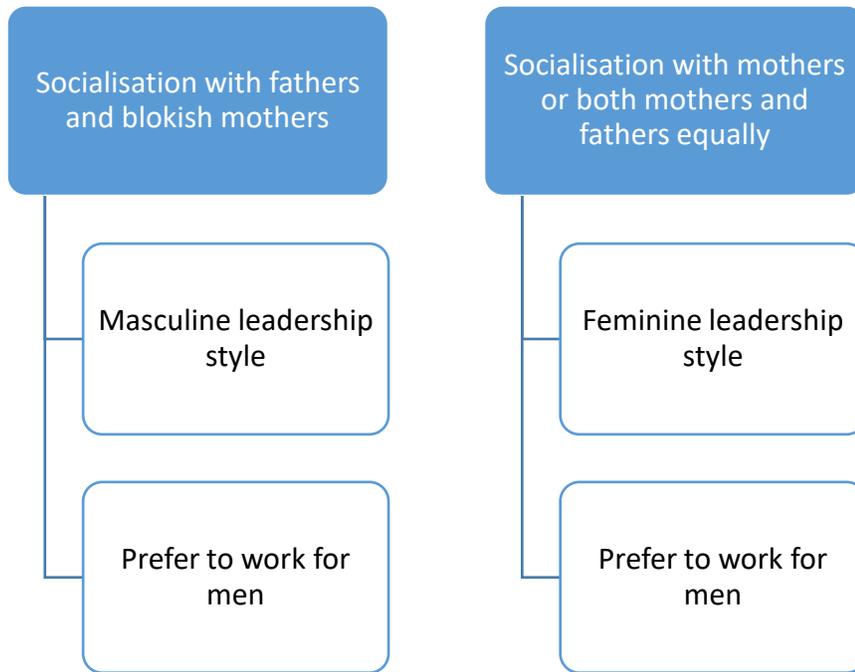
The Socialisation and Leadership

Women described their leadership style in two ways: open, friendly, collegial, empathic, encouraging, proactive and assertive. These findings were cross-referenced with the early upbringing and socialisation process. It appears that the leadership style can not be linked with the socialisation process that emphasises the amount of time that women spent playing with boys or girls when they were growing up since all women reported either spending more time with girls or with both, boys and girls equally. The leadership style thus can be linked with the socialisation process based on the amount of time that women spent with mothers who adopt masculine patterns or fathers when they were growing up. This is a very different finding from the one in England where women who spent time playing with boys were showing different characteristics than women who spent time with girls (Topić, 2020).

From childhood onwards, the family is the foremost context for socialisation, and parents represent one of the most powerful influences in their children's lives (Axpe et al., 2019). This influence continues throughout individuals' entire lives (ibid, 2019). In this study, women who spent more time with fathers and mothers who adopted masculine values in climbing the ladder tend to adopt masculine leadership style and prefer to work for men, whilst women who spent time with both mother and father or who spent more time with mothers tend to adopt feminine leadership style and also prefer to work for men. This is in line with Grunig, Toth and Hon's (2008) conclusion that socialisation, as a process that leads us to play traditional sex roles, is the early gender-based programming according to which "men and women cannot help but adopt different managerial styles" (p. 95).

As it appears from graph 3, there are differences in leadership and work styles that derive directly from the socialisation process, and the findings echo findings already published in England in May 2020 (Topić, 2020).

Graph 3. The Pattern of Socialisation and Leadership



Women who spent more time with fathers and blokish mothers internalised masculine leadership patterns. For example, an interviewee who spent more time with her father stated that her leadership style is “reflection of her relationship with the father. My leadership style is based on my own business advantages. I know that I am excellent at writing press releases and media relations. My leadership style is extremely proactive“ (interviewee 4). A similar view is echoed by interviewee 9 who spent more time with her blokish mother saying that she “internalized the assertive leadership pattern from my mother“.

On the other hand, women who spent more time with mothers or with both mothers and fathers equally internalised feminine leadership patterns which they tend to describe as “helping my colleagues to see the bigger picture“ (interviewee 2), “liking to hear other people's opinions“ (interviewee 6) and “collegial“ (interviewee 7). Interviewee 14 claims that her leadership style is democratic: “I consult subordinate colleagues and ask for opinions on proposals, I try to encourage the participation of others in the decision-making process, two-way communication“. These descriptions of leadership styles are inherent to the results of Aldoory's (1998) study about the leadership skills of female public relations practitioners that women tend to use “participative management, attempts to energize staff and empathy“ (p. 97). In addition to that, as echoed by interviewee 10 who “always encourages employees to perform their duties professionally and

responsibly“, women tend to perform so-called interactive leadership that “involves attempts to enhance other people's self-worth and to energise followers“ (Rosener, 1994, p. 15).

The internalisation of the leadership patterns based on the number of time women spent with their parents support Bourdieu's (2007) standpoint that family, acting as the monarchy by divine right based on the authority of the father, was “one of the main agents in reproducing the masculine domination and the masculine vision“ (2007, p.85). Thus, women who spent more time with fathers and blockish mothers demonstrate “male agency/instrumentality (a self-centred orientation concerned with achieving one's ends)“ while women who spent more time with their mothers or with both, mothers and fathers equally demonstrate “female communion/expressiveness (an others-centred orientation that seeks the good of all and is characterized by cooperation)“ (Wetherell, 1989, pp. 38-39). Criteria for interactive management include “participative management, sharing of power and information, energizing stuff“ (Aldoory, 1998, p. 76).

Related to socialisation is some women's ambivalence towards their careers and the Velvet Ghetto study (Cline et al., 1986) and thus findings show that some women express less involvement in their jobs which can be reflected in the standpoint echoed by interviewee 5: “I have no affinity for leadership positions, I think I can contribute to the department without managing people. I like to lead a private and business life separately, and I think that by accepting a certain position it becomes more difficult“. Interviewee 12 claims similarly: "I don't think I'm a good 'leader' at the moment. If I had problems with people in the team, I'd rather do everything myself. My goal is to complete the task. If I had a team of people I could choose and lead myself from start to finish, it would probably be different then and I would be motivated to invest in my team."

It happens that women sabotage their ambitions if, as Johnson (1976) found, they fear success because of what they perceive as its negative consequences on their personal relationships. According to Gallese (1991), “women do not crave power enough“ (p. 91) and the socialisation might be the reason why this happens to women. In addition to that, it is evident that at the management positions, women face double bind when compared to male counterparts:

“I claim that from the type of management and communication style it is clear how much someone’s character is involved, and the best example of this is the aspect of emotional intelligence. But here (at the management position) we encounter a problem because when it comes to women in top management positions, emotional intelligence is involved to a greater extent. However, their emotional intelligence is taken for granted and when women at the top management position show emotional intelligence they are classified as moderately

competent leaders in comparison to men, who are classified as excellent leaders when they apply emotional intelligence at the same level“ (interviewee 2).

According to interviewee 17, her leadership style is:

“Disheveled. I am not militarily organised and I am extremely repulsed by the military management style, in the stupid sense of the word. However, there is one military style that is phenomenal, that of Major General Jack Galvin (who wrote the Pentagon documents) who offered a job to his associate, later General Petraeus, with these words: "My job is to lead the division, and your job is to criticize me." I am primarily focused on building authority with knowledge, competencies, ideas and creative solutions...”

Something similar is also claimed by the interviewee 18:

“I would say my leadership style is more democratic than autocratic. Although I have a certain vision and mission that I like to stick to and that I try to realize, I involve others in the management process, by asking for opinions and feedback, according to which, then, I check if I am doing everything right, that is, if I continue according to the originally defined direction. I like to hold the strings in my hands and be present throughout the management process (idea/plan), but I also nurture two-way communication, I think feedback is important for everyone involved and that teamwork and more heads, at the end of the day, is still smarter than one (although that one must think ahead and be careful not to lose context).”

Namely, the image of the manager is stereotypically masculine and “the successful organization and the successful leader share many of the same characteristics, such as strength, aggressiveness and competitiveness“ (Acker, 2009, p. 208). Women do not fit the image of the (masculine) leader, thus they face a double bind: they are either too masculine and assertive or they are too feminine and soft (Kanter, 1977). Morrison, White and Van Velsor (1987) pointed out that if women display too many masculine traits such as assertiveness, ambition, risk-taking and they are perceived negatively because these qualities are not consistent with the female roles. However, if they display too feminine traits such as passivity, dependence and emotionality, they are perceived as lacking in the characteristics for leadership positions. This gender-stereotyped images contribute and help to perpetuate gender segregation of jobs. These inconsistencies “leave many professional women walking an uncomfortable tightrope“ (Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2008, p. 306).

Leadership style is linked with the communication style and the parallel can be drawn with the work of communication and language scholar Deborah Tannen (1990) who argued that men speak the language of competitiveness, independence and status while women speak the language that creates intimacy and builds a relationship. Taking this perspective, it appears that those women who spent

more time with fathers and blockish mothers describe their communication style as direct, while women who spent more time with their mothers or both mothers and fathers equally describe it as careful or situation-dependent, thus showing the combination of communication styles that ranges between what is usually perceived as masculine and feminine (Tannen, 1995; 1990; 1986). For example,

“In general, my communication style can be described as considerate. But, when I have to provide feedback on the team’s performance or feedback to the client’s brief, then I’m direct – elaborating my direct comments with examples and argumentation“ (interviewee 3).

“I would describe it as considerate in most of the cases. If I estimate that in a particular situation I have to be direct, I will be. It depends on the interlocutor’s communication style“ (interviewee 5).

Interviewee 15 claims that her communication is a combination of direct and considerate communication. She is more direct in private life, but “at work depending on who I am addressing and how I think the person will react, but I try to be more careful.”

This difference is additionally supported by interviewee 4 who states:

“I used to spend more time with my mother when we were talking about feminine (women stuff) topics and when it comes to the politics, I used to spend more time talking with my father. I hang out with both, boys and girls equally. However, when I was playing with girls, I noticed their jealousy. Boys were not jealous as girls were. I think that men have always understood me better than women but I don’t know why. I cannot say that every woman is the same, some of them are more jealous than the other ones. In my opinion, feminine jealousy can be related to insecurity and nurture.“

Many others (interviewees 13, 14, 15, 16, 19) are direct in communication:

“I am direct in private and business communication, open, simple, firm in attitudes. Those who know me better say that I don't have a filter, that sometimes I need to think before I say something to avoid misunderstandings and possible violations of other people's feelings, sometimes I use sarcasm, sometimes I'm misunderstood but I can't say that I do it on purpose. It comes to me more spontaneously. People close to me know that there is no need to talk to me in gloves, and business has shown that it is easier to communicate with open cards.” (interviewee 16)

Thus, showing that some themes like “women stuff“ are stereotypically connected with females (mothers) and that the “politics“ that can be categorized as a more tough theme is stereotypically connected with males (fathers). This evidence goes in line with traditional male interest in current affairs or what is known in journalism as hard news (Topić, 2020) or “factual presentations of events

deemed newsworthy” (North, 2014, p. 356), usually centring on “serious stories about important topics” (Bender et al. 2009, p. 133) including politics and economics (van Zoonen, 1998) which can be categorised as public interest matters (Baum, 2003). Perhaps it is this connection with “emotions (and emotions are typically seen as feminine attributes) that, in part, marks stories in the soft news category as less prestigious in the news hierarchy and female reporters more often assigned to report on them than male reporters” (North, 2014, p. 2). Hence, it can be assumed that families function as some type of newsroom where there is a strong division between the hard topics that the children can talk about with father and soft topics they can talk about with mother. This evidence goes in line with radical feminism perspective according to which women and men have different interests (Rakow & Nastasia, 2009).

When asked about the characteristic necessary for effective leadership, all participants show that the combination of what is usually perceived as masculine and feminine characteristics are needed to be an effective leader. Among the so-called masculine characteristics, participants emphasise “ability to make hard decisions“ (interviewee 2), “proactiveness and directness“ (interviewee 4), “emotional stability“ (interviewee 9) and “justice“ (interviewee 10), “rationality, vision, diligence, courage or willingness to take risks and take responsibility” (interviewee 11), “authenticity, authority but also empathy” (interviewee 13) which supports the idea of masculine organizations as “instrumental arenas separated from the category of emotions“ (Alvesson, 1998, p. 986). Among the so-called feminine characteristics participants mentioned: “adequate communication“ (interviewee 1), “empathy“ (interviewees 3 and 4), “tolerance of different opinions, understanding employees, listening abilities“ (interviewee 6), “gratitude to employees and rewarding them for their efforts and success” (interviewee 7), “motivation” (interviewee 9) and “emotional intelligence” (interviewee 10), “regular communication with subordinates, teamwork, creating a pleasant business environment, sharing responsibilities, having a vision for the future of the organization” (interviewee 14), “understanding towards subordinates and availability, a little humor to break a difficult period”, (interviewee 15), “openness (approach outside the box), honesty / trust, transparency (in communication), ability to take risks and lead by example (talk the talk, walk the walk)” (interviewee 18), “justice, consideration, consistency, honesty, courage and modesty” (interviewee 19), “showing solidarity, advocating for employees” (interviewee 20), “the art of respecting those different from oneself” (interviewee 21).

Half of the participants stated that the high level of knowledge is vital for the effective leadership, and several strongly focused on professionalism which can be linked to the fact that sometimes “women’s glamour and sexuality are more valued than women’s professionalism” (Grunig, Toth, Hon, 2008, p. 300) showing the existence of masculine domination where men define what is appropriate behaviour, what it means to “be professional” (ibid, 2008). Scholars (Theus, 1985; Cline et al, 1986; Lance Toth, 1988) 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 (Topić, 2020). The fact that women stress professionalism as characteristic necessary for the effective leadership can be linked with Bourdieu’s (2007) observation that “positions which become feminised 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), showing the internalisation of male habitus and alignment with masculine patterns. According to Grunig, Toth and Hon (2009), women “have to prove themselves because others are too quick to assume women’s inferiority” (p. 310).

The evidence about the necessity of possessing the combination of so-called masculine and feminine characteristics to be an effective leader was linked to the participants’ self-evaluation of characteristics they possess. Participants were asked about the following 10 characteristics - aggressive, able to promote oneself, self-confident, politically savvy, analytically competent, possessing managerial skills, possessing operational skills, emotional and sensitive to people. Almost all participants (except interviewees 16 and 17) stated they are sensitive to people, thus they possess the empathy, characteristic which is usually perceived as feminine. However, when it comes to the emotions, fifteen out of 21 participants stated they have emotions, but interviewee 3 stated that she “tries to balance emotions” and interviewees 10, 15, 16 and 21 did not claim they are emotional. Almost all participants stated they have managerial skills (except interviewees 12,15,21 and 17 who did not want to describe herself without bigger picture) and only two participants did not mark that they have operational skills (interviewee 21 and 17). Regarding analytical competence five participants did not marked this characteristic (interviewees 16,17,18,20,21) and nine participants did not marked themselves as managerially motivated (interviewees 12,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21). Seven participants claim that they are politically savvy and when it comes to the self-confidence, twelve out of 21 participants claimed they are self-confident. Five out of 21 participants claimed also that they are

aggressive. It is interesting that interviewee 17 answers following when asked: “Would you say that you have any of these characteristics?”:

“To be able to give a more detailed answer I would first have to see how these characteristics are described. I lack the ability to see the bigger picture (synthesis and analysis), the ability to imagine alternative futures, ethical competence.”

When it comes to the opportunities for promotion, two participants stated they are completely able to promote themselves, three of them claim that they do it “in a controlled manner” (interviewee 1), “partly” (interviewees 3,11,13) and “sometimes” (interviewee 7) and the other twelve participants said they were not able to promote themselves. Promotion is characteristic that can be linked to the publicity and since men have historically belonged to the public sphere and had to right to speech while women were reserved for the private domain (household), it can be concluded that this traditional division between the public, masculine universe and private, female words still exists. This evidence can be additionally supported with Bourdieu’s (2007) conclusion that “men continue to dominate the public space and the field of power (especially economic power overproduction) whereas women remain (predominantly) assigned to the private space (domestic space, the site of reproduction), where the logic of the economy of symbolic goods is perpetuated, or to those quasi-extensions of the domestic space, the welfare services (especially medical services) and education, or to the domains of symbolic production (the literary, artistic or journalistic fields, etc.)“ (p. 93-94). Public relations can be categorized as the service work, thus it can be assumed that it is the quasi-extension of the domestic place which perpetuates the gender asymmetry in which women are not so keen to promote themselves.

Women show divided opinions about the need to behave in a particular way to be taken seriously by their bosses. Half of the interviewees claim that they have to behave in a certain manner to be taken seriously:

“I have to behave in a particular manner because I have to protect my position, myself.“ (interviewee 2)

“ A lot of time I have to be silent about things I really mean and I have to agree with the things I do not agree with, level down my own ego so his ego would shine, I must not confront him. Whenever I confront him, he would not take that into account, he would keep going in his own way. I know that there is no possibility for changes because my opinion can not change anything which makes me quit my job.“ (interviewee 4)

“ With the male boss I had to be very careful not to hurt his vanity in any way, and to take me seriously, I had to communicate firmly, decisively and argumentatively (although the arguments didn’t always help me). With

the current female boss, the communication is more casual, but she adapts to the attitudes of the male boss so in fact how much the current boss will take any of the employees seriously does not depend so much on her as on her boss.“ (interviewee 6)

“ Yes, there are certain patterns of behaviour that I should adhere to to be taken seriously by people around me, including my boss, too. I don't know why is that so, but I stick to it.“ (interviewee 7)

“Yes, I think so. Since I am part of the university community, I am obliged to respect the University Code of Ethics, preserve the reputation and dignity of my profession and the University, and thus treat other members of the university community responsibly and ethically. Also, in informal communication with a superior, I apply a casual, relaxed, but exclusively professional approach.“ (interviewee 9)

“Yes, I often felt I had to be louder and act “like a man,” but I never agreed to that. By nature, I am gentle and quiet and everything else would be unnatural to me. I always followed myself, even if it cost me some business opportunities.” (interviewee 11)

“Yes! I get the impression that we “need to be sold” every day to emphasise our own importance.” (interviewee 12)

“I didn't have to behave differently to be taken seriously, I had to behave more differently because I constantly had an inner need to prove myself further because I was so complex (a combination of a very strict mother and a relaxed father and parenting style).” (interviewee 17)

“I think I had to and should act responsibly and have clear arguments and opinions so that the boss would take me seriously. I don't think it's bad, in fact, but in some situations, I had the feeling that I had to act even more seriously and specifically to convince the person in question of what I was saying because that's how I put myself in communication. Unpreparedness or the lack of argumentativeness, in my opinion, and impression, could have grown into a somewhat awkward conversation.” (interviewee 18)

“Yes, that involved setting and maintaining distance to avoid familiarity.” (interviewee 19)

Thus, supporting argument from Bourdieu (2007) that in masculine habitus men decide how women should behave, and organisations are still a masculine arena where men play the game and exert the power. A study by Clutterbuck and Devine (1987) showed that when dealing with the man at the office, women repeatedly had to demonstrate that she is just as bright as any man. However, women are not comfortable with playing the game by the men's rule because they were not socialised that way and some women are bothered by the rules (Grunig, Toth, Hun, 2008) which is echoed by interviewee 1 who said “I do not have to behave in a particular way to be taken seriously. I have always tried to argue all my decisions and views. If I encountered unreasonable disapproval, I moved away“. According to the study conducted by Grunig, Toth, Hun (2008), for women “business is a

different animal, thus women do not know how to get what they want“ (p. 303) which sometimes leads women to exclude themselves from the business world, to walk away.

Asked about women managers as role models, the majority of participants said they either can not identify with women managers at all or they use the level of knowledge to explain the reasons for comparison:

“I can not identify with her because I have much more knowledge than her; in general I cannot be impressed or role models bosses of deficient knowledge whether they are men or women.“ (interviewee 6)

“ From my personal experience, rarely has the woman I have met so far been a good boss. Rarely does one find a good balance between private and professional life. Rarely does she manage to be collegial at the same time and be there for her colleagues, when they need any help and advice, and at the same time be a good leader.“ (interviewee 7)

“ I can identify with her but only in certain skills and abilities such as managerial skills.“ (interviewee 9)

“ In a professional sense, yes, I can identify, because superiors should, as a rule, have more knowledge and experience from those they lead who should learn from them and apply in their work.“ (interviewee 10)

“Yes, I could identify, but it is important to mention that my superior is a volunteer who invests her free time in the work of the association. I really appreciate the current boss (I am not a bootlicker) because she is reasonable, calm, rational, open and most importantly operational and cooperative, communicates clearly, has no hidden motives and has equal access to each person.” (interviewee 16)

“In terms of some things, habits and business approach, I could identify with the previous female boss, that is, I would like, in part, to become like her in the future. Self-confidence, calmness, directness and concreteness, is what I recognized in the approach of the former female boss, and at the same time it is what I consider to be the characteristics of a good leader.” (interviewee 18)

According to Carli (2006), people “judge women’s abilities more harshly than men’s, holding women to a higher standard of competence and evaluating female managers and leaders more critically than their male counterparts” (p.76). They expect certain traits, such as “competence and influence” in good leaders and those traits tend to be considered masculine (Rojahn & Willemsen, 1994). However, when women start to portray those so-called masculine traits, they are criticized for not being feminine enough. These standpoints portray catch-22 (Topić, 2020), a paradoxical situation in which women can face obstacles if they are seen soft in traditionally man's world, however, when they show strength they face criticism from other women.

In order to succeed women have to become like men (Mills, 2014; 2017) which is evident from the self-evaluation of the majority of participants recognizing blokishness as the *conditio sine qua non* for the success of women in the public relations industry:

“My behaviour has nothing with the so-called typically feminine behaviour. I’ve learned to make my decisions by implementing men’s way of thinking.” (interviewee 2)

“Deeply in my soul, I know I am able to do anything that men can do.” (interviewee 4).

“I can contribute to the development of the institution in which I work as much as men can.” (interviewee 9)

“I think I’m somewhere in the middle, but if I have to choose something, I would say that I am a “blocked” woman, that is, that I behave more like men. I am perhaps a little stricter in character than other women.” (interviewee 15).

Therefore, women have to embrace masculine-stereotyped patterns of on-the-job behaviour, what is commonly understood as cultural masculinity in behaviour to become part of masculine habitus (Bourdieu, 2007; Alvesson, 1998). This internalisation is supported by the “deeply embedded images of men as natural leaders and women as unsuitable for leadership” (Acker, 2009, p. 214). They become so bloke-ified that other women don’t see them as role models (Topić, 2018) which goes in line with the perspectives participants stated in this report.

However, it seems that some participants recognize in their patterns of behaviour traits that are stereotypically attributed to either men or women. For example, interviewee 21 claims:

“It’s hard for me to unequivocally put myself in just one category. I find myself more of a “stereotypically understood woman,” but in certain situations I may be prone to behaving in accordance with “stereotypes attributed to men,” even though it depends on what stereotypes are involved. As I have observed language behavior in relation to gender through all scientific papers (master’s / doctorate), then here I am referring to these stereotypical differences.”

Yet it seems that (some) women in Croatian public relations industry today are aware that ambitious women are expected to adopt certain characteristics and behaviours attributed to men in accordance with patriarchal stereotypes and that these women resist it. But in their resistance, they also perpetuate patriarchal gender stereotypes because they agree to a “self-evident” binary division of human characteristics into so-called male and female characteristics. This is evident from the following answer:

“I would describe myself as a "real" woman. I try not to copy or act in accordance with the stereotypes attributed to men, in order to show the so-called "female power". It seems to me that this way of behaving and communicating is more and more present today and I do not approve of it. I try to be natural, to respect the equality I really strive for and believe in, and until recently I do not plan to take an exclusively masculine, "macho" approach, in order to create the impression that I am a strong woman today.” (interviewee 18)

Conclusion and Further Research

Given the fact that so far the attitudes and opinions of women employed in the Croatian public relations industry regarding gender equality have not been researched, the aim of this study was to explore attitudes and opinions of women in the Croatian public relations industry regarding working culture (networking, interaction at work, dress codes, etc.), gender-biased leadership, as well as their ability to see other senior women as role models. The research was conducted in the period from April 16 and May 15, 2020, by the qualitative method of in-depth interviews which were conducted by a combined technique of telephone conversation and e-mail communication on a sample of 21 interviewees, women working in the Croatian PR industry, of which eight managers and 13 employees.

In the introduction of the study were presented data on gender equality in the Croatian labour market in general (data from the Report of the Gender Equality Ombudswoman for 2019) and the results of research conducted so far on gender equality in the judicial and legal profession and management. These data indicate the existence of gender inequality in the Croatian labour market as well as in some specific, conditionally speaking, similar sectors. Gender inequality is visible from the smaller representation of women on leading positions, from the so-called glass ceiling effect, from lower wages of women compared to men for the same job, and consequently from lower women's pensions. Research from the introduction part of the study also points to the conclusion that women in the labour market themselves perpetuate gender stereotypes.

In the research part of this study the following results were obtained:

Ad 1)

Lived experiences of women working in Croatian public relations industry is marked with long working hours, weighted work-life balance in which work increasingly dominate over private life and family, difficult and unequal career progression opportunities in comparison with male colleagues, conflicting expectations on women's behaviour and attitudes women need to demonstrate to progress, often examples of direct discrimination such as disapproval, different treatment based on gender, sexist comments and practices, and impression of women that they need to behave differently to be taken seriously. Research also points out on queen bee syndrome and women's need to be better than men to get approval. It seems that the PR industry in Croatia still prevails so-

called masculine patterns although, according to data of the Croatian Public Relations Association, is dominated by female employees.

Ad 2)

According to participants' opinion Croatian PR industry office culture is not, generally speaking, patriarchal gender-biased, ie. the positive progress is notable regarding the office interactions, banter and dress code. The majority of participants did not experience gendered differences in office interactions and banter. Regarding the office dress code participants declared the existence of informal expectations on how women should dress. Moreover, most participants take for granted these expectations, treat them as something natural. When it comes to the process of making important business decisions, the situation is different because women still report exclusion from important business decisions. In fact, twelve out of 21 participants stated that they were excluded from important business decisions. Exclusion from making important business decisions is associated with far weaker networking of women in the Croatian PR industry, that is similar to other business areas. However, participants are aware of it and some participants stated that women in Croatia lack female business networking groups aimed at sharing experiences between women in the public relations industry.

Ad 3)

The last part of the research was dedicated to leadership and socialisation process, 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). The survey confirmed the results of previous research in other states and other business areas according to which women who spent more time with fathers and blockish mothers internalised so-called masculine leadership patterns while, on the other hand, women who spent more time with mothers or with both mothers and fathers equally internalised so-called feminine leadership patterns. When it comes to double bind, it is evident that women at the managerial positions are exposed to it far more than their male counterparts. Also, it appears that those women who spent more time with fathers and blockish mothers describe their communication style as direct, while women who spent more time with their mothers or both mothers and fathers equally describe it as careful or situation-dependent, thus showing the combination of communication styles that ranges between what is usually perceived as

so-called masculine and feminine communication styles. When asked about the characteristic necessary for effective leadership, all participants claim that the combination of what is usually perceived as masculine and feminine characteristics are needed to be an effective leader. However, research shows that because of the so-called queen bee syndrome majority of participants do not recognize women in senior positions as role models. The research confirmed the deep-rooted patriarchal gender stereotypes about the so-called female and male characteristics, in particular on the desirability of some of the characteristics specific to gender roles.

This research showed certain limitations, primarily in the part of the participants' lack of awareness of their own gender prejudices and their own perpetuation of gender stereotypes in everyday life, especially in communication. Therefore, our recommendation is that future researchers compare the basic knowledge of gender stereotyping of participants and their specific patterns of behaviour and the reasons for perpetuating gender stereotypes. Namely, we noticed the acceptance of the ideas of patriarchal essentialism (according to which certain human characteristics are understood as masculine or feminine, and not as human characteristics) at all study participants. We also recommend research regarding the numerical representation of women in leading positions in the Croatian PR industry, especially in corporations, public authorities and PR agencies, as well as research on the participation of women in the ownership structures of PR agencies.

Finally, it can be concluded that the results of this research are largely consistent with the results of similar research conducted in other countries, not only within the marketing and public relations sectors but in the business world in general. Although the public relations sector in Croatia is dominated by women, at least when it comes to female employees, and the respondents themselves claimed that they believe that women in public relations progress more easily in their careers because it is a kind of women's ghetto, the further perpetuation of gender stereotypes is visible. It can be concluded that women in the Croatian public relations industry still advocate the ideas of liberal feminism, and do not recognize the need for radical social change that includes raising awareness of women about their own patriarchal prejudices, without which there is no way to achieve real gender parity.

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