

T.C.
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
MASTER'S PROGRAM IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

**THE QUEEN BEE PHENOMENON ACROSS THE BALKANS: A
PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF INTRAGENDER DYNAMICS IN THE
WORKPLACE**

MASTER'S THESIS
BELMA KOCHAN

ISTANBUL 2025

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

THE QUEEN BEE PHENOMENON ACROSS THE BALKANS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF INTRAGENDER DYNAMICS IN THE WORKPLACE

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The Queen Bee Phenomenon refers to a behavioral pattern observed in women who have attained managerial positions but distance themselves from other female subordinates. Although these women have fought for their place in high-ranking roles, they may adopt attitudes that reflect male-dominated leadership norms, often resulting in a lack of support or mentorship for other women. This phenomenon has been studied across various fields such as academia, business, law enforcement, and healthcare. While the precise causes of the Queen Bee Phenomenon remain unclear, researchers suggest it stems from the desire of women leaders to gain acceptance within male-dominated environments. Societal and cultural expectations of leadership—often shaped by masculine ideals—may compel female leaders to conform to traditional male leadership styles. This can result in distancing from other women, withholding of support or promotion opportunities, and ultimately, a negative impact on workplace well-being and morale. From a psychological perspective, most participants reported feelings of exclusion and isolation caused by their female managers. These experiences were associated with decreased self-esteem and emotional exhaustion, often leading to symptoms of burnout. In the long term, such conditions may contribute to more serious mental health issues, including anxiety and depression. This study

examined the effects of the Queen Bee Phenomenon on employee well-being and explored possible strategies for addressing the phenomenon without causing harm to organizations or subordinates. The research was conducted through qualitative interviews with 20 female participants from the Balkan region (North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia), all of whom had at least two years of work experience under a female leader.

Keywords: Queen Bee, Well-Being, Leaders, Female Subordinates, Work Environment



ÖZET

BALKANLAR'DA QUEEN BEE FENOMENİ: İŞ YERİNDEKİ CİNSİYET İÇİ DİNAMİKLERİN PSİKOLOJİK BİR İNCELEMESİ

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Queen Bee (Kraliçe Arı) Fenomeni, yönetici pozisyonuna ulaşmış kadınların, kendilerinden daha alt pozisyonlardaki diğer kadın çalışanlardan uzaklaştıkları davranışsal bir örüntüyü ifade eder. Bu kadınlar yüksek statülü roller için mücadele etmiş olsalar da, erkek egemen liderlik normlarını yansıtan tutumlar benimseyebilirler. Bu durum, diğer kadınlara yönelik destek veya mentorluk eksikliğine yol açabilir. Queen Bee Fenomeni, akademi, iş dünyası, kolluk kuvvetleri ve sağlık sektörü gibi çeşitli alanlarda incelenmiştir. Fenomenin kesin nedenleri hâlâ net olmamakla birlikte, araştırmacılar bunun kadın liderlerin erkek egemen ortamlarda kabul görmek istemelerinden kaynaklandığını öne sürmektedir. Toplumsal ve kültürel liderlik beklentileri – genellikle erkeklik normlarıyla şekillenen – kadın liderleri geleneksel erkek liderlik tarzlarını benimsemeye zorlayabilir. Bu durum, kadınların diğer kadınlardan uzaklaşmasına, destek veya terfi imkânlarını sunmamasına ve dolayısıyla iş yerinde iyi olma halinin (well-being) ve moralin olumsuz etkilenmesine neden olabilir.

Psikolojik açıdan bakıldığında, katılımcıların çoğu kadın yöneticileri tarafından dışlandıklarını ve izole edildiklerini hissettiklerini belirtmiştir. Bu deneyimler, benlik saygısında düşüş ve duygusal tükenmişlikle ilişkilendirilmiş; bu da genellikle tükenmişlik belirtilerine yol açmıştır. Uzun vadede ise bu durum, kaygı (anksiyete) ve depresyon gibi daha ciddi psikolojik sorunlara dönüşebilmektedir.

Bu alıřma, Queen Bee Fenomeni'nin alıřanların psikolojik iyi oluřu zerindeki etkilerini incelemiř ve bu olgunun, alıřanlara veya kuruma zarar vermeden nasıl ele alınabileceėine dair stratejik neriler sunmayı amalamıřtır. Arařtırma, kadın liderin altında en az iki yıl alıřma deneyimine sahip olan ve Balkan blgesinden (Kuzey Makedonya, Bosna-Hersek, Sırbistan ve Hırvatistan) gelen 20 kadın katılımcı ile yapılan nitel grüşmeler yoluyla gerekleřtirilmiřtir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kralie Arı, Refah, Liderler, Kadın Astlar, alıřma Ortamı



To my dear parents, whose strength always inspire me.



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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Over time, women have adapted to the work dynamic. This led to, where today we can see a noticeable increase in women in CEO positions. But in this article, we will get to know another view of the dimension that is not so well known to the people, and I believe that we have all faced with the Queen Bee Syndrome. Queen Bee Syndrome is a phenomenon where a woman in a leadership position distinguishes herself from other female subordinates, projects unsupportive behavior or adopts a male management style.

Occurrence is not known and one of the reasons is that this topic is really rare in research. Various theories claim that the formation of queen bee phenomenon begins due to a male-dominated environment. In order for a woman to be accepted in a male-dominated work environment, she begins to accept a male-style view of leadership. Where there is also distancing from other female subordinates. This theory is known as social identity theory (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002 as cited in Derks et al., 216). Other evidence also claims that senior women tend to distance themselves from junior women, the reason being that a senior woman somehow feels threatened for her position. And she believes that "I came to this position with difficulty", so for that reason, the senior woman begins to exhibit negative behaviour towards the junior woman (Derks et al. 2016).

A woman who has the trait of queen bee behavior distances herself from other female subordinates from those who have not yet made, or do not share, the significant personal sacrifices deemed necessary to succeed in male-dominated environments. The study performed in Switzerland and Albania found out that senior women are less willing to help junior women who have not been through similar hardship (Faniko et al., under review as cited in Derks et al. 2016). Even though many research emphasize the occurrence is only met in the male dominated work settings. It has been found female-dominated settings also exhibit patterns of QBS, particularly in fields such as healthcare and nursing (Dellasega, as cited in Wuertele, 2017). In the United States,

the term "Eating the Young" is frequently used to describe a phenomenon in which older nurses display aggressive behaviour toward younger nurses.

Researches are more focused on the occurrence of the queen bee, while on the other side there is no much literature review of the well-being of the queen bee as well as the well-being of the affected female subordinates from the queen bee leader. Derks et al. (2016) stated that the queen bee experienced negative emotions such as: anxiety, anger, and fear. It is believed that this behaviour serves as a defense mechanism for low self-esteem. But female subordinates who are exposed to this behaviour have much more consequences as questioning their self-worth, dissatisfaction.

Also, the company is hit by this type of dynamic because losing a qualified and capable employee represents a significant loss and costly issues for the organization.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main reason for choosing the topic comes from mix of personal interest and the potential contribution for the business filed in the Balkan region. Surprised that this research topic has never been studied in this region even though this concept has been discussed in various international context. This research will bring insight of the queen bee behaviour, even though main focus is whether this queen bee behaviour is present in the Balkan region and the well- being of the female subordinates that are under queen bee female leaders. The purpose of the study is to investigate a more comprehensive picture of Queen Bee Syndrome (QBS) affects female employees' satisfaction, harmony, and well-being at work.

Another goal is to present suggestions that would enable companies to establish more fair and supportive surroundings where every employee, including women, has the chance to grow and advance in their professions.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What kind of gender stereotypes and biases may reinforce Queen Bee behaviours that successful women compete with one another rather than collaborate?
2. In which way Queen Bee behaviours impact the career progression of female employees in the workplace?

3. In which way Queen Bee behaviours of female leader is associated with lower women well-being and experience a higher level of women workplace stress? What kind of interventions may help to overcome such situations?

1.4 Significance of the Study

As mentioned above delving in this topic brings significance for several reasons. First, the main reasons as mentioned above delving to this topic is making fulfilling the literature gap in the Balkan region. Niche topic in the Balkan that for now no one has studied the topic and there is no translation of the concept. This study is significant due to the reason that people will be introduced with the concept of the queen bee behaviour. This research is design in that manner for giving deep insights of the understanding the queen bee as concept as well as possible occurrence. This study will be focused on the well-being of the female subordinates affected by queen bee leader if it's present in this region. Additionally, this research aims to provide possible strategies for overcoming the consequences of the queen bee on the behalf for both the female subordinates and the organization.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Leadership

The contemporary perspective on leadership places a high value on establishing a balance between relational and innovative components. These days, a leader's job in an organization is to inspire, encourage people, provide innovative chances, and be flexible in response to developments that will benefit the business.

Moreover, the functions of manager have been changed. Contemporary managers are primarily responsible for strategic planning, resource allocation, and ensuring functional effectiveness (Marijanovic,2024). A manager's daily responsibilities include identifying effective strategic pathways to achieve organizational goals. On this path, the manager focuses on providing adequate resources, organizing the team, and assigning clear tasks to each team member to facilitate smooth and successful goal attainment. (Sikavica, Bahtijarević-Šiber, Pološki Vokić as cited in Marjanovic 2024) Shortly, contemporary management focuses on human resources, finance, innovations, and changes for competitive advantages. (Gracan, 2016)

A good leader represents someone who cultivates an organization that motivates employees, cultivates respect, and builds trust. However, the queen bee phenomenon implicit of creating a dysfunctional work environment where employees are prevented from advancing to higher positions (Bennis & Nanus as cited in Wuertele, 2017).

2.1.1 Organizational management. Management represents an instrument for leading people. There is broader definition of management in which they describe a manager as a role model that accomplish organizational goals, in effective ways, efficiency planning, organization, leading and controlling organizational resources. We can define management as:

Process: achieving Goals Corporation with the others in dynamic environment with limited resources.

Skill: Management represents the skill of successfully performing managerial roles and functions.

Scientific Discipline: Management is recognised as a scientific discipline that is systematically studied and researched.

Profession: Managers are professionals responsible for directing and guiding individuals toward the collective attainment of organizational objectives.

Organizational Role: Management functions as an activity performed within the broader framework of various organizational processes and functions (Sikavica, Bahtijarević-Šiber, Pološki Vokić 2008 as cited in Cosic 2023).

Management experts highlights two main categories of skill that one manager should possess : core managerial skill and specific managerial skills (Rosić, 2018 as cited in Cosic 2023).

Moreover, a successful manager must possess a variety of core competencies, as their role entails formulating solutions that fit an organization and are repeatable (Trstenjak & Kukovec, 2018 as cited in Cosic 2023). Strategic thinking is one of the most important attributes of an effective manager as it helps them focus on essentials across diverse situations. Today, it is evident that communication skills are among the most vital attributes a manager must possess. We can describe a good leadership style in terms of someone who possesses effective communication skills, encourages collaboration among subordinates, enhances motivation, and highlights the value of interpersonal relationships. In order one organization to promote positive harmony within the organization the key is the communication. In summary, without communication, nothing is possible. According to this we have to highlight the definition of contemporary management states: *“Management is, therefore, the process of achieving organizational purpose and objectives in an efficient and effective manner through the integration and coordination of limited human, material, financial, and informational resources by applying the functions of planning, organizing, human resource management, leading, and controlling.”* (Cosic, 2023;Rupčić as cited in Botak,2021)

’“Managers are people who do things right
and leaders are people who do the right thing”
(Bennis & Nanus 2007 cited in Wuertele 2017)

2.1.2 Woman in management. Women have fought for their place in society. It can be said that their intellectual potential was recognized, and as a result, there are two specific waves in the history of women's involvement in management. The first wave began ten years after World War II and lasted until the late 1980s. During this period, women adapted to a model where they adopted male leadership styles and ways of thinking. The second wave began in the early 1990s. During this period, it is marked by an emergence of a significant transformation in leadership style. Women began to develop their own authentic style of leadership, illustrating their capacity to adjust to rapid changes and achieve goals in a more innovative manner (Gracan, 2016; Cosic, 2023).

Organizations that encourage the career development of competent and capable women benefit from having the greatest leaders in high positions who blend the skills and expertise of both men and women. The development of female role models within the organization is yet another crucial benefit. Successful women not only inspire their staff by setting a good example, but they also send a positive message to their female clients, who will see the company as one that encourages competent women to succeed (Gracan, 2016). Even though women have fought for their position, and by the enormous research based on the effectiveness of women as leaders has shown that many women display effective leadership skills that are aligned with the modern view of leadership style. Unfortunately, women still experience struggles achieving the higher positions within organizations, which means although advocacy for gender equality has contributed to progress, deep-rooted biases remain. One dominant belief is that women struggle to blend into male-dominated corporate groups. Prejudice toward female leaders highlight a common scholarly perspective that women are often perceived as incongruent with leadership roles. This perspective advises that bias against female leaders appears from the nonalignment between gender stereotypes and leadership expectations. The deep-rooted social norms that associate leadership with traditionally masculine traits, boost the belief that men should occupy positions of authority, while women are expected to fulfil nurturing roles (Baloch et al. 2021). Goldberg (1968) conducted an experiment known as the Goldberg paradigm. Goldberg asked participants to rate identical resumes of candidates. One group was rated as belonging to male candidates, while the other group was rated as belonging to female candidates. The findings demonstrated and confirmed the discrimination that women face in the professional environment. Although participants were given

identical resumes, they were more likely to choose the male candidate, all of which highlights the impact of gender bias in hiring decisions. (Hoyt, 2017)

Botak (2021) states that because of these social norms that people believe and act on, women cannot excel in their careers because they believe that the primary responsibility is the family.

These deeply rooted stereotypes contribute to preventing women from advancing to leadership positions.

2.1.3 Leadership styles. Throughout human evolution, men and women have had specific duties assigned to them. While men were in charge of hunting, women were responsible for household tasks. This early division of labor contributed to having a great influence on the development of the human body, where it created men to be physically stronger and bigger in order to enable them to have better hunting skills and defense. According to that, male brain has evolved to support these duties and tasks. While on the other hand, the female brain is designed to support caregiving responsibilities. It is well-grounded that male and female brains differ in terms of information processing, meaning that they exhibit different patterns in thinking, perception, beliefs, behaviour, and priorities.

The study showed that although the male brain is larger, the female brain has more neurons in certain areas. This leads to the female brain having faster communication or information flow between the two hemispheres: the left hemisphere (responsible for logical functions) and the right hemisphere (responsible for visual functions), which allows women to be capable of multitasking (Cosic, 2023).

The difference in leadership style between women and men can be categorized into three categories: work, biological, and psychological (Sikavica, Bahtijarević-Šiber, Pološki Vokić 2008; Cosic 2023).

A) Psychological Differences:

This category includes points of how childhood experiences and genetic influences shape a person's personality. While women are obligated for being dominant when giving advice, assisting, and interacting with others, on the other hand, men are dominant when it comes to spatial tasks. As society describes men and women, the softer personal characteristics are most often attributed to women. Women are considered to be more empathetic; women

are described as being more sensitive, dependent, and nurturing. While on the hand, men are given slightly stronger attributes. Personal characteristic with which a man is associated are autonomy, self-confidence, and perseverance.

During the upbringing process, boys are directed toward independence, activity, and assertiveness, while girls are more often encouraged toward empathy, sensitivity, and compliance. (Sikavica, Bahtijarević-Šiber, Pološki Vokić, 2008 cited in Cosic 2023)

B) Biological Characteristics:

Biological characteristics play a crucial role in differentiating leadership styles between men and women. As mentioned, the female brain's remarkable ability is to connect information between the two hemispheres and that results in greater emotional intelligence, which facilitates better reading of emotions and understanding of non-verbal cues. (Sikavica, Bahtijarević-Šiber, Pološki Vokić, 2008 cited in Cosic 2023).

C) Work-Related Characteristics:

This category includes approaches to work, working styles, and decision-making processes.

1. Work style

In this context the main difference the way of preference of working style is that women prefers working together or teams, while men prefer individuality.

2. Work orientation.

In this context, we can observe in women they strive for open communication with their team members, they believe that the key for organizational success is the interpersonal relationships. While man, they are more focused on results and achievements.

3. Source of motivation.

Women strive for engaging for gaining more positive interpersonal relationships, helping others. On the other hand for the men the only source of motivation is coming from financial rewards and status.

4. Communication style

As per usual, we have different point of view how we perceive the communication. Women believe that building good relationships with

subordinates its crucial for work as well as understanding. While men typically their conversations are based on solving problems and giving instructions.

5. Relationship with colleagues

As we have seen from the previous paragraphs this interaction among the subordinates it is important part for the female because they believe that's how one healthy work environment is build. On the other hand, men often communicate in terms of like networking or sharing task-related information.

6. Decision-Making Approach

Women tend to rely on their intuition while men tend to rely on rational decisions.

7. Negotiation Approach

Women tend to decide where all of the parties will be satisfied. While men focus more on bringing the best possible outcome for their own self despite of it's at someone else's expenses.

8. Attitude towards Mistakes:

Women tend to receive in an easier way. They accept the mistake as a learning journey. While men face it with difficulties (Sikavica, Bahtijarević-Šiber, Pološki Vokić cited in Cosic, 2023)

Transformational leadership style compared to men, which can be beneficial in organizations with less rigid hierarchical structures (Botak, 2021).

There is another study that confirmed that women tend to rely on transformational style more than man. While man tend to be transactional leader. Transformational leadership involves inspiring others, promoting the development of subordinates, and motivating them to advance. It corresponds with transactional leadership in that both prefer a reward-based incentive system to encourage performance. However, transformational leaders go beyond mere transactions by focusing on vision, motivation, and personal growth (Hoyt,2017).

On the managerial approaches end, the leadership styles can generally be divided into masculine and feminine. The feminine managerial style is a modern approach to leadership that focuses on building strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues, facilitating the sharing of information, and encouraging collaboration. Finally, this leadership type focuses on ensuring a psychologically safe workplace, where team members feel they belong to the organization. Men are still perceived as passive

listeners; women, on the other hand, are often known for their high patience and speaking attentiveness, as well as emotional intelligence.

On the other hand, the masculine leadership style is fundamentally different from the feminine style and is generally perceived to be more forceful and uncompromising. It is characterized by traits that encompass strength, boldness, objectivity, skilfulness, confidence, aggressiveness, logical analysis, and decisiveness (Poloski, 2003; Rupcic, 2018 cited in Botak, 2021).

Fundamentally, an effective manager will be required to adopt attributes from both leadership styles, striking a balance between emotional intelligence and decisiveness. Over-emotional involvement in decision-making, for instance, interferes with the ability of a manager to assert authority and make logical, strategic choices. (Botak, 2021).

2.2 Queen Bee Behavior

The Queen Bee Phenomenon was introduced by Staines, Tavris, and Jayaratne in 1974. Queen Bee Phenomenon represents behavioural pattern which is characterized by a woman leader in male-dominated environments exhibit prevention for advancing of another woman.

The most obvious way in which women aspiring to achieve leader positions may try to fit in male-dominated organizations is by emphasizing what they see as masculine characteristics and leadership styles. Because stereotypes about the characteristics of successful leaders (i.e., agentic qualities) and the gender roles of women (i.e., communal qualities) are incongruent, women are at a disadvantage to achieve leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002 as cited Wuertele 2017). Although the initial definition of queen bee syndrome (QBS) often refers to its occurrence in male-dominated environments, it is important to note that today, female-dominated settings also exhibit patterns of queen bee phenomenon, particularly in fields such as healthcare and nursing (Dellasega, as cited in Wuertele,2017) In the United States, the term "Eating the Young" is frequently used to describe a phenomenon in which older nurses display aggressive behaviour toward younger nurses. There are three main explanations for this behaviour:

1. Fear of being replaced
2. Jealousy, driven by the need to outperform others

3. Resentment stemming from personal dissatisfaction, including the stress and challenges associated with nursing, such as long working hours, unfair pay, and heavy workloads.

Additionally, one of the reasons that female in top position distance themselves from other subordinate they are afraid of being replaced, characterized by withholding knowledge, and sabotage the advancement for other subordinates (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011)

These combined factors can contribute to increased stress, which may manifest as aggressive behaviour (Dellasega, as cited in Wuertele, 2017).

One article compares women leaders exhibiting queen bee characteristics to the "mean girl" commonly associated with school settings. With the presence of the queen bee behaviour in the organization result in lack of support for female subordinates which leads to negative impact on the career development and the overall functioning and culture of the organization (Derks et al. cited in Wuertele, 2017).

Women have faced with various life challenges as achieving equal pay and opportunities. Women were faced for the need to compete in order to be recognized and advancement in the workplace. In this reason, in the way of proving themselves, proving their capabilities, women display masculine characteristics in the organization. This ongoing struggle, foster aggressive behaviours as women navigate the barriers to leadership roles. The concept of leadership is often framed by cultural norms, and the "queen bee" phenomenon reflects this dynamic. A queen bee leader may adopt behaviors traditionally associated with the view that one leader has to show masculinity in order to gain acceptance and assert her authority. Adopting of masculine traits have negative effects, particularly when such leaders distance themselves from other women in the organization. This distancing is often driven by the belief that dissociating from female colleagues will strengthen their own position, believing that: "I am different from the rest." While such behaviour may be perceived as a good strategy to keep your own position, unfortunately, it has negative impact of the workplace harmony (Baykal et al. 2020).

Achieving personal excellence is a desire that everyone wants to achieve, however if an employee does not receive adequate support and felt threatened problems arise. As mentioned previously, current leadership is focused on emphasizing team-work collaboration, equity, and harmony among team members (Cosic 2023; Botak 2021). Unfortunately, the queen bee phenomenon impairs these

values, the behavior leads to unwanted effects such as: increased turn overs, diminished well-being, employee burnout and dissatisfaction. (Baykal et al. 2020).

The influences of queen bee behaviour we can witness in scenarios where female subordinates want to advance in the company, but the queen bee does not allow it because it sets unclear or unattainable expectations. Most often, female subordinates blame themselves for the impossibility of completing a task successfully. Also, this view of dynamics creates a dysfunctional work environment because employees struggle with unclear given directions, which can lead to increased workplace stress and dissatisfaction (Baykal et al. 2020).

Queen Bee leaders tend to prioritize their personal growth ahead of those of their team, sometimes at the cost of the latter, which creates a climate of sabotage and undermines group progress. This disadvantage makes women at a disadvantage in achieving leadership positions. Studies suggest that women try to resolve these contradictory demands by emphasizing characteristics associated with career success, which are stereotypically associated with men (Derks et al. (2011). For instance, the study conducted by Ellemers et al. (2004) showed that senior female faculty in Italy described themselves as equally or more masculine than their male peers. In the Netherlands, female board members described themselves as more status-oriented, a stereotypically masculine characteristic, than female controls and male counterparts (Lückerath-Rovers et al. as cited in Derks et al.2016). Similar results have been found among senior policewomen and women leaders in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Albania. These findings highlight the need for women to recognize and address the gender roles and stereotypes that hinder their success in leadership roles (Derks et al., 2011).

Distancing themselves from other women is a second way that women can enhance their own possibilities in male-dominated enterprises. For instance, in the research conducted they discovered that female leaders had a greater sense of ambition and dedication to their careers compared to their female subordinates, but not their male counterparts (Derks, Ellemers et al., 2011; Faniko et al., under review as cited in Deks et al.,2016) According to Derks, et al. (2011) women who have succeeded in environments that exhibit gender bias also frequently perceive themselves as being extremely different from other women. They perceive themselves as significantly more masculine than other women, in addition to projecting a stereotypically male image (Faniko et al., under review as cited in Derks et al., 2016). Research in male-

dominated law firms supported these findings by demonstrating that junior women indeed perceived women associate as distancing themselves from their gender identity (Ely, as cited in Derks et al., 2016).

According to Ellemers et al. (2016) stated that senior women have tendency to isolate themselves from other junior subordinates, because they view themselves as more masculine and more career oriented. Interestingly, they do not distance from women of equal rank. One of the main objectives of studying the queen bee phenomenon is to show that this reaction is created in workplaces where women are undervalued and negatively stereotyped, rather than being a normal result of women's personalities or innate competition toward other women.

Individuals base their identity on their gender, according to Tajfel and Turner's (as cited in Derks et al. 2016) social identity theory. Members of marginalized groups are inclined to believe that the normal traits of their group are not respected or significant when they are in a minority position.

Therefore, women's identity is endangered when they encounter the low proportion of women in management, preconceptions of women as unfit leaders, or salary disparities at work. However, people are frequently quite robust in controlling a threatened identity rather than passively perceiving this social identity danger (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002 as cited in Derks et al. 2016).

The social identity viewpoint describes many methods that people might employ to achieve this goal and makes a distinction between individual and group coping mechanisms. Collective-level tactics strengthen the group's overall standing, which lessens identity danger. Reevaluating current group traits ("social creativity") or attempting to enhance group-level results ("social change") can both enhance perceptions of the group's status (Derks et al. 2016).

Studies demonstrating greater queen bee reactions among women in male-dominated environments provided preliminary evidence for the association between work environments that jeopardize social identity and queen bee responses. One of the earliest research on this subject, for example, measured queen bee reactions across two generations of Italian female university professors in order to investigate this connection (Ellemers et al., 2004). The argument was that since older women (born between 1921 and 1949) sought academic careers at a period when this was unusual for women, they probably developed a male self-description and separated from other women in order to succeed in their careers. In fact, the findings showed that older

women had stronger queen bee responses than younger women: older faculty members portrayed themselves as more masculine than younger faculty members, and they reported more stereotypical views of lower career commitment among their female doctoral students than male doctoral students (Ellemers et al., 2004)

Sealy (as cited in Derks et al. 2015) discusses how queen bee responses are influenced by the perceived permeability of the rank hierarchy. During their early careers, successful female directors in investment banks claimed to have adopted masculine behaviours in an attempt to attain individual mobility. However, they later abandoned this strategy after realizing that the promotion system lacked permeability and meritocracy, making this individual mobility strategy ineffective. The unwillingness to assist other woman due to the influence of identity-related has been measured in other studies. Study conducted by Duguid (as cited in Derks et al. 2015) studied the issue of identity-related threats when women act in reluctance way to other women in achieving success.

The influence of identity-related dangers in senior women's unwillingness to assist other women in achieving success has also been measured more precisely in other studies. The study found that the less women are in the male dominated workplace settings, they were less likely to choose a female candidate. From this we can understand that there two kinds of threats: competition threat and collective threat from the competition threat it refers that women would not choose female subordinate. On the other hand, collective threat appears when a female assumes that with choosing female subordinate it directly threatens own performance (Baykal et al. 2020)

Ellemers et al. (2011), conducted two research studies and the results highlighted that queen bee phenomenon is not inevitable reaction of woman from high hierarchy. Rather, it is especially stimulated in workplaces where unfavourable stereotypes and gender discrimination pose a danger to women's social identities. Ellemers et al. (2012) identified an additional factor contributing to women distancing themselves from other women. The study found that women exhibiting queen bee behaviour often distance themselves from those who have not yet made, or do not share, the significant personal sacrifices deemed necessary to succeed in male-dominated environments. The study performed in Switzerland and Albania found out that senior women are less willing to help junior women who have not been through similar hardship. The greater a woman's belief that she has made substantial sacrifices for her career, the less likely she is to provide support to female subordinates. (Faniko et al., 2017).

In the Balkans, there is a well-known proverb: “You are who you associate with.” Consequently, individuals often aspire to align themselves with more prestigious social circles, selecting companions who elevate their social image. However, the most concerning line appears when this desire leads to artificial attempts at losing one's identity. People begin to suppress or alter their authentic selves in pursuit of broader acceptance. Today, women are expected to adjust to a mold that is, paradoxically, shaped by cultural norms derived by women themselves. They are required to fulfil multiple roles: the dutiful daughter, nurturing mother, devoted wife, and, increasingly, the successful professional. The constant pressure to excel in all spheres of life in order to gain cultural approval often offers little substantive reward. Recognition from society does not provide support when one reaches the brink of emotional exhaustion.

This phenomenon is connected to the concept of queen bee syndrome. Many researches have come to the conclusion, through their research studies, that a woman wants to identify with a dominant group where she begins to adopt their behaviour mold in order to be accepted. Derks et al. (2011) once explained that the reason for the occurrence of this kind of behaviour is due to the social identity threat. Derks et al. (2016) explains that if a woman is in a discriminatory work environment, her social identity threat feels threatened, and for this reason she begins to distinguish herself from other female coworkers so as not to be judged through the lens of gender stereotypes. According to that scheme women most often adopt masculine leadership characteristics, in order to show themselves in the light that they are career oriented, rational, and unemotional. Another significant factor contributing to queen bee syndrome is the pressure women face to gain acceptance from their colleagues and establish themselves as competent leaders. As we have mentioned before women tend to adopt traditionally masculine traits. Men, comparing to women are perceived as better decision-makers, more rational, and more capable, while women are viewed as less competent, overly emotional, and possessing characteristics unsuitable for leadership roles (Grangeiro et al. 2023). Working in the heightened discriminative work environment, female leaders exhibit behaviors such as distancing themselves from other colleagues, particularly female. With distancing herself she is fostering lack of support for growth, and toxic work environments which leads to burnout among the female employees. Ely (as cited in Derks et al. 2016) conducted a study in law firms with point of view of junior women, where she derives the result that junior woman

would describe senior woman as adopting masculine traits, and disconnected from them, and perceiving them as poor role models. The similar results, research study conducted in Netherlands showed that senior woman described themselves as more masculine and career-oriented, emphasizing their distinction from other women (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011). Further highlighted that female leaders tend to be more critical of female employees compared to male employees. They often perceive female subordinates as less qualified and are less willing to support their career advancement. (Dobson & Iredale, 2006 as cited Baykal et al. 2020)

Gini (as cited in Johnson & Mathur Helm, 2011), explained that occurrence of this of pattern it is among female leaders to align with male colleagues, resulting in greater support and promotion opportunities. For instance, women who were close to receiving promotions have reported being blocked by their female leaders, who either halted critical projects or provided negative references to prevent their advancement (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011).

Further research by Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) found that women in senior positions often took significantly longer to achieve their roles and were primarily mentored by men rather than women. A study of Australian women executives (Rindfleisch, as cited in Johnson & Mathur Helm, 2011) showed that women more often compete rather support each other. Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) agreed that senior women perceive other women as a threat, particularly with the ones that might outperform them. This fear triggers self-serving behaviors, such as withholding opportunities and actively preventing other women's advancement.

Moreover, they justify these actions by believing that since they have struggled by achieving their goals and position, they do believe that junior women should go through the same way in order to advance within the organization.

The reasons for dysfunctional behaviour significantly vary, and everyone has same chance of becoming the victim (Lewis et al. as cited in Agarwal, 2016).

The characteristics of dysfunctional behavior are jealousy, insecurity and the need for power and control (Namie & Namie; Österman as cited in Agarwal, 2016))

Additionally, researcher found out that the possible reason for projecting negative behaviors, it's because the woman leaders wants to display an image of being strict, resilient, and tough. (Gini, as cited in Johnson and Mathur-Helm, 2011).

2.2.1 Well-being. In contrast to traditional gender roles, women are now significantly more represented in leadership positions and across a wide range of industries in the global professional landscape (Sarwar and Imran, 2019; Hornak, Murphy, & Johnson, 2016). Although this changing presence is a sign of advancement, it also adds to and intensifies the pressures already present in contemporary workplaces. All workers may encounter demands at work, but because of a combination of social, familial, and professional expectations, women frequently shoulder a disproportionate amount of the load (Jindal, 2016; Kristina, 2008; Karyotaki et al., 2020; Opie & Henn, 2018; Reich & Nussbaum, 1994). The ubiquitous, but frequently unseen, work of juggling several responsibilities is a major source of stress for many working women. In contrast to men, women often manage the equivalent of two full-time jobs, juggling professional careers with long-term caregiving, childcare, and elder care duties (Jindal, 2016; Kristina, 2008; Opie & Henn, 2018; Reich & Nussbaum, 1994; Abdou, 2024; Greenhaus & Singh, 2004; Michel et al., 2010; Repetti & Wang, 2017; Humanoo, 2025). (Jindal, 2016; Kristina, 2008; Karyotaki et al., 2020; Opie & Henn, 2018; Melchior et al., 2007; Herserentity, 2025; Humanoo, 2025; Egon Zehnder, 2024) This structural inequality creates a baseline of chronic stress and emotional exhaustion, which exacerbates any secondary workplace pressures and makes women especially susceptible to negative psychological outcomes.

Women experience work-related stress differently than men, which is characterized as an unfavourable response to excessive demands (Kristina & Stephen, 2015; Reich & Nussbaum, 1994; Kristina, 2008). Studies consistently show that women experience more stress than men, a difference that is frequently explained by the dual burden mentioned above as well as encounters with discrimination and stereotyping (Jindal, 2016; Kristina, 2008; Karyotaki et al., 2020; Kristina & Stephen, 2015; Herserentity, 2025; ResearchGate, 2025). The psychological effects are widespread and include increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout, all of which are closely linked to the demands of their jobs (Karyotaki et al., 2020; Melchior et al., 2007; Stutts et al., 2018; Herserentity, 2025; Humanoo, 2025; Egon Zehnder, 2024). Chronic stress can seriously affect focus, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships both inside and outside of the workplace, especially when people feel

overburdened or underappreciated (Karyotaki et al., 2020; Melchior et al., 2007; Repetti & Wang, 2017; BetterHelp, 2024; NHS, 2024).

Stress derives from Selye (1975), describe as a biological response to environmental challenges. While mild stress is adoptable, on the other hand exposure to severe or chronic stress results in psychological distress, that results in physical and emotional symptoms.

Physical stress is characterized as muscular tension, tachycardia, sweating, nausea, jaw tightening, while psychological symptoms include depression, anxiety, insomnia, reduced self-worth, emotional sensitivity, and interpersonal difficulties (Lipp 2003).

Workplace stress represents sequences of negative psychological, physiological and behavioral reactions to situations in which contribution of high job demands overwhelm the worker's abilities, resources or needs.

(Sauter i Murphy, 1999 cited in Kovac et al. 2005).

Although stress can be caused by many reasons, it is primarily categorized in the following

1. The source of work: if the employee finds himself in a situation where his work becomes routine or the content of his work becomes monotonous.
2. The amount of work
3. Work hours: flexible or non-flexible time, overstay at work, low shift organizations.
4. The small amount of opportunities for decision making.
5. Lack of career advancement
6. The continuous solving problems of others within the organization.
7. Interpersonal relationships where they belong, weak communication among the subordinates, weak support system, mobbing, isolation, loneliness.
8. Organizational climate among the relationship between the manager and employee.
9. Balance of work and personal life.

As mentioned above, when an employee finds herself for not achieving balance at work it leads to several consequences .When women balance multiple roles as wives or mothers, it can be especially difficult to maintain emotional balance and close relationships. This ongoing psychological burden often spills over into personal life (Jindal, 2016; Kristina, 2008; Opie & Henn, 2018; Reich & Nussbaum, 1994; Abdou,

2024; Greenhaus & Singh, 2004; Michel et al., 2010; Repetti & Wang, 2017; Humanoo, 2025). This burden is further compounded by the “invisible labour” of emotional management and unacknowledged service tasks, which take time and energy away from career advancement and contribute to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, even among high-achieving women (Meza-Mejia et al., 2023; Dickinson, 2024; Clance & Imes, 1978; Stipek, 2002).

In this complex framework, the 'Queen Bee' phenomenon becomes a prominent, if frequently misinterpreted, gendered phenomenon. Often characterized by harsher treatment, active obstruction of advancement, and intentional distancing, this syndrome describes antagonistic behaviour displayed by women in leadership toward female subordinates (Staines, Tavis, & Jayaratne, 1974; Narcikara, 2018; Achhnani & Gupta, 2022; Faniko, Ellemers, & Derks, 2021; LevaApp, 2024; TWFHK, 2023). Importantly, the Queen Bee phenomenon is now reframed in academic discourse as a reactive reaction to systemic gender discrimination and social identity threat that are common in male-dominated organizational environments, rather than as a fundamental weakness in female leadership or the root cause of gender inequality (Faniko, Ellemers, & Derks, 2021; TWFHK, 2023; Derks et al., 2016; LevaApp, 2024; AB Academies, 2019). This change in viewpoint, which shifts the analytical focus from personal responsibility to the underlying organizational and cultural biases that encourage such behaviours, is crucial. The complexity of the Queen Bee phenomenon's manifestation within organizational psychology becomes clearer when one views it as a coping mechanism or adaptive strategy, even if it is ultimately harmful. By encouraging an environment of distrust and rivalry rather than cooperation and support amongst one another, this phenomenon greatly weakens female solidarity (TWFHK, 2023; Achhnani & Gupta, 2022; Narcikara, 2018).

According to Meier et al. (2014) signifies how interpersonal conflict at work functions as a key stressor that has significant impact for both psychological and physical well-being. Most important finding is that identifies depressive symptoms.

Relationship conflicts at workplaces as personal tension, disrespect, and interpersonal rejection are one of the significant threats for damaging well-being due to threaten of the fundamental human needs such as belonging and acceptance. In overall this social stressors are linked with: depressive mood, reduced job satisfaction and increased somatic complaints such as : gastrointestinal issues, headaches ectra. Additionally, as this study implies that individuals with higher levels of

depressive symptoms are more vulnerable to the negative effects of conflicts. Furthermore, this statement is supported by several theoretical explanations:

1. Appraisal theory: individual with heightened depressive symptoms are more prone to interpret conflict as a threat because of their low self worth, dependency, and fear of rejection.
2. Cognitive biases: individuals with sad moods tend to focus more on negative aspect, receive it in more personally and recall conflicts more vividly.
3. Poor coping skills: Depressed individuals exhibit poor coping skills.
4. Rumination: tendency to be reserved on negative vents deepens psychological and physiological harm.

According to Harvey and Fernandes et al. (2002), stated that emotional suffering or psychological distress is characterized by non-psychotic symptoms as: insomnia, forgetfulness, irritability, combined with somatic complaints such as headaches and stomach pain, are result of psychosocial environment of work. Fernandes et al. (2002) in his study discovered that 30,7% of the participants had minor psychological disorders, most common in the following occupations: teachers, IT workers, or health professionals (cited in Bezerra et al. 2016)

A “culture of silence” around these issues is perpetuated by the lack of specific terminology for such behaviours in some cultural contexts, such as the Balkan region, which makes it more difficult to recognize and address them (Zhang, 2020).

This study attempts to thoroughly investigate the causes, expressions, and outcomes of “Queen Bee” behaviours in modern organizational contexts, with an emphasis on the psychological effects they have on women who are balancing several roles. The study aims to determine the ways in which institutional stereotypes and gender norms contribute to the development and maintenance of Queen Bee dynamics, examine women's psychological reactions and identity-building processes in these gendered workplaces, and characterize the distinct patterns of Queen Bee behaviours, including exclusionary competitiveness, distant leadership, and avoidance of support. Additionally, it seeks to assess how these behaviours affect the psychological health and professional development of female employees, as well as the general atmosphere of the company, both directly and indirectly. The study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the Queen Bee phenomenon by examining the role of

cultural context and the fragility of female solidarity. This understanding acknowledges the phenomenon's roots in systemic inequalities and its intricate interaction with individual psychological experiences (Faniko, Ellemers, & Derks, 2021; LevaApp, 2024; AB Academies, 2019).

This study's importance stems from its ability to address the enduring issue of gender inequality in leadership and advance more just and encouraging work environments. Women still encounter particular obstacles and systemic biases in the workplace, such as the widespread “glass ceiling” and “sticky floor” effects that prevent them from rising to senior positions, despite growing awareness and efforts towards gender equality (Hornak, Murphy, & Johnson, 2016; Meza-Mejia et al., 2023; McKinsey, 2022). This study examines the paradoxical reality that successful women may unintentionally add to the difficulties faced by their female subordinates, frequently in response to their own experiences of discrimination, challenging the oversimplified notion that women in positions of authority will automatically support other women (Faniko, Ellemers, & Derks, 2021; AB Academies, 2019). The study illuminates a commonly disregarded internal obstacle to women's advancement by empirically investigating these intra-gender dynamics. Additionally, it draws attention to the significant psychological costs suffered by female workers as a result of Queen Bee behaviours and the larger gendered workplace culture, such as stress, burnout, and a decline in self-esteem. The study highlights the critical need for interventions that promote psychological safety and supportive work cultures by describing these effects. In the end, the results will guide policy and practice, supporting systemic and cultural changes that go beyond “fixing” women to tearing down the deeply embedded barriers that limit their professional experiences and feed these harmful cycles. Examples of these changes include focused leadership training, organized mentorship programs, and work-life balance policies (AB Academies, 2019; Speexx, 2024; Humanoo, 2025; Luca, 2025).

The Queen Bee has legitimized gender inequality in the workplace, leading some to blame women for poor performance. According to Derks, et al. (2016), the media perpetuates the myth that women are catty and unable to collaborate, blaming the problem on female competitiveness rather than the system itself. The consequences of these behaviours are affecting both the perpetrator and the victim. According to Xiong et al. (2022) female managers perceive happiness, however queen bee who isolates herself from her work environment and refrains from identifying with other women

sacrifices the psychological benefits that identification and solidarity with other women might provide. According to Derks et al. (2016), such isolation can result in decreased emotional support and a lack of psychological resources, which are often gained through interpersonal connections. Current studies indicate that queen bee that engages in this kind of behaviour may experience negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and fear. These feelings are often linked with poor self-esteem and emotional instability, which can cause the Queen Bee to behave defensively. Such responses may result in problematic workplace environment (Dellasega, as cited in Wuertele 2017).

The consequences are more severe for female subordinates. Since the queen bee prevents them from moving up for higher position within the organization, one of the primary consequences is a decline in their self-confidence. Additionally, it has negative impact on the persons' career advancement, this "sabotage" increases turnover rates. Shortly, individual career advancement and perceived opportunities of success might be negatively influenced by the presence of a Queen Bee.

According to Derks et al. (2016), the characteristics of queen bee managers are giving harsh criticism and negative feedback, distancing themselves from other female subordinates. Consequences for subordinates is reduces self-esteem which correlates to poor productivity. Being exposed to bias, particularly Queen Bee behaviour, is highly distressing because it requires people to confront a false view of themselves. This encounter frequently elicits intense sentiments of hatred, confusion, and even emotional retreat.

Employees face considerable psychological and emotional suffering as a result of the Queen Bee's stereotypes, harassment, and bullying. This can show as harmful levels of stress, decreased productivity, burnout, anxiety attacks, and, in severe circumstances, victims may suffer long-term consequences. The harm can be so severe that some people may be caught in the victim role, unable to fully heal no matter where they go or what they do (Dellasega, 2005, p. 58 as cited in Wuertele 2017).

The Queen Bee phenomenon also helps to maintain and legitimize gender inequality in organizations on a societal level. It strengthens the belief that individual behaviours, are the problem, giving women the impression that they are to blame for their own poorer results. This story is frequently reinforced by popular media, which describe women as naturally competitive and unable to work well with others. This supports the idea that the Queen Bee Syndrome is mostly caused by female rivalry rather than systemic injustices (Derks et al. as cited in Wuertele, 2017).

2.2.2 Implication strategies. The implications of these findings are crucial to understanding the broader impact of the queen bee phenomenon within organizational culture. As long as such behaviour are not detected it leads to creating an undesirable work environment where collaboration within the employees and leader as well as support is replaced by competition. If an organization is experiencing the traits of queen bee, it is recommended to take mentoring programs, to put an emphasis on communication. Every organization should thrive to create a work culture where women are directed to support each other, the opportunity for mutual growth and team work.

The queen bee phenomenon limits companies' ability to actually reap the benefits of gender diversity because when women feel that they need to adjust themselves to the masculine organizational culture in order to be accepted, they are unlikely to add a diverse perspective. Furthermore, queen bees have a negative impact on the diversity climate because they signal to junior women that in order to be accepted, they must downplay their gender, potentially leading to even higher turnover rates among women in companies with queen bees in management than companies without female leaders (Baykal et al. 2020).

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research design in form of interviews is used for this study. The reason why we have decided to be in the form of qualitative is due to the catching the deep insights in terms of psychological and organizational effect experienced by female subordinates under woman supervision. After transcribing the interviews in written form, the data were imported into MAXQDA. MAXQDA is a software that is used for analyzing qualitative data (Kuckartz & Radiker, 2019)

Each of the interviews have been analyzed and each statement was coded. After the codes were generated, the codes were grouped in themes that represented patterns within the data.

3.2 Participants

For this study in total 20 female participants that have 2- year work experience under female manager were in study. Participants were from Balkan region: North Macedonia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia and Croatia.

Most of the subjects they were 34 years old which make 15, 8% of the population used for the study. Most of the participants by the level of education the most were with university degree 57.9%. According to the education data most of the participants 57.9% hold university diploma, while 10.5% of the sample population have PhD. Additionally, most of the sample population 36.8% answer that the field or department that they are working is Human Resources/Administrative Affairs/Industrial Relation/Personal Affairs production, while least represented is the field of fashion industry that make only 5.3% of the population size. The most respond for position/title is the Specialist/ Senior Specialist 31.6%. Moreover, most of the population size 21, 1% responded that company's industry is education/ consulting. Marking that most of the company that participants are working for 47.4% responded

private. As mentioned above this research was based on the Balkan region, according to that five participants of each country were picked for conducting the interview.

3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews done via online platform google meet. Interviews questions were based on measuring stereotypes, career and well-being of their own experience. Before the start of the interview each participant was obtained with the informed consent and short debrief of the definition of the queen bee, provided with example of queen bee behaviour. The interviews were voice recorded and deleted after written transcript.

The survey contained 3 parts questions about stereotypes there were in total 6 questions. Second part questions were demonstrating career where in total are 4 questions. And the last part includes the question of well-being with 3 questions. Each interview was under the time limitation of 30 minutes. Due to the decision for conducting research via interviews no need of permission of scales were needed.

3.3.1 Data collection procedures. Starting with the obtaining data, started immediate after receiving ethical approval from the university's ethics committee. Each participant was obtained with the informed consent where it was explained what they will expect. In the consent form were information about the reasons for conducting this type of research, the definition of the term queen bee; informed that the interviews will be voice recorded until written transcript. Confidentiality is guaranteed; no names will be published. Participants were informed that they can withdraw any point of the interview without any consequences. The interviews were done via google meet.

3.3.2 Data collection instruments. Main instrument for this research was semi-structured interview. The already prepared questions were open-ended in order to get to deep insights of the experiences of the participants. With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio recorded. The recordings were deleted after writing the transcripts.

3.4 Limitations

While this research provides valuable insights into the experiences of employees working under female leaders who exhibit Queen Bee behaviour, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, due to the qualitative nature of the study and the use of semi-structured interviews, the sample size is relatively small, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population across the Balkan region. Additionally, participants' responses are based on personal perceptions, which may be influenced by individual biases, emotions, or specific workplace experiences. The interpretation of Queen Bee behaviour may also vary among participants, leading to inconsistencies in how the phenomenon is understood. Furthermore, the study is limited to a particular cultural and regional context, and the findings may not fully apply to other countries or professional environments. Access to participants willing to speak openly about their experiences posed another challenge, as some individuals may have felt uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics related to leadership dynamics. Lastly, as with most qualitative research, the potential for researcher bias in the interpretation of data must also be considered, despite efforts to maintain objectivity and transparency throughout the research process.

Although this research offers significant insight for the female subordinates that work for female leaders that exhibit queen bee behaviour, it's crucial to address possible limitations.

Firstly, due to the qualitative research design and conducting the research in the form of semi structured interviews, the sample of the participants is small, which limits the generalization for the wider population. Additionally, the answers of the participants are based on their own perceptions that might be affected from their own biases or specific workplace environment.

Another possible limitation is unviability of the findings for applying to the other countries or professional environments.

Moreover, talking about their own experience, represents a challenge because participants might feel uncomfortable about sharing their own experience.

Chapter 4

Findings

With the qualitative approach for analyzing the participants' response resulted with labelling of 411 codes that includes different but connected aspects of gendered workplace dynamics. The codes were grouped as themes that had similar meanings which result that in forming of six main themes and eighteen categories. Themes contain pattern of behaviours, as deep emotional, psychological factors that appears with the occurrence of queen bee behaviour. Analysis was done by MAXQDAPRO 2024 software.

Table 1

Code Book

Table 1. Code Book

Theme	Category	Code
Gender Norms and Institutional Stereotypes	Male-Dominated Institutional Culture	Pressure to conform to male norms
		Gender-based promotion barriers
		Idolization of masculinity in leadership
	Gender Roles and Expectations	Devaluation of feminine traits
		Expectation of emotional support from women
	Internalization of Stereotypes	Burden of metacognitions placed on women
		Successful women seen as an "exception"
	Invisibility of Gender-Based Discrimination	Seeking acceptance through masculine behavior
		Defensive stances against female competition
		"If I haven't experienced it, it must not exist" belief
Identity Construction and Psychological Responses	Social Identity Threat and Distancing	Explaining success solely through personal effort
		Identifying with men to protect status
		Distancing from female group identity
	Tokenism and Representative Burden	Explaining success through individual effort
		Coping with perceptions of inadequacy
	Identity Conflict and Dual Role Pressure	Tension between leader identity and gender identity
		Emotional distancing as a defense mechanism
	Psychological Reactions and Internal Conflicts	Pressure to reject traditional feminine roles
		Belief in "I have to be tough"
		Constant need to prove oneself
Queen Bee Behavior Patterns	Avoidance of Support	Feeling inadequate despite success
		Sense of not belonging
		Emotional burden of role conflict
	Distant and Harsh Leadership Style	Avoiding mentoring relationships
		Withholding information and experience
		Blocking developmental opportunities
	Exclusionary Competitiveness	Perceiving successful women as threats
		Cold and formal communication style
		Avoidance of empathy
	Avoiding Role Model Responsibility	Lack of emotional connection with employees
Impacts of Queen Bee Behaviors	Psychological Strain on Women Employees	Exercising control and supervision
		Pitting female employees against each other
		Favoring male employees
	Deterioration of Organizational Climate	Excluding women under status threat
		Undermining other women's competencies
		Avoiding being a role model
	Lack of Modeling and Mentorship	Framing personal success as "exceptional privilege"
		Defining success as individual struggle, not collective
		Undermining the value of women's solidarity
	Barriers to Women's Career Advancement	Constant feelings of inadequacy
Fragility of Solidarity and Cultural Context	Weakness of Solidarity Among Women	Decreased job satisfaction
		Loss of self-confidence and withdrawal
		Organizational disengagement
	Collective Threat and Fragmentation Mechanisms	Stress and burnout
		Atmosphere of mistrust and discomfort
		Lack of horizontal solidarity
	Conceptual Gap and Silence in Balkan Context	Increased conflict and polarization
		Weakening of collaboration and sharing
		Lack of inspiring examples
	Cultural Norms Hindering Solidarity	Absence of inclusive leadership experience
	Coils Paid by Queen Bee Women	Exclusion from promotion processes
		Neglect of potential
		Blocking access to training and development
	Conceptual Gap and Silence in Balkan Context	Constant pressure to perform
		Jealousy and perceived status threat
		Inability to celebrate other women's success
	Cultural Norms Hindering Solidarity	Weak trust between women
		Isolation of successful women
		Distancing and individualization within the group
	Cultural Norms Hindering Solidarity	Lack of local conceptual equivalent
		Culture of silence and hesitation to express
		Normalization of competition among women
		Strong adherence to traditional gender roles
		Glorification of solitary success culture

The process of categorization followed a gradual and careful approach. Codes that were similar in meaning or experience were grouped into medium categories, and then united into broader thematic units that represent the main ideas of the research. This multi-layered structure enabled a better understanding of complex phenomena such as exclusion, internal prejudices, emotional strain and weakening of solidarity among women in the workplace. Each topic contains several categories that together show various aspects of the dynamics of the Queen Bee - from the transmission of established stereotypes in institutions to the psychological consequences suffered by women in lower positions and those who show patterns of behaviour of the Queen Bee.

In the following part, each category is explained separately and placed in its own topic, with the support of selected quotes from the participants. These quotes depict real experiences and help to better understand how certain behaviours and attitudes appear in everyday work. For example, in the topic "Queen Bee Behavior Patterns" there are categories such as Avoiding Support, Cold and Strict Leadership Style, and Excluding Competition, which together show how a person with these traits behaves. In the theme "The Fragility of Solidarity and the Cultural Context", categories such as Weak solidarity among women and Cultural norms that prevent support among women.

The code book represents the basis of the foundation tool for this analysis due to the participants personal psychological responses and the broader cultural influences that shape their perspectives. Comprehensive list of themes, categories and codes and serves as a form for presenting the research findings. The comprehensive list offer opportunities that each interpretation can be traced back to specific statements within the data. By linking each analytical section to corresponding codes, although the finding will show the reflection of the participants but also portraying how their experiences align with the wider patterns of meaning.

4.1 Gender Role Expectations and Organizational Stereotypes

The issue of Gender Role Expectations and Organizational Stereotypes represents deep and complex issues within the organization cultures. In the table (table 2) illustrate the participants' engagement with the subcodes, highly highlighting their

personal expectation of emotional support from women and gender-based promotion barriers.

Table 2

Gender Role Expectations and Organizational Stereotypes: Frequency of Participant Responses by Category

Main Theme	Subtheme	Total Mentions (SUM)
Male-Dominated Institutional Culture	Gender-based promotion barriers	5
	Bias against feminine-associated skills	3
	Pressure to conform to male norms	3
	Idealization of masculinity in leadership	2
Gender Roles and Expectations	Expectation of emotional support from women	17
	Burden of meticulousness placed on women	2
	Successful woman seen as an “exception”	1
Organizational Stereotypes	Seeking acceptance through masculine behavior	2
	Defensive stance against female competition	3
Invisibility of Gender-Based Discrimination	“If I haven’t experienced it, it must not exist” belief	2
	Explaining success solely through personal effort	6
Total		46

The findings highlight that women's emotional labor maintain center in the workplace- particularly women in the leadership position. Participant frequently have stated that, what they expect from woman leader is serving as source of emotional support. Additionally, participants stated that they experience struggles according to the promotion in male-dominated environment, which also represent lack of advancement. It can be understood that women undergo to dual work in order to meet the performance standards and proving their competence in environments defined by masculine norms.

Despite of these challenges, the matrix reports on the issue of internalized gender stereotypes. From the participants 'reflection it is evident that woman leader tends to adopt of masculine behaviors that serve as defensive posture against other women.

These patterns propose that institutions shapes both the external expectations and internal strategies for self-presentation.

Even though there is no rich evidence regarding the theme of gender-based discrimination, several participants struggled to recognize the dynamics within organizational culture.

4.1.1 Male-dominated institutional culture. In male dominated institutions, due to the deep-rooted gender biases, women experience severe disadvantages regarding to promotion. Additionally, instead being witnesses of growth as a team effort from the participants reflection, we can observe lot of competition play out between women which in turn deters from collaboration. It is observed that women in leadership positions portray lack of support in order her status to be protected. In the absence of mentoring, lack of support, a hostile environment often emerges, that has negative impact on women's advecement. In conclusion, it has significantly negative influence of trust and solidarity among women in the workplace.

"In places where most men work, I think women kind of feel pressure to compete for their positions, and they kind of distance themselves from other females. "(Dina)

"Women in management position in my opinion they can be really good example for inspiration. I've seen good examples, but in banking woman have hard time in advancing." (Marija)

“Women can be great leaders, but they have bigger problems, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields.” (Ana)

Women in leadership are often forced to adopt dominant male roles in order to be seen as competitive, assertive and authoritative. This issue of performing masculinity creates pressure on women to ignore the collaborative and empathetic leadership approaches. Additionally, portraying the masculinity traits, send a message that we value the traditional masculine approach.

I think women can be capable leaders and can bring emotional intelligence to management. I think that there are some woman leaders that act in more tough way in order be taken much more seriously. I have two stories to tell. My past leader supported my growth and pushed me to lead my first project. On the other hand, my current manager often puts me on side.” (Jelena)
“I fully support women in leadership. But in my personal opinion many feel they have to act like men to be taken seriously.” (Teodora)

In the following issue we can observe the female traits in institutions. Traits such as: interpersonal skills, empathy, and collaborative communication which are associated with female characteristics -- do not get the recognition they deserve. Additionally, women who display these traits may instead be question about the ability of effective leader.

“I do believe that women can be great leaders. I do believe that a women have good communication skills... However, I’ve noticed that women sometimes receive more criticism and less recognition compared to their male subordinates.” (Lara)

“I think it’s important for women to be in leadership roles. They bring unique opinions, especially in male-dominated industries like IT.” (Tanja)

At the institutional level, female subordinates and leaders are pressured to fit to consideration of male norms that resulted in isolating women in their professional lives.

Instead of shaping the role, women frequently engage in behaviours to fit into structures.

While gender diversity is often discussed, on the other hand there is neglect of the need for deep cultural transformation-cultural settings that value the different leadership's approaches and actively addresses systematic biases.

"The distribution should be nearly equal. Having equal number of different genders brings different strengths and having both genders is important for a balanced workplace." (Tanja)

"It should be nearly equal. Definitely, it leads to more innovation and balance in decision-making." (Ana)

These issue such as promotion barriers, masculine leadership models, the undervaluing of female traits, and conformity pressures - form a layer of invisible systems prevent women's advancing in professional settings.

Additionally, this has negative impact as well as the psychological well-being and work satisfaction. By creating settings in which women are encouraged to compete instead of to cooperate combined with not valuing their true leadership styles, organizations in fact are creating the very conditions which produce Queen Bee behaviours.

4.1.2 Gender roles and expectations. In work environments that promote traditional gender roles, participants reflected that women leaders have to be emotional available and nurturing, which on the other hand have significant impact on their own advancement. Instead of being evaluated by the same objective criteria as men, women are often judged by their skill in managing other's emotions or in giving off continuous reassurance.

"I think it's easier to work with a male manager. Male manages seems to be less emotional if we compare it to women. For me working with female managers, you have to deal with the added

pressure of navigating gender dynamics and sometimes rivalry.”
(Lara)

“Yes, female bosses can be more emotionally responsive but more demanding.” (Andzela)

“It only matters regarding their emotional intelligence and age honestly. Middle aged women tend to go through a hormonal rollercoaster with menopause which might lead to mood swings at work, so maybe in this case male manager would be better. So, in the end it doesn’t really matter what gender they are to me, as long as they are intune with themselves their actions and mature.”
(Anastsija)

These emotional outputs are also implied by the society, which presents women as to be of a more careful and responsible nature. As one participant stated that in the workplace settings women are better for administrative roles, financial roles, which play to gender, not skill. Additionally, women are frequently assigned to tasks that reflects the gender assumptions of what is perceived ‘natural’ for them rather than on their professional expertise.

“There needs to be balance, especially for our work. It’s known that women are more organized when it comes to finances. On the other hand, certain tasks, like the ones my colleague does (e.g., vehicle registration, working in the field), are easier when there are men involved.” (Kate)

Despite of social expectations, it is observed that from the participants’ reflection that woman who are successful in their roles as leader and go beyond the social expectations are rare. Even though it portrays a hope for other woman to advance in higher position. It might also cause other woman to lose hope for their own advancement. Additionally, specifically for the female leader she might engage in isolation because she is the only woman in top. This represents a turning point of Queen Bee behaviours

"I respect women in any high position and seeing woman as leader. I really admire their ambition and strength." (Dina)

"I think it is very empowering and there should be more women leaders as long as there are confident in themselves." (Anastsija)

Over time, the attributes such as lack of mentorship, rejection of a collective identity, cultivates of creating a culture that impacts the women's advancements. Instead of fostering positive culture in terms of collaboration, opportunity, unfortunately, leaders might engage in behaviours such as isolation.

As mentioned above these kinds of patterns have negative impact both of the well-being of the workers and the growth of inclusive and cooperative professional settings.

4.1.3 Organizational stereotypes. In organizations that value traditionally male leadership approaches, women may see it fit to change their behavior in order to be accepted and recognized. This includes adoption of what is seen to be strong, assertive or emotionally distant. We have to highlight that this represents a cost for the female leader of putting out their true feminine self. This represent that women choose a path that respond to structural indications of what is valued and respected.

"I would support them, why not? Anywhere where a woman can adapt both mentally and physically, why shouldn't she be able to rise as high as men in the field she is in? I would support their growth." (Kate)

"The distribution should be nearly equal. Everyone brings something different. Different point of view. From the perspective of man and woman." (Tanja)

This issue also plays out in the context of how we see women's interaction in the workplace. Some women display a defense in response to what they perceive as competition from other women colleagues which may influence the leader to distance herself from other subordinates, criticizing them more, not offering support. These reactions are not only recognized in individual insecurities but also the by the historical

scarcity of leadership for women. As women compete for a limited number of leadership position, tensions arise, reinforcing the Queen Bee phenomenon especially in work settings that promotes competition over solidarity.

“For me personally, it is important. Even though female managers are more empathetic than comparing to man but sometimes this can be more critical of other women, while male managers often provide more straightforward feedback without emotional undertones.” (Lara)

“I think it’s definitely easier to work with a male manager because they are more control with their emotions and don’t try to get involved in people’s personal lives. I think women focus a lot more on social aspects and some are very insecure which makes sense to why there are so many cases of queen bee behavior.” (Anastsija)

It is the evident that not all women experience these stereotypes in the same way. It is observed the women’s tendency to adopt male dominated norms and at the same time develop protective attitudes toward female colleagues which is proof of how far rooted these stereotypes are in to professional relations and leadership. Additionally, Queen Bee trend is a result of a complex play of structural gender issues which women internalize and put into practice in professional settings.

4.1.4 Invisibility of gender-based discrimination. When we base our view of fairness on what we ourselves have lived through we may miss out the bigger picture of what is discriminative towards others. This belief system frames biased practices as isolated incidents or normalizing them. In such settings women who are not face with the direct discrimination- they can neglect wider systematic structures that continue to exclude individuals.

“There is. For the same reasons. When I was told that my manager, who is a woman, would interview me for a job in my current company, I was taken aback. I even thought about leaving without the interview. It’s not that I had a conflict with the people I worked with, but I was just observing their behavior. It doesn’t necessarily

mean that men are better. There are men who are full of themselves and somehow want to belittle or deceive you.” (Simona)

“Giving attention to communication and being open is key. Stereotypes hold us back more than anything else.” (Lejla)

Another area in which this invisibility plays out is in the individual accounts of professional success. Many report their career successes as a result of their own doings which they separate from the gender-based issues which may have played a role in their rise or fall. While such a perspective is a measure of self-confidence it also may put a blind eye to the roles which institutional structures played in those results.

“Like the previous question, it all comes down to the person, to the individual. It depends on their sensitivity. There are women who are skilled, but it doesn’t matter if they’re women. I can’t really say much more. I’ve been lucky with my manager.” (Kate)

“In general for me it doesn’t matter manager’s gender.

For me, what I am looking for is the ability to lead professionally and fairly. Good leadership comes from balance, not gender.” (Dina)

Success is due to individual effort alone and bias is only recognized in its most obvious forms. We see that which presents itself as full equality may in fact be which prevents in depth look at present issues of difference thus protecting a work environment in which subtle discrimination is left to thrive.

4.1.5 Psychological impact of gendered role expectation. The themes ’Psychological Impact of Gendered Role Expectation ’ provides a critical lens into how women negotiate the internal and external demands of leadership within gendered organizational contexts. As visualized in table 3, participant engagement with this theme is particularly concentrated around two high-frequency codes: “Belief in ‘I have to be tough’” and “Constant need to prove oneself”.

Table 3

Psychological Impact of Gendered Role Expectation: Frequency of Participant Responses by Category

Main Theme	Subtheme	Total Mentions (SUM)
Social Identity Threat and Distancing	Explaining success through individual effort	1
	Identifying with men to protect status	1
	Distancing from female group identity	4
Exclusion and Psychological Burden	Coping with perceptions of inadequacy	2
Identity Conflict and Dual Role Pressure	Belief in “I have to be tough”	10
	Emotional distancing as a defense mechanism	2
	Pressure to reject traditional feminine roles	0
	Tension between leader identity and gender identity	2
Psychological Reactions and Internal Conflicts	Feeling inadequate despite success	0
	Sense of not belonging	3
	Constant need to prove oneself	10
	Emotional burden of role conflict	8
Total		53

In the case of the “I have to be tough” belief we see that many women adopt the traditionally male leadership skills which they have internalized into what is

expected of them. This is not out of choice but a strategic play into environments that put out the message that emotion is weak. Also at issue is the fact that the pressure for us to prove our worth plays out even once in the role of leader, which is a very deep-rooted issue. We find out that success does not bring relief from this issue but in fact heightens the need to prove oneself which in turn causes burnout and self-doubt. Equally large is the group which clusters around issues of “Emotional burden of role conflict” and “Sense of not belonging”, which we see to be a lasting issue of which women speak about navigation of conflicting gender and professional roles. Women report of isolation, competition with other female leaders, and emotional wear and tear from unmet expectations and relational issues. What we see is that these psychological issues are not just personal issues but are in fact elements of larger cultural stories which pit women against one another, that undermine the possibility of real leadership.

4.2 Social Identity Threat and Distancing

The psychological weight that women carry due to the gendered structures within the professional setting causes them to internalize issues of success and failure in terms of personal achievement. Instead of identifying systems of exclusions, or unequal treatment, some women blame themselves in response to negative events. This individualized focus on performance neglects the wider systematic issues, at the same time foster self-doubt. In the result, women may refrain from challenging authority or systematic norms that offer consequences, directing them to the efforts of self-improvement, believing this is the only way to achieve success.

“I love seeing women in leadership. I believe in that we bring empathy, organization, and strength. I have always wanted to become one myself. I have worked with a female leader for years. At first, I looked up to her, but I i have noticed that I found myself doubting. What I was affected the most She never complimenting me, corrected me publicly, and seemed closer to male colleagues. Still, I thought ‘maybe I wasn’t good enough’ — I never blamed her.” (Amna)

Gendered environments pressures women into maintaining status or avoiding scrutiny by associating with male colleagues or leadership. This association might be subtle, and it represents a response to a desire for professional acceptance or to avoid what is seen as the emotional issues that come from same gender interaction. Additionally, women may use male identifiers as a strategy to minimize their vulnerability in competitive settings.

*“Personally no, but in practice it sometimes does, depending on how the manager handles authority and peer relationships.”
(Farah)*

This issue of preservation of status is accompanied by what may be described as a range of emotional and relational separations from other women in the workplace. Some women might be conscious or not, they distance themselves from other female subordinates in an effort not to fit into the stereotypical box and to present themselves as unique individuals. This kind of patterns of behaviour is observed in organizational settings where women establish professional or strategic distance.

Though at a personal level there may still be comfort in same gender interactions, what we see in terms of organizational climate is that women put a professional or strategic distance between themselves.

“Very important. I used to think staying quiet was the way to survive. Now I understand support is everything.” (Amna)

“Personally, I think it’s easier to work with female managers. We have more understanding like same topics to talk. However, within organization I do prefer equality. We all bring something different for the organization.” (Nasiha)

Through a focus on individual strength, adoption of male norms, and breakdown of female collective ties it is resulted by limiting their own advancement.

4.2.1 Exclusion and psychological burden. Organizations that value masculine behaviors, women tend to change their style of leading in order to be

accepted and to be positively performance evaluated. Adopting traits such as being assertive or being emotional distant are the characteristics that are highly valued in men. According to this scheme, women tend to adopt this trait to her own leading style. Adopting in order to fit to the image what one culture expects, serve as a professional tactic. Even though it is not due to the decision for women to choose this path - they are responding to the voice of the culture.

In the reflections from participants 'responses, in the case for support women in leadership position is observed that it's given with the dosage of confidence. This is categorized as a defense mechanism against feelings of inadequacy. Consistently, we observe the issues of fairness, equal opportunity and capability, which represent a burden point that women leaders are faced in the male dominated environments.

"I would support them, why not? Anywhere where a woman can adapt both mentally and physically, why shouldn't she be able to rise as high as men in the field she is in? I would support their growth." (Kate)

"I would give a lot of support and would love to see more women in leadership roles. I would give everyone a chance. I wouldn't limit who has the opportunity to progress. I prefer equality." (Tima)

4.2.2 Identity conflict and dual role pressure. As mentioned above, women in leadership positions in order to be accepted tend to adopt masculine leadership style, specifically authoritative traits as emotional distance, decision making, or control, while on the other hand the same traits do not work in their favor. This whole cycle represents a performed version that does not support the traditional view of feminine, which cause dual role that is difficult to handle in male dominated or competitive environments.

"I think women can be capable leaders and can bring emotional intelligence to management. I think that there are some woman leaders that act in more

tough way in order to be taken much more seriously. I have two stories to tell. My past leader supported my growth and pushed me to lead my first project. On the other hand, my current manager often puts me on side.” (Jelena)

“I fully support women in leadership. But in my personal opinion many feel they have to act like men to be taken seriously”. (Teodora)

To protect against what they perceive as weakness many women in leadership report that they display patterns of toughness. The drive to be “tough enough” which they undergo shapes how they interact with both male and female colleagues often they adoption of hyper vigilant or hyper competitive behaviours which in turn distance them from emotional authenticity.

“Women can be excellent leaders, but they often have to be tougher as they usually are not just in order to be respected. My current promotes certain women.” (Milica)

“I admire strong female leaders. But some adopt toxic traits. I had a manager who didn’t encourage me to take risks and actively discouraged me from applying for a higher role.” (Andzela)

In the terms of relational issues some women preserve emotionally distant as a form of professional self-preservation. Although same gender work environment at first might promote connection at the same time might causes discomfort which is a result of blurred boundaries resulted in the sense of rivalry. Emotional distance becomes a method of preserving authority and protecting oneself from vulnerability in hierarchical settings.

“Advantages of having female leader definitely is this point that you can talk about personal struggles.. Disadvantages: much more chances for criticism or if the relationship turns competitive.” (Lara)

“Advantages: Working with a same-gender manager can make communication easier and create strong support for career growth. Why it is disadvantage. It is because of the sense that you need to compete or the

tension. It has affected me in both ways and personally and professionally.”
(Dina)

The identity conflict represents a result of the fact that we as a society think of professional success as going hand in hand with emotional restraint and relational detachment. Additionally, some of the participants reported better support from male managers which they see to be less threatened by ambition and more straight forward in their feedback. On the other hand, we can observe that female managers are reported as more critical or defensive especially when their authority is put into question.

“It’s easier with a male manager. They tend to be more supportive and less to feel threatened by your success, which is something I’ve observed with female managers who might feel like they need to ‘prove’ themselves.” (Tanja)

“I prefer working with a male manager because it’s easier. Men often don’t feel the same pressure to ‘prove’ themselves, so they’re less likely to try to diminish your contributions. With female managers, there’s sometimes an unspoken rivalry or competition, which can be exhausting.” (Marija)

These issues of performing a tough image, managing distance from her team, and out navigating identity issues they are what play out in the psyches of women in leadership roles. They are expected not only to do well in their jobs but also to constantly put forth the right image of gender in relation to the authority they bring to the table. The dual play of being present emotionally yet maintaining professional distance and leading with confidence which does not step into domineering space, is a tiresome tightrope walk which brings to light the very real and complicated experience of female leadership in fields still run by gendered assumptions.

4.2.3 Psychological reactions and internal conflicts. Women in many professional settings report a great deal of pressure to constantly prove themselves which is in spite of success in the past or at the time of their great competence. This issue is a result of both external and internal factors which question their role and value. Additionally, in senior roles many reports that they are not recognized for their

value in a secure way, that which is rather temporary and in need of constant reassertion.

“Yes, it does matter. Women tend to have a more empathetic approach, but there’s also the possibility of experiencing more criticism and challenges in proving oneself.” (Marija)

“Advantages: it’s this empathy, understanding Disadvantages: Constant pressure to prove yourself and this kind of rivalry of proving oneself.” (Tanja)

“It can matter. Female managers might better understand personal struggles, but they can also be more competitive.” (Jelena)

In the face of success women may still feel a great deal of inadequacy which in turn is a result of hostile or unsupportive behaviour from peers and superiors. We see that it isn’t required minor mistake in order to feel they are of little value, or they are not heard- that in itself is a form of psychological dissonance. It also represents, success does not always bring with it a sense of validation; in fact, women may question the achievements which brought them success, especially when those in power are critical, indifferent or show favour to others.

“It’s all about the same complexes, and from that comes arrogance. At the moment, I can only share successful stories with my current leader. In the past, I couldn’t say the same. It was just a way of treating complexes. For example, my previous manager would come from home irritated and then take it out on the employees.” (Simona)

The issue of professional growth also includes issues of not fitting in the workplace. Women report that they feel like out sides which may be a result of other’s treatment of them or the competitive nature of the environment and thus may begin to doubt that they are wanted or valued in the organization.

"It's important to have good relationship, but it can be difficult when there's jealousy or competition. I try to have good relationships but have experienced instances where I've been excluded by other women." (Lara)

"Yes. I work in a pharmaceutical company. I have a female manager, and I have the feeling that she sees me as competition, and I can't reach higher positions because of her ego-driven issues." (Tima)

Many women have several titles as professionals and caregivers, leaders and subordinates, mentors and competitors. These conflicting demands require emotional labor to maintain equilibrium and to avoid coming across too soft or too hard. As women try to meet these opposite expectations the emotional burden often goes unrecognized which in turn leaves them isolated in their attempt to resolve internal contradictions in terms of external performance.

"It's important to have good relationship, but it can be difficult when there's jealousy or competition. I try to have good relationships but have experienced instances where I've been excluded by other women." (Lara)

"Yes. I work in a pharmaceutical company. I have a female manager, and I have the feeling that she sees me as competition, and I can't reach higher positions because of her ego-driven issues." (Tima)

"Advantages: Shared experiences, empathy. Disadvantages: Hidden rivalry, favoritism toward men." (Jelena)

Women that feel they are not valued or are put down by other women in leadership report confusion, frustration, or resentment. Some find support in these shared experiences, others however see it as proof of internal gender bias which in turn plays out in personal conflict. This play out of past issues in female managers which

they see ambition as a threat and so they secure their position by stifling growth in others. These dynamics create a cycle of defensiveness and withdrawal which in turn hurts collective success.

“Insecure women leaders. Someone who will not let their places be replaced, and somehow, they are accepting to be at the same place. Why they also do not develop themselves. Being in one position there is nothing to be learn new. They are afraid to be stepped out of secure chair.” (Andzela)

“Always from yourself. You can make a switch in your behaviour. You can approach people in different ways. You have to realize that you’re not competition. Like a queen, you wouldn’t lose your shine by supporting others.” (Kate)

What we see in total is that the pressure, the emotional wear and tear, the uncertainty about belonging, and the interpersonal stress that is placed on women's minds, dismantles the idea that success is a shield against adversity for women. What we find is the role that emotional elements play in women's leadership; we see a constant play between what is validated from the outside and what also contradicts how they see themselves, and that shows up in how they present and struggle with their professional selves.

4.3 Queen Bee Behavior Patterns

The theme *Queen Bee Behavior Patterns* reveals a complex and deeply entrenched system of exclusionary practices that undermine solidarity among women in leadership and subordinate positions. As illustrated in table 4, the strongest emphasis among participants centers around three subcodes: “Avoiding mentoring relationships”, “Blocking developmental opportunities”, and “Pitting female employees against each other”.

Table 4

Frequencies of Queen Bee Behavior Patterns and Subthemes

Queen Bee Behavior Pattern	Subtheme	Sum
Avoidance of Support	Avoiding mentoring relationships	17
	Withholding information and experience	8
	Blocking developmental opportunities	18
	Perceiving successful women as threats	–
Distant and Harsh Leadership Style	Lack of emotional connection with employees	3
	Avoidance of empathy	9
	Cold and formal communication style	5
	Excessive control and supervision	5
Exclusionary Competitiveness	Pitting female employees against each other	14
	Undermining other women's competence	8
	Excluding women under status threat	12
	Favoring male employees	3
Avoiding Role Model Responsibility	Framing personal success as "exceptional privilege"	5
	Defining success as individual struggle, not collective	3
	Undermining the value of women's solidarity	13
	Avoiding being a role model	5
Total		128

The overarching problem we see is that support is avoided, and we see this playing out as a very common disengagement pattern. This is not a matter of neglect; in many cases, we see active suppression of other women's growth as a result of insecurity or competitive anxiety. We find that women report that their female superiors are emotionally unavailable, deliberately reject them, or deliberately unhelpful, actions that stifle growth and therefore create isolation. The fact that this subtheme is so prevalent in what we hear from participants suggests that mentoring and support are not only absent, but actually removed, which we see as reproducing the male-centric models of career advancement that we present as being based on merit.

Alongside this, we see the development of a separate field of what might be called the exclusive competition among women in leadership positions. Queen bee behaviours appear through the promotion of men over women, the belittling of talented women, or the pitting of female colleagues against each other. These actions go beyond simple interpersonal issues and become status-preserving mechanisms that maintain status and reproduce inequality. We see these themes coming together in a very present and intrusive way, and this points to a highly institutionalised set of practices in which power is maintained through exclusion rather than shared through unity.

4.3.1 Avoidance of support. In a supportive setting which is supposed to promote mentorship and professional development, some female leaders drop from forming mentoring relationships. This is less a matter of disinterest than of consciously avoiding competitive female apprentices, whom senior women see as highly talented or ambitious. A lack of willingness to make an effort to mentor or encourage has also been reported, leading to lower long-term motivation and internalized self-doubt in younger workers.

"My colleagues are great, but my supervisor — she has never offered me mentorship or recognition. I thought it was my fault."
(Amna)

"With a male manager, I felt more mentored. With my current female manager, there is some defensiveness and lack of trust."
(Farah)

“Not really. She avoids mentoring other women.” (Jelena)

Beyond the issue of mentorship some report that they were denied access to information.

“Yes, I’ve experienced situations where a female manager seemed to hold back other women to protect her position. For example, she didn’t provide growth opportunities or mentorship, which made it harder for others to advance.” (Dina)

“Personally, no, because I haven’t allowed it. But I’ve been a witness to my colleagues who directly faced Queen Bee syndrome. For example, withholding knowledge so that others wouldn’t have the opportunity to progress.” (Simona)

“Yes. My female manager once took credit for my product demo.” (Tanja)

Several subjects reflected that there are some existing barriers to advance in their workplace organization. This portrays in behaviours such as withholding informations, giving less qualified role or as they have mentioned they have been left out from important meetings. Additionally, several women reported that have real life experience of being passed over for promotion without any given excuse or reason-leaving them with feeling of left out and unfulfilled.

“Yes. I was once passed over for a research leadership opportunity. The manager didn’t inform me until after someone else was selected.” (Teodora)

“I had a female HR director who canceled my promotion even though I met all criteria. She said I wasn’t ready.” (Lara)

“Yes. I was told not to ‘get ahead of myself’ when I asked to attend training.” (Bojana)

The elimination of women’s opportunities is not always a silent event; in some cases, we see active subversion. In the case of women in leadership, we see them

strategically disadvantage their subordinates or sap their emotional power to maintain hierarchy.

“I would call it ‘queen of the workplace’. In my context, it’s when women in position undermine their female colleagues to maintain their status. I’ve experienced this when a manager gave me tasks that were designed to fail.” (Ana)

“My current manager supports only a select few.” (Andzela)

“Women can lead well but often adopt a ‘cold’ leadership style. My supervisor criticizes without mentoring and later she didn’t help me for resolving the issue. It’s the same situation that I am talking once I made a small error, and she used it to question my competence in front of others.” (Bojana)

The problem is that there is a recurring theme in reports of successful women: Women who show promises are seen as threats, not as future growth, which leads the incumbent to act defensively.

“The Queen: It’s when a woman in power suppresses other women’s growth out of fear of losing her own position.” (Jelena)

“Women who see other women as competition and either sabotage their progression or create barriers.” (Lara)

“She promotes only those she sees as ‘safe’.” (Milica)

These exclusionary environments create a place of collaboration driven by sense of fear. We can observe that leaders might help certain group of members if they perceived the victim as “not being a threat” to their own position, as well as promoting that there is limited position for advancing and fostering competitive behaviour among female subordinates.

“Queen Bee Phenomenon in my opinion occurs when a female leader kind of disable women in advancement to protect her own status or power, also it represents creating competition instead of collaboration and hindering growth in the workplace.” (Dina)

“I would say ‘the complex queen’ — someone who climbed the ladder and then pulls it up behind her. It’s when a woman in leadership keeps other women small through coldness, criticism, or lack of support.” (Amna)

“Women who block other women’s progress instead of helping them. In Serbian, ‘sindrom kraljice’.” (Milica)

From the reflection of participants in the interview we can understand that maintaining dominance and eliminating growth opportunities, are not part of the strategic choices it is reaction rooted in insecurity, leading to widespread disengagement.

“In my language I call that insecurity and serious self-esteem issues. I don’t see a confident woman taking part in a behavior as such. Disregarding other women’s talents just so you can have the spotlight isn’t a healthy or a professional way to deal with your business.” (Anastsija)

“Minimal support from female managers. Colleagues are more supportive.” (Bojana)

“Insecure women leaders. Someone who will not let their places be replaced. They are afraid to be stepped out of a secure chair.” (Andzela)

The reported avoidance is not always out of hostility. In some cases, what is seen is emotional distance and a lack of mentorship which is adopted as a leadership style in which to fit institutional expectations. For the end, the impact on interpersonal dynamics and growth is great.

"Yes. Some women in position they know to provide mentoring others and avoid collaboration..." (Ana)

"Train leaders on mentorship and inclusion. Promote women who lift others." (Jelena)

"Not enough. I think some women act like they owe leadership roles rather than share them. Refusing to mentor, discrediting peers, or emotionally isolating others." (Teodora)

Mentorship and spreading knowledge serve as tools for creating individuals' identities and leadership. In the absence of adequate mentoring, it leads to disintegration of professional relationships, which dissolves solidarity among women.

"Yeah, once she excluded me from huge projects, eventhough I know my capacity, I am qualified.. (Jelena)

"We are not trusted to make decisions, and we're not given reliable information. That's why I believe that for a company to be successful, more men are needed. They are trusted more. That's a fact." (Tima)

"My manager didn't provide growth opportunities or mentorship, which made it harder for others to advance." (Dina)

4.3.2 Distant and harsh leadership style. Some female leaders present a remote and authoritarian style of management which has great impact on the well-being of their female reports. Reporters of this issue note that such leaders are unemotional, very critical, and do not support. This type of leadership leads to feelings of inclusion, reduces psychological safety and increases stress in the workplace.

"I used to think gender didn't matter. Now, I realize working with my female supervisor has been emotionally taxing. She's often dismissive and cold toward women, and I didn't see it for what it was until now." (Amna)

“Women can lead well but often adopt a ‘cold’ leadership style. My supervisor criticizes without mentoring and later she didn’t help me for resolving the issue. It’s the same situation that I am talking once I made a small error, and she used it to question my competence in front of others.” (Bojana)

In this style of leadership communication is very formal and void of emotion. Female leaders report to give feedback in a way to keep emotion out of the workplace. This communication gap which also interact info flow and teamwork is also a source of what they perceive as uncertainty and discomfort. We have to emphasize that according to participants there is difference between female and male managers. Male managers were described as cold-headed and they are characterized for direct feedbacks.

“Male managers provide clearer feedback. Female managers often use indirect criticism. c) Nearly equal diversity builds strength.” (Andzela)

“ From my personal experience, I find it easier to work with male managers. I can describe male leader as cold-headed, they are more for direct feedback, and are less influenced by emotions or personal matters, making collaboration more stable and predictable.” (Dina)

Avoid in empathy is a large element of what we saw in terms of Queen Bee leadership. Also report that some of the women put up walls emotionally or could not get a handle on their feelings at work which in turn caused issues in the group. Some female leaders brought in their private issues into the workplace which in turn created a very charged emotional environment which in turn affected the whole team’s performance.

“I can share my experience. I have worked with a female leader. She struggles for real, to separate work from her personal life. Whenever something was off in her private life, she had this kind of habit to bring the problem at work. She would yell to everyone; tense could be felt. And most of time, her assistant was finisher her tasks because she was so distracted with her problems happening

in her private life. In this reason because she is not capable of balancing or keep this two thing on different table, we as a team had some consequences as less being productive.”(Dina)
“It matters. Eventhough woman can understand another woman well, but I had to highlight that sometimes they can be really critical. while, on the other hand male provide direct feedback.”
(Lara)

The issue of emotional distance between managers and their female subordinates is that it is not just about maintaining distance professionally but often plays out in a very cold and formal work environment. Female subordinates have reported that they have felt excluded out and unsupported from their female managers. Unfortunately, this issue is "accompanied by female managers who project their own insecurities into the team. The exclusion of emotions has great impact on the trust that we have to build as a team. Participants reinforce the feelings that they are not valued enough in their work environment.

“Her personality as a whole was just very unattractive, she came from a very rich family so her whole business was just a joke to her or a hobby to just make extra money from and not just depend on her family. Even her products were bought from her family friends or employees at her dad’s company. She was terrible in communication and had serious insecurities, and she let those insecurities affect her professional life and projected on her employees, just terrible.” (Anastsija)

“Kind of. Only for work she knew to act distance. But in informal conversation she seems okay.” (Ana)

The urge for over controlling as participants have mentioned, we observe this pattern in cultures that foster competition over collaboration. Additionally, participants have reported that they have been felt being analyzed by female managers who saw them as competitors. They found themselves to constantly prove themselves which resulted in high level of anxiety and low self-esteem.

“Yes, it matters. Female managers are sometimes overly controlling toward other women.” (Milica)

“Advantages of having female leader definitely is this point that you can talk about personal struggles.. Disadvantages: much more chances for criticism or if the relationship turns competitive.”

(Lara)

Some members reported that when female leaders are very sensitive to emotions, results in controlling behaviour. This creates a volatile and unpredictable leadership environment where subordinates do not know whether they will be approached or attacked.

“Yes, female bosses can be more emotionally responsive but more demanding.” (Andzela)

“It can be really under pressured. For instance, just imagine how is it to be in the environments where everyone tries to be noticed, trying to catch the spotlight and trust me being in that chaos creates huge tension.” (Jelena)

From the reports, we can understand that Queen Bee behaviour is characterized by remote and tough leadership, which includes a lack of empathy, cold communication, emotional distance, and micromanagement. The presence of these patterns of behaviours in organizational settings has negative impact on women's health and job satisfaction, which is accompanied by emotional exhaustion, lowered morale, and feelings of inferiority.

4.3.3 Exclusionary competitiveness. Exclusionary competitiveness is the patterns that female leader engages. It represents when a female leader belittles another woman within the organizational settings. We also have to highlight among the participants, we can understand that there is a trend of promoting male colleagues, while at the same time the female leader diminishes the value of female subordinates. From the outside it might seem that roles are fairly distributed, in reality, female leaders are being limited for promoting due to the unspoken rivalries and gender biases.

"Honestly, no. But recently that I have noticed that according to promotion, she promotes more man than woman. I don't if she whether trust other woman in the organization, but it seems that she gives less responsibility to woman." (Amna)

"I can say for my female colleagues they have been really helpful, but my manager tends to favor male team members." (Tanja)

Favoring of male employees is a wide-ranging issue which goes beyond promotions and task assignment into the core of what we do as a company. When women see that they are passed over for key decisions and that despite their competence they are left out of meetings and leadership discussions that is a sign of something deeper than bias, it is a structured effort to put their careers at a disadvantage. Also reported was a feeling that they are put aside by senior female members of staff which in turn reinforces a system of which women are the outliers.

"Yes. I can tell that she rarely invites women to main projects. in case she decides to do it, you are on the sight." (Amna)

"Of course yes. I have a colleague she was really good worker. she knew her job really well. Somehow the manager would find excess for not calling her for meeting and not offering promotions (Farah)

In many cases, what we see is that women in leadership roles identify talent in their midst, and instead of mentoring, they push them down. Some even create barriers to their growth by not giving them key projects or by putting them in very visible but non-critical roles.

"In my language I call that insecurity and serious self-esteem issues. I don't see a confident woman taking part in a behavior as such. Disregarding other women's talents just so you can have the spotlight isn't a healthy or a professional way to deal with your business." (Anastsija)

"My female colleagues are amazing. Managers, less so. I often feel there's no room for two women to shine." (Jelena)

Another main issue that we need to take in consideration is taking advantage of female subordinate's skills. This can be qualified as low team moral, that we can observe ruined trust among the workers, that lead to engaging in competitive behaviours and questioning their abilities.

"I love seeing women in leadership. I believe in that we bring empathy, organization, and strength. I have always wanted to become one myself. I have worked with a female leader for years. At first, I looked up to her, but I i have noticed that I found myself doubting. What I was affected the most she never complimenting me, corrected me publicly, and seemed closer to male colleagues. Still, I thought 'maybe I wasn't good enough' — I never blamed her..." (Amna)

"Yes, where I have worked before , my manager would assign important tasks to male colleagues while giving me administrative ones, even when I had more experience. As far I remember she hasn't complimented other women openly that much, so everyone turned to be competitive" (Ivana)

This is very much the case in how we see women pitted against each other via rumors, or favoritism. Also, as a result women may not put out support systems that are supposed to be there or have the mentoring they are meant to which in turn creates toxic trustless relationships with peers and also upper management.

"The environment can get hostile or unfriendly. When women feel threatened, they tend to isolate instead of collaborating." (Lara)

"It can be really under pressured. For instance, just imagine how is it to be in the environments where everyone tries to be noticed, trying to catch the spot light and trust me being in that chaos creates huge tension." (Jelena)

In many areas, what we see is that exclusion due to perceived status threat becomes a part of the culture via informal practices. This includes the development of social hierarchies within teams, favoring loyalty to the leader over merit, and restricting access to resources and development opportunities. The results are felt

organization-wide, which in turn sets a tone that doesn't support open communication and mutual support among female employees.

"I don't feel isolated by my female colleagues, but I don't feel accepted by the manager. I work for everyone, but I don't receive even the raise I deserve. I've talked to my other female coworkers to see if they feel the same as I do. They told me that 'she's just like that, 'that I should accept it, and that it will pass. Also, when there are New Year's celebrations in our company, we're often divided into two groups — the manager's favorites and a few of us. Those favorites also tend to get higher salaries and better positions more often." (Tima)

In a world that constantly demands that women have to prove ourselves through subtle forms of sabotage and emotional exclusion, we see burnout and withdrawal. Women of this potential report feeling invisible despite their high performance. This glass ceiling emerges from how we interact with each other, and these issues are created, and thus gendered disempowerment is seen.

"Yes. I applied for a promotion twice. Each time, my supervisor gave me really weak feedback and said I 'needed more time, 'while promoting a male colleague who had been with us less than 2 years." (Amna)

"Yeah, once she excluded me from huge projects, even though I know my capacity, I am qualified. (Jelena)

Dismissing peers is a tactic which some leaders use to maintain power which in turn they do out of fear that they may lose it to the rising stars in the form of female leaders.

"It's when senior women in leadership roles feel threatened by other women rising in the organization and try to isolate them or prevent their success. I've seen this with a former superior, who would withhold information and give me less critical tasks because she saw me as a threat." (Ivana)

“Ruining the reputation of colleagues” (Teodora)

Looking at the issue as a whole our reports suggests that there is presence of blocking women’s advancement in the cultural settings. Firstly, the preference for male colleagues. Secondly there is the presence of the competitive behaviours, that every woman feels threatened in the organization. We can observe that these issues are not simply individual conflict incidents, but are constantly occurring on a larger scale; rooted in large scale issues of gender based power in hierarchal settings. Additionally, in terms of the Queen Bee as a leadership style we see it as a method of control that undermines women’s solidarity, development and also their psychological health.

4.3.4 Avoiding role model responsibility. In issues of organizational structure which see women in leadership roles, the rejection of that which would make one a role model for other women can greatly impede the growth of female professionals as a group. When in power women do not put forth effort in mentoring or bringing attention to other women which is a lost chance to change leadership stories. This distance which they may put between themselves, and other women is put forth as an individual approach or a result of merit which in turn supports hierarchies that alienate growing female talent and break down solidarity.

“I would say ‘the complex queen’ — someone who climbed the ladder and then pulls it up behind her. It’s when a woman in leadership keeps other women small through coldness, criticism, or lack of support.” (Amna)

“Not enough. Some women hoard leadership roles rather than share them. Refusing to mentor, ruining the reputation of colleagues, or emotionally isolating others.” (Teodora)

Several women in the interviews stated that most of the time their female leaders perceive their success as their personal privileges. We can label this behaviour as the perpetuation of exclusivity, that blocks the development of the organization.

Additionally, we can observe a tendency that female leader her own success represents to the organization as a solitary and separate accomplishment.

“An insecure, frustrated woman who thinks only she should have influence. She doesn’t see anyone else. Everyone else should be subordinate to her.” (Simona)

*“Yes. My female manager once took credit for my product demo.”
(Tanja)*

Another area in which we see role model responsibility avoided. It is in the tendency to present success as a personal struggle, which is achieved through individual effort instead of a product of team work. By putting forward hard ship and individual perseverance as the main elements of success, these leaders in fact underestimated the role of teams and peers. Additionally, this frame of thought discourages young professionals from thinking of success in terms of what is achieved together as a collective. and at the same time, it instills a culture of individualism which in turn diminishes group empowerment.

*“Yes. I was denied a promotion despite strong performance.”
(Jelena)*

“Yes. The head of my department repeatedly delayed my project approvals and discredited me in front of executives. It slowed my progression for nearly a year.” (Ana)

Across reports of participants’ experiences, they have expressed that most of the time women’s solidarity is undermined. In terms of building networks of trust and inclusion, some leaders do it out of question; instead, they take on an exclusionary stance which includes downplaying the role of support among women, or in some cases, they work against unity. It is mostly out of fear of replacement or loss of control, which they put forth as the reason for their competitive behaviour. Also, what we see is that the results are very much gendered, which plays out in women being affected the most.

“Queen as a queen we know what represents, but this queen bee what she is expecting to be, she is expecting everyone to run for her, to feed her illusions, ego... these kind of people for me they don’t have any value neither as an individual or professional, colleague etc. They don’t enter my world.” (Kate)

“Insecure women leaders. Someone who will not let their places be replaced, and somehow, they are accepting to be at the same place. Why they also do not develop themselves. Being in one position there is nothing to be learned new. They are afraid to be stepped out of secure chair.” (Tima)

The results showed that most of the cultures haven't created workplace that opportunity for women's advancement. This is observed in the avoidance of the suppression of collective identity, and the equating of solidarity with isolation.

The fourth theme, which is Impacts of Queen Bee Behaviours, address many of the issues that exclusive female leadership brings to individual employees and to the organization as a whole. In Figure 4 we see this theme is divided into five main areas which include women employees 'psychological stress, improved organizational climate for some at the expense of others, lack of mentoring and role models, women's career growth, which is impeded, and also the personal costs that Queen Bee leaders

offer. These categories present a full picture of how power preservation, emotional detachment, and competitive exclusion affect the workplace.

Table 5

Frequencies of Individual and Organizational Effects of Queen Bee Behavior

Effect Category	Subtheme	Sum
Psychological Strain on Women Employees	Constant feelings of inadequacy	3
	Decreased job satisfaction	8
	Loss of self-confidence and withdrawal	4
	Organizational disengagement	3
	Stress and burnout	4
Decline in Organizational Psychological Climate	Atmosphere of mistrust and discomfort	3
	Weakening of collaboration and sharing	3
	Heightened interpersonal tensions	4
	Weak peer support	3
	Lack of inspiring examples	10
Lack of Modeling and Mentorship	Absence of inclusive leadership experience	11
	Neglect of potential	12
Barriers to Women's Career Advancement	Blocking access to training and development	10
	Exclusion from promotion processes	10
	Constant pressure to perform	3
Costs Paid by Queen Bee Women		
Total		87

Among the issues which stood out are “Lack of inspiring examples”, “Neglect of potential”, and “Exclusion from promotion processes” which participants brought up the most, thus identifying what are in fact the key areas of concern. These codes point to ongoing structural issues which see women’s talents ignored, growth opportunities given out unevenly, and which also lack female role models which in turn do not support mentoring. The specific details of how these plays out are reported in the following sub sections.

4.4.1 Psychological strain on women employees. In terms of low self-worth that women reported in many competitive and still and gendered work setting has become a trend, particularly, if a woman find herself in a setting that does not see the value

they bring to the table, it is resulted by exclusion or marginalization. Additionally, in this kind of environment individual achievement is neglected, that reinforce women to question their value and ability as professionals.

“There’s emotional exclusion and lack of recognition for contributions.” (Milica)

*“What I feel is a lack — a lack of opportunity to express myself.”
(Tima)*

“Yes. In women-dominant teams, competition is more psychological: exclusion, or performance sabotage.” (Ana)

The reported decline in job satisfaction has brought decrease in emotional connection in the workplace. While some women report on rare instances of supportive leadership, more often we see tense and emotional burn out. Lack of consistent management support combined with what may be characterized as emotional instability in leadership is creating a volatile work environment which in turn is causing decline in performance.

“To feel... dissatisfaction.” (Tima)

“Very high-stress” (Tanja)

“Yes, especially passive exclusion” (Teodora)

Along with reports of low job satisfaction, it is observed that many employees experience declines in self-confidence. It is emerged when recognition at work is given based on favoritisms. Being excluded from decision processes and social circles several participants reflected that, they have felt internal withdrawal, self-doubt and in many cases, they just tolerate it.

“Yes. Sometimes you’re ignored.” (Andzela)

“Yes, I’ve felt excluded from certain decision-making groups. I cannot say that I was fully excluded.” (Ivana)

*“It’s very important, but I’ve experienced that sometimes female colleagues try to isolate me, especially when I am excelling.”
(Tanja)*

Exclusionary practices have negative impact on progressive disengagement of employees from the institution. When exclusion within the organizational settings is reflected by

limited access to information, in decision making, and promotional visibility it creates a gap between the employee and what the organization stands for.

"Yes especially exclusion." (Bojana)

"Yes. I've been left out of HR planning sessions, and other female colleagues say they've experienced the same." (Lara)

"In this company I don't feel anything. But my previous experience can say that I have felt isolated and excluded at every point. I wasn't informed about anything." (Simona)

The issue is psychological strain, which in turn causes high levels of stress and exhaustion as women report simultaneously trying to find their way through highly complex power structures, interpersonal competition, and emotional strain. Also, in environments that may appear to be gender equal, we see that hierarchical issues and what is perceived as rivalry play a role in creating an unstable environment which in turn leads to overexertion. We also see that women are expected to constantly prove themselves, deliver good results and keep their composure under pressure, which in turn has very real emotional consequences.

"Stress is high where competition isn't healthy. Women are under pressure to be perfect." (Teodora)

"High levels of stress. More women don't always mean more support." (Milica)

"Stress increases when women compete for limited roles." (Bojana)

In many cases, what we see is that even though women are achieving leadership roles, it doesn't translate into empowerment or a sense of security in a relational sense. We also see that it can represent concern of emotional distance from some leaders,

choices about who they support, and problems of internalized prejudices that in turn affect women's mental health. This in turn contributes to a framework that supports self-doubt and at the same time makes it difficult for women to excel professionally in a way that is recognized and appreciated.

“I used to think gender didn't matter. Now, I realize working with my female supervisor has been emotionally taxing. She's often dismissive and cold toward women, and I didn't see it for what it was until now.” (Amna)

“Yes. I've observed women being excluded by other women from key decisions or information. It creates tension and affects negatively.” (Farah)

“If there is a presence of competition, stress can go really up. There's sometimes an unspoken pressure among women...” (Farah)

These studies reflect complex set of emotional issues, that are found in the setting of exclusionary and unsupportive behaviors. While same-gender distribution in organizational environment should bring unity, in settings in which Queen Bee behavior is the norm, this similarity instead fuels increased scrutiny and rivalry. Women in these settings report internalizing blame, living with chronic dissatisfaction, and experiencing long term emotional wear and tear in which the organization does not address.

Women workers' psychological health is greatly impacted by the interaction of stress and exclusion, which frequently results in unique coping difficulties and fuels professional burnout. Due to constant pressure to succeed and negotiate intricate power dynamics, interpersonal rivalry, and unrecognized emotional labour, participants frequently reported high levels of stress. In situations that may appear to be gender-equal at first, hierarchical issues and perceived competition exacerbate this pressure, leading to overstretching and emotional exhaustion. Because people tend to internalize blame rather than attribute distress to systemic issues, the invisibility of subtle discrimination and the normalization of competition among women exacerbate

this psychological burden. According to reports of stress and burnout, there are real emotional repercussions to this constant demand for perfection and poise under duress. For women with family responsibilities, the psychological effects of work-related stress and marginalization are often worsened, significantly affecting their personal lives. Significant role conflict and an increase in emotional burden can result from the emotional work needed to uphold a professional façade while juggling domestic responsibilities. Effective coping strategies are seriously weakened when female employees—especially those with families—face persistent exclusion from important networks, emotional instability in leadership, and a lack of consistent management support. A profound sense of inadequacy that permeates their everyday lives and lowers job satisfaction is often the result of this, as it often results in a diminished sense of control over their career path and balance in their personal lives. Many women, particularly those juggling work and family, feel unsupported and vulnerable to burnout as a result of the ongoing pressure to perform and the emotional isolation that comes with competitive environments. Reduced psychological well-being at home is often the result of the emotional toll that these dynamics exact, impacting family relationships and general life satisfaction.

4.4.2 Decline in organizational psychological climate. In many organizations it is observed the development of a climate of distrust and discomfort which result of Queen Bee behaviour. When employees feel excluded from important meetings, or targeted by senior staff a culture of instability is created. This emotional disconnect decreases motivation and weakens the psychological connection between employees and the work environment.

“I think it has negative impact. Without motivation. And cannot wait for the weekends and the end of the work hour” (Tima)

“Very high-stress” (Tanja)

In the wake of these issues of trust, it is recognized great reduction in cross women’s solidarities. Although organizations may promote the idea of workplace collaboration, in practice, it is reported dissolved alliances. Additionally, women in leadership position tend to, both consciously and unconsciously, do not engage in informal communication with the newer female employee.

“There’s a pattern among women in leadership, they frequently left out newer women of informal discussions” (Tanja)

The traits such as collaboration, sharing knowledge, positive relationships among the workers and leaders often are disrupted in work environment, where a female employee feel pressure to guard their own position and withdraw from team efforts. Additionally, the emotional labor that is displayed in environments when female subordinates feel the need to fit in, it is resulted by reducing mental energy. Instead, this mental energy to be directed towards team performance, it affects the whole organization’s performance.

“I believe that at work, it’s important to love what you do. You should feel connected to your colleagues, and everyone should make an effort to create a pleasant or enjoyable atmosphere. Unnecessary tension shouldn’t be created, because it’s important for higher productivity. There should be space for everything — a place to laugh, have fun, and work together.” (Kate)

“Owned leadership roles rather than share them” (Teodora)

“Firstly we have to start with leadership culture. We should note the importance of collaboration and having collaborative leader. The leader’s job is to encourage connection over competition.” (Ana)

Instead of fostering collaborative environment, this disruption of collaboration in the workplace settings increase the conflict and polarization. Instead of encouraging friendly relationships, it is replaced by competition.

“The environment can get hostile or unfriendly. When women feel threatened, they tend to isolate instead of collaborate” (Lara)

“Stress is high where competition isn’t healthy” (Teodora)

“Female-heavy teams can be great or full of rivalry. It depends on leadership” (Andzela)

In adverse environments, leadership do not provide positive image of work settings, it creates climate that has great impact on the relationship among the subordinates. Emotional favouritism, withholding of information, and being excluded influence the work dynamic within the organization. These conflicts contribute to mistrust and support in the organization decrease. The main issue appears, if this kind of dynamic is not recognized on time, it is resulting in major concerns as arising polarization, where team members are distant from one another.

“High levels of stress. More women don’t always mean more support” (Milica)

In terms of organization wide issues, it is observed in adverse organizational climate has an impact on productivity and engagement. Through the instances that participants have reported: dividing team members, evidence of lack of communication result in distancing behaviour among the subordinates. Even though participants haven’t mentioned it directly being distance from others, we can observe in traits such as reduced social interaction, lack of input, and overall disinterest.

“Yes. I can tell that she rarely invites women to main projects. In case she decides to do it, you are on the sight.” (Amna)

“I don’t think so that only queen bee can cause this kind of behavior of isolation or exclusion. Women know to separate each other’s in the groups” (Nasiha)

“It is very important. We spent lot of times at the work. And we do need healthy settings. I cannot imagine myself working in toxic environment and waiting to finish my job. Plus, the work done will not be good done job” (Nasiha)

All these results showed, Queen Bee behaviours which might be subtle or occasional have a great effect on the emotional and relational aspects of the work environment. Additionally, women in leadership position, instead of fostering a positive image, to serve as inspiration to other female subordinates. They engage in

patterns of behaviours that negatively affects the organizational climate as: promoting individualism instead of teamwork; creating mistrust environment and also it degrades moral of the subordinates-they feel demotivational.

4.4.3 Lack of modelling and mentorship. In terms of senior women being inspiring role is a lacking element that diminishes junior women employees ' motivation and aspiration. When leadership is accompanied by lack of support or empowerment, it is resulted by interpreted of their growth path within the organization. This gap affects not only the individual but also weakens the whole leadership culture.

"In my experience Mixed. Some female colleagues have been supportive, but in leadership, I've felt that some women were hesitant to promote others unless they were seen as non-threatening." (Ivana)

"Minimal support from female managers. Colleagues are more helpful." (Bojana)

"Colleagues are supportive. Managers rarely." (Andzela)

In many organizations, women reported lack of inclusive leadership from their superiors. While some managers might provide slight professional input, on the other hand we can observe emotional distance among the leader and subordinates, it is reflected by interruption of the relationships that leads to weakened connection and reduction in mutual trust. With the appearance of these issues, female subordinates might start to feel excluded that negatively affects their work performance.

"I can rate it positively at the moment. However, in past experiences, I can say that we felt excluded." (Simona)

"Female leaders — some are helpful, others defensive." (Teodora)

"Yes. Some women avoid mentoring others and avoiding collaboration." (Ana)

Mentoring becomes a key element missing in women's professional development.

"My colleagues are great, but my supervisor — she has never offered me mentorship or recognition. I thought it was my fault."
(Amna)

"There are many advantages as: understanding between each other, also seeing a successful woman can make you to follow the step later on to become one." (Nasiha)

"If I were a manager, I would make it a point to identify and encourage talented women, especially those who don't speak up for themselves." (Farah)

On the other hand, several participants described their leaders as supportive. The supportive leader is described in terms that appreciate their growth, being available to them, and offering mentorship.

"I've had a very positive experience with a female director in our hospital. She was firm, fair, and very approachable. She listened to feedback and mentored several of us into leadership roles."
(Lejla)

"My current manager, she is really supportive woman, a woman with nerves that's how I would say because she has nerves for everyone to explain for multiple times the same thing." (Nasiha)

This distance in personal connection might lead to minimal development.

"I can't say much, but with a woman, you can share certain moments of the day. You can share more privately... even though we didn't have that closeness, she still supported me on a professional level." (Kate)

“Promote collective achievement over individual success.”

(Milica)

“I would be supportive for women. I would provide mentorship and opportunities for growth. Especially to the newly graduated workers.” (Tanja)

The worst scenario is when a woman leader does not foster collaborative work environment, it might influence the junior female subordinates opinion, they might begin to think that power is associated with emotional distance or competition. At the end, we can highlight that queen bee behaviour has negative effect for professional excellence.

“At the moment, yes. There’s no withholding of information. If you want to learn, it’s here. There is support available.” (Simona)

“Female leaders — some are helpful, others defensive.” (Teodora)

“Promote collective achievement over individual success.”
(Milica)

When management does not promote inclusive environments or inspiring practices, it is resulting in a way that the organization’s culture might start to lose potential opportunities for collective growth and solidarity. Mentoring gaps and inconsistent role modelling not only suppress women’s professional development but also fade away the trust and cohesion which represent key element for sustainable progress within the institution.

4.4.4 Barriers to women’s career advancement. In the culture of Queen Bee leadership, there is pattern that female leader eliminate women subordinates from promotion, which it has great impact in terms of career growth. Additionally, it is reported that promotions are achieved by subordinates that were selected as favorites to the senior woman. Additionally, participants reported that they get vague feedback and see their progress delayed even when they are experienced/ qualified and competent.

“Yes. I applied for a promotion twice. Each time, my supervisor gave me really weak feedback and said I ‘needed more time,’ while promoting a male colleague who had been with us less than 2 years”.
(Amna)

“Yes, I had a female HR director who canceled my promotion even though I met all criteria. She said I wasn’t ready.” (Lara)

Beyond the issue of which women being eliminated from promotions, there is another pattern of women’s issues that are being ignored and being unrecognized, accomplishing tasks where no recognition is given that results in self- doubt.

“I don’t feel isolated by my female colleagues, but I don’t feel accepted by the manager. I work for everyone, but I don’t receive even the raise I deserve.” (Tima)

“Support from peers is good. But from female managers, not so much. There’s this unspoken attitude of ‘I had it hard, so you should too.’” (Lara)

We see that in managers that act in the way of Queen Bee role, it is characterized by withholding information, and assigning tasks that are designed to fail which has disadvantageous outcomes for career growth. Additionally, these actions not only harm the individual development, but it also reduce organization’s ability to develop leaders.

“Personally, no, because I haven’t allowed it. But I’ve been a witness to my colleagues who directly faced Queen Bee syndrome. For example, withholding knowledge so that others wouldn’t have the opportunity to progress.” (Simona)

“I’ve experienced this when a manager gave me tasks that were designed to fail.” (Ana)

Male managers were described that they are more oriented towards growth and to keep emotions on side. Female subordinates that do not support women in leadership position might cause isolation or distancing themselves from female leader.

“I find it easier to work with male managers. There’s less of a sense of competition, and I feel like there is more trust in my abilities without the extra layer of judgment that I sometimes face from female managers.” (Ana)

“I’ve received mixed support from female colleagues and managers. While some were there for me, others are more focused on their own progress, which can limit opportunities for others.” (Dina)

When managers prioritize compliance over results or passion over strategy, a biased system of advancement is allowed to grow, which in turn silences many talented women.

“She supports those employees who run around after her, who try to be obedient. Those who just do their job and aren’t interested in anything else are the ones who end up isolated.” (Tima)

“Female colleagues have been helpful, but my manager tends to favor male team members.” (Tanja)

In many cases it's seen that instead of supporting one another, managers engage in behaviours that undermine other women in order to protect their own position. Even though female leaders tend to be represented as supportive leaders, in fact the underlying tones are being competitive, disrupting the advancement of other.

“She wants to be the only woman at the top. It means when a woman in power prevents other women from advancing, fear of being replaced etc.” (Farah)

“Yes. A female department head repeatedly delayed my project approvals and discredited in front of executives. It slowed my progression for nearly a year.” (Ana)

The Queen Bee patterns of behaviours that are observed in female managers affects both the personal interaction, and organizational climate. It is evident that affects the women's recognition, training and advancement. Additionally, it has negative impact on the emotional and professional level, that not only directly influence the individual career, but the of inclusion, equity, and leadership growth in our organizations.

4.4.5 Costs paid by queen bee women. Queen Bee behaviors impact the well-being of the subordinates. The issue of constant pressure to prove themselves and being in the presence of dysfunctional leadership represents a challenge, especially in gendered stereotypes. Additionally, there is a possibility that female managers, in order to show their value, might act in a stricter way and engage in distancing behaviour as needed. The collaboration of these kinds of behaviours results in affecting their well-being and the well-being of their team members.

"Managers need to know that we are not here to take their jobs, and we are not here to compete with them. They are here to guide us, not to be in competition with us, but for us to work together to successfully complete the job. Some managers don't understand this, and simply understanding that can lead to better workplace harmony, better job performance, etc. I believe that every manager should attend a seminar and work on themselves." (Tima)

"There has to be something for promoting better work environment as doing leadership training a requirement and reward mentorship efforts. Women helping women should be part of performance reviews." (Tanja)

In another turn women report to feel emotional isolation which they experience as they navigate male dominated and competitive environments.

"Yes, every company should have a psychologist. It would help, especially for those with Queen Bee syndrome, to work through their frustrations and complexes." (Simona)

The continuous pressure for control and superiority which we see in many of these leaders' behaviours diminishes the quality of their engagement which in turn

affects the individual leader's emotional well-being as well as the team climate. In the quest for constant evaluation, which is a part of their role, these women may become less open to feedback, more skeptical of true team cohesion, and very focused on status preservation.

4.5 Weakened Support and Cultural Context

The Fifth theme is the 'Weakened Support' and 'Cultural Context' shows how systems and culture play a role in breaking down the unity among women in professional settings. As we see in Figure 5 this theme includes four related categories which in turn present both interpersonal issues as well as large scale structural and social cultural issues, which in turn play a role in the women's group success. The most common issue reported is "Weak trust between women" which is repeated issue of emotional distance and defensiveness which is in large part brought about by status anxiety and competition.

Table 6

Frequencies of Weakened Support and Cultural Context Themes

Theme	Subtheme	Sum
Weakness of Solidarity Among Women	Jealousy and perceived status threat	8
	Weak trust between women	15
	Inability to celebrate other women's success	3
	Isolation of successful women	5
Psychosocial Responses To Group Threat	Distancing and individualization within the group	8
Conceptual Gap and Silence in Balkan Context	Lack of local conceptual equivalent	1
	Culture of silence and hesitation to express	3
Cultural Norms As Barriers to Solidarity	Normalization of competition among women	2
	Strong adherence to traditional gender roles	1
	Idealization of individual achievement over collective threat	0
Total		46

The codes such as “Jealousy and perceived status threat” and “Normalization of competition among women” which present how in fact what we see is that both in terms of relationship dynamics and in culture we are dealing with a very fragile support system. These codes propose that we cannot assume solidarity among women based just on them being women; instead, we must see to it that we create spaces which question the rivalry and hierarchical structures. The sub sections which follow go into how this play out and are reproduced in day to day organizational life.

4.5.1 Weakness of solidarity among women. In the office setting women have reported the presence of competition and jealousy, it weakens the image of cohesive work team. In some settings where women feel threatened, collaboration is less present, and it is replaced by more exclusionary practices. Additionally, it has significant impact in terms of professional growth when adequate support is not met. Participant reported feeling of exclusion due to fail recognition of their performance. Also, this plays out psychically and in terms of professional growth which is damaged when support is not given out to a woman in the wake of her achievement or increase in visibility.

“It’s important to have good relationship, but it can be difficult when there’s jealousy or competition. I try to have good relationships but have experienced instances where I’ve been excluded by other women.” (Lara)

“From my personal perspective is mixed. Unfortunately, I cannot say that in our company we support each other. For example, a women will never offer another woman for recommendations, I don’t know maybe it is because everyone cares about their position.” (Milica)

“Advantages: Shared challenges. Disadvantages: Jealousy, insecurity.” (Bojana)

According to what is reflected from the participants' reports, there is a lack of celebrating women’s achievement. When women achieve success, that achievement is

either ignored or questioned, which in turn heightens emotional barriers and weakens the development of trust within professional settings. This emotional disruption plays a role in the hard process of recognition and advancement.

“Very important. We need more support and less silent competition.” (Jelena)

“I’m glad to see a woman succeed in any field.” (Tima)

Trust between women in professional settings is key to a unified and empowering atmosphere. But we see in our interview data that if there is an emotional disruption results only to on person’s gain. Additionally, lack of unity and lack of support among the female subordinates results great issue for organizational climate.

“Yes, it’s very important to establish an open relationship where I can communicate about work without holding back, wondering if I’ll be judged or how I should behave.” (Kate)

“It is pretty important for me in general to establish a good relationship with anyone at the workplace. Regarding women I would like to have a good relationship with them as long as it is professional, and our personal lives aren’t involved.” (Anastsija)

Experiences of mistrust produce social and professional exclusion for women. Some women reporting that as they do better in their careers, they in turn see less of their peers and superiors.

“There’s a pattern among women in leadership, they frequently left out newer women of informal discussions.” (Tanja)

“In my experience Mixed. Some female colleagues have been supportive, but in leadership, I’ve felt that some women were hesitant to promote others unless they were seen as non-threatening.” (Ivana)

In many cases, what we have observed is a great deal of betrayal and disappointment when women experience interpersonal rejection and subtle forms of sabotage. Excluded from teams, which also represents an issue that success and

belonging don't go hand in hand, which is what happens most often in some of the greatest teams led by women.

"In women-dominant teams, competition is more psychological: exclusion, or performance sabotage." (Ana)

"Insecure women leaders. Someone who will not let their places be replaced, and somehow, they are accepting to be at the same place." (Andzela)

From the reports obtained, the negative view of women in leadership positions was explained in terms of being assertive, narcissistic, and manipulative. These characterizations explain the structural issues rather than an issue at a personal level.

"Cold-hearted woman. How can you behave to someone in that way? Who is giving you the right? Also, this kind of woman I would call narcissistic, jealous." (Nasiha)

"We think that all woman are our enemy, which I don't believe in that." (Nasiha)

In some settings expressions of gendered loyalty is completely disrupted, characterized by women associating with their female peers with instability or hostility. Additionally, some participants reported a preference for working with men, they mentioned that working with men means less emotional drama and less competition this also shows how same gender trust can be disrupted under pressure.

"Because there is no presence of jealousy, no competition, while among the woman there is Hypocrisy. In general, I don't prefer women in the context of work. The woman is evil." (Simona)

"There are more men, but with women, there's more drama and less work." (Tima)

Even at times when women do trust or support each other, the same traits are not obtained from the organizational culture. We found out that women's identification with each other did not result into support in the organizations that offer limited number of leadership positions, that heightens the competition among the workers.

"Mixed. It depends, there is a group of friend we support each other, but there is another group that they don't support no one because there is little promotions for those positions, and want to keep the potential opportunities for themselves." (Farah)

"It can matter. Female managers might better understand personal struggles, but they can also be more competitive." (Jelena)

These studies report that which we see is a break in solidarity among women which is not random nor uniform in all settings. It is a result of the interaction between personal issues, leadership styles, and institutional structures which favor competition over connection. The breakdown of which we celebrate each other, the wear of trust, and the isolation of high achievers is not only a sign of Queen Bee behaviour but also an indicator of a system, which in its imbalance consistently works against large scale female success.

4.5.2 Psychosocial responses to group threat. In female teams we see a tendency for interpersonal disruption, that result of distance and individual. It represents competition and public recognition are the main focus over collaboration. In such settings women may begin directing their energy into personal issues, which in turn causes great professional isolation. Additionally, disruption of the team structure results in less solidary between members and a careless attitude toward shared success.

"In female-dominated teams, competition can be intense. Sometimes the pressure to 'stand out' leads to stress and distrust." (Ivana)

"The advantage I've realized is that I shouldn't behave like them. As for the disadvantage, there's not enough collaboration." (Simona)

Moreover, we can see the disruption in cohesion and how participants react in the forms of exclusion. Situations in which someone feels ignored or excluded in informal circumstances show how interpersonal distance (emotional or social) manifests itself in direct relationships between people. Although these "microscopic" events — such as situations in which individuals feel ignored or excluded — are the experience of the individual, they actually reveal broader social or systemic problems. These problems relate to how a society or organization often favors individual success (emphasizing individual achievement and competition) over collective empowerment and cooperation among to people.

“Yes. Sometimes you’re ignored.” (Andzela)

“Yes especially exclusion.” (Bojana)

Despite that we see some representation of female empowerment in certain spaces what we in fact see are stories of distance and fragmentation which question the true strength of these ideas in practice. When support is not consistent and team relationships do not have mutual investment group identity breaks down as well as the ability for that group to be resilient. The fact that there are successful women in a setting does not represent enough to foster solidarity if the environment does not support the structures that foster support inclusive engagement.

“In a positive way I think it helps promote inclusiveness at the workplace and creativity as well, female empowerment and growth.” (Anastsija)

The distancing behaviour is the result competitive pressure. We also can see that the move from collaborative structural organization into fostering individual culture it weakens the voices of the female subordinates in the organization.

4.5.3 Conceptual gap and silence in Balkan context. In the absence of a local term that translates to “queen bee” we see a gap in the recognition and treatment of gender issues in the Balkan setting. When these behaviours go unlabeled, they are harder to identify and might be accepted without question. In cultures which support

and value mentoring and support as the main practices, the issue of which behaviour is out of line is left unsaid or rejected.

“We don't really use a term like ‘queen bee ’here, and I personally haven't seen this behaviour. In our hospital, I can say that woman mentor another woman. I think it's more about culture than gender. It is mine first time approaching with this term, so according to the text that you have provided I have understood when a senior woman distances herself from other women but honestly, I haven't witnessed that here.” (Lejla)

Nevertheless, workers are starting to become aware of the silence. Some of the participants report the need for forums where women will feel free for addressing their issues without fear of judgment. The reticence to suggest is not a result of a lack of insight but of greater issues related to social consequence and professional peace. When people do not speak out the basic issues of inequality go unchallenged.

“Here are the leaders that needs to make safe scape for communication so the issue could be addressed. Many women are afraid to speak up because they don't want to seem ‘difficult. ’I can firmly say that every change starts with the safe space for communication.” (Ivana)

These issues present a picture of how we see the integration of conceptual ambiguity with a culture of hesitation.

4.5.4 Cultural norms hindering solidarity. Unfortunately, work-place competition among women is an accepted practice that manifest low collective motivation and creates issues with solidarity. At this point we see the development of emotional fatigue, disengagement, and dysfunctional team dynamics.

“I think it has negative impact. Without motivation. And cannot wait for the weekends and the end of the work hour.” (Tima)

“The only preference is for the manager to be male, regarding employees I don’t really have a preference, half can be male half female so there is a balance.” (Anastsija)

Strong in the perceiving roles based on the stereotypes. We can see that even for the tasks are divided in terms of female or male capacity, same as with the leadership approaches.

Although we may talk of equal terms, we still reinforce to what society that perceive proper for a certain gender. In the terms of what is expected in the work place and in we limit what is presented for mutual support and recognition.

“C) There needs to be balance, especially for our work. It’s known that women are more organized when it comes to finances. On the other hand, certain tasks, like the ones my colleague does (e.g., vehicle registration, working in the field), are easier when there are men involved.” (Kate)

“While I personally have had better experiences with male managers in terms of emotional stability, I believe a diverse leadership team offers the best balance of logic, empathy, and adaptability.” Start with leadership culture. Highlight the importance of collaborative leadership.” (Dina)

In some situations, leadership success is labeled as a personal accomplishment. Due to this reason the collective progress is excluded and reduce the values of collaboration. This model arise individualism which diminishes the structural support and collaborative actions which in fact sustain long term success.

“Firstly we have to start with leadership culture. We should note the importance of collaboration and having collaborative leader. The leader's job is to encourage connection over competition. ” (Ana)

These presentations of what is considered normal in our culture support rigid gender roles and individual success at the expense of cooperation. They also form a setting in which solidarity is hard to achieve and sustain.

Chapter 5

Discussions and Conclusions

5.1 Discussion

The study's conclusions highlight the significant psychological load that women bear in gendered work environments. Participants consistently articulated how their daily experiences were shaped not just by tasks and roles, but by emotional labor that remained largely invisible to those around them. This burden was particularly noticeable for women who had to manage leadership roles in settings where men predominated. A psychological environment characterized by exhaustion, self-doubt, and alienation was produced by the pressure to maintain composure, competence, and emotional restraint—often while also handling subtle exclusion or outright disregard. According to Karyotaki et al. (2020) and Repetti & Wang (2017), such a setting is not just stressful in the conventional sense; it gradually undermines self-worth. Many participants talked about using defensive emotional strategies to stay functional rather than feeling validated in their leadership roles. Their descriptions of feeling “like an outsider even when at the top” best illustrate this. Such statements reveal a profound detachment from the organizational cultures they are a part of, rather than being rhetorical devices. Women's self-descriptions of “hardening” or “shutting down emotionally” indicated both personal anguish and the structural inability to accept a range of emotional styles. These responses are in line with the ideas of surface acting and deep acting as presented in *Frontiers in Psychology* (2024) and *The Glass Hammer* (2024), which postulate that psychological exhaustion results from prolonged emotional repression.

Participants frequently complained that expressing their emotions was frowned upon rather than valued, which made them doubt the authenticity of their leadership identities. To avoid being perceived as “too soft,” “too harsh,” or “too emotional,” many talked about calibrating every word, tone, and response. Authenticity and inner peace were sacrificed for these overly tuned performances. According to Brescoll (2016), dynamic participants frequently reaffirmed in their interviews that female leaders are more likely than their male counterparts to face consequences for displaying emotion. In addition to professional stagnation, women suffer from

personal exhaustion as a result of internalizing the notion that their innate interpersonal styles are immature or unprofessional.

Most troubling of all, emotional pain was frequently characterized as something that needed to be handled alone. One crucial component of workplace resilience, mentoring, was conspicuously lacking or purposefully withheld, especially from female leaders. Numerous women spoke of female superiors who actively avoided contact, declined to provide advice, or even blocked their path to advancement.

Women reported feeling discouraged, invisible, and undeserving as a result of these actions, which were frequently subtle but had a lasting impact. According to Faniko, Ellemers, and Derks (2021) and Narcikara (2018), these accounts show patterns of “Queen Bee” behaviour that are adaptations to hostile professional ecologies rather than isolated pathologies.

This study reframes the term “Queen Bee” as a systemic outcome, even though it may suggest individual dysfunction. Due to years of inclusion and emotional suppression, women occasionally turn to gatekeeping practices to safeguard their precarious position. In a moving statement, one participant said, “She pulled the ladder up behind her.” This metaphor captures a real-life situation in which survival demands sacrificing unity. According to the participant accounts, these behaviours are the result of long-term exposure to situations in which only one woman can succeed at a time rather than malicious intent. The dynamics of Queen Bees must be interpreted in light of the larger cultural narrative of competition and scarcity, as suggested by LevaApp (2024) and AB Academies (2019).

These dynamics have an effect that extends well beyond the specific job function. Many participants talked about how their personal lives were impacted by workplace exclusion, which had an impact on their relationships, mood, and sleep. A recurrent pattern became apparent: women would leave emotionally stressful workplaces to enter emotionally draining home life, where unappreciated caregiving responsibilities awaited them. This dual burden aligns with research on emotional exhaustion and invisible labour (Humanoo, 2025; Michel et al., 2010).

Women were frequently exhausted in both areas as a result of the pressure to appear competent in public while repressing their emotions in private.

This emotional burden was exacerbated for women who were also mothers or other caregivers. Coworkers and superiors rarely understood or valued the degree of

emotional control needed to balance work and home responsibilities. After a long day of emotional masking at work, participants often reported feeling irritable with loved ones or missing milestones at home as examples of moments of guilt. These individual sacrifices highlight the need for a more sympathetic corporate culture that views emotional labour as a valid and expensive form of professional contribution rather than as a liability.

The conflict between professionalism and humanity is evident in the participants' descriptions of emotional repression. Many believed they could never afford to look uncertain or overwhelmed, especially when other women were around. This suggests a more profound kind of identity conflict, in which female leaders have to control their perceptions in order to meet gendered expectations in addition to performing well in their positions. This pressure frequently resulted in what some have called “performing leadership,” a role that required them to mask their inner struggles and wear confidence like a mask. According to Baira (2019) and Will Hall (2018), this is known as “identity performance,” which eventually causes a detachment from oneself and other people but may enable survival in hostile systems.

Even admirable qualities like empathy or teamwork are usually undervalued in these kinds of settings. Women who attempted to use relational intelligence as a leadership style reported feeling weak or unsure of themselves. On the other hand, people who took on more assertive roles frequently encountered criticism for being “too harsh” or “unfeminine.” A limited and masculinized leadership model that penalizes deviation on both sides is reinforced by this dilemma. The outcome is what SAJIP (2023) and Powell & Butterfield (2003) refer to as “trait conflict,” in which women are judged on their ability to meet conflicting expectations rather than their effectiveness. Many participants talked about feeling “never enough”—too passive, too outspoken, too emotional, and too detached all at once.

Such internal dissonance has tangible professional repercussions and is not limited to psychological experiences. Many participants related how they were excluded from important meetings, denied promotions, or withheld information—actions that were frequently excused by ambiguous terms like “not ready” or “not a team player.” Long-term career stagnation resulted from these ostensibly minor exclusions. Women complained that they were ignored despite being expected to perform better and conform more than others. These trends are consistent with the

structural barriers described by Narcikara (2018) and Derks et al. (2016) as being normalized by cultural silence and justified by personalized language.

Crucially, a large number of participants blamed their difficulties on personal shortcomings rather than gendered exclusion. Across accounts, this internalized narrative—"perhaps I wasn't good enough"—was strikingly consistent. Women were reluctant to identify the problem, even when it was evident that there was bias or sabotage, and they frequently framed it as a need to "work harder" or "earn respect." This supports the findings of Sheppard & Aquino (2017), who contend that people internalize systemic inequality as personal inadequacy, which is why the myth of meritocracy endures. These kinds of stories actively weaken women's ability to resist as a group while also obscuring injustice.

Women's interactions with one another were also influenced by the pressure to self-censor. A number of participants recounted situations in which openly discussing exclusion or expressing solidarity was viewed as dangerous or unprofessional. Therefore, even when they saw other women being mistreated, they automatically remained silent. This quiet was a form of self-defense rather than indifference. Zandria et al. (2020) claim that these actions are a reflection of "invisible labour" and "representational burden," where people constantly have to balance not only their tasks but also their identities and allegiances. These relationships have a huge emotional cost, resulting in feelings of guilt, complicity, and emotional distance from peers. Perceptions of other women, particularly those in positions of authority, as unsupportive or even hostile were frequently the result of these experiences. Many participants reported that female superiors had ignored, dismissed, or micromanaged them. Some saw these experiences as signs of institutional scarcity, while others framed them as personality conflicts. Competition frequently takes the place of cooperation in environments where few women can advance. According to Faniko, Ellemers, and Derks (2021), Queen Bee behaviours are learned tactics in settings that set women against one another rather than being innate traits of personality. Under such circumstances, denying mentorship or undermining others turns into a survival tactic rather than a betrayal.

These dynamics result in immediate and long-lasting psychological harm. Participants talked about becoming less confident in their skills, questioning their choices, and avoiding opportunities. Some reported physical symptoms that are directly related to chronic stress, such as headaches, digestive problems, and insomnia

(BetterHelp, 2024; Humanoo, 2025). Others said they could not bear another cycle of emotional isolation and silent struggle, so they stopped pursuing advancement. These findings support the warnings of Stutts et al. (2018) and Michel et al. (2010) that when organizations disregard emotional wellbeing, they lose talent through emotional attrition rather than failure.

Women stated in a number of accounts that the emotional strain of their jobs continued after they left the office. Rather, it followed them home—into their roles as daughters, mothers, partners, or caregivers. They talked about becoming emotionally unavailable to spouses, becoming irritable with children, or entering homes with no energy left for meaningful connection. This buildup of stress resulted in an unseen but debilitating burden for those who had to perform multiple caregiving responsibilities. These women talked about feeling “fractured,” as if they had little time for themselves because they had to be everything to everyone. Repetti & Wang (2017) have extensively documented this phenomenon, characterizing the emotional spillover from work-related stress into interpersonal relationships as a significant predictor of psychological distress over the long term.

Burnout syndrome at work represents a consequence of long-term exposure to professional stress (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1996; cited in Poredos & Kovac 2005). The most common signs are: a feeling of physical and emotional exhaustion, loss of sense of personal worth, negativism, both related to oneself and to the goals of the job or organization in which one works, loss of interest in colleagues, cynicism and insensitivity to others, a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness, pessimism often accompanied by the sentence "Nothing can be done anyway", irritability and low tolerance for frustration, anger as a common emotion, hostility, suspicion, rigidity and inflexibility, withdrawal in social relationships, more frequent conflicts and aggressive outbursts, increased use of alcohol, tobacco, stimulants and medications, absenteeism from work, feeling of general weakness, frequent illness, hypersensitivity to stimuli (sounds, smells, heat, etc.), communication difficulties, loss of sexual interest and the development of sexual problems, physical symptoms: headaches, back pain, difficulty breathing, sleeping and eating, gastrointestinal disorders (Poredos & Kovac, 2005). Participants who reported working under Queen Bee leaders were particularly affected by this dual burden.

Due to the lack of psychological safety in these settings, women were frequently kept on high alert throughout the day. Many talked about having to carefully consider

interactions, control impression management, and foresee criticism. This feeling of loneliness was exacerbated by supervisors' lack of warmth or guidance. The result was a life without a place to recover, especially when combined with the emotional toil at home. This situation is consistent with research by Humanoo (2025), which found that employees are much more likely to experience burnout, anxiety, and relationship problems when they are unable to unwind in either area of their lives.

A number of women also emphasized how their confidence in female leaders had been undermined. Many had optimistic expectations about female solidarity when they first started working, but their expectations had changed after being excluded, fired, or sabotaged by other powerful women on multiple occasions. Some claimed that they “preferred male managers” because they felt less emotional complexity or perceived competition, rather than out of loyalty. These observations are directed at the structures that normalize competition and scarcity, not at women. According to Heilman & Okimoto (2007), assertiveness in women is frequently misinterpreted as aggression, whereas men are rewarded for having the same qualities, which distorts views of professionalism.

It was not merely a question of taste; institutional culture influenced the propensity to problematize female leadership styles and idealize male ones. Numerous participants discussed how individualism, emotional distance, and hierarchical control were rewarded in their workplaces. These standards subtly valued relational approaches, which are frequently associated with women, while favouring traditional masculine leadership qualities. Because of this, even women who came into the workforce with the intention of working together had to change in order to survive. Instead of being genuine expressions, these adaptations evolved into identity performances over time. According to Derks et al. (2016), women in high-pressure occupations who experience this type of ongoing emotional dissonance are more likely to experience identity instability, exhaustion, and alienation.

A recurrent and distressing theme was mentoring—or the absence of it. Participants frequently saw their lack of access to professional feedback, development opportunities, or guidance as a sign of personal failure. They started to lose their ambition, doubt their abilities, and wonder if they belonged. Some described being passed over for promotions or denied access to leadership trainings without providing an explanation. Others spoke of female supervisors who, despite strong performance, did not provide encouragement. Many women internalized a lowered sense of self-

worth as a result of these incidents, which grew worse over time. Mentorship, according to Maguire et al. (2024), is a psychological safeguard against the ongoing stress of underrepresentation and invisibility rather than a luxury.

Even in cases where women achieved professional success, the emotional toll of that achievement was rarely recognized. A number of participants talked about feeling indifferent or undeserving after reaching important milestones, such as leadership roles in projects, promotions, and organizational impact. They were met with criticism, envy, or silence rather than approval. The “imposter phenomenon,” a psychological pattern in which high-achieving people question their accomplishments and fear being exposed as frauds, is a result of this lack of recognition, according to Clance & Imes (1978). Stories from participants frequently recite this phenomenon: “I felt like I got lucky, not like I earned it,” or “I kept thinking they'd find out I wasn't as good as they thought.” Despite their irrationality, these beliefs capture the emotional reality of working with little support and constant scrutiny.

Participants also mentioned that, on a cultural level, their surroundings frequently lacked the language necessary to discuss these dynamics. The Queen Bee concept is not linguistically or conceptually well established in the Balkan context, which served as the study's foundation. Consequently, women's exclusionary practices were hardly ever identified, much less contested. Employees found it difficult to confront or explain what they were going through as a result of this normalization. Zhang (2020) highlights that the lack of language restricts resistance as well as recognition. People are left to understand exclusion as personal rejection rather than systemic dysfunction in the absence of common terminology for gendered power struggles.

These dynamics were made more complex by the cultural norm of avoiding conflict. Even in cases where abuse was evident, many participants spoke of an unwritten rule of “keeping the peace.” It was frequently viewed as improper or disruptive to openly discuss emotional neglect, favoritism, or exclusion. Women consequently learned to justify negative actions, repress their discomfort, and emotionally separate themselves from their peers. In addition to shielding detrimental organizational patterns, this cultural expectation made women feel alone because they had nowhere to turn to vent their frustrations or look for help. Such environments erode female solidarity by promoting individualism and discouraging group participation, claim Pillay-Naidoo and Vermeulen (2023).

This decline in trust eventually affected not just individuals but also the atmosphere at work as a whole. Several participants spoke of a culture in which women did not celebrate one another's accomplishments, where cooperation was the exception rather than the rule, and where jealousy took the place of encouragement. These dynamics were particularly common in hierarchical environments where women had limited access to leadership positions. Success was viewed as a finite resource in these situations; if one woman made progress, others were thought to lag behind. This phenomenon, which Narcikara (2018) calls “worker bee syndrome,” occurs when female subordinates reject female superiors due to internalized bias, thus sustaining the very dynamics they are subjected.

Participants' perceptions of women's ambition and authority were also influenced by media representations and cultural narratives. Some observed that while similarly assertive men were respected, assertive women were frequently characterized as cold, egotistical, or manipulative. Because of these beliefs, women were afraid of receiving harsh criticism if they spoke up for themselves or voiced their displeasure. According to Brownlee (2013), workplace behaviour is greatly influenced by cultural messaging surrounding gender norms, which prioritizes conformity over creativity. Women learn to suppress their voices and put off their needs in order to remain socially acceptable, even at the expense of their own well-being. This leads to a type of psychological containment.

In the end, this study shows that the difficulties women encounter in the workplace are largely caused by structural, psychological, and cultural systems that interact to produce ongoing stress. The Queen Bee phenomenon is a sign of environments that penalize solidarity and reward detachment rather than a personality defect. Women are expected to compete without trust, lead without assistance, and achieve without recognition. These pressures will continue to restrict not only the professional opportunities for individual women but also the potential for advancement as a group unless systemic change is implemented. Rethinking what leadership, mentoring, and solidarity mean in the contemporary workplace is necessary to address these issues; it goes beyond personal adjustment.

Creating a healthier organizational climate necessitates a systemic shift in how leadership, solidarity, and emotional labor are perceived and managed. Research by Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers (2016) highlights that Queen Bee behavior is not a product of individual pathology, but rather a defensive response to identity threat in

male-dominated professional settings. The accounts in this study—particularly those involving female supervisors withdrawing support or mentorship—mirror this pattern. As women ascend in environments that reward detachment and penalize empathy, they may suppress identification with junior women in an effort to secure their own standing. This distancing mechanism, while self-protective, ultimately reinforces the very culture of exclusion from which it stems (Derks et al., 2016).

To counteract these dynamics, Edmondson (2019) emphasizes the importance of psychological safety—an organizational condition in which individuals feel safe to express vulnerability without fear of negative consequences. The emotional withdrawal, guilt, and isolation reported by participants in this study reflect a profound lack of such safety. When workers feel that expressing doubt or seeking help is penalized, emotional resilience deteriorates. Encouraging open communication, tolerating mistakes, and fostering inclusive leadership can transform defensive behaviors into collective growth, helping reduce the emergence of Queen Bee patterns over time (Edmondson, 2019).

Moreover, Mafishiraz (2023), in her article suggested that assigned psychologist to company has significant impact. Firstly, psychologist might advise managers to learn how to listen and hear woman's voices, which reduce the burnout of the subordinates. Secondly, psychologist can have significant role in making the organization that supports work-life circulation, which will offer more understanding for woman due to their dual roles.

Additionally, mentorship plays a crucial buffering role. As Faniko, Ellemers, and Derks (2021) argue, formal support systems mitigate the psychological strain of underrepresentation and promote intra-gender solidarity. This aligns with participants' longing for guidance, validation, and recognition—needs that were often unmet in their professional narratives. Furthermore, Eagly and Carli (2007) show that leadership rooted in empathy and relational intelligence improves employee well-being and performance. Yet, these qualities are frequently devalued in masculinized cultures, forcing women to choose between authenticity and survival. Supporting a broader definition of effective leadership and institutionalizing mentorship could enable female leaders to uplift others without compromising their own legitimacy. Moreover, evolution of the performance management is crucial for developing more inclusive workplace. Where each subordinate will have right to give an opinion, which

will bring the organization in higher levels. The evaluations should be done anonymously without any consequences. (Eshete & Birbirssa, 2024)

5.2 Conclusion

The results of this study present that which Queen Bee behaviours in the workplace are very much a complex and dynamic issue which plays out in the context of gendered hierarchies. We see through the reports of our participants that themes of exclusion, rivalry, and emotional distance play out in particular with regard to female leadership which we note especially in settings which already had weak structural support.

In the study, we noted a large-scale issue, which is the emotional impact that women have reported experiencing in these types of work environments. Reportedly, they put forth that they feel out of place, stressed, and burned out, which they attribute to working for competitive or unsupportive female leaders. What we found is that while there was certainly overt hostility present, the primary issue was in fact more subtle in nature—issues of distance, of those who are leaving others out, and of favoring some over others. Also, we saw that the lack of what they identified as emotional safety and trust played a role in a setting which, in theory, is about professional achievement but, in practice, is dominated by personal issues.

Mentorship and modelling behaviours were reported as a consistent issue in many accounts which in particular concerned junior women professionals. We saw that many did not get the guidance or support from female superiors which in turn affected individual motivation as well as the overall leadership culture. In settings where women in leadership did not function as mentors or role models junior employees had difficulty seeing themselves advancing within the institution.

In what is reported by many of our participants we saw that while there is similarity between leaders and subordinates that does not in itself bring about solidarity. In fact what we found is that similarity often brought out defensiveness from the powerful which played out especially when subordinates showed signs of competence or ambition. We saw this play out in reports of sabotage, in the choice of tasks given out and in the promotion of others. Also, we see in these results that women leaders may

put forward an us against them mentality which they play into instead of a us as a team approach which includes the advancement of other women.

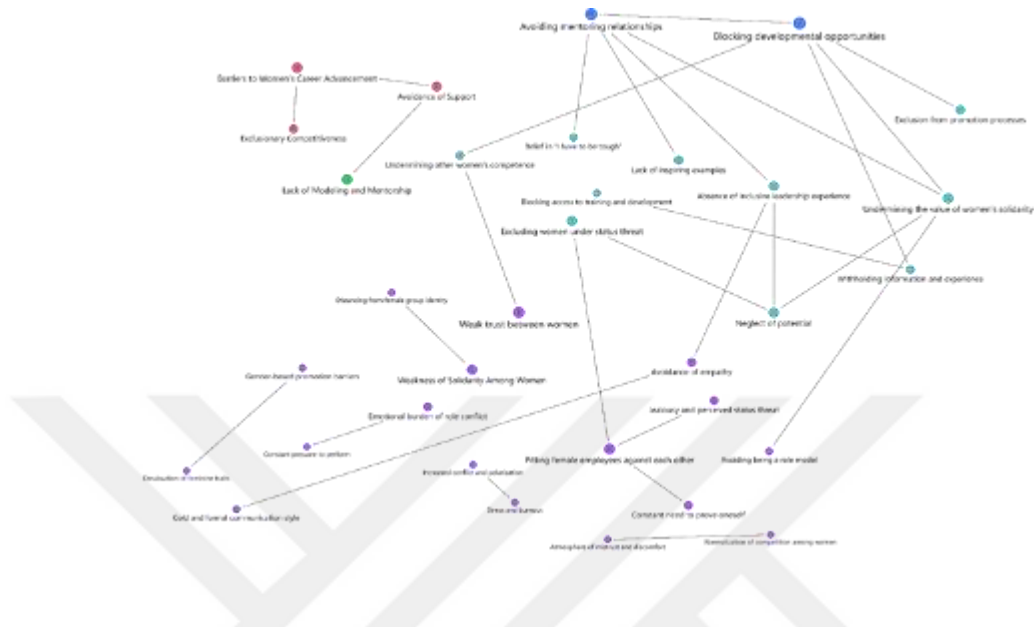


Figure 1. Map of code relation.

To also present the picture in detail, we have in Figure 1 included a relational map that which displays the grouping of Queen Bee actions and their related results. In the pink group which is very tight in its focus on career barriers, exclusion in competition, and which also includes a lack of support we see that which these elements very much go together. This interplay confirms that in reports of career standstill women also at the same time experience professional isolation and emotional neglect.

Adjacent to the pink group the green group which reports on the issue of mentorship's absence presents a noteworthy structure. In which it is seen that at points of exclusion and competition which dominate, mentorship does not play a role at all it is a totally absent element. Also, we see that the green group does not connect out to other dimensions which reports an environment where role modeling is a private preserve and not a shared attribute.

The purple group also goes into the issue of emotional breakdown which forms the base of what we see in terms of behaviour. It is a dense network of broken trust,

which at the same time is filled with interpersonal strife and social withdrawal mainly between women.

In the blue cluster of Figure 1 we see that which at first appears to be individual issues is in fact an issue of relationally rooted trust and emotional distance. These patterns which may at first look like personal issues are very much a product of the environment which the purple cluster represents. Additionally, we see a reciprocal element which puts in to play a cycle in which women who report low trust, or which do not have support are very much put in to a position which brings out defensive and1 which ends up excluding others. This interplay also puts forth the idea that Queen Bee behaviours do not come from person personality traits alone but are in fact grown out of what is very much a very competitive and emotional professional setting.

Transition into the dark blue cluster where we see that which structures put in place which impede women's progress are brought into focus, which includes actions like blocking promotions, not presenting development opportunities, and not including them in decision making processes. The close by presence of the blue and green clusters reports a dual structure of restriction. In one hand, we see the active push down of competence (blue) and in the other we see the lack of positive mentoring which should be there (green).

The green and dark blue groups 'complex interaction is at the core of this story. Although this tie is more of a background detail it is very much a key element. We see that which does not serve as a role model is in fact a player in professional standstill. Women in leadership by which they do not mentor others at all or do so poorly thus support the hierarchies which may in the past they fought against. These we see to be true relations which we back up with what we observe of the directionality between clusters. We see that mostly what we have is a progression from emotional breakdown (purple) to competition which leaves no room for the other (blue) and finally to issues of advancement which are great barriers (dark blue). In this which we present the purple cluster is in a base mediating role in which trust breaks down and we see interpersonal suspicion grow.

The issue of gendered specifics is very much at play here. In which we see that despite reporting to female managers many study participants did not report feeling supported by said leaders. Instead, what we found was a climate of distance, watchfulness, and comparison in which recognition was a rare thing, solidarity weak, and collaboration conditional. We see that which the assumption goes in to is that

which increasing the number of women into leadership roles will in turn make for more inclusive and empowering work environments. What we found however is that the quality of those relationships and the emotional tenor which they are framed in becomes a more determining factor in the professional development of individuals.

In another area of note we see that which pertains to the issue of trust and emotional labor between women colleagues. In many instances it was reported that they had greater psychological comfort and professional validation under male managers. This may not have been a result of what we may term positive male leadership traits but a result of less intra gender competition. Women in leadership on the other hand tended to be associated with micromanagement, selectivity, and affective inconsistency.

Also adding to these issues is the acceptance of competition between women which we see play out as an invisible yet powerful element in the professional setting. Many reported that women tend to become defensive or avoid collaboration when resources or outplacements are few. This competitive atmosphere which also is supported by larger cultural narratives and the lack of leadership roles, in turn we see a professional setting in which female solidarity breaks down.

These structures are not random but are a part of the system as a whole. We see that many organizations do not have in place what it takes to foster open communication, to recognize emotional labor, or to put in place mentorship programs which in turn leaves them unprepared to handle Queen Bee issues. Also as reported by a number of clusters in the visual map we note that support systems do not exist in a vacuum but are in fact a product of interpersonal relationships and power structures. Also, we note the issue of the structural neglect of mentorship which in turn puts down development of individual members and also depletes organizations of intergenerational knowledge which in turn hinders progress of the institution.

In looking at the data presented in Figure 6 we see that Queen Bee behaviours come from a mix of individual insecurities, organizational failures, and emotional peer dynamics. These behaviours are not rooted in fixed personality traits but in flexible responses to system level issues like scarcity of resources, power imbalances, and a lack of psychological safety. The relational maps and language used in the figures also present that these issues are at once emotional in feel and structural in nature which in turn form a perpetuating cycle of out grouping and division. Also at root is a multi-layered dynamic which plays out on the emotional, structural, and relational levels. We see in Queen Bees 'behaviours from emotional distance and competitive gate

keeping to passive neglect of mentorship that these issues play out through related sets of processes which in turn shape how women experience leadership, collaboration, and career growth.



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