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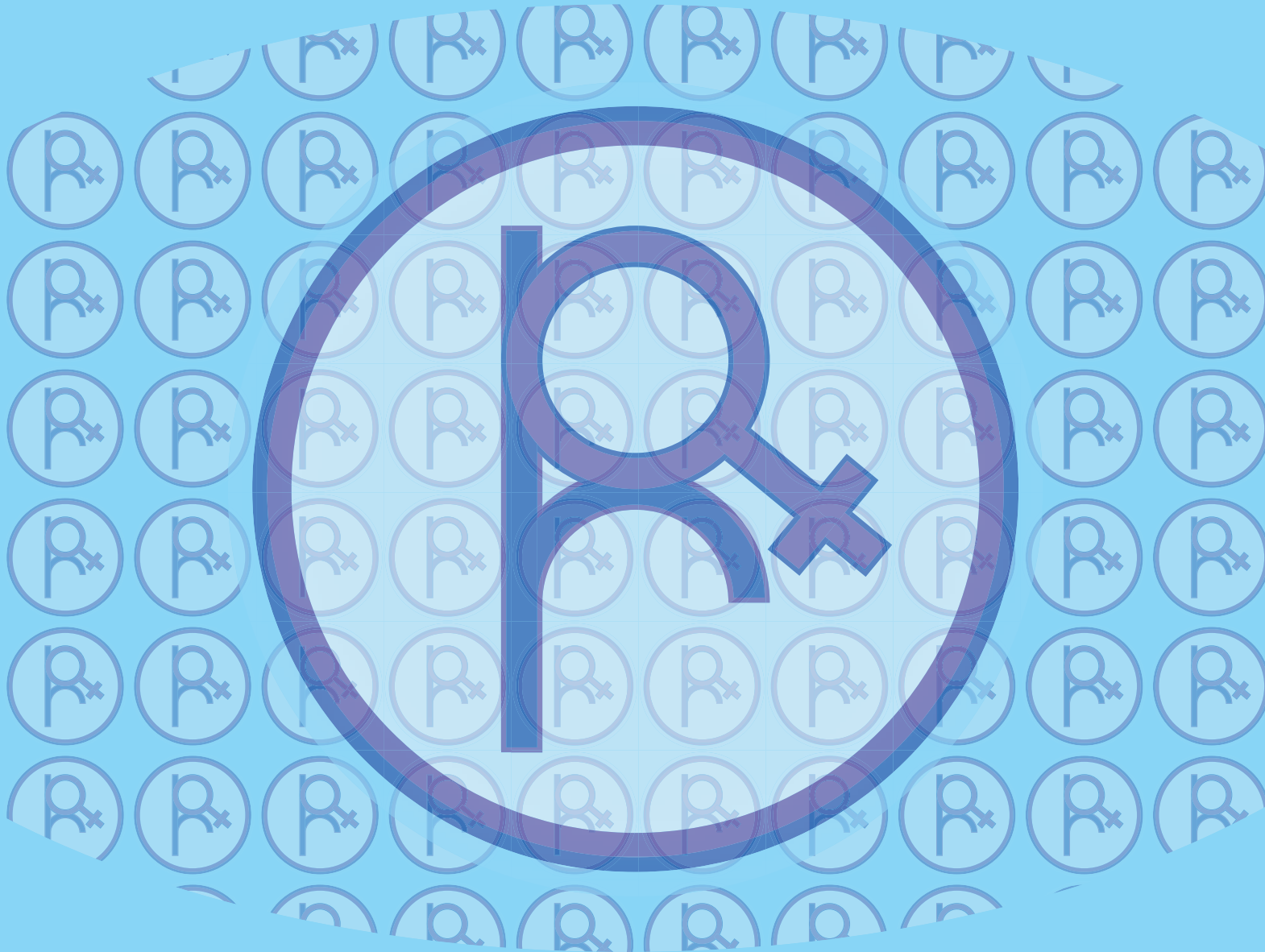
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EUPRERA REPORT Vol.3, N°2
Women in Public Relations in Greece



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First published 2021

By

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Women in Public Relations in Greece

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Table of Contents

Summary	5
Introduction	7
Method	9
Findings	14
Lived Experiences of Women in Public Relations	14
Office Culture	29
Communication and Leadership Styles	40
Conclusion	64
References	69

Summary

The present study sheds light on the position of women in Greece's public relation industry. Two web surveys with open and close-ended questions were administered to female public relations managers and employees from January to March 2021. Following the framework of Topić (2020) the survey was built on three sections that examined the (a) lived experiences of women in public relations in regards to their career advancement process, work-life balance and differential treatment and behaviour based on gender; (b) the office culture in terms of employee discussions, jokes made by colleagues, and inclusion in decision-making process; and (c) leadership perceptions. In total, 55 practitioners participated in the survey and the response rate was 31.25%. Of the 55 practitioners, 15 answered the employee questionnaire.

Results indicate that there are encouraging signs regarding the status of women in public relations as well as the recognition of public relations in general. However, despite the positive progress in the field, old stereotypes persist. Findings across the three sections of the study underscore the "double-standard" requirement faced by women practitioners who must retain their strong feminine traits (emotional intelligence, empathy, and effective listening) but also adopt masculine (self-confidence, planning, and decisiveness) qualities. The combination of feminine and masculine traits was found in career advancement strategies, women's appearance and attire, perceptions of ideal leadership, and communication style. Hence, the "gyno-androus" model emerged as an effective model describing female professionals in Greece.

Although, female practitioners in Greece prefer situational leadership that combines transformational and transactional characteristics their perceived personal leadership is people-oriented or participatory but simultaneously performance-based. A link between the communication style and the leadership style of practitioners is also manifested as women who are more supportive and inclusive in their practices change their communication style to fit the environment and the individual. Regarding the antecedents of female leadership in Greek public relations, results show that females who grew up playing with both genders and were raised in a democratic parenting style followed a people-oriented and participatory leadership style combined with a mixed communication style. Other important antecedents of personal leadership style were the experience of managers and their personality traits.

The stereotypes, sexism and discriminatory behaviour toward many of the sample's female professionals originated mainly from old male as well as female managers indicating the existence of old-boys clubs and queen bees or blokish females. However, no clear patterns in female role models emerged.

Several practical implications have been derived from the findings. Private companies need to promote more family-friendly and clear work-hour policies while the industry of public relations should promote female role models. Education can also help reduce the stereotypical perceptions regarding female inequality in management and public relations.

Keywords: women, public relations, Greece, stereotypes, female leadership, gender discrimination

Introduction

As a part of the EUPRERA project “Women in Public Relations” the present study will shed light on women experiences in public relations in Greece. Research on women in the field of public relations in Greece remains scarce and to our knowledge, only the study of Panigyrakis and Veloutsou (1998) has investigated the differences between men and women regarding their roles. Hence, our study will enhance the understanding of public relations practice through the eyes of women practitioners. Moreover, Greece represents an interesting case to study female public relations practitioners.

Greek society, despite the recent reforms in legislation that promote diversity and gender equality in the workplace, remains patriarchal and masculine (Hofstede et al. 2010). Moreover, women are still under-represented in the workplace with few women holding top managerial positions (Kyparissiadis, 2019). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), Greece occupies the last place in the 2019 EU Gender Equality Index with gender inequalities more pronounced in the domain of power. The share of women on boards is 9% for the largest publicly listed companies, 10% for the top decision-making bodies of national Olympic sports organizations, 13% for research funding organizations and 20% for publicly owned broadcasting organizations. As Chatzopoulos (2019) notes, one out of three companies in Greece does not have a female board member while women are paid 15% less than men. Hence, fruitful insights could be yielded by identifying the status of women in public relations in a society that lags behind other European countries in terms of gender equality. The percentage of businesses in Greece that had not taken actions to promote general balance in senior management stood at 53% in 2020, by far much higher than the global average of 18% (Grant Thornton, 2021).

Most of the studies exploring the status of women in Public Relations fall within a liberal-pluralist and reformist conception of politics. In addition, they espouse a positivist epistemology and conceive of gender as an attribute of unitary subjects. Female subjects in these formulations possess either feminine or masculine traits or a mixture of both. Analyses mainly focus on spotting sex-infused stereotypes and biases in an attempt to identify their sources and offer prescriptive corrective action. There is also an alternative research tradition that falls within a reformist and mostly radical conception of politics. Studies that adopt psychoanalytic, constructivist or poststructuralist lenses offer critiques

of the status quo, adopt an interpretative epistemology and ascribe, with the exception of many psychoanalytic treatments that stick to a unitary subject position, to a societal or discursive conception of gender. Analyses focus on unearthing the underlying societal and linguistic discourse structures in an effort to uncover power differentials among societal groups and classes (Weedon, 1987; Avdela, 1999; Fotaki, 2021). With this caveat in mind, the present study aligns with others in the field of management and organizational studies that treat gender positions as individual traits and aims, by adopting a positivistic methodology, to contribute insights and empirical findings to a growing corpus of literature on the status of women in the field of Public Relations.

Filling the gap in the status of women in public relations and as a part of the EUPRERA project “Women in Public Relations”, the present study will shed light on women experiences in public relations in Greece. More specifically the aim of the present study is three-fold: first, to identify their everyday interactions in their workplaces, their career advancement processes, and work-life balance; second, to examine the office culture in public relations in terms of attire, everyday discussions, the role of networking in their work, and involvement in decision-making; and third to address the issue of female leadership in public relations in Greece.

Method

To address the research questions two web surveys were conducted through two self-administered questionnaires: one for public relations managers and one for employees. Both questionnaires contained open-ended as well as close-ended questions. More specifically, this research utilized the research instruments and analysis of Topić (2020) and converted them to a mixed-method survey to facilitate research and increase the research sample. Specifically, both questionnaires included open-ended questions that collected the views of Greek female public relations practitioners around three areas, with which this study aligns itself with other studies of the project and thus enables comparative research,

- **Lived experiences** of women where women were asked questions about work hours, work-life balance, working and raising a family, career advancement opportunities, attitudes women need to demonstrate in order to progress, experiences of direct discrimination such as disapproval, different treatment based on gender, sexist comments, having to behave differently to be taken seriously, and equality of opportunities.
- **Office culture** where women were asked questions about networking, dress code, chats and banter in the office, exclusion from the decision, and expectations of women such as having to work harder to prove themselves based on gender.
- **Leadership** where women were asked about their socialisation process, early social interactions, communication style, experiences with male and female bosses and preferences, ideal leadership traits, personal leadership, self-assessment of leadership qualities and managers' evaluations.

Both questionnaires also contained close-ended questions that asked female practitioners to indicate their work hours and self-rate several leadership qualities on a five-point Likert scale. Moreover, for the employees' questionnaire, particular care was taken to examine their views regarding their bosses by rating their leadership qualities. To collect a sufficiently adequate sample of responses, we chose a web survey over in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) coupled with thematic maps.

The research was conducted from January to March 2021. In total, we sent 101 emails and 75 direct messages on LinkedIn accounts of female public relations practitioners in Greece. 55 practitioners participated in the survey and the response rate was 31.25%. Of the 55 practitioners, 15 answered the employee questionnaire. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the study's sample.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample

Title	Experience	Inhouse/ Agency/ Freelancer	Title	Experience	Inhouse/ Agency/ Freelancer
Public Relations, Partnerships, and Sponsorships Officer	11 to 20 years	In-house	Communication Director	11 to 20 years	In-house
Corporate Communications Manager	11 to 20 years	Freelancers	-	5 to 10 years	In-house
Public Relations Specialist	11 to 20 years	In-house	Acting Country Manager	11 to 20 years	Agency
Head of Information Department for Citizens, Social Organization, and Public Relations	11 to 20 years	In-house	Corporate Affairs Sustainability Manager	11 to 20 years	In-house
Corporate Affairs Director	More than 21 years	In-house	Founder & Managing Director	11 to 20 years	Freelancers
Strategic Communications Consultant	More than 21 years	Freelancers	Founder	11 to 20 years	Freelancers
Head of Communication - Management Office	More than 21 years	In-house	Head of International PR	11 to 20 years	In-house
Chief Executive Officer	More than 21 years	Agency	Vice President & CEO	More than 21 years	Agency
Head of Corporate Affairs	More than 21 years	In-house	Public Relations and Marketing Director	11 to 20 years	In-house
-	11 to 20 years	In-house	Communications Value Lead	11 to 20 years	In-house
P.R. Director	11 to 20 years	In-house	Public Relations and Communication Director	11 to 20 years	In-house
Communication Manager	More than 21 years	Freelancers	Founder & Managing Director	11 to 20 years	Agency
Head of Public Relations	11 to 20 years	In-house	PR Manager	5 to 10 years	In-house
Deputy Director of Marketing and Corporate Communications	11 to 20 years	In-house	Marketing Communications Manager	11 to 20 years	In-house

Press and Public Relations Officer	Less than 5 years	In-house	PR & CSR Specialist	11 to 20 years	In-house
Communications Manager	More than 21 years	In-house	Public Relations Executive	11 to 20 years	In-house
Corporate Affairs & Communication Director	5 to 10 years	In-house	Corporate & Brand Communications Manager	5 to 10 years	In-house department
Corporate Communication Manager	11 to 20 years	In-house	Customer Success Executive	Less than 5 years	Public Relations Agency
Senior PR Manager, Corporate Communications	More than 21 years	In-house	Director	More than 21 years	Freelancers
Head Public Relations & Culture	More than 21 years	In-house	Director Brand and Public Relations	11 to 20 years	Agency
Group Account Director	11 to 20 years	Agency	General Manager	11 to 20 years	Agency
Senior Public Relations Manager	More than 21 years	In-house	BBT for Internal Communications - Enlargement.	5 to 10 years	Freelancers
-	More than 21 years	Agency	Communication & Social Media Specialist	5 to 10 years	In-house
General Manager	11 to 20 years	Agency	Account manager	5 to 10 years	Agency
-	More than 21 years	Agency	Corporate Communications Manager	More than 21 years	In-house
Founder & Managing Partner	More than 21 years	Agency	Media & Communications Manager	11 to 20 years	Agency
Sponsorship & Exhibition Congress Manager	5 to 10 years	In-house department	Communication Specialist	More than 21 years	In-house department

Almost half of the respondents (50.9%) had experience in the field between 11 to 20 years, and 30.9% had more than 21 years of experience. The majority of female practitioners worked for an internal public relations department (80%) while 25.45% worked at a public relations agency and a mere 14.54% were freelancers. Regarding their educational background, 54.54% of female respondents had pursued studies in the

disciplines of public relations, communication, and media and almost 37% of the sample has training in other, irrelevant to public relations, disciplines. Moreover, only 9% of respondents had studied marketing and advertising.

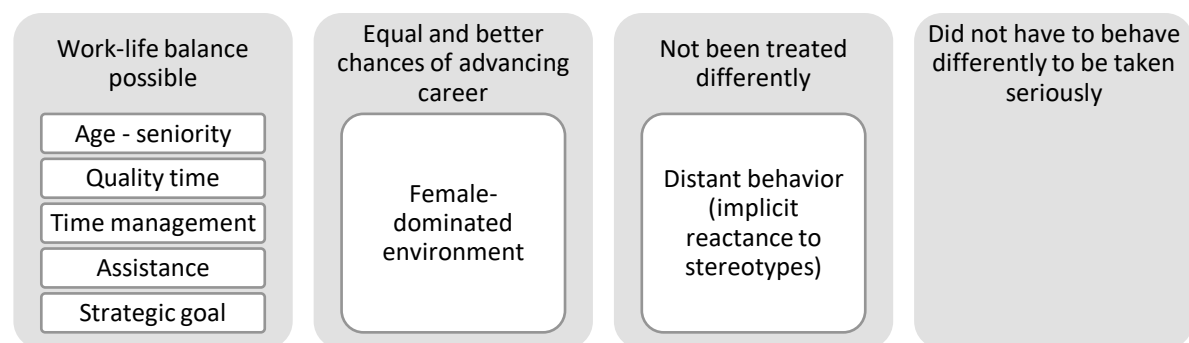
Regarding the gender balance of the practitioners' team or department and organization, results indicate that most participants worked in female-dominated departments (80%) as well as on gender-balanced teams/departments (15%). Only, 5% of respondents worked in male-dominated team/departments. These results are indicative of the feminization of the public relations field in Greece. Regarding the balance of gender in the respondents' organizations, 42% of them worked for organizations with equal gender representation, 29.1% worked for female-dominated organizations and 27.3% worked for male-dominated environments. It should be noted that all practitioners who worked at female-dominated organizations (16 respondents) also worked at female-dominated teams/departments. Moreover, 11 females out of 16 that worked at female-dominated organizations and teams were employed at public relations agencies. This finding suggests that most public relations agencies are feminized, which goes in line with the situation in other countries where the public relations field is also a woman's profession.

Findings

Lived Experiences of Women in Public Relations

Two main opposite facets of women’s lived experiences in public relations in Greece were revealed which suggest that there are signs of progress but still some old problems remain. Looking at the bright side of findings (Figure 1) it can be argued that female public relations practitioners in Greece can achieve a work-life balance after years of experience and through several tactics such as time management, spending quality time with loved ones, and having assistance in child upbringing. Hopefully, work-life balance is starting to be recognized as a strategic goal for public relations agencies. Several respondents indicated that the chances to advance their career are equal and better compared to men due to the dominance of females in the profession. Moreover, a great number of female practitioners stated that they have not been treated differently nor they had to behave in different ways to be taken seriously. It should be noted that the advancement in the field of public relations was “conquered” by females who implemented reactance strategies to stereotypes.

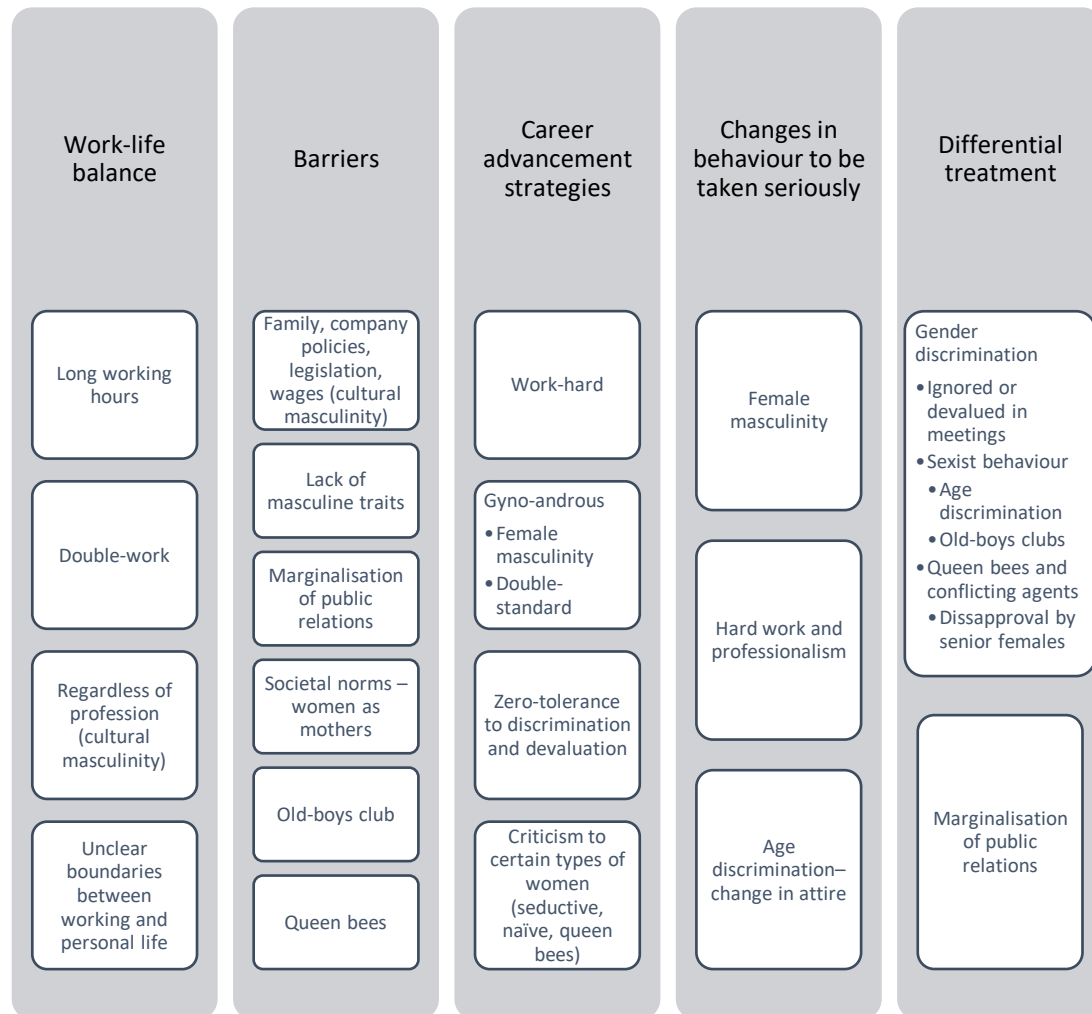
Figure 1. Positive themes on lived experiences



On the dark side (Figure 2), a significant number of women stated that they face challenges regarding their work-life balance as well as their career advancement due to the long working hours, their multiple roles, the societal norms, the gender discrimination by senior male managers and females characterized as queen bees, their lack of masculine traits for effective management, and the devaluation of public relations field. Signs of the Greek’s societal cultural masculinity were also revealed as women stated that the obstacles they face are not only found in public relations but all professions in Greece due to the lack of policies and legislations that support women as well as the archaic perceptions of top management. Moreover, several women reported incidents of discrimination and

devaluation due to the existence of the old-boys club, their age, and queen bees. Blokishness along with the “double standard” emerged as important themes since women try to address these challenges by combining the adoption of masculine traits (self-confidence, decisiveness) with the cultivation of their strong feminine traits (emotional intelligence).

Figure 2. Negative themes of lived experiences



Most women indicated that they work from 9 to 12 hours a day which is well above their typical eight-hour work schedule. As a consequence, 29 women indicated that it is very difficult for a woman to progress in her career and raise a family. They argued that women wanting to raise their family must “*sacrifice personal time*” in order to “*reach the top due to the long working hours of the profession*”. However, most of the participants noted that women face challenges regarding their work/family balance **regardless of profession**. One participant also indicated that this is due to the workplace conditions and policies that do not encourage women:

“As in all professions, it is really hard for women in a managerial position to combine them both. A woman in such positions, need to do “double work” compared to men to show that she can. This causes physical and emotional exhaustion as well as regrets for the time that she does not spend with her children.”

Several respondents mentioned that women that have advanced their careers **after certain years of experience** can more easily combine their work and their family. As a participant stated:

“My experience has shown that it is extremely difficult. If a woman wants to climb the career ladder, her colleagues need to truly respect her and not gossip about her, she must be incredibly dedicated to her work. Otherwise, they start talking about her and promote the classic stereotypes about women that once she has a family, she will stop being good at her job. It's really hard. And if you don't work in the field for at least three years, it's devastating to have a baby. It's tough. But if a girl who has just entered the room (1-2 maybe 3-4 years) has a child then she will be left behind. You must have worked at least 10 years in the field to take such a step. Thus, you should have an established career and earned the respect that can't be easily destroyed. But to maintain respect, you'll have to go back or continue with a business of your own. In my experience, I have seen that women returning after 10 years of raising their children having forgotten everything and starting from scratch as secretaries rather than managers even if they held in the past a manager's position. This is not unreasonable given the enormous changes that the field of public relations has undergone, especially due to the rapid technological development and the new tools that emerge.”

Moreover, several participants mentioned that it can be possible for women to balance their careers and family only if they **have assistance** from their partner or their parents or paid services for childcare and other household activities. Other participants noted that it depends “*on the social and economic status of woman*”, as well as “*the business sector and the outward orientation of the company*”. Several women also indicated that with the right planning, time and task management, prioritization, and spending quality time with children, they can combine their work and family. A more romantic view was stated by a participant:

“We live in a multi-role society. We are called upon to take responsibility and respond to conflicting challenges. This balance does not come in a magical way and nor is it the same for everyone. But it's definitely a daily challenge, progress, and maturation”.

When asked about their ideal work-life balance and how they manage and negotiate their work and leisure time, most respondents stated that they try to work only eight hours a day and five days a week leaving their weekends free. Several women highlighted the need for more clearly defined company working hour policies. As one participant noted,

“Free time should be cleared for every employee regardless of his/her position in order to be able to “detoxify”, rest and engage in creative activities. This way employees will revitalize their minds, spirits, and body so that with fewer hours of work they will be produced in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The violation of the free time even of managers, for a not so urgent situation that is done to ensure the “personal career” of his/her superiors, can destroy the balance of the entire work chain and ultimately can disrupt employee relationships and work climate”.

In addition, the changes that covid-19 has brought with the demands for remote working were stated by two participants. As one professional put it: *“there is an urgent need for a specific work hour framework that is strictly followed. Every overtime should be paid. If you know what hours you work and what hours you have for yourself, you will be happy. The non-stop working from the home condition that covid-19 has caused, and the unpaid overtime has destroyed this balance”.*

Hopefully, there are exceptions and progress has been made by public relations agencies that recognize the relationship between work-life balance and an individual's well-being. As a female “general manager” stated *“work-life balance is a strategic priority at my organization and is executed with a specific work schedule. In my case, as a “general manager” there are few exceptions, but I have now the experience to handle them”.*

For many women in public relations, work and life balance are achieved when they spend quality time with their family; engage in hobbies and activities like physical exercise, reading; and relaxing. Seven women stated clearly that the long working hours make it impossible to find the right work-life balance. Instead, these women indicated that they

counterbalance their work overload with **quality communication** with their family. For example:

“Unfortunately, I’ve never been able to find the ideal balance in my free time. What I did find was high-quality communication and support from my family”.

“When I leave from work, I try not to bring work home. I have made an agreement with my husband that we will not talk about our problems at work unless it is something extremely important and we have to make a decision”.

“The right balance does not, in my opinion, arise from the time itself, but from its management and how focused one is on what he/she does at a specific time. Bringing work home, even when you leave from office early, causes stress and has a negative effect on the family and work and vice versa. The biggest challenge is to find time primarily to rest and be healthy and then for family and work.”

Many women mentioned that the right balance is “conquered” after many years of work, personal effort or change in their marital status. As a participant put it: *“I am working on it, but I am not always successful, thus I haven’t found the right balance yet :). As I get old, I set limits, and this brings me closer to my goal of work-life balance”*. Another woman noted, *“before my marriage, at the age of 40, there was a limited personal time. Now that I am accountable to my husband, I try to return home early and not to work on weekends”*. An important point was raised by one participant that stated *“When you work 12 or 15 hours a day you don’t have free time. You create free time from your work and you try to build relationships with colleagues and members of the field”*. This suggests that the boundaries between working and personal life are unclear for women professionals in public relations.

Other participants noted that prioritization, planning, and working overtime only for urgent matters are the keys to effectively combine work and leisure time. As a professional stated:

“Planning, predicting, being prepared and working well with colleagues, most of the time prevents crisis situations and therefore saves you time”.

Another woman stressed:

“I only work overtime when something is really urgent. I evaluate priorities and adjust my time. I do not sacrifice my spare time unless it is something urgent. I’m setting limits for my associates as well”.

In participants’ answers emphasis was placed on the physical as well as emotional benefits associated with more free time. As one participant indicated *“Free time is absolutely necessary because it gives us experiences that are useful at work, enables us to rest and have an emotional balance that consequently improves our effectiveness”*. In a similar vein, another woman argued that *“for me, the right balance is important in order to feel good about myself and see my family happy”*. This balance is highly personal. As one participant mentioned,

“Each woman is responsible for her own work-life balance and has her own recipe. I think achieving “mental balance” is the ideal”.

Under this perspective, another woman noted *“One size does not fit all. Every workplace has different conditions, every family and woman as well. Undoubtedly, there must be free time for ourselves to do the things that we like”*.

A number of important themes emerged when respondents were asked to indicate whether the chances of advancing their career in public relations are equal compared to men.

Equal and better chances: Half of the women believed that in public relations women can progress their career just like men without significant problems mainly because their sector is over-represented by females or because the communication field is seen as a better fit for women. As a woman stated: *“the field of public relations favours women or men with a feminine way of thinking.”* However, several women stressed that in general women can advance their careers, but it depends on the area of public relations they practice or the sector in which their organizations operate. In this vein, a participant noted:

“It is possible, given that the field of communication and public relations is a workplace dominated by women. I have identified differences in the areas of political communication and business consultancy, which I believe that there are dominated by men, because of the “prestige” in people’s minds in a male-dominated market and society.” Another woman suggested: *“I believe yes, but it*

depends on the sector. For example, in male-dominated industries like banking, energy, and construction it is hard for women in public relations to reach senior positions.”

Raising a family: One important barrier to women's career advancement is a conflict between career and family roles. Almost one-third of women indicated that childbearing, pregnancy and family responsibilities are the most important barriers to the career advancement of women in public relations. However, they stressed that this barrier impacts women in senior positions of all sectors and not just in public relations. These beliefs are reflected in the following statements of participants:

“In all professions, the factor “family” is like “the sword of Damocles”. It's hard to combine a career and a family, compared to male colleagues...”

“I do not think there are equal chances for career advancement compared to men, especially when a woman starts a family, and everything becomes difficult, while there is a perception that a woman cannot be as dedicated to her professional life as a man who does not face this barrier.”

“It's harder for women, as women bear the burden of family responsibilities. If you want to start a family, you must think about “timing” very seriously. If you don't combine work and family properly, you could even lose your career. There are consequences. Because even if you have a supportive husband, your body may not support you and you may be on leave for all nine months of your pregnancy or more. Moreover, the workplace climate does not favour pregnant women. Stress touches toxic levels for the woman and her baby. Also, things are even worse if your husband is not supportive and still society expects the woman to do everything for her children and home. The life of a woman who wants to work and have children can become unbearable and perhaps a real hell when everyone expects everything from her and blames her when she wants to combine these two things (family and work) that men have managed to combine over the years because many women sacrificed everything in their lives to raise their family.”

Moreover, the need for a change was raised by women who argued that the government needs to provide adequate and appropriate child-care services and facilities to support women. Moreover, they highlighted the need for changes in legislation that will allow flexible working conditions.

Personal factors: Several women pinpointed that a number of personal constraints exist that tend to make it difficult for women to pursue higher career goals. These personal constraints are the lack of self-confidence and assertiveness, risk-aversion, as well as hesitation and fear of combining career and family. Thus, women indicate that the chances for advancing their careers are unequal compared to men who typically possess these masculine traits. As one woman indicated: *“No. I believe that although we are more flexible and multi-taskers, we tend to stop ourselves by not being assertive.”* Another participant noted: *“I guess not. The main barriers are related to our reluctance to combine our career and family.”*

Societal and organizational stereotypes and practices: Other barriers were related to general-societal norms that expect women to be responsible for their household and child-care. As a woman stated,

“No, the chances are unequal. The main barriers are the societal norms. It is expected from women to take care of their children, manage their household, and simultaneously be productive in their work.”

Another woman made a direct comparison between women in public relations in Greece and other countries,

“It is not about the industry but about the position of working women in Greece. Having worked abroad, in London in particular, I can confidently say that in Greece women, regardless of their academic knowledge and experience, are considered inferior to male workers.”

Cultural masculinity, organizational norms, beliefs, and prejudicial attitudes where women are seen as less qualified, less committed to their work compared to male managers were also stressed as important constraints of their career progress. In addition, other restraining factors were associated with legislation, organizational practices regarding the promotion processes and salaries. The above barriers are reflected in the following statement of one professional:

“Not! For the reasons that apply more or less to all management positions. Wages remain unequal (a woman will receive three times less money than a man in the same position) and I also believe that there is still the general gender stereotype about women that are underestimated more easily and not taken ‘seriously’ compared to men.”

Gender stereotypes, marginalisation of public relations and unsupportive organizational cultures were stressed as barriers to the career development of female professionals in a comment made by one participant:

“Although public relations sector is female-dominated, the prevailing outdated societal stereotypical perceptions, the lack of knowledge about the value of public relations for each company and the fact that company policies do not foster the raising of a family, but instead view it as a problem in the performance of the employee, are factors that influence the professional development of women in the field of public relations.”

Women professionals stressed that another obstacle is related to the top management of most companies in Greece which can be characterized as an ‘old boys’ club/network’ (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). This finding was captured in the following three statements:

“The complexity of our roles, the fact that in high positions there are several executives for many years and the lack of meritocracy-infused promotion processes in higher hierarchy levels.”

“...in some cases, the stereotypical perceptions of bosses.”

“In Greece, no, they can't. It is difficult to integrate women into top management and advance their careers quickly. Usually, they have very good progress up to the middle position level. Factors:

- Taboos and stereotypes of top Management of companies against the advancement of women in the hierarchy

- *Legislation: Greece should enact laws that will dictate the diversity and inclusion of women in companies.*
- *Family obligations of women, as there is no support from the state in such matters.”*

Although not featured frequently in the sample, one woman also highlighted the “queen bee syndrome” as a barrier towards their career advancement:

“Most women are being domineering towards other women because of enormous anxiety about their professional development. This shows that opportunities are fewer, and our career progression is longer so the effort to advance in the field is evolving into ... safari...”

Respondents were also asked to describe the traits needed for the career advancement of women in the field of public relations. Three important strategies emerged from the sample’s answers: (a) passion and hard work (b) gyno-androus strategy, (c) no tolerance of discrimination. Table 2 summarizes the necessary traits for career progress in the field.

Table 2. Essential Traits for Career Advancement

Masculine traits	Feminine traits	Neutral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tolerate their sensitivity and keep their personal matters out of work - Be less vulnerable - Competitiveness - Networking - Self-confidence - Dynamism - Reduce self-constraints - Defend own beliefs - Ambitious - Leadership ability - Be able to promote themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Committed to work - Open-minded - Emotional intelligence - Adaptable - Communicative - Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hard work - Professionalism - Show values and skills - Goal and result orientation - Consistency - Reading & knowledge - Know their limits and potential - Be themselves - Love their job - Let the work speak for itself - Integrity - Creative thought

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zero tolerance on stereotyping behaviour - Distant - Willing to take a stand - Assertiveness - Courage and nerve of men - Don't let anybody cast doubt about their work and ethos - Don't act dumb and cute 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentoring: listen to the industry experts
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Be yourself-love your job - work hard: More than half of women indicated that there is no need for women to behave differently compared to men in order to advance their career. Most of them suggested that career advancement should be based on neutral-gender traits like loving their jobs, being themselves, being hard workers, professional, goal and result-oriented, meeting deadlines, and knowledgeable. As several women professionals stated, “*women have to let their work speak for itself.*”

Gyno-Androus managers: Another common theme that emerged from responses was that women in public relations in Greece need **to reduce their feminine vulnerabilities** (sensitivity and lack of self-confidence) while simultaneously **adopt more masculine characteristics** like competitiveness, ambition, and assertiveness. In addition, several women emphasized that females in public relations should **cultivate and boost their “positive feminine characteristics”** like emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, and communication. As one participant put it:

“They should temper their sensitivity, keep their personal lives to themselves and not allow others to see a more “vulnerable” side of them, thereby keeping their competitiveness “high”.”

Zero-tolerance to discrimination: Moreover, most women pinpointed the need to adopt a **zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, intimidation, and sexist behaviours**. One participant noted:

“To have the ambition to progress, to believe and show that they have the ability to lead and take responsibility, to set boundaries in relationships and not to allow gender bias and sexist behaviours, to invest in personal branding & effective relationships with others (networking)”.

Indirectly, two sexist female professional portrayals emerged. The first described female public relations practitioners as “objects of seduction” that utilize their sexual appeal to pursue their career goals and engage in unethical behaviours (Ezzedeen, 2015) and the other as “weak” where women in public relations were described as acting naive and showing lower levels of competence (Schoch, 2013). These types of women were criticized by a respondent as threats to their professional credibility and values:

“Their work should speak louder than anything else. They should not use unfair ways to climb the ladder because this way they insult and destroy the effort of so many women who fight with their work as the only weapon. They need to show seriousness and extreme professionalism without acting naive and cute. To claim equality and not allow stereotypical behaviours by shutting the mouths of those who try to challenge them with their proper work and their ethos.”

Another finding was that most women in our sample did not have to behave differently in order to be taken seriously (23 respondents). On the contrary, several women indicated that they need to reduce their feminine vulnerabilities and enhance their masculine traits in order to be taken seriously. This strategy resulted in reactance to the devaluation of women and intimidation by top executives. This is why several women highlighted that they had to work harder; be more aggressive, strict, and distant; raise their voice to be heard in male-dominated meetings, and be professional. This finding suggests that women in the field challenge the traditional gender dynamics. The aspect of blokishness could be found in the following statements of female professionals:

“I had to work "twice" as hard, to articulate my ideas and to formulate counter-proposals that would work more efficiently and have the opportunity to present them at the minimum amount of time available by my supervisor. That's where you sometimes get to 'show your teeth' due to the insecurity of a superior who insists in an authoritarian way to take the wrong decision regarding an activity or tactic.”

“Sometimes I need to be aggressive and raise my voice and way of speaking to be heard on the boards.”

“In my work, I'm too serious and I can't joke or smile because they easily start to see you as a toy and not as an executive and a professional. You have to prove at all times that you're there for your job and not for your appearance or because you've been "sweet" and liked by the boss or HR manager.”

Age discrimination was an important theme that emerged from respondents' answers. According to Hon (1995) age discrimination is evident in public relations as young female practitioners are often devaluated due to their age. Three women mentioned that during the early stages of their career they had to behave in a certain way to be taken seriously. Others indicated that they had to change their attire to be taken seriously. These findings are captured in the following statements of participants:

“When I was younger, yes. Because I was wearing casual clothes! I remember one time participating in a meeting with my partner where one of the managers thought that I was working at the coffee shop and looked at me and ordered his coffee. My reaction was to let the man order, and then I introduced myself to him with a name and title.”

“Yes, at the beginning of my career, because of my young age, I remember when I had an important appointment, I went to a hair salon and told them to make me look older in order to be taken seriously.”

“Yes, when I started, a supplier for an event, because of his previous collaboration with a male colleague, he thought that he could be late in our appointments, not have the mock-up ready on the scheduled dates and send kisses over the phone! It has also happened several times and with male clients, who because of my young age felt that I do not have the knowledge and skills to pitch their interviews and articles in financial and business media.”

Almost half of the participants indicated that they had not been treated differently by others due to their sex. Interestingly, two of them alluded to their distant behaviour and attitude as rationalizations for their stance. Again, the theme of stereotype **reactance** emerged as women in public relations attained their equal treatment by improving their vulnerabilities to be able to survive in gendered workplaces.

On the other hand, the other half of women reported incidents of differential treatment. Based on the data two main themes emerged: **gender discrimination and underestimation of the role of public relations in organizations**. Almost one-third of women reported discrimination and stereotyping behaviours by males. Most of the times women were devalued and ignored in meetings or suffered from sexist comments by males. Specifically, fifteen of them mentioned that this sexist behaviour originated mainly from old male managers. In addition, fifteen women were underestimated mainly by old male managers who told them that they are not good enough due to their gender. It should be noted that most of the discriminatory incidents were related to the early stages of women's careers. Below are several statements that provide insights about sexism and gender stereotyping faced by female professionals of the sample:

"I have been in an environment where the boss valued men's opinion more than women's. We may have said the same thing, but it was more important when a man expressed it."

"A male colleague had devalued and insulted me, using offensive words because I was a woman and newcomer in the profession compared to him."

"After making sexist comments - about women - and laugh about them, they apologize because I have shown my indignation. Now, of course, I manage it aggressively and reply that "I expect a better sense of humour from executives of this level". But it's definitely an embarrassing situation. Also, I have experienced some compliments that go beyond the limits of politeness."

"Sometimes in business decisions we are stereotyped that because we are women, we don't possess knowledge about financial issues and that we're more emotional."

“Yes! I have suffered from sexist behaviour and discrimination by a male chief executive who underestimated women and thought that our role in the company is equivalent to the traditional female role at home.”

Moreover, almost two-thirds of our sample have heard sexist comments from females in their organization (30 women). In a female-dominated field such as public relations, women also reproduce stereotypes, discriminate, and devalue other women based on their qualities and their marital status. This finding reveals another reactance strategy of women to stereotypes called “conflicting agency” (Kissane and Winslow, 2016) where women reinforce stereotypes concerning women to their advantage and differentiate themselves from other women. As two professionals noted:

“I have experienced it from female colleagues. I have received questions in interviews about my marital status and my child-rearing plans (without having mentioned anything about my personal life). I have been criticized for how I will cope with a demanding project since I have a family, I have received personal criticism and have been devalued through jokes, while they have placed obstacles during a period that I combined work and studies. I have only seen male colleagues being promoted because they were men. It should be noted that these behaviours are found in large organisations with many employees.”

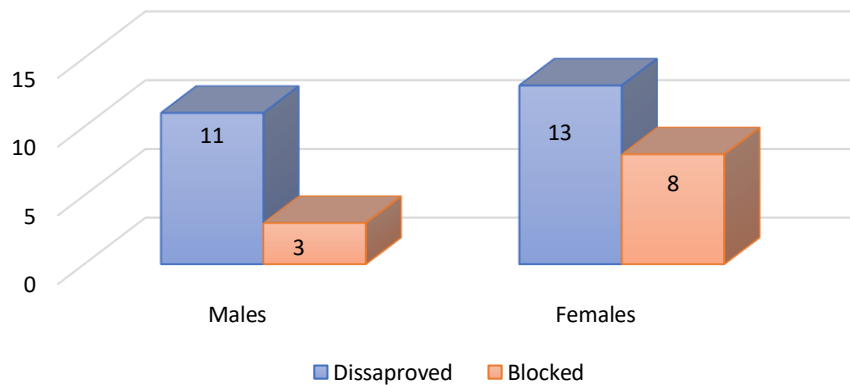
“From a female boss near my age: desiring a man to carry... faster a message...because he is male or by a female supervisor not to wear a specific colour to an event for protocol reasons, so that eventually... to wear it herself, or from a female general manager... not to wear heels (supposedly for uniformity) due to her female competitiveness.”

Another theme that emerged as a reason for discriminatory workplace behaviour was the general perception regarding the value of public relations. Women have been devalued mainly due to their profession and the lack of importance often placed on public relations by management. As a practitioner stressed:

“Few times, but this is associated with the misogyny of certain people, or the general scepticism about the role of public relations (many consider our profession to be super-talkative and unnecessary, thus they snub us or act with scepticism)”.

The majority of women (42 women) stated that they had faced some kind of disapproval. As Figure 3 shows female practitioners tend to be disapproved and blocked more by female and lesser by male executives. Moreover, these women indicated that they had been blocked and disapproved mainly by senior managers with many years of experience. This finding could be indicative of old boys and girls clubs in public relations.

Figure 3. Disapproval based on Managers' Gender



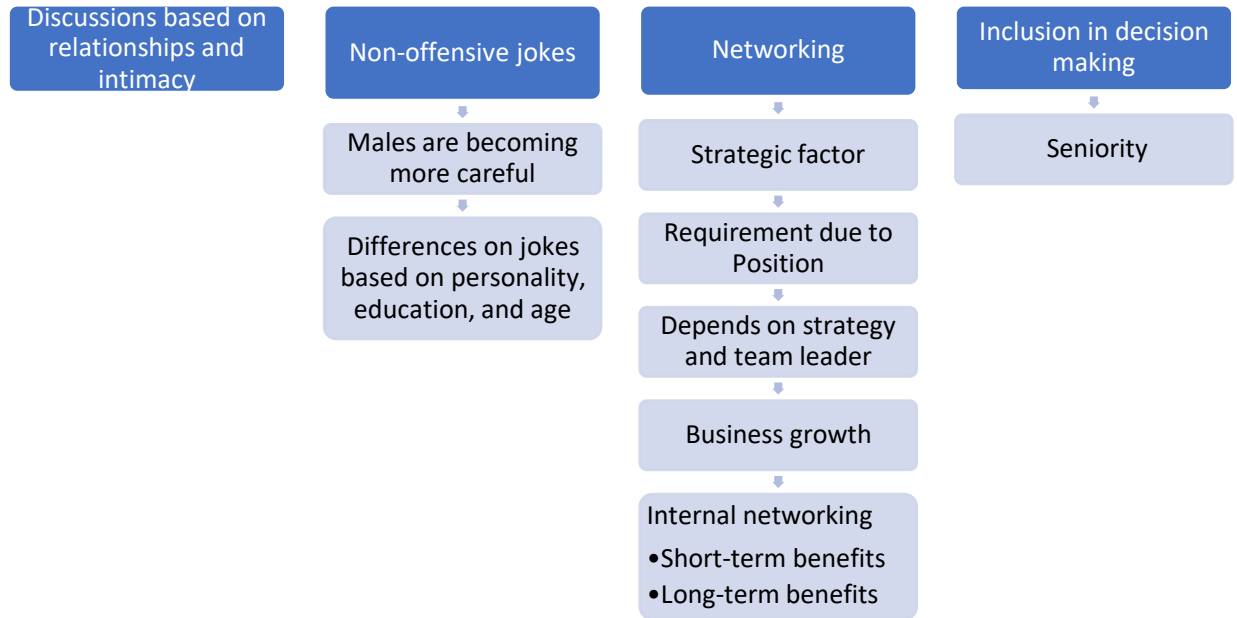
Office Culture

In this section of questions, we also found a range of positive signs that reflect the progress in the field (Figure 4). Female practitioners indicated that the discussions that take place in their offices are mainly based on their relationship with the interlocutor and not based on gender. In addition, respondents argue that male colleagues are becoming more careful with respect to their jokes, but they observe differences in jokes based on personality, education, and age.

Networking emerged as a strategic factor that is required by female practitioners due to their position (as public relations managers) and depends on the strategy. They value external networking for the business growth opportunity while internal networking emerged as a critical aspect of their work mainly for the short term (everyday activities) as well as the long-term benefits (reputation, team bonding, organizational culture).

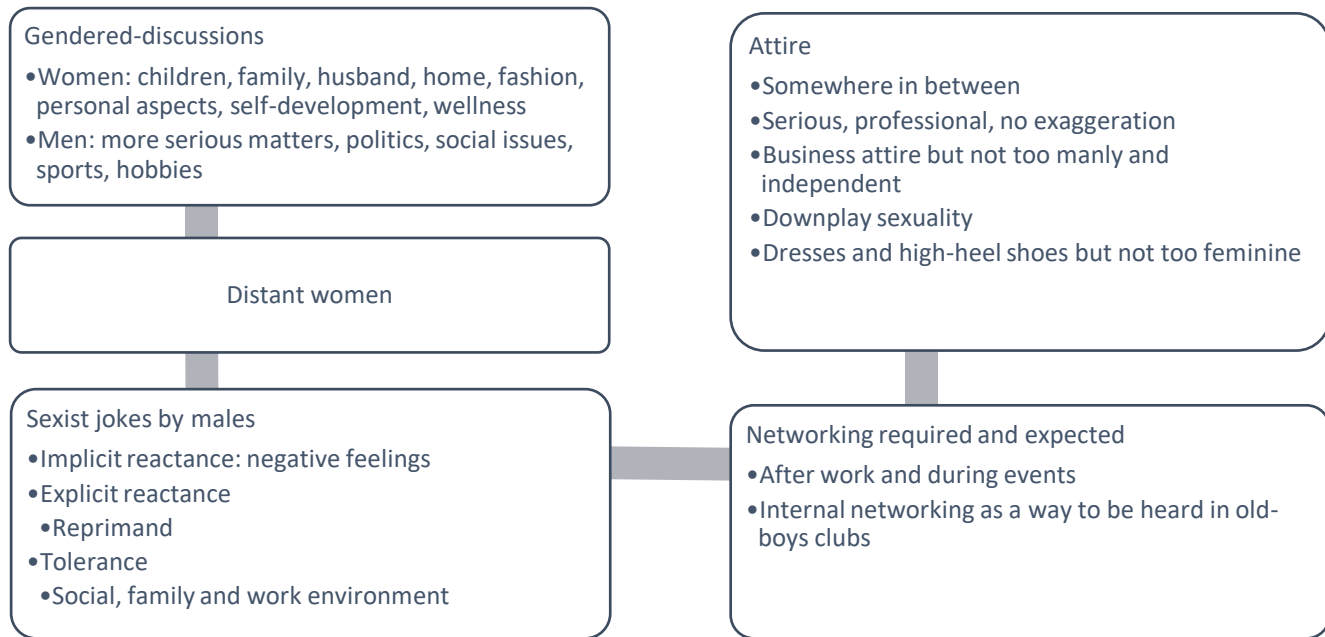
Another predictor of the field's progress is the inclusion of female participants in decision-making processes. This inclusion seems to come along with seniority.

Figure 4. Positive Office Culture



However, the signs of progress with respect to the status of women in public relations coexist with traditional gender-discriminatory behaviours and sexism (Figure 5). Several women suggested that there are differences in discussions between male and female colleagues. Interestingly, blokishness was also found in this section of analysis as women cultivate a distant and unapproachable persona to be able to work and progress. Sexist jokes mainly originate from male colleagues while women utilize a number of reactance strategies ranging from passive to active. Passive reactions and tolerance towards sexism were found to be related to early socialisation processes and the gender balance of the business sector. The double standard prevails in the attire of female practitioners as they are expected to be formal but also feminine while they have to downplay their sexuality. Networking serves also as a strategy used by female practitioners to break the old-boys club.

Figure 5. Negative Office Culture



When asked about the discussion topics with their colleagues three main themes emerged: (1) relationship-based discussions, (2) gender-based discussions, and (3) socially distant women. Almost 26 women mentioned that their discussions with colleagues do not differ based on gender but rather based on *the relationship or intimacy with the colleague* as well as his/her age. Common conversation topics among colleagues are lifestyle, hobbies, politics, arts and entertainment, daily issues, movies, series, travel, and fashion. These respondents stated that more personal issues about family and health are discussed with coworkers with whom they have developed a more intimate relationship.

On the other hand, 16 women indicated that the topics of conversations differ based on the *gender of the discussant*. For example, women colleagues, tend to talk about education, career, children, family, house, fashion as well as more personal aspects of their lives whereas with men they discuss the economy, and more “serious” matters such as health-related problems. Moreover, women mentioned that their male coworkers engage in more “formal” discussions about news stories, social issues and politics. There were few women who adopted more **distant ways of interacting** with other coworkers as the following statements show:

“I avoid discussing out-of-work issues with my colleagues. If one of my associates asks me something that is not about our work, I remain formal. I don’t change my attitude if I’m addressing a man or a woman.”

“I seek to cultivate relations with both genders. I do not have personal conversations with employees. This does not necessarily mean that I’m not participating in “friendly” moments that may occur. As a human being I find it easier to usually talk about several topics with male colleagues”.

A PR director stated, *“with colleagues regardless of their gender, we discuss news stories and perhaps more personal matters, which I generally avoid because I do not want to mix them with work”.* Many women (20) indicated that men tend to make more **sexist jokes** compared to women. Sexism was evident in the following comments:

“The truth is that humour varies by gender. Men focus on sexually-oriented jokes, while women avoid them. Women’s discussions are focused on issues such as self-development, introspection, wellness, their children’s issues and home management. Men focus on career issues, economics, politics and sports”.

“...There’s a strong element of sexism in men’s jokes. In recent years I have been more sensitive to such matters and I am more easily disturbed than in the past”.

“Several times I have been in discussions between colleagues who do not represent my own attitude of life, beliefs and values. Such discussions concern issues of sexual content, political and/or religious beliefs, racist and sexist comments. I usually notice that in such discussions men are becoming a little more offensive. I feel sadness! Only sadness! I have found myself in a difficult position listening to extreme words. My frequent reaction to such discussions is to state my own point of view. When I see that my view is causing tensions... I feel sadness! Only sadness!

“There’s a lot of sexism in our profession, and anyone who denies it is blind. Comments in the form of jokes for body parts and stereotypes exist for both genders in almost all the places that I have worked at”.

The reactions of women when confronted with these types of jokes vary. For example, as the following statements pinpoint several women seem to tolerate these jokes because they are used to them due to their male-dominated workplace or social and family environments:

“Because I’ve always socialized with boys, I haven’t noticed anything different. I think it’s more a matter of personality rather than gender.”

“Indeed, there are times when men joke with each other and the majority of jokes are sexist. Sometimes it bothers me, but because the company and the industry I work in (beverages) is male-dominated, I’m used to it. If the jokes get annoying, I say it.”

“Given that I have two brothers, I think I’m more familiar with boyish jokes. In any case, in my workplace, even jokes are civilized.”

Other women feel uncomfortable with such jokes and get disappointed, and others react more intensively by stating their opposite views or reprimanding the employees. The following statements capture these implicit and explicit reactions:

“...There are indeed cases where some jokes follow stereotypical and sexist norms, but there is always intervention on my part to eliminate such “jokes”. Issues of respect for gender, diversity, equality, racism, etc are extremely important to me and to the company and there is zero tolerance to divergent views and behaviours”.

“..less than before. In our company there is zero-tolerance for jokes of this kind. When it happens, we point it out and explain it right away.”

“Yes, I notice differences in jokes between genders, especially in older ages, not in younger ones. I’m obviously showing my annoyance, and if I have to (i.e. jokes that have a sexist tone) I get caustic.”

As shown in the statements below few women noticed that although they identify differences in the way men joke compared to women, however, they find these jokes non-offensive:

“Men like to tease more, and women are just following. But everyone at least in my workplace has good intentions and innate humour.”

“... Most male colleagues make jokes mainly about our multi-tasking skills and our multiple roles.”

“..Usually men are more "brutal" in their humour, but that doesn't mean they become offensive.”

Hence, another theme that emerged is that men are more likely to tease and make jokes while women most of the times are passive. As one participant noted:

“Until now, I have observed that women are more difficult to joke in the workplace and mainly respond to jokes and banter coming from male colleagues. I can also say that so far I have encountered basically good behaviours from the majority of my male colleagues. Among women, there seems to be more competition... It does not bother me because I accept this gender gap and acknowledge the weaker position of women according to existing social norms. In any case, I remain focused on my work.”

There are encouraging signs of progress since more and more men are becoming careful with respect to their jokes and women are more intolerant toward offensive behaviours. This is further confirmed as 11 women do not identify differences in the jokes between males and females, but instead indicate that these differences are a matter of personality, education, and age. These findings are reflected in the following statements,

.... But I have noticed that most of my colleagues are respectful of women in general. There is progress in this regard, and they will defend their rights. We talk about the politics of other countries, about our personal love affairs (recent marriage or relationship), we often make jokes about how our partners deal with

our endless hours, sometimes we will talk about some difficult clients and finally, we will make jokes about the sports teams. In my team, I am the only girl. However, I do not feel uncomfortable, and I laugh a lot at our conversations. I have never felt uncomfortable with my colleagues.

“In our company, which is small (10 employees), all employees have friendly relationships, discuss as they would discuss with friends and joke often - humour plays an important role in our company. I haven't noticed any differences in jokes between genders, just between different personalities with different senses of humour.”

“Again, there are no clear gender-specific differences. I believe that there are more related to education and age.”

“...Big differences in jokes, but this is not about gender but about cultivating your personality, regardless of gender. The things that make you laugh, or you find funny is in direct relation to the real qualities of your personality and most of the times reflect your work.”

Overall, we found evidence of mainly relationship-based discussions and to a lesser extent gendered discussion in public relations workplaces based on women responses. Indicative of these gendered discussions is that men employees tend to discuss topics stereotypically male such as politics, career development, sports, and hobbies whereas females mainly chat about food, children, wellness, self-development, husband, and relationships.

Networking for women in public relations in Greece seems to follow similar patterns to those found in England (Topić, 2020). Many women indicated that networking is required or expected in their organizations or departments due to its importance. Interestingly, networking becomes a strategic business objective for PR agencies. Based on responses, networking depends also on the strategy of the organization as well as the leader of the team.

Others indicated that the nature of public relations dictates networking inside as well as outside of the organization. These participants commented:

“The nature of Public Relations focuses on human relations, therefore contacts with people from the industry, with the media, but also with other corporate actors, are extremely important to stay up to date, to know what is going on in the industry, and to be able to search for new business etc.”

“Consulting services are at the core of our company. So, in order for clients to trust you as a Communication Advisor, you need to have a relationship based on mutual trust. At the same time, a good network of acquaintances is always useful for new contacts and finding new customers.”

“Building relationships is one of the most serious parts of this job. You help to get helped, you participate in awards, events and you network many times after work. Your colleagues, partners, suppliers, even some competitors, become a big part of your daily life and your life in general. It's a sacrifice, especially if you're ambitious and want to ascend into the hierarchy and that often helps more than how good you are at work and how hard you try. I've seen it and lived it.”

Other women stressed that networking is the main aspect of their work due to their role and position in the organization. As a female practitioner indicates *“It's part of the job description”*.

A female communication manager also stated *“The role of Communication manager is related to networking both within the organization and with external audiences such as media, suppliers, influencers, VIP's etc. So networking is done through continuous communication and actions via various channels which can be either face-to-face, social media, a LinkedIn platform or synergies and projects. It's something that takes time and energy because it's not enough to network, but you have to maintain your contacts and enrich them.”*

In a similar vein, a managing partner of a public relations agency stressed the importance of networking while the owner of a boutique PR agency mentioned that “*due to my role as an owner of a small boutique PR agency, networking becomes so important since the company is anthropocentric*”.

As most women indicated, networking requires time and effort and it can be done through meetings with key contacts from the industry, media and journalists, institutional stakeholders, NGOs, and other key stakeholders. Participation in events, awards, conferences, face-to-face meetings, and the use of online platforms such as social media are important means for effective networking. Another participant indicated that networking can be done also through effective media relations (e.g., quick response to journalists’ requests, and honesty in relationships with them).

Another theme that emerged from the responses of the women, is the importance of internal networking and cultivation of relationships with other employees. Specifically, most women value relationships with their coworkers as they associated internal networking with a number of benefits such as “*effective team work*”, “*flow of operations*”, “*Access to information*”, “*inter-functional cooperation*”, “*identification of personalities with similar characteristics*”, “*completion of everyday tasks*”, “*promotion of innovation*”, “*friendly work environment*”, “*creativity, cooperation, shared knowledge*”, “*trust, and support*”, “*success in joint projects*”, “*achievement of business objectives*”, “*increased understanding of organization*”, “*feelings of belongingness*”, “*quick task completion*”, “*improvement of team bonds*”, “*enrichment of organizational culture*”, “*identification of new opportunities and business*”, “*thinking out of the box*”, “*improvement of reputation*”, “*alignment with organizational culture*”, and “*effective problem solving*”.

This internal networking is done through activities like everyday contacts, team projects, and joint projects with other departments, and seminars. Interestingly, one participant noted that networking should improve the diversity in the organization through “*team building activities that take into consideration the interests of different groups of colleagues such as music festivals (employees create bands), initiatives based on volunteerism and environment, blood donations, events related to health and wellness*”.

In a similar vein, another respondent stated that “*networking can be done through pleasant activities outside the office. A meal or a yoga class can make miracles*”.

Internal relations are regarded as a strategic tool for organizations. A corporate communication manager indicated that in their organization internal networking is performed through “*strategic plans and strategic alignment between departments, key engagement factors such as annual engagement survey, thematic internal workshops for enhancing a common understanding, alignment and stakeholder engagement*”.

Another important point was also raised by an in-house Director of Public Relations and Marketing who argued that building internal relations is the key to be heard and taken seriously by members of a male-dominated board:

“...because I am the only female director in the company, and because my office is in Athens - Capital - while the company's headquarters are in the western region of the country, networking is imperative, although very difficult. It is difficult to "hear" and accept a female opinion in a group of 9 men over 45. A specific approach is needed, per person, to understand that I have the knowledge and skills, regardless of gender.”

Regarding the dress code, almost 34 women indicated that there is a mandatory dress code in their organization that requires women to wear dresses and high heels. On the other hand, 17 women indicated that their organization does not have a dress code and they are free to wear whatever they like. In both cases, most women agreed that every woman working in public relations need to be dressed in a “**professional manner without exaggeration**” that reflects her role and position in the workplace. As one participant pinpointed “*there is no specific dress code. However, there are limits for both sexes. For example, the flip-flops or a peeled/fluor colour on the nails does not show professionalism and seriousness towards the customer.*” These views are highly related to the nature and scope of public relations. As one woman stated, “*I believe that in a professional environment our appearance should inspire confidence in the interlocutor in regards to the professional role of the employee*”.

Another woman also noted “*In my case, there is no specific dress code, but I think it is reasonable to expect from company executives, men and women, to dress as professionals. Especially in a public relations agency, where there is frequent interpersonal communication with clients. The image that we create is important.*”

Attire is also dependent on the circumstances. For example, women in the office are dressed more casually but when they meet with clients they must be professionally dressed and in line with the profile of the client. As one woman stated “*The dress code, which means I don't "exaggerate" whether I'm a man or a woman, I respect others (partners and clients) and try to be compatible with the different clients and places (from bank offices to artists' studios or photographer's studios). In our company, everyday appearance is more casual (without exaggerations), but when there is a meeting with a customer or some other special need, then the outfit adapts accordingly.*” An internal communications executive indicated that “*my outfit is always professional and discreet. I wouldn't accept working somewhere where it would be a prerequisite to dress up in order to provoke the opposite sex...In exceptional cases and only if it is required for a specific occasion, I would dress more feminine but still discreetly.*”

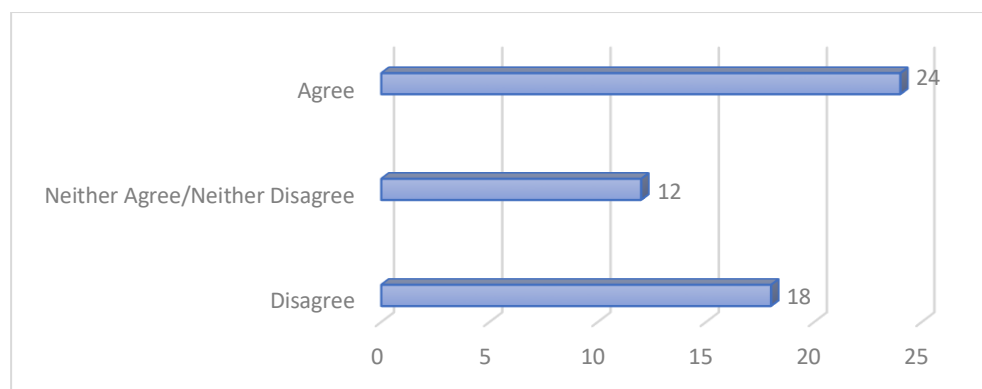
We did not find evidence that women are expected to show their feminine side thus, are not forced to be “sexy” but rather to downplay their sexuality, with a business-like appearance, that reflects their competence and formality without distracting others with their sexiness. Although this is a step ahead, however findings indicated that simultaneously with their professional style, women should not be too manly thus not too independent by wearing dresses and high-heeled shoes (Bartlett, 1994). Women in public relations in Greece should adopt a combination of a feminine and a masculine style. In a way, women are viewed, subordinate to men and existing community norms are reinforced. For a woman to succeed in business she must adopt a more masculine style of behaviour. Few women expressed autonomy and equality concerns with formal dress codes. These women noted that they feel uncomfortable with mandatory dress codes which do not encourage women to be themselves and better display their individual personalities.

Contrary to our expectations, most women (45 participants) indicated that they are involved in most decisions made by the top management. This finding is related to our sample that is mainly comprised of senior managers with experience totalling 11 or more years in the field. On the other hand, few women managers attributed their exclusion from top management decisions to the lack of recognition evident in the public relations discipline. In addition, women employees, as expected, argued that their position does not enable them to take part in the decision-making process of the company. These

results are encouraging for two main reasons. First, public relations is gaining a more strategic role in organizations by participating in the decision-making process. Second, the involvement of public relations in top management is not related to the gender of the department's head.

When women were asked whether they have to work hard to prove themselves results were inconclusive as shown in Figure 6. Half of the women indicated that they had to work harder while the other half stated that they disagree with that statement or they neither agree nor disagree.

Figure 6. Women Need to Work Harder to Prove Themselves



Communication and Leadership Styles

Respondents were asked to name the characteristics of effective leadership. Based on their responses five leadership dimensions emerged, namely: (1) emotional competencies, (2) communication skills, (3) vision and strategic thinking, (4) personal traits and ethical leadership, and (6) communication knowledge and expertise.

Emotional competencies: Emotional intelligence and empathy were frequently mentioned by respondents as important characteristics of leadership in the field of public relations. As Schutte et al. (1998) noted, emotional intelligence is related to the ability to listen and understand the emotions of others. Empathy is one dimension of emotional intelligence that refers to a person's sensitivity towards the needs of others (Choi, 2006). The outcome of emotional intelligence and empathy is empowerment which is related to support of other's ideas through motivation and personal recognition. Most women of the sample suggested that a good leader needs to lead by example, to engage and inspire, to acknowledge the efforts and ideas of his/her subordinates, to show understanding, to reward employees, to motivate them and support them in a broader way. Following is a

list of responses testifying to the value professional women in public relations attach to emotional competencies:

“motivating the team, rewarding effort and result, avoid focusing on mistakes but on the knowledge and experience, showing understanding, and supporting employees not only about professional issues but also about personal/family or mental health issues that arise.”

“to recognize the skills of every member of your team, to inspire and get the best out of everyone.”

“The continuous and multi-layered cultivation of personality with the ultimate goal of renewing mental and emotional intelligence in order the leader to be characterized by empathy both in quantitative and qualitative terms”.

“to motivate your subordinates and make them feel as special members of the team”.

“to inspire confidence, leave room for and trust new ideas and suggestions of colleagues.”

Communication skills: Another important point stressed by women of the sample was that empathy goes hand in hand with good communication skills. An effective leader according to their answers should be open, accessible, attentive to other views, as well as willing to share information and engage in dialogue. As one professional put it:

“To inspire, to “listen”, to “lead”, to be “open and honest”. Emphasize the relationship building on a basis of respect and confidence”.

Vision and strategic thinking: Several women also noted that an effective leader should think strategically. Thus, leaders need to have a clear vision, show direction, being flexible and able to adapt, predict future threats and take measures, being willing to change, as well as set objectives, and effectively organize activities. One professional characteristically stated that:

“Strategic thinking, seeing the big picture, being able to exert influence, avoiding tensions - being focused on resolving conflicts... making decisions and above all not doubting your abilities and performance. Set specific goals and feel able to achieve them.”

Personal traits and ethical leadership: According to women’s responses effective leadership in public relations requires decisiveness and self-confidence in making decisions and taking risks. Moreover, several women stressed the need for leaders to take responsibility for their actions, successes, and mistakes. Moreover, effectively handling criticism was another attribute mentioned by many women which could also be related to emotional intelligence. One woman professional enumerates the personal traits as follows:

“Honesty, self-confidence, passion for this job, good communication and decisiveness...”

Another woman professional underscores in her response the pitfalls of decision making and humility in accepting human frailties. In her own words, a woman professional must possess *“dynamic character with decisiveness, not afraid to terminate projects that do not run, not afraid of rejection and be willing to accept mistakes as well as successes. To see work as part of life- to be reconciled with oneself and to love women (because PR consists mainly of women).”*

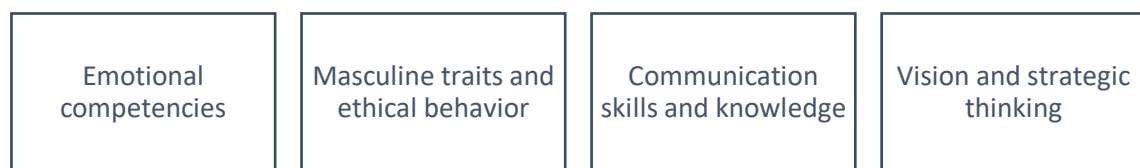
Women in our sample, also aspire to be leaders that are value-driven and ethical. Specifically, effective leaders should be driven by the alignment of words with deeds, meritocracy, and modesty. Moreover, they should respect colleagues and enhance transparency in decision making. As one woman stated: *“effective leaders are dynamic, show respect to their subordinates, are courteous, fair, calm, and communicative.”*

Communication knowledge and expertise: Female participants of our sample indicated that leadership manifests itself along with expertise and experience in public relations as well as a broader knowledge of organizations. As stated by a respondent *“being open-minded, doing constant research and have a broader knowledge (not only for the field of*

public relations)". All the aforementioned leadership dimensions, are encapsulated in the following comment made by a woman: *"to lead the way, to be kind and courteous, to inspire, to take risks, to seek development, to love progress, to encourage colleagues to take action, to be responsible and to turn all that into a result."*

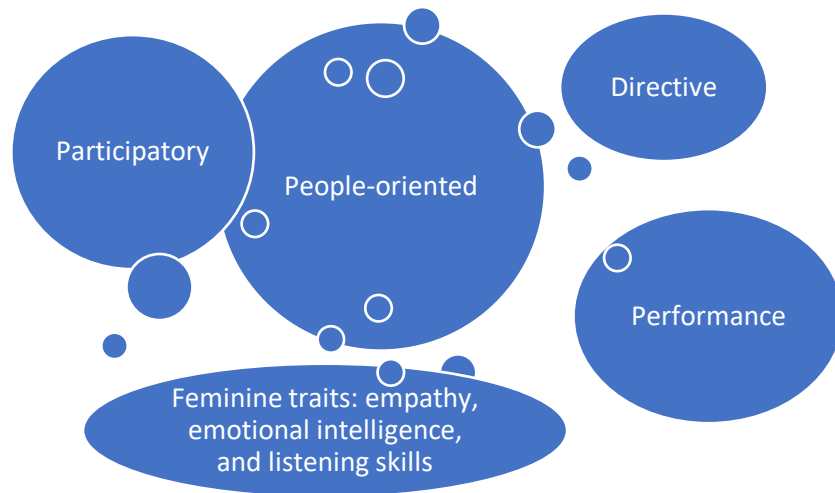
Based on the preceding analysis, it can be argued that women in our sample favour "transformational leadership" over the "transactional type of leadership". Transformational leadership is related to emotional intelligence, empathy, empowerment, and relationship building with followers (Mandell and Pherwani, 2003), a leadership style, that is, more attuned to female leaders. Also, it should be noted that although women in our sample assign mostly feminine traits to effective leaders such as empathy, understanding and sensitivity to the needs of others, they also emphasize the need for female leaders to exhibit masculine traits like self-confidence, decisiveness, and willingness to take risks. This finding could attest to the case of situational leadership where women can pursue both styles depending on the circumstances (Aldoory and Toth, 2004). Moreover, the preference for feminine as well as masculine leadership traits also reveals the double bind facing women professionals who are asked to conform to feminine expectations while simultaneously exhibiting masculine leadership traits. Figure 7 summarizes the main themes of ideal leadership.

Figure 7. Themes of I deal Leadership



As Figure 8 shows we identified three leadership styles, namely: people-oriented, participatory, and directive. All these three styles shared an emphasis on performance and results.

Figure 8. Leadership Styles



Based on our findings, most women suggested that their leadership style is **mainly people-oriented** (21 participants). Specifically, they stated that they emphasize interpersonal relationships with their subordinates, take into consideration their needs, are friendly and supportive. Women valuing the people-oriented leadership style reported:

“Friendly, “coaching”, with emphasis on results and the cultivation of sincere relationships between team members”.

“Although I want to keep everything under my control, I always try to engage my people according to their points of interest. The outcome is of great importance and when something is not done correctly, we discuss it in order to identify mistakes so that they are not repeated. Because of my character, I invest in human relationships inside and outside my department. As a result, I have gained the trust of many people who are seeking my opinion even on personal matters (I am very proud of myself for having achieved this!). I love change and innovation and I always support every effort of the organization - even when these efforts do not benefit me.”

“Directed towards people, taking into consideration the individuality and needs of every person.”

“Leading by example, friendly, neo-liberal but within specific boundaries. Supportive in regard to the development of my people and providing help in every difficult, even personal situation”

“To be close to my partners. Not to be a figure of fear but a figure they respect and will seek my advice because of my experience and my work. I want them to be able to share all their problems, joys, successes....”

“I’m friendly, very supportive and I always listen to my subordinates, I always stand up for them. We make jokes, we talk in person, I’m open and I don’t have a hidden agenda. I encourage them to turn off computers early (unless there is an emergency) and let them choose the work schedule that serves them.”

Several women stated that their leadership style is **participatory or inclusive** (13 women) encouraging their subordinates to take initiatives and exchange new ideas as well as listen to their suggestions and proposals. As participants stated,

“I listen to the opinions of my employees, I listen to their needs, I encourage initiatives, I share my knowledge, I reward, I evolve my executives.”

“My goal is to inspire and motivate my team, show my colleagues to take initiatives, to interact, to experiment, to invent... especially not to be afraid. Failures happen, but it also depends on whether you see them as failures. My role, among other things, is to be inventive to cover up these "mistakes" and turn them into results.”

Moreover, eight women were categorized as **task-oriented and directive leaders** as they indicated that they are goal-oriented, set objectives, guide their subordinates, and reward them. The following statements provide evidence for the value they accord to efficiency in carrying out the prescribed tasks,

“I keep the team focused on its goal, coordinating group activities. I allow and support the decisions of the members of the group and define their objectives. I trust others in carrying out their duties. I try to inspire and look for ways to develop my team and I always take responsibility for the work of the team while always rewarding them.”

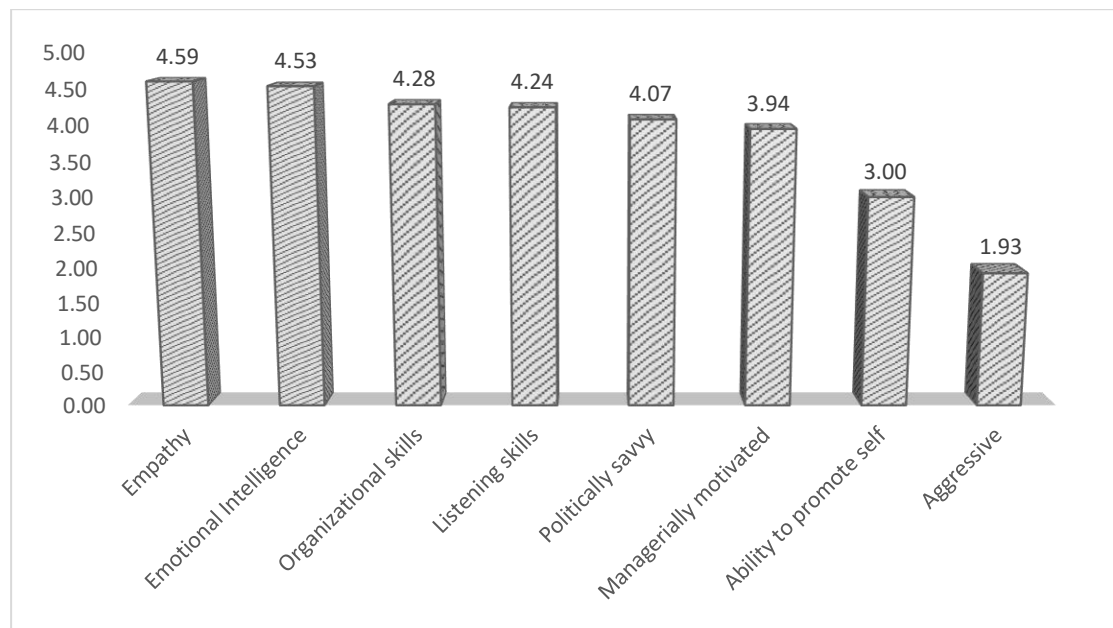
“I’m relatively strict, but fair. I am always willing to share my knowledge and encourage my team to expand their knowledge. I’m goal-oriented and I’m trying to get the best out of my team.”

“Fair and highly centralized...something that I need to change.”

Another important dimension of leadership that emerged irrespective of the type of leadership was **“performance and result-orientation”** as many women emphasized that their personal leadership is focused on producing results. Similar findings were obtained by Berger et al. (2007) who found that US practitioners define success and excellence in public relations in terms of performance.

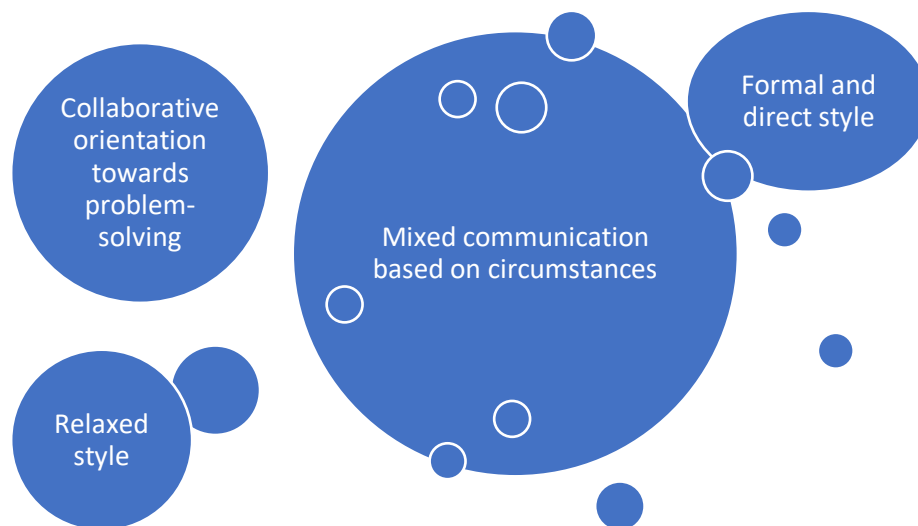
Based on the preceding analysis, we found that most women of our sample adopt mainly feminine leadership styles that concentrate on people, relationship-building, and empowerment. Masculine types of leadership such as task-orientation and directive style were found in only a few women but should hasten to add that their leadership style also contains elements of other styles like people-orientation and teamwork. Moreover, we asked participants to rate themselves based on several leadership qualities. Results are presented in Figure 9. Based on the sample’s responses women practitioners indicated that they mainly possess qualities associated with transformational leadership such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and listening skills. These traits are stereotypically feminine.

Figure 9. Ideal Leadership Qualities



We identified four main communication styles, namely: formal, mixed with an emphasis on the individual, collaborative with an emphasis on problem-solving, and relaxed style (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Communication Styles



The formal communicative style was associated with characteristics such as directness, formality, honesty, and politeness. This style was found only in 7 respondents. As a respondent noted, *“due to the many years in corporate public relations the communication is mainly typical, formal and based on the strict profile of the*

companies.” This formal communication style tends to favour written forms of communication. As another woman indicated,

“My professional communication style is based on directness and courtesy to the recipients of the message (colleagues, partners, etc.) while maintaining a formal style. For example, communication between the employees involved in the implementation of a project is always done by email - written communication and not by oral communication. It's a personal principle that I've been following in my professional routine....”

Most women adopted a **mixed communication style** (18 respondents) which combines directness with a more friendly and people-oriented approach. This style is characterized by qualities such as professionalism, formality, meeting deadlines, politeness, friendliness, and a human-oriented approach. In addition, this style features prominently the individuality of the interlocutor. Advocates of this style adjust their communication to fit the conditions and the needs of their interlocutors without losing sight of their own communication objectives. Moreover, several women indicated that this mixed style is in their own words a “personalized” style of communication. Thus, women adopting this style vacillate along a continuum ranging from formal and polite communication to a more friendly and anthropocentric approach depending on the occasion. Circumstances matter as the following statements of three professionals testify:

“I adapt according to the people and circumstances. Usually, I am formal when I make a presentation to my superiors, supportive when I'm with artists, friendly at a party, but formal at an event etc.”

“It changes according to the occasion and between human and formal-professional.”

“Wide-angle thinking, with quick reflexes, taking into account the uniqueness of every person's personality with whom I am called to interact”.

This mixed communication style clearly reflects the function of public relations which adapts to the needs of the different publics. Moreover, as one woman suggested it represents the ethos of the public relations profession:

“Suitable with the style and ethos of my work: polite, friendly, but at the same time serious and with substance.”

Mixed communication also favours interpersonal relations, direct contact, oral communication, discussion, and willingness to listen. Following are some representative responses:

“I have chosen the personal communication style. Personal contact is important to me and can help me to build friendly, professional and all kinds of relationships. I can determine the feelings of a person by looking into the eyes...”

“I am always interested in taking part in discussions – to analyze my interlocutor and synthesize the information.”

“always direct and conciliatory. I believe in interpersonal relations and in fruitful dialogue”.

“Immediate, friendly and meeting deadlines. I have concluded that the solution to problems or issues at work comes easily when we are in the mood to listen to what our interlocutor is saying and asking for”.

Another communicative style found in several women’s responses was the **collaborative orientation towards problem-solving** (10 respondents). This style placed emphasis on teamwork, collaboration, conflict resolution, shared knowledge, and effective problem-solving. All respondents praised the value of teamwork and collaboration as evidenced in the statements below:

“Analytical and intuitive, didactic to the least experienced members of the team, oriented to problem-solving to preserve the balance of the team.”

“Direct, supportive, willing to find solutions and not to blame. Collaborative when it comes to announcements that concern the whole company. The aim is to inspire, mobilize, and thank colleagues. In addition, I consider regular meetings

with the team leaders to be important because we can exchange views on issues that affect the company and I consult them before final decisions are taken...”

“I work mainly intuitively and then analytically. I pay particular attention to the details, I emphasize the creation of new ideas, then I analyze the data to achieve the goal or solve the issue. Throughout the process, I choose to work with the team as I believe that the best results come from the synthesis of different ideas.”

“I place a lot of emphasis on the human factor, I am extroverted, relaxed and supportive to my colleagues and subordinates, I am friendly, and I like to follow the rules consistently. I prefer to work in collaborative models and be fair. I do not like aggressive communication, I think we should always respect partners and competitors.”

Lastly, another style found was the **relaxed style**. This style was found in seven women and was associated with a more open and informal way of communication that is directed towards innovation. Humour is an important ingredient of this style primarily because it facilitates interpersonal relations and puts co-workers at ease. The following statements are indicative:

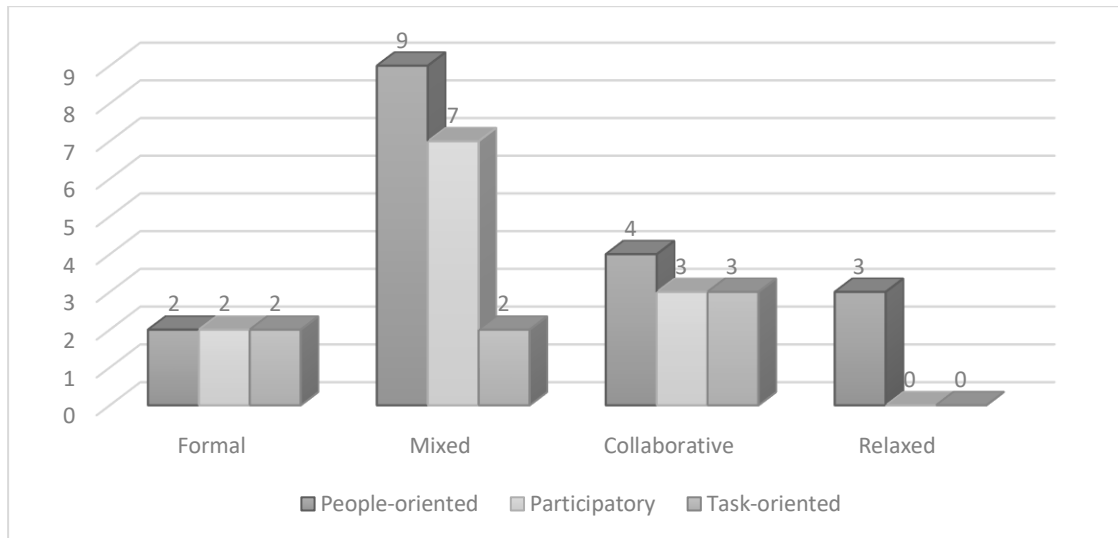
“Relaxed, anthropocentric, with vision and orientation towards innovation”

“I prefer to be relatively relaxed and informal. I use a lot of humour in my interpersonal relationships and try to offer my help wherever I can...”

“I am communicative, I love humour at work (in reasonable conditions) and I do not believe in excessive strictness. I think our work is based on teamwork and is heavily influenced by our inner psychological conditions. That's why we need to encourage, motivate and not behave like divas”.

Participants were assigned to one of the leadership approaches and communication styles. As Figure 11 shows leadership style is associated with the communication style of practitioners. More specifically, practitioners that adopted a people-oriented and participatory leadership style were more inclined to use a mixed communication style.

Figure 11. Leadership and Communication Styles



Results indicated that 22 of the women grew up with their mothers while 23 were raised by both parents. Moreover, our sample socialized mainly with both genders (38 respondents) as well as with girls (16 respondents). Only two participants answered that they socialized with boys. In addition, 32 women were raised by a democratic parenting style, 10 by an authoritative, 9 by supportive and 4 by a permissive style. Next, we tried to examine whether the leadership and communication styles were related to factors regarding the early socialisation process. Based on Figures 12, 13, and 14 two patterns emerged.

Figure 12. First Agents and Leadership Styles

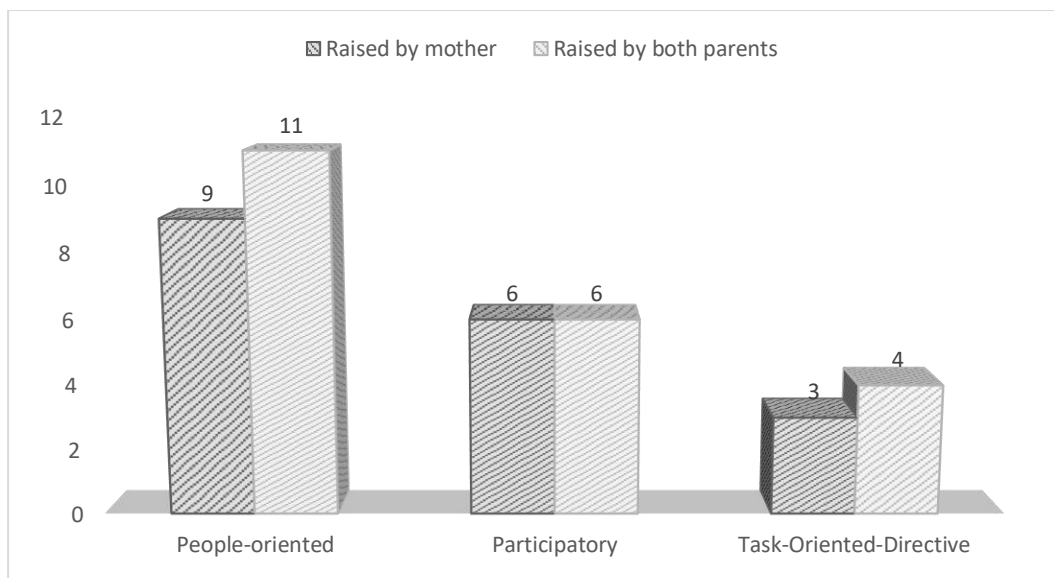


Figure 13. Childhood Relationships and Leadership Styles

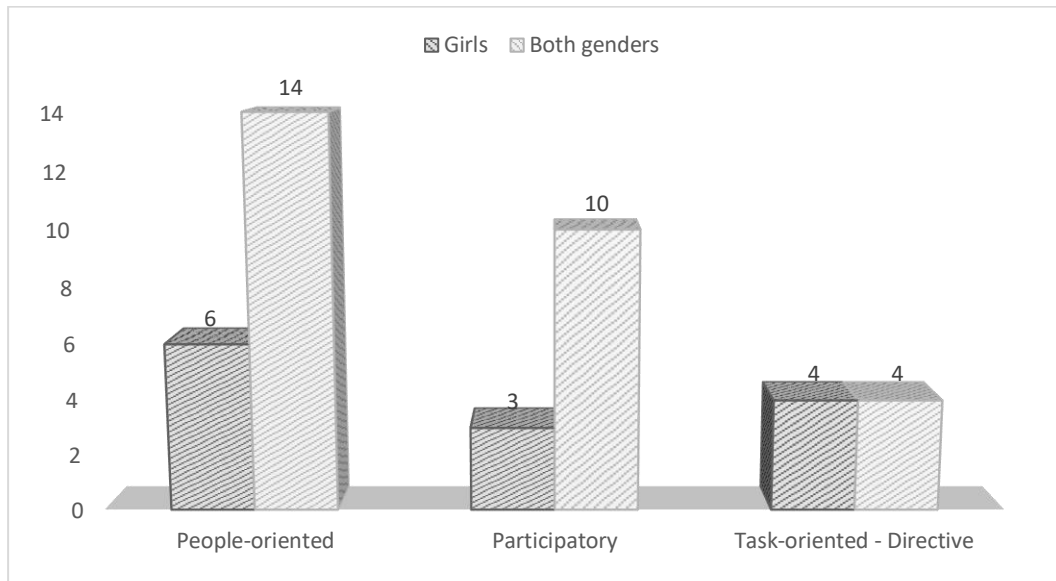
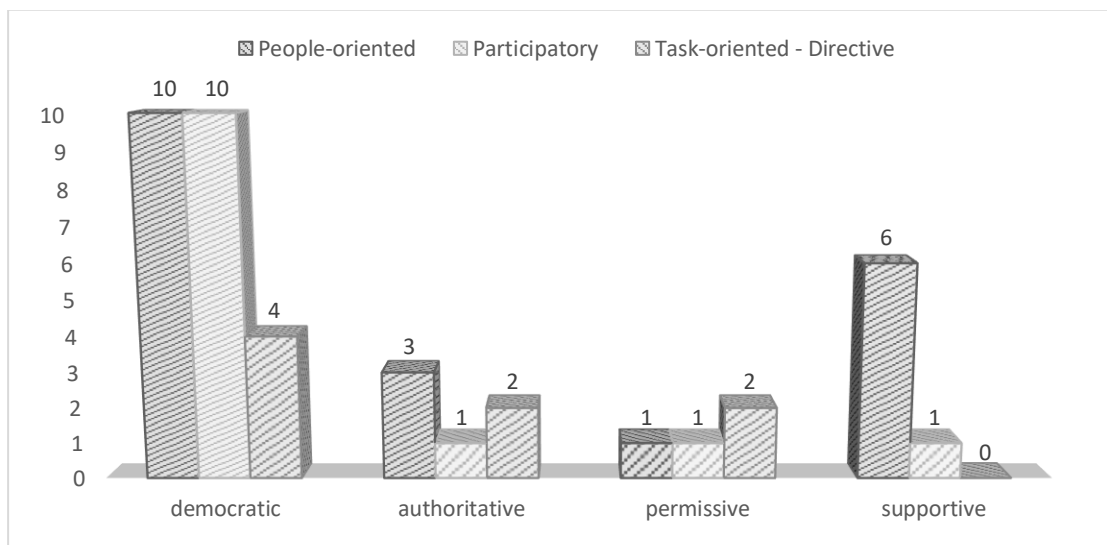


Figure 14. Parenting Styles and Leadership Styles



As Figure 13 shows women with a people-oriented and participatory leadership style reported that in their childhood they socialized with both genders. Moreover, another pattern found was related to the parenting style. More specifically, as shown in Figure 14 women who were raised by a democratic style tended to adopt a more people-oriented and participatory leadership style. Moreover, a people-oriented leadership style was found in women raised by parents through a supportive style.

Most women indicated that their family and **parenting style** played an important role in their leadership style (15 respondents). One woman underscored the values inculcated to her through family upbringing as follows:

“Respecting others, superiors and subordinates, taking responsibility for tasks, having confidence in supporting ideas and values, constant cultivation of the self on many levels and constant training on the subject of work in the narrow or broadest sense, so that I express my opinion to superiors and subordinates, are clearly related to the chiselling of character, the formation of the code of life values and your family standards (where words coincided with actions). The concept of responsibility and all that this entails was a family lesson through a number of paradigms and a tool to pursue one's dreams, but without losing one's tenderness and humanity.”

Another woman with a participatory leading style mentioned that *“from my childhood to my adulthood my parents inspired me to think, create and work with what comes from inside of me, not just what I see or read. They placed special emphasis on my feelings, they induced them pleasantly....”* In a similar vein, another participant noted *“my mother raised me by talking to me and providing me with examples. This is what I'm trying to do with my team...”*

Next, we examined whether communication styles were influenced by early socialisation agents (Figures 15, 16, and 17).

Figure 15. First Agents and Communication Styles

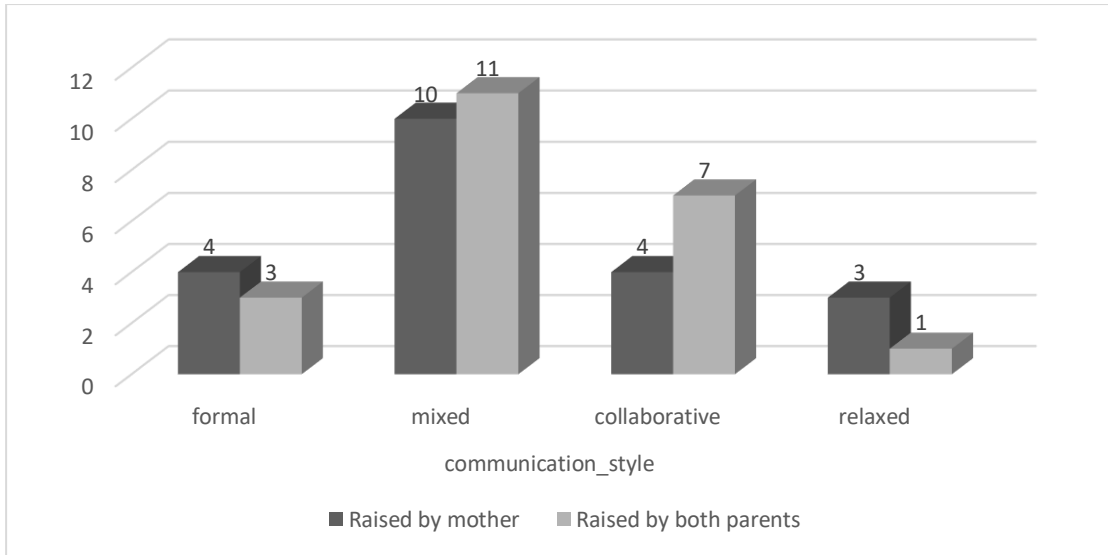


Figure 16. Childhood Relationships and Communication Styles

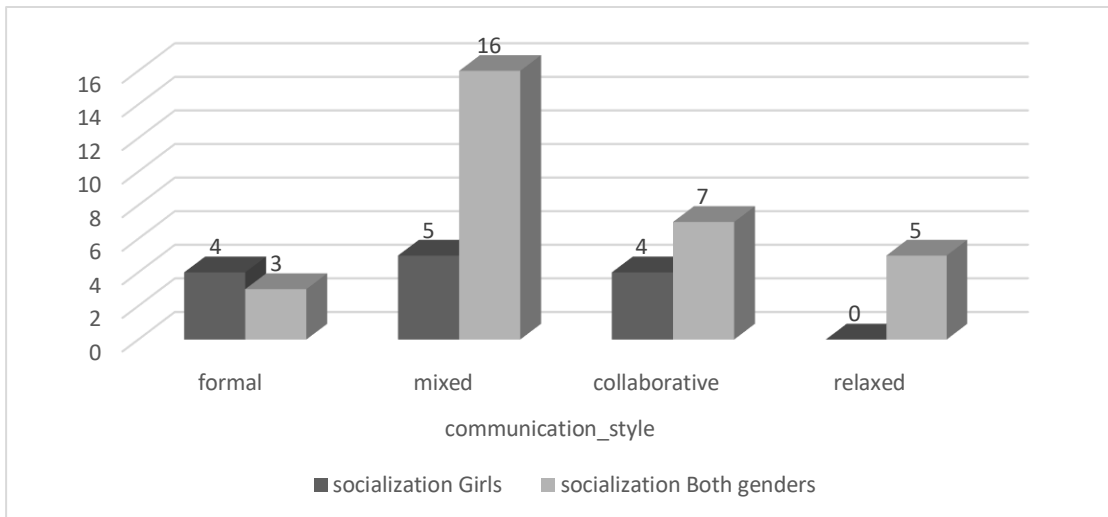
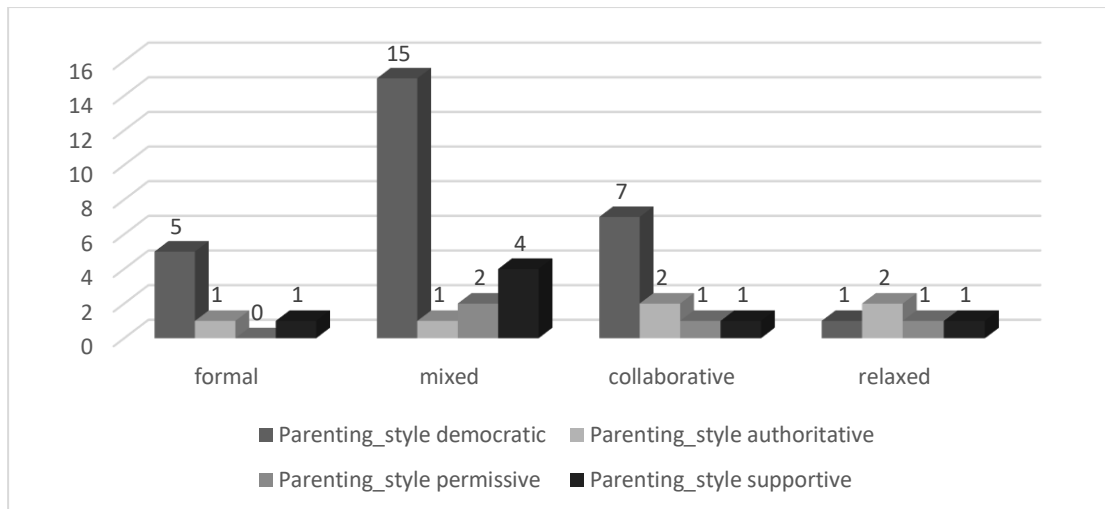


Figure 17. Parenting Styles and Communication Styles



Based on Figures 16 and 17, the mixed style of communication was associated with women who socialized with both genders and were raised by a democratic parental style. No significant patterns emerged in relation to time spent with parents. In identifying antecedents to leadership styles, several respondents (8 participants) made explicit references to communication styles. As a woman indicated *“communication is an aspect of leadership, thus our personal communication style reflects our leadership style”*. Another participant stated *“my personal leadership style is direct and honest and this is something that characterizes the way that I communicate with colleagues...”*

Another factor that influences leadership style was the personality of practitioners. One woman noted, *“due to my extroversion, I initiate a discussion with my team in order to progress together based on our organizational goals and customers’ needs”*. Another respondent indicated: *“In the past, I had women supervisors that did not want me to progress. I have learned that if you are not close to your subordinates and open to communication, you will lose your leading position”*.

The experience was also stressed by participants as an important antecedent of their leadership style (7 respondents). Participants stated that their leadership style was influenced by their experiences, superiors, and challenges faced during their professional careers. The following statements allude to the impact of the experience factor in the leadership style:

“It is defined by personality and personal experiences. My international experience and the managers I worked with at the beginning of my career also

characterized my own style, as they were open people, recognized ideas, and successes encouraged initiatives and were in a positive mood. This also affected me personally, combined with the family lifestyle that made me more consensual, not aggressive, fair/ethical.”

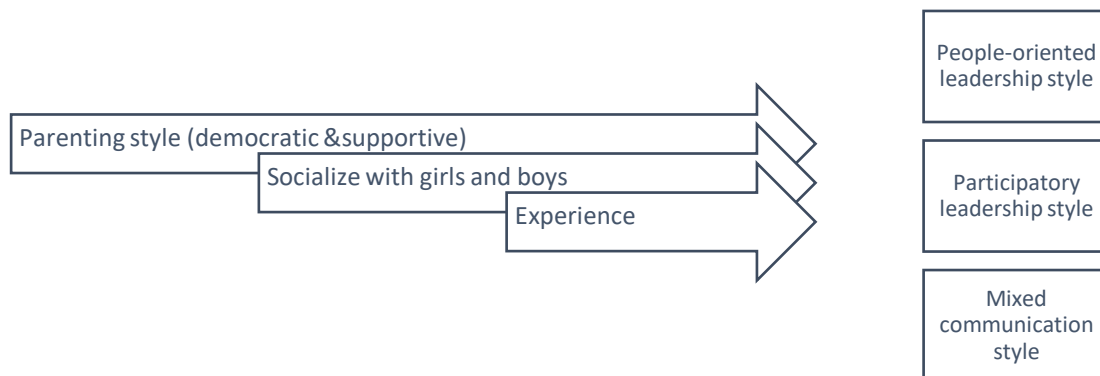
“The years of experience in a managerial position play a huge role in the leadership style. When I first took up the position, I was having a hard time seeing the big picture, I felt overwhelmed and insecure about both my performance and my image. This slowly changed with experience, I gained more confidence and courage as well as I took more initiatives and I formulated and established my point of view about my profession...”

“My leadership style incorporates all the challenges that I have faced during my professional career along with my decision to be fairer and more direct.”

Other predictors of leadership styles were childhood friends, professors, and school, as well as organizational culture. Specifically, one participant indicated that *“leadership is also related to the workplace environment and the way a company operates. A company with an autocratic environment will push you to adapt your style accordingly.”*

Figure 18 summarizes the main themes and interrelations found between personal leadership styles, communication styles, and socialisation processes.

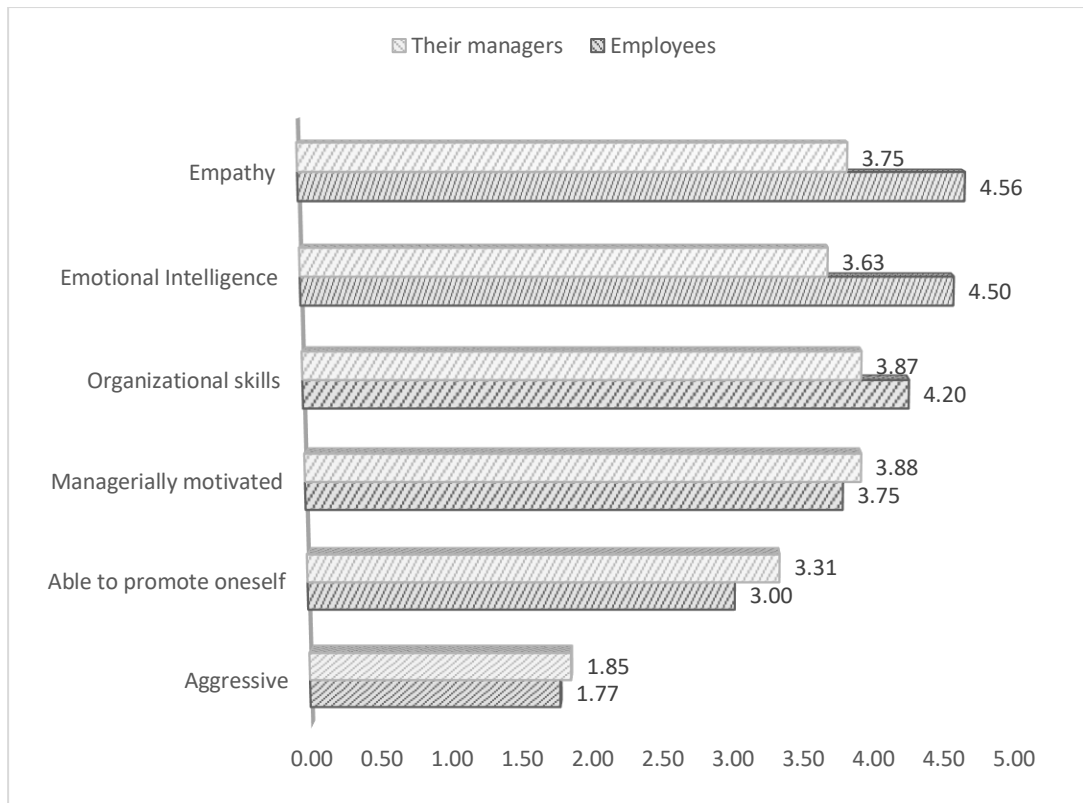
Figure 18. Antecedents of Leadership and Communication Styles



Female Employees

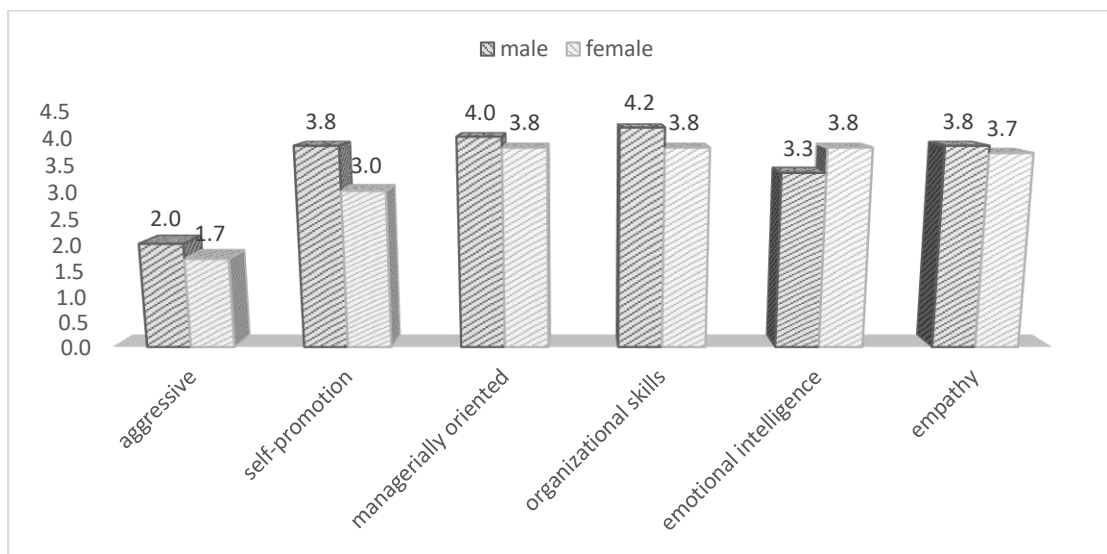
Women employees in public relations rated their own leadership qualities as well as those of their bosses (Figure 19). Results indicate that employees believe that their bosses do not fare as well compared to their own regarding empathy, emotional intelligence, and organizational skills. On the contrary, findings suggest that women subordinates think that their bosses are more managerially motivated, capable of promoting themselves and aggressive, traits that are stereotypically attributed to masculine roles.

Figure 19. Differences between Managers and Employees in Leadership Qualities



The above finding was further exemplified when checked for differences in the leadership quality scores than women employees assigned to their male and female bosses (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Differences in Leadership Qualities based on the Gender of Employees' Managers

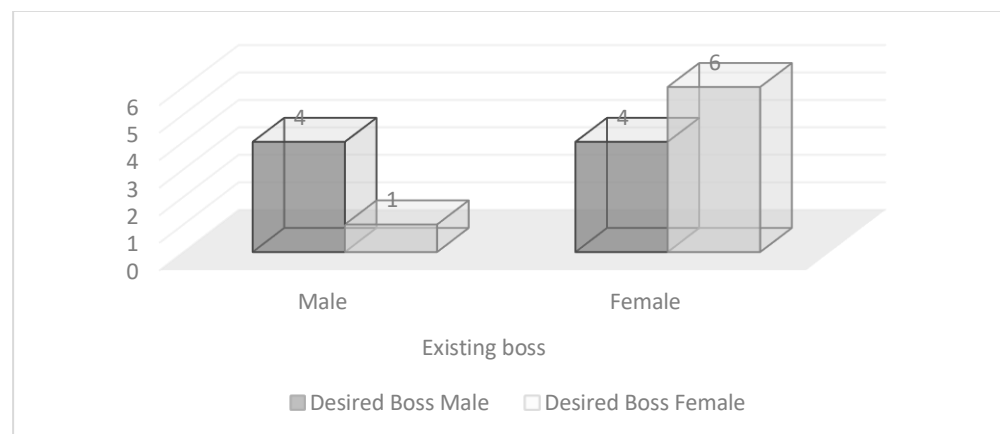


Women employees evaluated their male bosses as more aggressive, able to promote themselves, managerially oriented and with more organizational skills compared to their

female counterparts who outperformed male managers only in their emotional intelligence scores. Thus, it can be assumed that female employees think that their female bosses are less competent while they find that their male bosses are more qualified in “masculine” traits compared to them. We can assume that female bosses are not role models for their employees. Again, hidden stereotypical perceptions were found in female employees who perceive female leaders as less competent in most leadership qualities. Moreover, female bosses were rated by their female employees as more emotionally intelligent than their male counterparts.

Next, respondents were asked about their preferences for male or female bosses (Figure 21). We found as shown in the diagram below, that women who now work with male managers desire to continue working with them in the future. The same does not hold true for female subordinates that currently work for female bosses. A good number of them (4 out of 10) opined that they would rather work with male bosses.

Figure 21. Gender Preferences for Managers



The reasons according to them are related mainly to the (a) advantages of working with male managers, and (b) negative traits of female bosses.

Those who prefer working with male bosses indicated their openness, willingness to listen to suggestions and proposals and less competitive manifested nature compared to their female counterparts. As the following statements indicate, female subordinates seem to be more at ease with male bosses:

“Men are more straightforward in their thoughts, and you can read them more easily.”

“Men, based on my professional experiences, are more cooperative and less competitive. They listen more easily and feel more comfortable with the opinions/suggestions of their partners and take them into account. I do not mean that this cannot happen with women. But this was derived from my experience”.

“Men listen more. They are open to new proposals and approaches. My judgement is based on the general manager of the company I work for.”

Female employees that prefer male bosses placed emphasis on the negative traits of female bosses as depicted in the following statements:

“On the contrary, my supervisor, being a woman, and tried, by all means, to take up this position, is inadequate, autocratic, control freak and constantly remind us of her position.”

“Men can be sexist many times, but they don't focus on micromanagement and don't have the same superiority complexes towards women. Many times, women are competitive with each other.”

Females who prefer male supervisors are those that most of the times have been blocked in their career prospects by women managers. These women could not see other females as role models and criticize them for not being supportive to other women and acting agentic. The following two respondents were quite critical of their female bosses for being egocentric and unsupportive:

“No. I had female supervisors who desperately wanted to be role models, but they didn't act according to the circumstances. Instead of supporting other females, they were trying to strangle them in order to get promoted.”

“Definitely not! The way she took the job doesn't make her capable of managing a team. Leaders inspire, do not direct and blame others for their mistakes just to cover up their weaknesses. The only positive thing I have gotten from my supervisor is to see and understand what I shouldn't do and how I shouldn't treat my team in similar circumstances.”

On the other hand, female employees that prefer to work with females stressed their multi-tasking skills, multi-dimensional approach, empathy, and relationship-building orientation.

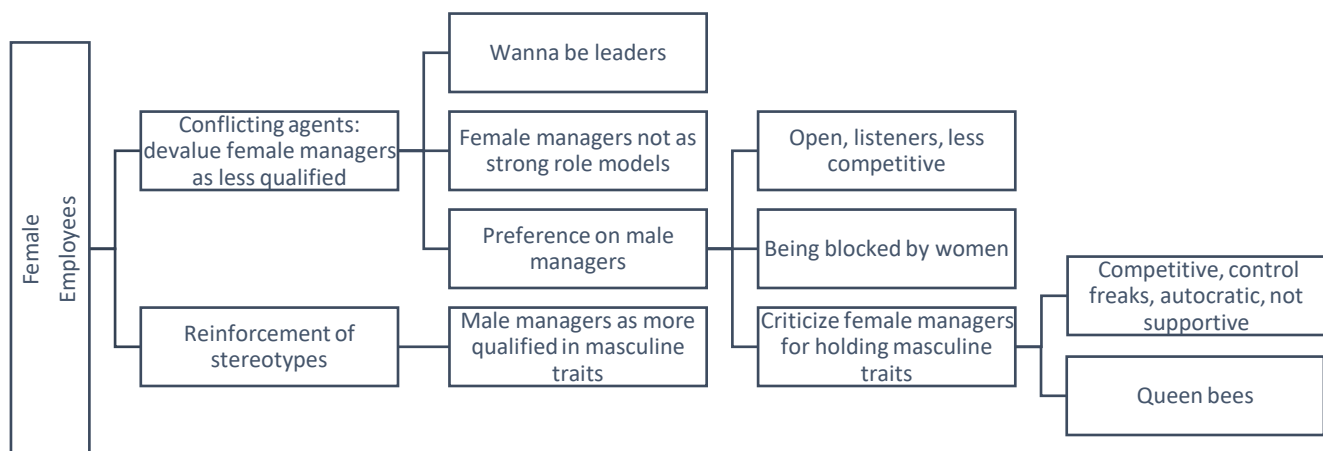
As one female employee indicated *“I believe that the female approach is multidimensional, which has helped me a lot in the advancement of my technical and intellectual skills»*. Moreover, another female stated, *“In most cases, (without being the norm) women rely on relationships and close communication with their team members. They tend to show more understanding and empathy.”*

Moreover, women who like to work with females stressed that they could easily identify with them and see them as role models mainly due to the professional qualities such as their *“dynamic character, strategic thinking, and ability to manage difficult situations with temper.”*

Results do not show a clear preference of employees with regard to the gender of their boss since several participants indicated that it’s not a matter of gender but rather of the character and behaviour of their boss. Nonetheless, subordinates are less likely to look up to their female bosses as role models.

Findings concerning female employees are summarized in Figure 22.

Figure 22. Female Employees’ Perceptions



Female Managers

The majority of female managers indicated that they prefer to work with both sexes. Most of these women indicated that diversity in the workplace in terms of gender can benefit the department as well as the organization, reducing stereotypical behaviours and views, maximizing results, increasing polyphony and reducing problems related to gendered workplaces. Indicative of the preference of female managers for mixed workplaces are the following statements:

“I believe that the mixed working environment can create a better result in terms of planning.”

“The balance employees in terms of gender can reduce stereotypical perceptions-behaviours and gives the opportunity to mix elements and traits of both genders and create an amalgam that can yield great results.”

“Each gender complements the other. In general, mixing genders has advantages - there is a complementarity of ideas and variety in all discussions (personal and professional)...”

Only two women, clearly stated that they prefer to work with females due to the nature of the field of communication that favours women and their feminine traits. In their own words:

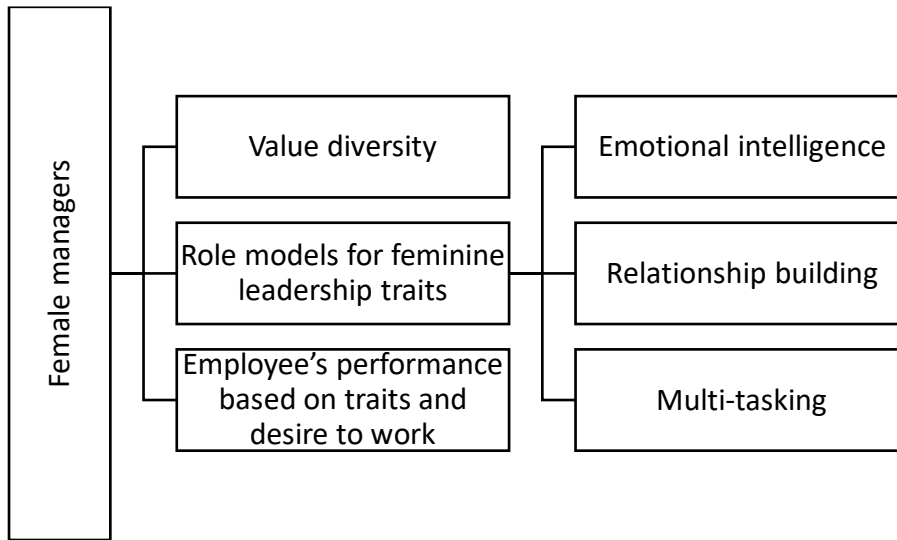
“More hard-working, faster, better perception, multi-tasking skills, better results through planning and HUMAN relationships”

“I personally believe that communication is primarily a woman's profession! I don't like men in this position, I also work better with women, I like the female mind is multi-facet and always finds solutions to whatever happens.”

Again, a clear theme that emerged is that women do not support the notion that there is a gender-based difference in the qualities of employees. Many female leaders noted that the performance of each employee is related mainly to his/her personal traits, character, and desire for work. As one participant stressed *“Each gender, each individual, has something to offer to the team and help achieve organizational objectives. You only have to create the appropriate work environment and give him/her the chance.”*

Results regarding female managers are summarized in Figure 23.

Figure 23. Female Managers' Perceptions

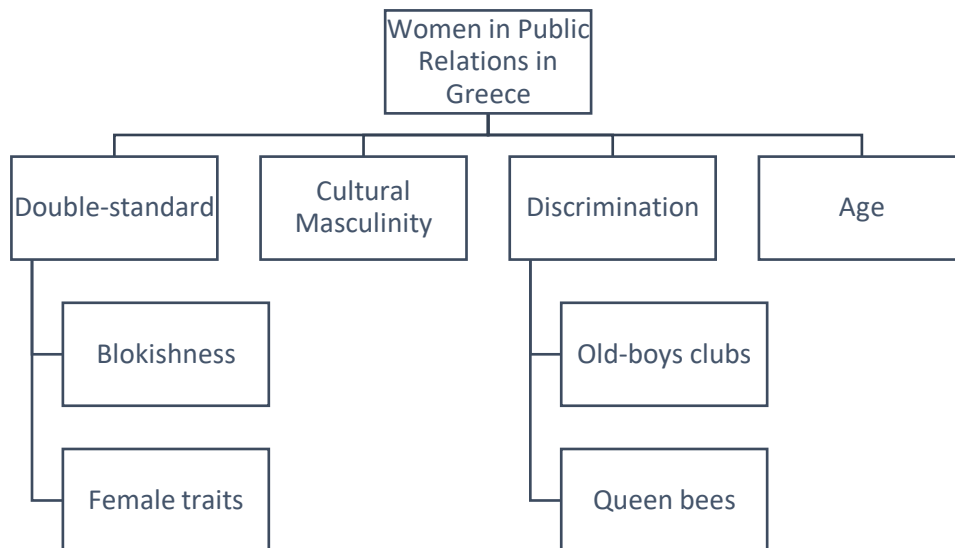


Conclusion

This research study aimed at analysing the position of women in Greece's public relation industry. In Greece, the number of women being recruited by private organizations is increasing (Mihail, 2006) and even though a significant percentage of them are becoming middle managers, they are still being underrepresented at higher managerial positions (Papalexandris, 2017). While attitudes towards women as managers have improved, old stereotypes still remain, being extremely rigid and difficult to change (Galanaki et al., 2009) and reinforced by the operation of the glass ceiling (Kottis, 1996). The above contradiction is also evident in the findings of our study (Figure 24). Results suggest that there are encouraging signs in regard to the status of women in public relations as well as the recognition of public relations in general. Almost half of the respondents indicate that they have equal and better opportunities to progress their career in the female-dominated field of public relations while they have not been treated differently by their male colleagues. Moreover, these women observe a positive change in the way the male counterparts interact with them. However, these positive signs have hard-fought and gained by female professionals due to their reactance to stereotypes.

Despite the positive progress in the field, old stereotypes still persist. What is important to note is the many female practitioners talked about the glass ceiling in their career advancement emanating from a culturally masculine society regardless of their profession. More specifically, women in our sample indicated that irrespective of their profession women find it hard to reach the top and achieve a desired work-life balance due to workplace conditions, organizational culture and practices, and legislation that does not enact a clear and flexible work-hour policy.

Figure 24. Main Findings of the Study



The findings across the three sections of the study underscore the “double-standard” requirement faced by women practitioners which are counterbalanced through blokishness and feminine masculinity along with the embracement of strong feminine traits. The need to adopt masculine traits but also cultivate their feminine qualities needed for effective management was found in the career advancement strategies of our respondents and their perceptions of ideal leadership. Ideal and preferred leadership was found to be “gyno-androus” as it is characterized by strong feminine traits such as emotional intelligence and empathy as well as masculine traits such as self-confidence, planning, and decisiveness. Thus, female practitioners of the present study prefer a mix of egalitarian and supportive leadership in order to prove their competency but keeping their feminine traits (Eagly and Carli, 2003) such as cooperation, respect, caring, sensitivity, fairness and commitment (Grunig et al., 2000).

Moreover, this double requirement was also found in their attire and communication styles as female practitioners need to be dressed in a formal business way while keeping their feminine side. Their communication style is also based on a mix of formality and relationship cultivation. As Aldoory (1998) argued female public relations leaders are “situational rhetors” and use a mix of communication strategies based on the individual and circumstances. The aforementioned mixed findings could also reflect the “contingent” perspective that permeates public relations. More specifically, the usage of public relations practices “depends” (Cancel et al., 1997) on the situation, circumstances, and environmental factors (Waters, 2013).

Corroborating the arguments of Galanaki et al. (2009) the present study found that old stereotypes concerning the role of women in management still exist and are difficult to change. The stereotypes along with discriminatory behaviour toward many of the sample's female professionals originated mainly from old male managers as well as female managers indicating the existence of old-boys clubs and queen bees or blokish females (Topić, 2020).

Another important finding that needs further research is related to the age of female practitioners. Age discrimination was found in a number of responses of several women professionals as they stated that they had to behave differently in order to be taken seriously during the early stages of their careers while they were also devalued and treated condescendingly due to their young age. On the contrary, seniority in our sample goes along with several benefits such as better time management, work-life balance and involvement in the decision-making process.

Another contribution of the present study is related to the stereotype reactance and confirmation strategies that have been adopted by the female public relations practitioners of our sample. According to Hoyt (2005), stereotype reactance is the behaviours and thoughts of individuals who defend their positions as a result of a negative stereotype. Herein, we identified four reactance strategies and one confirmation strategy. Implicit reactance was adopted by several female practitioners through negative emotions of disappointment when they were confronted with sexist behaviours. Others used more explicit reactance strategies by raising their voices or reprimanding male employees for the discriminatory behaviour. Again, female managers need to adopt more masculine traits to counter the stereotypes. Internal networking was also utilized as a reactance to females' exclusion from decision-making.

Blokishness seems to be another reactance strategy towards discrimination and devaluation of women. As findings indicate female managers adopted a more distant and unapproachable style in order to be able to work unhindered. The queen bee syndrome also emanates as a reactance to stereotypes and devaluation. Women are becoming "conflicting agencies" (Kissane and Winslow, 2016) and adopt feminine masculinity by being competitive in order to promote and to differentiate themselves from other "less qualified" women. These types of public relations managers have been criticized by respondents as unsupportive and dominant. Interestingly, in a female-dominated field, we found the usage of stereotype confirmation by several females who passively tolerate

sexist jokes. Tolerance to sexism was found to be related to socialisation factors such as growing up with brothers and playing with boys and also with male-dominated organizations. In addition, respondents of the study perceive their female bosses as less skilled and less qualified in characteristics required for effective leadership and management compared to their male bosses. Hence, the results of our study enhance the “think manager...think male” perception (Schein, 2007). Employees rated their bosses as less qualified in feminine traits implying that they perceive themselves as the transformational managers of the future.

The present study sheds light on female leadership qualities and their antecedents in the underexplored field of public relations in Greece. Ideal leadership of women public relations practitioners is comprised of five dimensions: emotional competencies, communications skills, vision and strategic thinking, personal traits and ethical leadership, and communication knowledge. These dimensions have been also found in prior studies concerning leadership in public relations irrespective of the leaders’ gender (e.g., Choi and Choi, 2009; Men et al., 2020; Meng et al., 2012; Jin, 2010).

Although, female practitioners in Greece prefer situational leadership that combines transformational and transactional characteristics their perceived personal leadership is people-oriented or participatory but simultaneously performance-based. The findings corroborate prior studies which found that female public relations practitioners adopt more pluralistic and inclusive leadership styles (Topić, 2020; Aldoory, 1998). Moreover, an emphasis on professionalism (Hon, 1995) was also another important aspect that was highlighted by female practitioners in Greece.

A link between the communication style and the leadership style of practitioners was also revealed as the mixed communication style was associated with more pluralistic and empowering leadership styles (e.g., people-oriented and participatory style). Thus, women who are more supportive and inclusive in their practices change their communication style to fit the environment and the individual.

Regarding the antecedents of female leadership in Greek public relations, results show that females who grew up playing with both genders and were raised by a democratic parenting style followed a people-oriented and participatory leadership style combined with a mixed communication style. Moreover, a supportive parenting style was also associated with a people-oriented leadership style. These results corroborate the findings

of Kalazde et al. (2020) in Georgia where practitioners' leadership style affected their leadership qualities. This consistency in results could be attributed to the cultural similarities of Greece and Georgia since in both studies most women indicated that they have been raised either by their mothers or both parents and they socialized with both genders during their childhoods. Other important antecedents of personal leadership style were the experience of managers and their personality traits.

In addition, no clear patterns in female-role models emerged (Topić, 2020) as gender preferences in leader's gender were equally distributed. Results suggest that female leaders are not identified as role models due to the perceived "queen bee" syndrome where women who reached top-level positions are becoming competitive and are unsupportive of other women. On the other hand, female managers seem to favour equality and diversity with respect to the gender of their subordinates and as Topić (2020) argued "do not form girl clubs" in a female-dominated field.

Several important practical implications could be derived. Although, progress has been made in public organizations in Greece where an increasing number of women hold higher-level positions (Papalexandris, 2017) more initiatives are needed in the private sector in terms of women inclusion in decision-making and work-life balance. As mentioned by several female professionals in public relations, companies in Greece need to cultivate a family-supportive organizational culture, establish clear work-hour policies, provide a flexible working schedule for mothers, reduce the wages gap between male and female executives, and implement zero tolerance strategies to sexism and gender discrimination. In addition, women need to fight and erase "gender stereotypes" about their abilities even from the minds of their female colleagues by pursuing transformational and pluralistic leadership as well as helping their female subordinates. Moreover, the industry needs to promote female role models to entry-level employees as well as communication and public relations students. Education can also help reduce the stereotypical perceptions regarding female inequality in management and public relations.

The present study has several limitations. First, the sample was small, thus results should be interpreted with care. In addition, most of our respondents had many years of experience in public relations and practitioners from entry-level positions were under-presented. Future research could explore further the issue of age in regard to the status of women public relations professionals in Greece.

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