



Papers of Canadian International Conference on Gender & Women's Studies 2021

July 3, 2021

Toronto, Canada

(Online Conference)

**Unique Conferences Canada Publication
Toronto, Canada**



Published by

Unique Conferences Canada

Unique Conferences Canada
94, Pettibone Square,
ON M1W 2J2
Canada

info@uniqueca.com
[http:// www.uniqueca.com](http://www.uniqueca.com)

Electronic book
Published in Canada
August 2021

ISBN 978-1-988652-42-9



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Gender & Women's Studies 2021 (CGWS2021)**

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Relational Agency to Combat Gender Injustice: An Exploration of a Gender Movement in Rural West Bengal

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Abstract

A swathe of feminist literature underscores the importance of collective forms of agency in transforming the structures leading to gender injustice. But, specifically, what kind of agency is conducive to such transformation? Drawing on primary research on a gender movement in rural West Bengal, this paper shows that the movement manifests itself through relational agency. That is, the agency of the movement and its members is concomitantly built through interpersonal relationships. First, relationships amongst its members enable them to develop their capacity for critical reflection on gender injustice, holding dialogue with stakeholders, and navigating challenging circumstances. Second, the members' relationships with villagers suffering from gender injustice lead them to have compassion for the victims, which instils their passion for its eradication. These emotional commitments are also strengthened through relationships amongst the members, enabling them to continue their activism despite facing harassment and death threats. Third, their agency significantly develops by transforming repressive relationships with others outside the movement into enabling ones through dialogue. Thus, this paper concludes that relational agency is conducive to transforming the gendered structures and more attention to relationships is necessary in deepening our understanding of movements for gender justice.

Keywords: *gender justice; agency; violence against women; social movement*

Introduction

Acknowledging the limitation of individual agency in combatting gender injustice, a swathe of feminist literature draws attention to the importance of collective forms of agency. But, specifically, what kind of agency is it, and how does such agency develop? Two bodies of literature suggest an answer to this inquiry. First, feminist literature on women's collective action suggests that women develop a variety of agentic capacities only through coming and acting together, resulting in collective agency that can combat gender injustice (Ibrahim, 2014; Kabeer & Sulaiman, 2015; Pande, 2000, 2002; Waldoks, 2015). Second, the growing literature on social movements of affection shows that emotions shared amongst a group of people galvanise them to mobilise against gender injustice and sustain their collective agency (Gould, 2003; Hercus, 1999; Jasper, 2018). I argue that these agentic capacities and communal emotions are generated by certain kinds of interpersonal relationships surrounding the movement, as advocated by relational theorists. In other words, it is the relationships amongst people that produce effects in the world and on the people themselves (Burkitt, 2016, 2018; Donati, 2015; Emirbayer, 1997). Taking this relational approach and drawing on primary research on a gender movement in India, this paper illuminates how the agency of both the movement and its members develop. In so doing, it demonstrates that the movement manifests itself through *relational agency*. While the scope of the paper is limited to this specific movement, I believe that its findings have wider implications for movements beyond this context, given the universal presence of relationships.

Context & Methods

The movement I studied is located in rural West Bengal, India, where violence against women and girls, child marriage, and dowries are still widespread despite laws to ban the practices. In this region, women's mobility, access to education and financial services, and involvement in decision-making both in domestic and public affairs are severely restricted. Thus, not only an individual woman's agency is constrained but also the chance of their taking collective action to challenge the status quo is slim. Against the odds, two local women's groups, together with a grass-roots NGO, have campaigned against gender injustice for more than two decades. Given the context, exploring this movement is particularly interesting. In presenting the information about the movement and the findings, pseudonyms have been used.

A grass-roots NGO, JDS, was established in 1994 by Abhijit Sen, who used to work for a development NGO. While JDS began by launching income generation programmes for local women, it now introduces a wide range of villagers to the concept of human rights by incorporating the concept into its development programmes. It also provides the two local women's groups AB and CD with technical and financial support, and together, the three conduct campaigns against gender injustice. JDS staff are professionals with at least a university or college degree, commute from the city of Kolkata, and vary in age and gender. The first women's group, AB, was founded in 2002 by local women who were already helping victims of violence since the early 1990's. After a series of training organised by JDS, more members joined, and now AB deals with cases of violence regardless of the gender of victims. The majority of AB activists are in their 40s or 50s with secondary education, but the founding members have university degrees. The second women's group, CD, was founded by a dozen local women in 2012 to eradicate the practices of child marriage and dowry. Having undergone training organised by JDS, CD holds meetings with local women to discuss women's and girls' rights. The group also conducts workshops and events to raise awareness amongst teenage girls about their rights. CD activists are in their 20s and early 30s, having completed only lower secondary education, and the majority of them are victims of child marriage and domestic violence.

For this primary research, two rounds of fieldwork were conducted in West Bengal. The first round took place from November to December 2016. Focus group discussions, informal interviews, and ethnographic observations were conducted with JDS staff, CD activists, and local women beneficiaries of JDS's microfinance programme (approximately N=40). The second round took place from December 2017 to January 2018 to explore the movement in depth. This time, I used an open-ended, narrative style of semi-structured interviews, which are particularly suitable for understanding the dynamic and interactive dimensions of the movement. The interviews were conducted with AB and CD activists as well as JDS staff (N=34), those supporting the movement (N=18), and other villagers (N=9). I also observed their campaigns, office spaces, and meetings, taking note of relevant information. Later, the data was transcribed and translated from Bengali into English and thematically analysed.

Relational Agency: How It Develops

Relationships amongst the members

Relationships amongst the members play an overarching role in developing the agency of the movement as well as its members. These relationships provide a nurturing ground for their agentic capacities—i.e., capacities for critical reflection, holding dialogue, and navigating challenging circumstances—to develop. These capacities develop relationally through professional training, more experienced members imparting skills, knowledge, and moral support to the less experienced, and working together with trial and errors as a team.

Sava Mondol, once a victim of abuse, is an exemplar of how capacity for critical reflection is generated through relationships. When her husband snatched all her property and disappeared to marry another woman, Sava was not capable of regarding this as unjust, until Samita Naskar, the founder of AB, came to help and took Sava to the JDS office. Receiving support from AB activists, Sava decided to pursue justice at court by undergoing training at JDS to handle her own case. Critically reflecting on gender injustice and her rights, she states: *Because of Samita, I have reached this place...after coming here, after undergoing the training, I understood what mine is and how much is mine – I understood myself.* Similarly, CD activists—most of whom are victims of child marriage—were unable to question gendered structures. However, by undergoing rights-based training and working with JDS staff who already have capacity for critical reflection, CD activists developed this capacity. Aarya Das says: *After becoming a member of CD, immense change has occurred. Previously, we were unaware of our rights, but we came to know about them...We have our own independence regarding our way of talking, walking, and moving. We must do this—there is nothing like that.*

The relationships amongst its members have also developed their capacity to hold dialogue. This capacity is important because, in the course of activism, the members have to advance their claim by putting forth arguments while allowing those with whom they communicate to do the same. However, this capacity was initially absent amongst CD activists. One such activist, Neela Pal, says: *Previously, we couldn't engage in many discussions. Every member used to say different things, so local women in village meetings used to get agitated and start shouting, and they were out of control.* In the face of this challenge, CD activists consulted JDS staff. Another CD activist, Aashi Gosh, recalls: *JDS staff used to sit with us and discuss what can be done. They were totally like friends.* To improve the communication skills of CD activists, JDS staff organised professional training and monthly meetings where they could practice dialoguing with JDS staff. With these enabling relationships in place, CD activists have gradually become capable of holding dialogue and delivering anti-child marriage messages to villagers.

The relationships amongst its members have also developed navigational capacity amongst them. Navigational capacity is indispensable for their campaign because it enables them to 'act in difficult circumstances and plan how they disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions' (Vigh, 2009, p.419). Sohini Saha, a senior JDS staff member, has an MA degree in Social Work and held several NGO positions in the past. Despite these qualifications, she says: *Earlier, I wouldn't understand the depth of what I was doing and would keep on thinking, 'What am I doing by going there regularly?'* Having undertaken training and worked with AB and CD activists as a team, her navigational capacity developed. She says: *Now I understand the work and what the objectives are behind it. Now, I understand what I can say to whom and when.* Similarly, recalling the journey of AB over the past two decades, founding member Anshu Sarkar says: *We have learnt a lot and it's not just because of the training we took. We have learnt a lot by actually working. We have learnt which path will lead us to where.* A newly joined AB activist confirms that this capacity was imparted from more experienced activists to her by working as a team: *We began to work while the training was on. But, all senior AB activists are always with us. Whatever we did not know, seniors have taught us everything.* Expanding beyond Kabeer and Sulaiman (2015), the finding shows that in addition to relationships between NGO staff and local women, relationships amongst local women themselves matter in developing agentic capacities critical for combatting gender injustice.

Relationships with villagers

The members' relationships with villagers also play a critical role in developing agency, generating compassion for those suffering and passion for gender justice. These emotions are very important to transform otherwise diverse individuals into a collective force. They also prompt the members to act even in the face of challenges, such as family objections, financial difficulties, harassment by villagers, and death

threats by anti-social gangs. Nearly all the interviewees emphasised that these emotions have given them the strength to continue their activism.

A JDS staff member, Tanuka Biswas, exemplifies how relationships with villagers develop the agency to fight against gender injustice. Being in charge of JDS's microfinance programme for local women, she inevitably witnesses women suffering from undeserved violence. A few years ago, a local girl whom she worked with committed suicide due to sexual abuse. She says: *This incident made me cry, and it took me a lot of time to overcome it.* Her way of overcoming this distress resulting from her compassion toward victims is to work hard for gender justice. She emphasises; *I get the motivation only from here. Such things do affect me, but then I concentrate on my work... When loan officers (who are local women) tell me that they talked to the bank manager and solved whatever problem, it makes me feel good.*

Sumitra Das's agency has significantly developed because of her close relationship with her elder sister. After marriage, her sister suffered severe domestic violence and was nearly killed by her in-laws. This tragedy triggered the development of these emotions in Sumitra and led her to become an AB activist. She admits that she has faced many challenges in the course of activism: anti-social gangs with guns came to her home when she was dealing with a rape case, and her female neighbours used to come as a group to criticise her whenever something happened in their neighbourhood. Being asked the reason for continuing to stand up for justice, she replies: *My father sold his land for my sister's marriage, and still it happened. Whenever I see any woman being tortured, I get shaken up. So, I try to make their lives a little bit better. I feel good when I am able to provide support to such women so that they can stand on their own two feet.*

Being nested in the enabling relationships within the movement further strengthens these emotional commitments. According to JDS director Abhijit Sen, regular training sessions and refreshers bring the members together, functioning as a critical incubating space where they can share their distress, compassion for victims, and passion for gender justice. Abhijit says: *I think the passion comes when you work with a team that is passionate. When your colleagues are also interested, they want to do something...you also make a leap forward into that goal, which is a more gender equitable and just, sustainable society.*

Similarly, a founder of AB, Samita Naskar, notes that relationships amongst members strengthen AB activists' emotional commitments and agency. Recalling her activism in the early 2000's, she says: *During that time, we did not receive any financial support. But, our motivation and energy for doing the work has always remained the same. The main motivator behind our energy has been JDS staff. In JDS, there have been many meetings, marches, protests, and plays. We have come here and relaxed, as if we have no sorrows.* At the end of the day, these activists have to return home where oppression of women is still widespread. Thus, in accordance with Hercus (1999), these women replenish their emotional energy through supportive relationships within the movement.

Relationships with others outside the movement

Just as relationships amongst the members develop their agency, so too do their enabling relationships with others outside the movement. These enabling relationships did not exist by default. Relationships between the members and others outside it used to be scarce or even repressive. By engaging in activism with passion and patiently holding dialogue with these others, the members gradually forged enabling relationships.

For AB, relationships with police officers are critical to their activism. Previously officers in the region were antagonistic to their activism. but enabling relationships have been forged through continuous dialogue. Sava Mondol proudly says: *Now, we are working with 48 police stations. Yesterday, I went to a new police station.* According to her, AB now has some supportive police officers who protect AB activists

from anti-social gangs and introduce them to other police stations to facilitate their activism. Sava said:
I get support for all my cases. I mean, I can find someone who supports me. Not only just me, they help all of the AB members. They also receive similar kinds of help and love as I do from the supporters.

Furthermore, relationships at home (with husbands and in-laws) are also critical for the agency of AB and CD activists. In villages, despite recent relaxation in norms, women leaving home is still severely discouraged, and many members left the groups because of family objection. Currently, the majority of these activists' families either support or allow their activism, which sustains their developing agency. What is noteworthy is that many of these enabling relationships were not given. They were gradually established by transforming repressive family relationships into enabling ones through continuous dialogue. Chan Das recalls: *Initially, my husband didn't support me and refused to acknowledge. But then I told him, 'I wish to do this. There are a lot of things that I don't do, if it's against your wishes. But, I want to do this.' Now I can leave all household duties to my husband and attend all of the training... To see a man take care of the household for a week is a big thing to me.*

Conclusion

This paper illuminated that the movement against gender injustice manifests itself through *relational agency*. Through enabling relationships within and beyond the movement being established, the agency of both these individuals and the movement as a whole develops. While confirming the findings from the feminist and social movement literature, it brought to light the enabling relationships as the nurturing ground where the agentic capacities and communal emotions are generated amongst its members. It further elucidated that transforming existing repressive relationships with others outside the movement not only develops the agency of the activists but also results in transforming the structures leading to gender injustice. Thus, I argue that relational agency is critical to combatting gender injustice and call for more attention to relational configurations in understanding movements for gender equality.

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Navigating Sexual Violence and Survivorship: A Survivor's Autoethnographic Journey Using TIKTOK

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Abstract

Little research to date has explored why survivors share their story through social media, especially through newer, mainstream platforms such as Reddit and TIKTOK. The purpose of this autoethnography was to explore how sharing and disclosing a lifetime of sexual trauma through first-person narrative on the social media platform TIKTOK impacts my recovery process as a survivor. I, as a survivor, believe that telling my story is empowering, and through this research I have found strength from a virtual community of survivors to create and post thirty one-minute videos and thirty reflexive journal entries. In this content, I worked through the intimate details of my experiences of sexual violence, the choices and decisions I made to cope at the time, and how I am negotiating the circuitous journey of healing in the aftermath. Using reflexive thematic analysis, I developed the following three themes: 1) being scared, 2) embodiment, and 3) survivorship and empowerment. This paper explores how working through the creation and naming of each theme helped me understand the complex emotions and fears faced as a survivor who is on a journey to recover from this trauma. This research highlighted a need to provide more safe spaces to give survivors the opportunity to talk about their experiences in their own words; this is our story to tell, and we must share it when (or if) we are ready.

Keywords: *survivorship, sexual violence, trauma, autoethnography*

Introduction

Sexual violence typically involves perpetrators exerting power and control over victims through unwanted sexual acts including sexual coercion, sexual assault, and rape. These acts do more than take away one's control; they also take away autonomy and innocence from victims who have been through such an act of violence (Conroy & Cotter 2017; Munro-Kramer 2017). Survivors of sexual violence often feel as though everything is taken from them; they are told what to say or not to say about what happened to them, especially when there is legal action being taken. There is a loss of power over who they are and over their bodies (Munro-Kramer 2017). "Victim" is the term often used right after an individual is sexually assaulted or raped, or prior to them beginning the healing process; a survivor usually refers to someone after the incident (could be shortly after or years later) who has begun to process the trauma. Identifying as a victim or a survivor is dependent on how the individual who experienced the trauma feels (Munro-Kramer 2017). Victims and survivors generally struggle to disclose incidences of sexual violence to police or officials like doctors, sexual assault nurse examiners, and counselors for various reasons such as embarrassment, blame, humiliation, victim blaming, and fear (Conroy & Cotter 2017). Comfort may be found in disclosing to friends, support groups, or in therapy settings; however, with a rise in social media platforms, survivors are increasingly finding ways to disclose to online forums and support communities from behind a keyboard and the safety of their home (Conroy & Cotter 2017; O'Neil 2018).

I am a survivor who has utilized online forums and social media after being assaulted when I was in denial and questioning what happened to me, to seek advice, and to release emotions that I did not feel comfortable saying out loud to a friend or therapist. I, like many survivors, hid my story out of fear and I never felt comfortable sharing the "complete" story with anyone. I spent over 30+ years

denying and hiding what started at 10 years old when my dad was sick, and one of the people that should have been there for me, sexually assaulted me; I had no family to protect me. Social media has become a large part of our daily lives, with more people becoming able to find individuals who have gone through similar life experiences. The myriad online forums, group chats, and support groups through social media sites provide a space for conversations and for the sharing of survivors' stories (O'Neil 2018). The anonymity of posting online can help fellow survivors find strength and empathy from behind a keyboard and somehow provides them control in their lives again as they are able to post what they need to say when they are ready (O'Neil 2018). Survivors can find a family in a virtual world when real life family and friends may have hurt them or betrayed their trust. The purpose of this autoethnographic research was to provide an analysis of my experience as both a victim and survivor of sexual assault and rape in areas that are emerging in this research context (e.g., autoethnography and survivors sharing their story on social media).

Methods and Materials

Ethnography and autoethnography are approaches to qualitative research that allow the researcher to be fully immersed in daily life and culture of the phenomenon of interest, namely through observation (Ejimabo 2015). Data is collected through various ways such as reflexive journaling, art, poetry and videos, and to ensure the integrity of the information collected, it is peer reviewed by members of the research team through checking for accuracy. I selected autoethnography as the qualitative research methodology for this project as it allowed for me to interject my personal narrative and emotions directly into the research. Allowing for me to be able to review the data from the thirty videos, twenty nine comments, and thirty reflexive journal entries provided me with benefits such as an upfront and honest reaction to the materials from the perspective of both researcher and subject. Autoethnography takes the researcher's own experiences and making them points of investigation (Ellis, & Bochner 2000). Due to the personal nature of autoethnographic research, the researcher(s) typically keep a reflexive journal that is incorporated into the data analysis process (Ejimabo 2015).

Societally, our daily communication through online environments has become pervasive and interactive, and with the addition of emojis, there is a perception that we are able to more effectively communicate our feelings and emotions in our online communications (Beneito-Montagut 2011). The critical part of being able to observe and engage is made difficult for those looking to do ethnographic research through online platforms as researchers are not able to visibly see how participants interact with what is posted. It is possible that as the researcher becomes comfortable with technology, the researchers can find a way to accurately record the interactions between users and online platforms. This allows for the researcher to collect data such as reactions to the personal narrative shared by the researcher by the online audience (Beneito-Montagut 2011).

I acknowledge my positionality in relation to this topic as a person with disabilities as well as being a survivor of multiple acts of sexual violence. I recognize that my emotions and experiences create a specific positionality on the subject matter. I recognize that I may show more empathy to women and those with disabilities who have also experienced sexual violence. I have chosen to place myself in the middle of the research and to document personal details of my experiences. Being the subject of my research has enabled me to show, track, and express the vulnerability survivors may show while dealing with the aftermath of a sexual assault and/or rape. I see my role in this research as continuing with something I—at one time—swore I would never do, which was talk openly about the experiences I had as a child, through my teens and twenties, and occasionally in my adult life. I chose not to discuss my most recent experiences of sexual assault and rape in this project as I feared what would happen if the perpetrator was to somehow see the videos and figure out I was talking about what happened. For my safety at this time, it was one piece of this journey I left out.

My intention was to generate and post content sharing statistical information, addressing myths regarding sexual violence, as well as sharing pieces of the sexual violence I have experienced. Topics included: discussing the emotional side of talking about sexual violence as a survivor to an online platform, reflecting on the process similar to other creators who have posted their stories (e.g., @thesourpatchteacher, @boby1991, and @sexualassaultawareness), reflecting on those creators and the hashtags I adopted (e.g. #sexualassaultsurvivor, #sexualassaultawareness, #nomeansno) (TIKTOK 2021), and reflecting on the comments that were left on the videos by users. The five most popular hashtags used on TIKTOK regarding sexual violence include: #metoo (currently 556.3 million views), and #nomeansno (currently 166.3 million views), #metoomovement (currently 49.3 million views), #sexualassaultawareness (currently 13.7 million views), and #sexualassaultsurvivor (currently 1.34 million views). I created themes and a schedule for seven weeks of video posts and engaged in weekly meetings with my supervisor to discuss my progress and the content that would be posted during the following week. Having prepared weekly themes helped me process and cope with the fear and emotions I experienced around posting a video. Processing that I had fears and emotions followed by flashbacks, memories, etc. that came up around posting and afterwards throughout the day or night allowed me to begin to openly discuss these fears and emotions in my own personal therapy sessions. I believe my personal narrative and documenting the journey enriched this project and will assist in bridging the gap in the lack of research involving survivors finding empowerment through telling their story and doing so through an online format. I conducted a thematic analysis on the seven weeks of video posts, reflexive journal entries, and comments left by TIKTOK users on the video posts (Braun & Clarke 2019). In this analysis, I focused on three main themes and nine sub themes that support the main themes. The data included thirty videos, thirty journal entries, three drawings, two poems, a tracking sheet of hashtags and metrics, and twenty nine comments left on some of the videos from TIKTOK users, some of whom disclosed that they were survivors.

Results And Discussion

In this section, I will focus on the following three interconnected themes: *struggle, embodiment, and survivorship and empowerment*. Under each theme, I explore several sub themes that help illustrate the complexity of my experiences in this project. These themes and sub-themes all contribute to a greater understanding of trauma recovery.

The main theme of *struggle* came up across the data. The first time in this project where I encountered feeling as though I was struggling, I could not associate or express it other than just struggling to write a reflexive journal entry after recording a video. I was not able to start breaking down the complexities of where and what I was struggling with until I started to explore what I meant by struggling within this journey. I had to first explore what exactly I was having issues with and the reasons I was struggling in my videos and journaling even when I was in a safe space where I had support to help challenge myself from shutting down when I was feeling uncomfortable. Some of the emotions I was struggling with were not being good enough, being scared, and feeling alone.

I noted multiple times in my reflexive journal that I was not good enough and that I was not doing enough to be engaging and leading in this research. I felt like a fraud or imposter for not doing more to reach enough people on TIKTOK and not reaching out and talking about my experiences in person to raise awareness about sexual violence. This struggle with not being good enough was also felt while looking at the number of views and likes on my videos: the most views one of my videos received was 375 total views for my introductory video, and this video also received the largest number of likes with 119. I tried to increase the level engagement on subsequent videos by posting at different times of day and different days of the week, using different hashtags, and using different sounds and voice recordings. This did not change the level of engagement. The following quote is from my reflexive journal after I posted my second video about statistics towards the beginning of my sharing

journey and how I had this need to do more: “I feel guilty for not being able to do more for survivors. I need a louder voice I feel I am responsible for helping everyone.”

Not being good enough came out in my video recordings as I talked about how I sabotaged myself at a young age from not speaking out about what happened and how it happened repeatedly:

“I felt alone and that I felt I had no one to talk to and how I did not realize, I sabotaged myself at 10 from happiness because I felt like I deserved being sexually assaulted. I feel a lot of anger at myself for what happened and for not being over it, for not saying something and still hiding from telling family.”

I continued to hide and not speak out and continued to not feel good enough and gave up on friends and family believing me. I gave up on a career in law enforcement—specifically the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—as I felt like I was not good enough to protect others from being sexually assaulted.

Feeling scared and fearing to show weakness was something I have struggled with since I was first sexually assaulted. I never felt safe after that experience and have always pushed to hide how scared I was. This research has allowed me to start expressing these feelings like struggling to feel safe as I went through the statistics and read comments from other *TIKTOK* users that they are “just another statistic” or “1 in 4”, knowing I am part of these statistics and I do not feel completely safe sharing my story with people I know in person or online. The days and nights that I posted videos I felt scared by the emotions and remembering the details of each event, and this was reflected in my journals:

“...what I admitted for the first time (really admitted) that my oldest was conceived through rape. My youngest was probably conceived this way as well. I have never told anyone how inhumane my ex treated me when he raped me. He raped and sexually assault all most every day for many years. I have not felt safe even after leaving him 18 years ago.”

Making this confession about my childrens’ father in my videos resulted in many commenters asking “Are you Ok?” or “Are you safe now?”; although I am not with him and my children are grown, it is important to note that feeling scared does not go away instantly when I start to process the trauma or because you are hiding the feelings. I tried for years to hide the feelings of being scared and thought they would eventually go away. This never happened. I just became more scared and that process allowed me to feel alone.

Survivors generally feel alone. I felt very alone during this process even noting how alone I felt after the assaults took place. The process of feeling alone manifested itself differently depending on the circumstances. Sometimes I felt alone even when I was surrounded by friends and family. This state of feeling alone I believe kept me from really connecting to my emotions when I was creating the first videos as I shutdown or partially disassociated from what I was talking about and how I was feeling so I would not become emotional in the video. Gatherings with friends, sitting in a room full of others and having never felt so alone; this is how I felt on February 14, 2021 after having a house full of friends to spend time with them. I feel alone all the time as I have not let those around me in to know what I am struggling with. Posting on *TIKTOK* allowed me to find others, including survivors that felt the same way. Other survivors would post kind and supportive comments: “you are so strong for sharing your story. You are not alone, stay strong you got this.” Also, “I’m so sorry this happened to you, as a two-time survivor I’m happy to hear other strong survivors share their story.” These types of comments helped me to feel like others understand the feelings I experienced and that other survivors appreciated hearing that they are not alone.

The second theme I will focus on is the theme of *embodiment*. In particular, I will focus on the experiences of the body and the mind I felt during this research as well as what I remember feeling during my accounts of being sexually assaulted. I will focus on three sub-themes of physical, anxiety, and flashbacks and memories. I felt various forms of physical symptoms throughout this project including ghost pain where I feel the touch of the other person, their breath and the pain from what happened, scaring, bruising, and remembering the unplanned pregnancies from two experiences. I also experienced a number of emotions throughout this project such as anxiety, anger, fear, flashbacks, and memories. Exploring what was happening and how that was coming out in the everyday was taxing on my physical and mental health. The experiences I have been through have affected my sleep, appetite, and exercise. I am working on changing. I have supports in place which include friends and counselors to talk to and this was helpful, but at times I was not sure what to say.

It took me a long time to be able to look at the scars across my body or to even look at myself because my body served as a reminder of what happened (what I “allowed” to happen). I am afraid of going to seek medical treatment for health problems because I put them off so long partially due to still being in an abusive relationship and the fear of answering questions. I was embarrassed to admit that I had gone through these experiences. Reflecting in my journal on the visible scars on my legs was so difficult as I had never talked about where those scars came from. One thing I struggled to accept at the time, and even now, is accepting how our bodies involuntarily react to our experiences. I hate explaining that the way my body reacted was based on the stimuli it was receiving. I was told by my perpetrators that I enjoyed it and it was not sexual assault or rape because my body reacted a certain way (moved, made a noise, etc.) or because I did not fight back. I was frozen in fear, my body was protecting me. That is such an empowering thing to admit, I have said “I froze” but never I was frozen, and my body was protecting me. Determining whether symptoms were physical or mental is at times difficult as I was experiencing nausea and a racing heartbeat. I also recounted feeling someone grab me or touch me, which felt so real (but there was no one else around). I experienced an increase in anxious feelings. I had to practice grounding myself back into the present moment from these flashbacks. I found myself reflecting on the physical symptoms in my journal and in my videos. I discussed feeling a past perpetrator’s hands holding me down so I could not move.

Making videos and reliving those feelings of anxiousness and panic, and trying harder to understand them, has been helpful with moving forward in my personal recovery. My anxiety interfered with my motivation in everyday tasks and in my studies as I started to take panic attacks while attending classes or meetings. I felt so nervous to log into virtual classes and while in class I was in a “brain fog” where it was difficult to concentrate and focus. I also felt physical symptoms of anxiety, a shortness of breath, heart racing, numbness in my hands, and the feeling of nausea. The anxiety I embodied routinely derailed my day or week depending on how severe it was; for instance, if I had an experience that triggered me to have an anxiety attack then I would generally find myself in an unstable state of panic for the rest of the day or for days where the symptoms caused me to want to stay in bed.

Intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, and memories have been part of everyday life for me since I was ten years old, coinciding with the first time I was assaulted. After posting a video, sitting working on schoolwork, writing a journal entry, or simply go about my day, I would have sudden reactions to feeling as though someone was in the room, they were touching me, or I was again being sexually assaulted. Reliving these experiences was and is something I have dealt with and is something I perceived as normal until I reached out for professional help and started to discuss my experiences. I talked about these experiences in a few videos where I can still feel every touch and breath on my body.

Reflecting on the purpose of this research, one question I kept returning to was how can an online community support a survivor of sexual violence? Through posting my story and observing how

other *TIKTOK* users engaged with my posts, I found an online community that fosters the third theme from this research—*survivorship and empowerment*—or survivors that helped individual followers posting positive comments, providing likes, and watching videos just to help support the individual that posted. I had several comments that started “I am sorry” or “thank you for sharing your story”. These comments were helpful to read on days I was feeling disconnected from the project or struggling with fears and anxiety when posting a video. Being on *TIKTOK* has allowed me to find others who have been through sexual violence experiences and to cultivate a sense of community through story telling. I have received comments asking if I and my children were okay, thanking me for sharing, and inspiring others to do the same. The positivity from those who interacted with my videos and other videos I viewed illustrates how online communities can be built and exist to offer supportive environments for individuals from similar backgrounds. There were a few comments on the posts where I started to directly talk about my story and other *TIKTOK* users commented positive statements “to keep this on the right side of *TIKTOK*” meaning the user made the comment as someone who is supportive to this type of content and they are trying to keep “internet trolls” away from the video.

Considering myself a survivor was something I struggled with guilt and shame of being assaulted because I wanted (and still do) to blame myself for being assaulted. As I proceed through processing my trauma and navigating my recovery journey, I have started to admit to myself that I survived. Although I will not say I am a victim for what happened to me at the ages of ten and fifteen, I still consider myself a victim in other cases such as what happened during the seven and a half years with my ex-boyfriend (the father of my children) and the most recent sexual assaults and rape that happened less than two years ago. These cases were overly traumatic, and I still have not started to process and accept these cases as I move forward on my journey. Reflecting on the times I felt like a victim—for example, when I was confronted with a situation where I felt like I was reliving my experience after learning of someone close to me having just gone through a similar experience—I found comfort in being able to support others through sharing my story. This was not an easy process, but looking back, I found the ability to express how I am doing to selected groups such as *TIKTOK* users and a few in-person supportive people. This happens too often where a survivor feels though their just another statistic and that they cannot express their feelings to someone they trust. Comments from my burgeoning *TIKTOK* sexual violence survivorship community such as “Just another stat” or “I’m a part of the 1 in 4. It’s such a fucking big issue but people don’t treat it like it is” are statements I connected with and find ringing in my thoughts when I am coming out of a flashback or memory.

At the beginning of this research, I did not know if this project was truly going to be helpful for me or if it would help me to find my voice and resilience to move forward. Yet, I can now say with confidence that it certainly has been helpful. I was very careful in the beginning to select my words in my journal, videos, and in conversations to not show emotions or to send concerns to others. I felt like I was on my own to go through this process as I never wanted to burden anyone with the emotions, and I have gone through my life not wanting to burden or inconvenience anyone with my life. I would disassociate from the content I was posting so I would not become emotional while recording. However, after posting I found it harder to handle anxiety and other emotions. Expressing these emotions and thoughts to others was difficult.

There were key findings that came from the analysis that were supported in the literature. Key findings from my project such as survivor struggles, feeling safe to disclose one’s experiences, and coming to terms with the physical aspects of sexual assault and rape connect to existing scholarly research (O’Neill 2018). As a survivor, these findings had a personal connection to my experiences and to my recovery journey. I reflected on these findings in my journal, through my videos, and throughout the data analysis phase of this project. Struggling with expressing and communicating feelings and emotions can be difficult for survivors as this can trigger memories and emotions regarding their sexual violence experiences. The struggle with the anxiety felt by survivors

after their traumatic experiences effects their mental health. For instance, I struggled and continue to struggle with anxiety as I feel as though I cannot trust my judgement when I interact with people. The struggles are based on fears of not being believed, being blamed for what happened, and possible retaliation from the perpetrator(s) (Moors & Webber 2013). I faced retaliation from one perpetrator for many years after the relationship ended. The fear impacted my daily life and how I interacted with others. Only 3.7% of cases are reported out of a thousand incidents as survivors fear retaliation from the perpetrator(s), their family, or friends (Johnson 2017). Survivors often find it difficult to disclose their experiences often because they do not know where to start and the process can be re-traumatizing. Yet, there are positive benefits for—and from—a survivor sharing their story either with individuals or groups. In the case of groups, they can either be in-person or online using social media platforms like *TIKTOK*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Reddit* (O'Neill 2018). Rebuilding a survivor's confidence through sharing their story can help rebuild trust and confident in oneself and building resilience allows for a victim/survivor to move forward after the trauma (Shariff & Eltis 2017).

This research brought an understanding of the body issues (physically and mentally) that I have been experiencing since an assault where I suffered physical injuries and I became ashamed to look at my body and to have others see me. Having a better understanding where the distorted views of my body started from has been therapeutic. Physical health issues that commonly arise from sexual violence include unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and physical injuries sustained at the time of the incident (Munro-Kramner 2017). Mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, have effects on school, life, and work (Munro-Kramner 2017; Senn et al 2014). Future research and advocacy work in the physical and mental responses a survivor's body goes through during a sexual assault and/or rape would benefit survivors and provide a better understanding for those that survivors reach out to. This could help reduce the stigma and victim blaming, as well as reduce the problematic questions that generally frame assaults (e.g., that it was some way the victim's fault). Also, further research in understanding the development and support of survivorship through online community platforms and how these benefits survivors in moving forward and feeling empowered to speak up is required. This would help survivors feel as though they can speak up and that they are not alone, making connections with survivors worldwide. Lastly, another area warranting future investigation involves extending autoethnographic and ethnographic research around what survivors feel is beneficial for them to feel empowered to report and (or) share their story, whether this is coping skills, alternatives to traditional forms such as sharing online or using forms of art.

Conclusion

Survivors of sexual violence often struggle to find their own way to share their story, find support, and to feel empowered over their life. Survivors generally struggle with feeling connected to a community and to find others who have had similar emotions and fears. There has been a great deal of research around sexual violence and the effects on a survivor's health, but little around empowerment and disclosing online. Although more survivors are disclosing online, there is a gap in research from the perspective of survivors. Being a survivor myself and having a personal connection to sexual violence, I recognized that there was space for autoethnographic research to bridge the gap between traditional support and online support and to highlight the benefits to other survivors. In continuing research, I believe that more exploration around building coping skills and embracing nature-based therapy as part of a survivor's recovery process will be an area I will explore. This will allow me to continue to bridge under-researched areas and to explore my own pathway to healing from trauma and to provide information that can assist others in their recovery journey.

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In Quarantine Times, is Going to the Beauty Salon a Priority? A Reflection on the Comment of Journalist Ainsley Earhardt from “FOX & Friends” and Public Opinion

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Abstract

With the pandemic caused by the new corona virus, many businesses had to close their doors, including beauty salons around the world. With this in mind, this study sought to analyze the speech given by the American presenter Ainsley Earhardt of “FOX & Friends”, about the need to go “to fix the hair and do the nails” during the pandemic. Her comment was controversial and Public Opinion revealed interesting interpretations in this regard. Therefore, this study based on the concepts of “primining” - this being the relationship between event/event and its target, and through the Critical Discourse Analysis method, sought to better analyze what meanings the presenter's speech can reveal and what reflexes her speech caused in the media and among her audience.

Keywords: *Pandemic. Speech. Female beauty. Public opinion.*

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO), in early March 2020, after the spread of contamination and the exponential growth in the number of deaths in several countries, declared that we live in a pandemic, which has led many countries to take protective measures for its population as the recommendation of voluntary and compulsory social isolation (DGS, 2020).

Based on this, measures such as closing trade, schools, and all services that have large numbers of employees were applied to help prevent the contagion and spread of the disease. In Portugal, cafes, stores, shopping centers, restaurants and beauty salons were forced to follow the restrictions of face-to-face closings to avoid fines and contamination problems (DGS, 2020). Many countries around the world are limiting access to face-to-face commerce, with people having to stay in their homes.

Therefore, telework regimes are being tested and implemented in this quarantine moment. Many habits that were previously common to be performed with ease, now had to be adapted, such as going to the beauty salon, for example. Fixing the hair, doing the nails, shaving, makeup are self-care that before were easy to access for those looking for services. However, for those who did not have the practice of doing it alone or alone, now they go through the situation of improvising in their homes or having to wait to reopen the beauty salons.

In this context and bringing to the situation to be analyzed in this work, it is observed here that the fact of not being able to go to the beauty salon can intrigue some people, such as the American journalist Ainsley Earhardt of the program “FOX & Friends”, who made a comment about being worried about people who can't go and take care of themselves in beauty salons. However, it was positioned in a context that generated a certain media controversy, as it did so during the agenda of the number of deaths and infections due to Covid-19 in New York. This comment generated repercussions in several news portals around the world, and not only, but also among the audience of the program.

So, this study sought to verify the comment of the North American journalist Ainsley Earhardt through Critical Content Analysis in order to observe intrinsic and contextual aspects of her speech, in addition to observing the repercussion of her speech in Public Opinion.

The FOX & FRIENDS Program and Journalist Ainsley Earhardt

It is understood that it is necessary, in the context of contextualization, to better understand what the “FOX & Friends” program is, the channel it is broadcast on and to present who the journalist in question is, Ainsley Earhardt.

Firstly, according to the official website of FOX News Channel, the morning program “FOX & Friends” is broadcast on the FOX News Channel and is present internationally in several signal providers, such as in Brazil and Portugal. Also according to the official website, the FOX News Channel (FNC) is “the most watched television news channel for 17 consecutive years” (FOX News, 2020) in the United States of America. On the website, it also says that “according to a 2019 Suffolk University survey, FOX News is the most reliable source of television news or commentary in the country,” and yet, according to “a Brand Analysis survey of Brand Keys Emotion 2019 found FOX News to be the most trusted cable news brand” (FOX News, 2020). The morning program “FOX & Friends”, which starts at 6:00 am, has been in existence since February 1, 1998, deals with the main national (USA) and international weekly news, in addition to reports on various topics such as health, entertainment and food recipes (FOX News, 2020).

According to Marisa Guthrie, a journalist for the Hollywood Reporter website (Guthrie, 2017), the morning show is the most influential in the United States of America, and publicly revealed by ex-president Donald Trump his positive preference for it, that is, the program has the support of the ex-president and its presenters often comment on the tweets and diplomatic actions and speeches of the present, revealing that they are often in favor of the same and its positions. In the Hollywood Reporter news, there is information that “four out of 10 Trump voters named FOX News as their main source of news in the 2016 elections, according to a January study by the Pew Research Center”. Guthrie (2017) further states that “FOX & Friends was credited or - depending on its policy - guilty of sending a reality show star to the White House, giving Trump a platform to reflect on politics when he thought of a dispute in 2012”. In addition, “since the November election, Trump has rewarded this loyalty by appearing on the program and expanding comments made by hosts and guests to his 33 million Twitter followers” (Guthrie, 2017).

In this way, Steler (2013), from The New York Times, says that “The morning show is reliable and conservative”, and called “right-wing media” by The New York Times, which it can demonstrate through the speeches of its members. presenters, reports and guests an inclination towards conservative ideological, right-wing political ideology and linked in support of the party ex-president Donald Trump. Therefore, realizing the context in which the journalist Ainsley Earhardt is inserted in the program in which she presents, it is now necessary to understand a little more about the history of the same, observing what is disclosed of information available in the media.

According to FOX News (2020), born on September 20, 1976 in Spartanburg, South Carolina, USA, Ainsley Earhardt graduated in journalism from the University of South Carolina. She currently hosts FOX & Friends, besides to present FOX's The Sean Hannity Show, with its own segment called "Ainsley Across America". In accordance with the journalist Langmuir (2018) of Elle magazine, Ainsley Earhardt “never sought to have political influence, but as a presenter on Donald Trump's favorite morning show, FOX & Friends, that's exactly what she acquired.” Langmuir (2017) says in the report that Earhardt “does not reveal who he voted for, but effectively serves as emissary of the 53% of white women who supported Trump in 2016”. In early May 2017, Langmuir (2017) says that Trump tweeted about Earhardt, that “a really great person, just wrote a wonderful book, *The Light Within Me*, which is going really well ... bring it to the number one!”, which was a crucial support for later in a few days the journalist started to sign large quantities of books (Langmuir, 2017).

With these details about the journalist's origins and her professional history, it is possible to realize that these details and the experiences throughout her life may have collaborated to generate a certain influence on her perceptions about her physical beauty.

Female Beauty and Quarantine

Compared by the daughter with the Barbie doll (Langmuir, 2017), which can be associated with characteristics that are physically similar to the traditional doll: straight and long blond hair, thin, tall, thin waist, white teeth, makeup and well dressed. Physical and aesthetic characteristics that are visibly compared and found in the journalist in question, Ainsley Earhardt.

From this, it appears that she has some conditions that many people do not have, such as having people to take care of choosing her clothes, taking care of her hair, with her makeup, mainly because she is a celebrity of the United States most recent recent morning program (FOX, 2020).

On the other hand, some people reflect on these “basic” needs of going to the beauty salon, of always keeping themselves shaved, made up, with hair cut during the quarantine. This is the case of the digital influencer and youtuber from Rio de Janeiro, Alexandra Gurgel, #bodypositive activist (Abrantes, 2019), that is, “acceptance of the “body you have” and “body positivity ” (Abrantes, 2019, p.1), who defends and fights for the well-being and acceptance of her own body in the face of a scenario of aesthetic beauty standard disseminated by the media, cinema, advertising (Cabecinhas, 2002; Oliveira, 2019). In one of her recent videos, Gurgel put the question of “How to love in quarantine?” for her followers, which caused some questions related to well-being and the need to go to the salon of beauty or worrying about aesthetic beauty standards being isolated, that is, in quarantine, without having extended social life, without people looking to ourselves, etc. Oliveira (2021) also brings this reflection about the female relationship with aesthetic care in the pandemic and which adds in this context to better understand this new moment of adaptation and search for well-being to mental and physical health.

From these contexts, to understand, therefore, better, the probable message present in the speech made by the journalist Earhardt in the program “FOX & Friends” is an interesting question to be analyzed here, trying to understand the relationship of her speech with the social context in which humanity is experiencing the pandemic of the corona virus and its reflexes in the public's opinion, either by the viewers or by people who had access to their speech through online social networks and by the media.

Critical analysis of the speech: the commentary of journalist Ainsley Earhardt of the program “FOX & Friends”

This analysis, is widely used to understand the meanings of phrases and words, in order to understand the real intention and context in which each discourse fits, perceiving the environment and historical, cultural, social and political period in which it is inserted. In this way, authors like, Cabral (2011, p.2) also shows that Critical Discourse Analysis “is a disciplinary field of discourse investigation that considers language as a social practice, and as a space for (re) producing relations of abuse of power, domination, and inequality”. Thus, realizing how the speech made by anchor Earhardt in the FOX & Friends program had, in a certain way, an ideological context to be transmitted, it is necessary.

Gerbner (*et al.*, 1986; Hu *et al.*, 2018) shows through the concept of “Priming” that the audience can be influenced by the media discourse, that is, there is an influence on the perception of a certain event, fact, situation, where the interlocutor or the vehicle of communication brings a specific meaning, a pre-established idea to the discourse that is transmitted. Wherefore, it is clear that “in the theory of culture, television plays a role in cultivating and shaping people's perception of reality” (Hu *et al.*, 2018), that is, there is a simplification of aspects related to the subjects, events and occasions to be disseminated, there is also a predisposition to the individual opinion of whoever is passing on the information, in order to allow an interference in the perception and evaluation of the recipient regarding the speech to be transmitted (Gerbner *et al.*, 1986; Hu *et al.*, 2018).

As for Salles (*et al.*, 2007, p.71): “Priming is a type of implicit (non-declarative) memory referring to the facilitating effects of antecedent events (primes) on subsequent performance (targets). In semantic priming there is a relationship of meaning or context between prime and the target”. Thus, it is possible to perceive when introducing the concept of prime relative to semantic issues from the presenter's speech, that the relationship in this case occurs between “prime = Earhardt” and “target = audience of the FOX & Friends program”. And, with that, Earhardt transmits her message from an event, this being the closing of the activities of the beauty salons due to the lockdown, and points her opinion in her context as a presenter of one of the programs of greater North American audience. Therefore, this allows us to observe that there is a point of view regarding a given antecedent event = prime, and that there are meanings from its speech.

Accordingly, realizing this context to analyze in order to perceive the intrinsic characteristics of the speech spoken by the presenter, that is, characteristics that allow to perceive in fact through Critical Discourse Analysis, what she wished to transmit with her speech to the audience of court hearing. Based on this, the speech made during the “FOX & Friends” program of the North American television channel FOX News on March 26, 2020, by journalist Ainsley Earhardt during a live broadcast, caused repercussions around the world, being the target news in several, in addition to generating comments and opinions exposed on Twitter¹ regarding the pivot's comment.

Earhardt (2020) said in her speech:

*You men don't think about it - and that's not a priority - but women need to take care of their hair. I saw a tweet saying 'you're going to see the real color of our hair, because our roots are going to start showing up'. Women, all my friends are saying, you know, this is not a priority, I understand that people are dying, but they can't get their nails done. Shops are closed everywhere.*²

The context of the presenter's speech occurs in a comment made during the program about the quarantine with voluntary and mandatory social isolation caused by the contingency plan of the World Health Organization to prevent the transmission of the disease generated by the Covid-19 virus. So, to see what each part of her speech can mean, let's divide it into three moments. The first: “You men don't think about it - and that is not a priority - but women need to take care of their hair” (Earhardt, 2020). In this speech, Earhardt seems to show a speech with sexist contents in the sense that every woman needs to take care of her hair, they need to be concerned with looking good, they need to be well disposed and presentable, they need to be concerned with their hair, as they are very important for its physical visual aspect, so that people see women always well groomed and cared for (Butler, 1990; Cabecinhas, 2012). In other words, in this part of her speech, she may be demonstrating something that Goffman (1987) revealed in his studies concerning the image of women and men in advertising, that non-verbal signals can communicate important references of power, which further encourages inequalities between men and women.

In this case, the fact that the presenter says that men are not as concerned with hair as women, may reveal here a reinforcement in issues of gender stereotypes (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1987). In other words, the separation between “things for women” and “things for men”, as if women had more interests in “banal”, “superficial” things than men, which contributes to stereotypes related to the construction

¹ Tweet shared in the public profile of Bobby Lewis, who had great media reach after sharing the clip with the journalist's speech during the FOX & Friends program. Available at: <https://twitter.com/revrrlewis/status/1243162967555870721>.

² Excerpt from the speech of journalist Ainsley Earhardt, translated into Portuguese by the Polemica Paraíba newspaper. Available at: <https://www.polemicaparaiba.com.br/internacional/apresentadora-diz-que-prioridade-das-mulheres-durante-pandemia-e-ir-no-salao-vaio-ver-a-cor-real-of-my-hair-the-roots-will-appear-see-video/>

of the female world, of being a woman. This aspect, which can be associated with conservative, traditionalist thoughts, which ends up bringing interpretations and perceptions to Public Opinion highlighting these characteristics and being a reason for discussion, bringing up discussions about social, economic and also political inequalities.

In the second part of the presenter's speech in which she says: "I saw a tweet saying that 'you will see the real color of our hair, because our roots will start to appear'" (Earhardt, 2020), can demonstrate a certain insecurity in reveal the true tone of the hair, possibly showing roots with white hair strands, a factor that is widely publicized by the media, advertising, digital influencers, fashion and television, to be avoided, that is, there is a wide dissemination and influence so that these hairs be painted, disguising age, and even, which can be interpreted for lack of "self-love", self-care, and well-being (Cabecinhas, 2002; Goffman, 1987).

The third part, consisting of the speech: "Women, all my friends are saying, you know, this is not a priority, I understand that people are dying, but they are unable to do their own nails. Shops are closed everywhere." (Earhardt, 2020). With this speech, she seems to be sharing that the "problem" related to not going to the beauty salon, or having someone available to fix her hair, nails and do her makeup is not only hers, but also close friends. to her. She says that this is not a priority at the moment, but it seems to be a big problem, such as the death of people, as a result of the contagion of the disease.

Earhardt seemed to say with this speech that it is indeed a social problem, a problem of the female gender (Butler, 1990); Perhaps, women are unable to do their own nails, it can be considered a comment possibly of an elitist nature (Cabral, 2011), in the sense that for a woman who seeks to take care of herself and be "good looking" she needs a professional from the beauty to contribute with this, that she can't do her own nails alone. In other words, this comment can bring a feeling of "nobility", that there are those women who pay for the service and who need people so that they can do it, demonstrating here a situation of power relations, a symbolic power (Bourdieu, 2001). Here, this discourse works symbolically as an instrument of domination for contributing to an integration of the dominant classes, differentiating it from the other classes (Bourdieu, 2001).

Accordingly, reviewing the presenter's speech as a whole, it can be interpreted here that there is the phenomenon of "Priming" (Gerbner *et al.*, 1986; Hu *et al.*, 2018) and that she exposed her opinion to the audience, perhaps waiting to show their concern, to be understood and understood by them and in order perhaps to contribute to reinforce an underlying idea of how women should be concerned with the care and physical and aesthetic aspects even in the quarantine where they are confined within their homes.

The controversy caused by the speech of journalist Earhardt arose mainly by the context in which the comment was made. Covid-19, pandemic, state of emergency, quarantined world, United States, health crisis, deaths. In this context, the city in which the journalist and her colleagues were commenting on the situation was New York. This city was the most affected by the Covid-19 virus, which is causing many infected people and deaths around the world. And in the midst of this great problem that the world is facing, the journalist makes a comment that seemed to be of a hierarchical tone (Bourdieu, 2001), that is, what was observed, for example, in the tweets in response to Bobby's tweet Lewis (Internet user who had the most responses for his post regarding Earhardt's speech).

There were many comments to criticize that it would be a style of "White people problems", among other words, in this context, and from the historical context of the United States, with the issue of slavery and white and wealthy people having people working for them, the presenter's speech brought this memory to the Internet users and viewers, which gave a perhaps racist tone to her speech. The journalist appeared to be concerned about the serious situation that New York City is experiencing with Covid-19, but she also somehow manifested that it was also a "problem" for many women the lack of going to the hairdresser, fixing up nails, for example, to be well with themselves and perhaps be "aesthetically acceptable" for society (Butler, 1990).

According to Rodrigues (1985, p.10-11 *apud* Barriga, 2007) the "Public Opinion, then, means an enlightened, well-known opinion -" made public "- to which everyone can access and to which all citizens can contribute", thus, "The public becomes, therefore, an instance of decision and legitimacy,

an authentic subject of discourse, starting to assume the right and the duty to inform and be informed". However, it is worth noting that the concept of Public Opinion must be taken into account in the sense that this opinion is established by a dominant "majority" (Bourdieu, 2001), and that Public Opinion where everyone participates, with the the presence of minorities and those who, due to lack of access or inequality, are less heard, may not exist. Bourdieu (2001) shows that opinion is not available to everyone, so influential people and influential television programs have a very important role in transmitting news and opinions to contribute to the perception of these people on matters that often do not have a dimension of what may actually be happening (Thompson, 2013).

Results

In this sense, realizing that the speech made by the presenter allowed the citizens who watched her speech to come to position themselves in front of other citizens, as can be seen in the tweets revealing her discontent and observation of a probable prejudice "in disguise" in the speech of same. Furthermore, Lawrence (1953) says that for an opinion it becomes public when it is accepted by an absolute majority of citizens, and in this case, it was observed that most of the comments in these tweets were of discontent with Earhardt's speech.

Something that may also have generated controversy, both in the news portals mentioned in the topic "The program" FOX & Friends "and the journalist Ainsley Earhardt", and for some viewers, was the fact that the presenter's speech also had a sense of "Lack of common sense" and "empathy", for appearing to "leave aside" the deaths of so many people in their country and in their city, and having put as a problem, in the sequence of their speech, the priority for "the need for go to the beauty salon ". In other words, an interpretation that can be had is that it seemed to be "more concerned with issues related to aesthetic beauty", ahead of life and human health.

Furthermore, Lawrence (1953) says that for an opinion it becomes public when it is accepted by an absolute majority of citizens, and in this case, it was observed that most of the comments in these tweets were of discontent with Earhardt's speech. Something that may also have generated controversy, both in the news portals mentioned in the topic "The program" FOX & Friends "and the journalist Ainsley Earhardt", and for some viewers, was the fact that the presenter's speech also had a sense of "Lack of common sense" and "empathy", for appearing to "leave aside" the deaths of so many people in their country and in their city, and having put as a problem, in the sequence of their speech, the priority for "the need for go to the beauty salon ". In other words, an interpretation that can be had is that it seemed to be "more concerned with issues related to aesthetic beauty", ahead of life and human health.

Some comments like: "People are dying and I realize that, but they can't get their nails done. A perfect distillation of Trump Republicanism"; I don't know what's sadder. People not being able to get their nails done or the fact that American women have lost the ability to file and polish their own nails... the humanity!!", and, "I'm not racist, but...". The strong criticism of Internet users regarding issues of racist tone, once again brings up the issue of symbolic relations of power and historical issues of the country, where often shown through films, series and TV programs, white people having people working for themselves, often of African descent, Latin or indigenous origins (Caldeira, 1994).

Final Considerations

It was observed that the journalist Ainsley Earhardt is indeed an influential and well-known celebrity in the United States. From this, it is observed that throughout her career she has a relevant speech power in the transmission of information, news and discussions in the program in which she operates: "FOX & Friends" in FOX News USA, and that, realizing the that Silverstone (1999, p.263) reveals about the media or those who are spokespersons for the media: they have a power of influence

by the social position they are in, with the mission of disseminating information en masse, such as through television and of online social networks. In this way, the journalist, in this context and as a spokesperson for a program with such an audience in one of the most powerful countries in the world (Thompson, 2013), has a role that can be considered important in the transmission of her individual opinion, and about her perceptions about events (prime). However, with this, it is possible that they contain the presenter's personal subjectivities that possibly can influence the way she perceives the news around her and transmits it (Hu *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore, it was evidenced through the Critical Discourse Analysis that the comment made by the presenter revealed perhaps a personal feeling of the journalist, that is, a concern regarding the care of her hair and nails, with the care of aesthetic beauty. However, the comment appeared to have been made at a bad time, as they were commenting during the program on the number of people who had been infected and/or died because of Covid-19 in New York. Because of this, Public Opinion, found in this study as the context of the opinions considered and mentioned in the Critical Discourse Analysis, demonstrated a negative view of the presenter's speech.

Thus, to conclude, it is observed that television continues to be a widely seen means of communication and that those who are spokespeople for major newspapers and programs such as "FOX & Friends" have a wide visibility and reach. Therefore, it is necessary to realize that the journalist as an opinion sharing instrument, may have a credibility that can often be placed on the agenda, for example, if in her speech she contains statements and positions that do not show empathy, which was what she seemed be the case analyzed of the comment made by journalist Ainsley Earhardt.

This article contributes to studies related to the observation and reflection of the impacts of the pandemic in relation to female well-being, especially in relation to aesthetic standards and beauty care. With this, it is necessary to continue studies related to female beauty and its relationship with the new social context that we are going through, with the pandemic caused by the new corona virus, revealing, therefore, that this is a relevant and important subject which will demand more analysis and reflections about the same in society.

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Experiences of Gender Awareness in Transgender Individuals

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Abstract

Transgender people face many obstacles throughout their lifespan, and one of the root causes of these obstacles is the lack of public support for and understanding of transgender individuals. As there are no clear theories of gender identity development, nor a clear developmental milestone for gender identity, we must look to individuals to begin understanding what development is like for young transgender people. For this study, five transgender adults of a variety of nonbinary gender identities were interviewed about their childhood and current experiences of gender identity development. This study aims to find patterns in their experiences that can better show how to support children and youth who may be questioning their assigned genders. It also seeks to explore from the perspective of the transgender community how initial experiences of gender recognition and gender labeling impacts relationships and self-perception. The results of the study showed that there was a gap in knowledge on the part of the participants of gender terminology at the age when transgender individuals first begin to question their assigned gender, which led to confusion and negative self-perception. Three aspects of transition were uncovered: internal, social, and physical, which the participants experienced in various ways. The study also demonstrated the importance of social support for transgender individuals, and the positive impacts that being able to express one's true gender identity has on an individual's self-concept.

Keywords: *Transgender, gender identity, child development*

Introduction

While some theories of gender identity development exist, such as that by Kholberg and by Slaby and Frey in 1975 (Ruble et al., 2017), no prominent theories correspond with modern understanding of gender, specifically through the lens of queer theory. Transgender youth and adults face many obstacles today (Taylor et al., 2020), and much of their history is obscured due to their marginalization (Rau, 2014). This study attempts to lay a foundation for giving transgender people a voice in the history of the study of gender identity development. Through the interviews of five transgender individuals about their experiences of gender identity formation and stabilization, answers surrounding the age of gender identity awareness and stability throughout the lifespan will begin to be uncovered. Additionally, the voices of this marginalized community will begin to be heard, and support for the youth of this community to prevent negative outcomes will be informed by their experiences.

Method and Materials

The central phenomenon explored through this research was the individual experiences of transgender children and youth, as viewed through the lens of their later adult selves. The term experience is quite broad, but this research specifically looked at both internalized feelings of gender awareness and understanding, as well as external experiences of sharing thoughts/feelings, gender presentation, and anything else the subjects felt was important to share. Five individual interviews using a prepared script were conducted with transgender adults. The interviews consisted of 10 questions (Appendix A) that measured demographic information and inquired about the experiences of the transgender individuals at the time of their initial and more current experiences of gender identity formation. After conducting the interviews and transcribing the qualitative data, codes were created

based on patterns found in the participants' responses in order to identify similar phenomena that the participants experienced. The research was interpreted through the lens of queer theory, which can be thought of as critically questioning societal norms, and how individuals are forced into normative identity categories (de Souza, Brewis, & Rumens, 2016).

The criteria for participants to be involved in this study was, firstly, that they were individuals who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. They may have used the term transgender, nonbinary, agender, genderfluid, or another term to describe themselves. They were required to be over 18 years of age and living in Canada or the United States. Additionally, they needed to be able to communicate verbally in English with proficiency. Participants were recruited through online forums. Data collection took place using the Discord voice chat system, and interviews were recorded using OBS Studio recording software.

Results

Five participants were interviewed for this research. They were given pseudonyms to protect their identities, Lee, Riley, Mia, Jordan, and Jem. The mean age of the participants was 25.6, and notably none of the participants identified within the Western binary system of gender (as a boy or as a girl). The following themes were generated based off the goals of the interview questions and patterns in the responses: age of initial gender recognition and of current gender identity/gender label, experiences of initial gender recognition versus experiences with current gender identity/gender label, actions taken during periods of gender transition, and impact of experiences on relationships and the self. The themes uncovered can be used to come up with ways to support developing transgender youth, as well as what needs and general experiences they may navigate as their gender awareness begins to manifest.

- **Age of Initial Gender Recognition and Current Recognition**

Each participant reported the age at which they first remembered understanding the concept of gender within themselves, as well as when they first began to label and express their current understanding of their gender identity. While an inner feeling of unease with their assigned gender was present from a younger age, the participants did not have the language or context to describe what they were feeling until they were in mid-adolescence to early adulthood. As Jem described: "...I didn't have really the right terms to understand what I was feeling, I didn't realize other people felt what I was feeling, I just thought it was some sort of like... maybe I was just weird, or maybe I just wasn't well-socialized enough to feel like a girl". The terminology of transgender identities was not accessible to the participants at the age when they began experiencing gender, and so they were forced to navigate nonbinary identity through cisgender, binary terms, which led to negative thought processes and confusion for some participants. Additionally, it is notable that the early twenties were a crucial time for every participant in beginning to express and label their gender.

- **Experiences of Initial Gender Recognition Versus Current Gender Experiences**

Participants reported how they felt and thought when they first identified that they were not the gender they had been assigned at birth. Lee noted that originally, they did not put much thought into their gender identity, but when they began exploring and understanding the possibilities of fully expressing their gender identity they found it felt very freeing and affirming to express themselves. Riley reported that, at first, they continued to present as a cisgender woman and were out to only a few people, which felt stifling. However, once they began transitioning more publicly, it combated their gender dysphoria and helped them feel more comfortable with themselves. Mia had some of the most negative initial experiences, as her initial perception of transgender people was that they were fetishists or that it was something strange or wrong. Mia also found it very stressful to hide the feminine part of themselves. As she aged, she began to strongly desire to be able to express the more feminine parts of

herself. Jordan spoke to a feeling of relief when they were able to say they were not cisgender and could explore with their gender identity. While Jordan noted that the journey to get to where they are was difficult, they expressed feelings of euphoria and comfort in their own skin. Jem noted that earlier in their development they felt concerned that they were weird, or that they were not 'well-socialized' because of how they were feeling. They also expressed feelings of confusion, and that something was 'off' or 'wrong' with them. However, they stated that they currently feel much less confused and more solid in how they feel, and more comfortable with themselves. They also expressed some feelings of gender dysphoria throughout their transition.

Each participant had a neutral to positive view of themselves as they experienced their gender in later life. Jordan mentioned "anything that allowed me to identify other than my dead name or my birth gender was incredibly euphoric." This is at odds with the pervasive narrative about transgender people in which they are less happy than cisgender people and prone to negative outcomes (Jones et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2020). Most of the participants had a very positive view of themselves, in large part because of their understanding of their gender. Additionally, any of the negative feelings that were expressed primarily came from outside influences, such as not being taught terminology they could use to define themselves and from stereotypes about the transgender community.

- **Actions Taken During Periods of Gender Transition**

The way in which the participants described their transition from presenting as their assigned gender to their actual gender can be sorted into three different categories: internal transition, social transition, and physical transition. Internal transition related to how they thought of themselves, self-labelling, and gender terminology learning. This was always the first transition stage for participants, as it happened when participants were beginning to form their concept of gender identity and to solidify it. The other categories, social and physical transition, tended to begin concurrently. Social transition involved telling other people about their gender, changing their pronouns, and, for certain participants, changing their name. The importance of this was explained by Riley, who noted that "I started to feel really closeted by other people's ignorance to it and that's when I started making more broad social transitions, and that did help to combat any dysphoria I was experiencing and to once again be at the comfort level that I want to be at." Physical transition accompanied social transition, as it involved steps such as binding the breasts, taking hormones, dressing in a way that expressed how the participants wanted to be perceived, and other similar appearance-based changes. Often this was done to offset feelings of gender dysphoria and to demonstrate to others the way the participants identified, as well as to allow those with more fluid gender presentation (such as Lee and Mia, who switch between masculine and feminine presentation) to be at ease during their fluctuating feelings of gender.

- **Impact of Experiences on Self and Relationships**

Participants had a variety of responses as to how their experiences as a transgender person impacted their identity and sense of self. Some had positive outlooks on the impact that their life experiences had had on them. Jordan noted that, despite any difficulties: "I'm so much happier, I'm comfortable in my skin, I'm not trying to stand to beauty standards that are of a gender that I don't identify with" and that overall, their experiences have helped them love themselves. Both Lee and Riley found that their experiences were beneficial with respect to how they relate to others; Lee said it has made them more open minded, and Riley stated: "It's made me more willing to feel like an advocate to other people having similar struggles... it's helped me to find ways to be brave in everyday life, and try to help others." Jem and Mia commented on more negative experiences, noting feelings of alienation from others as well as increased stress.

Several participants reported that their family members had difficulty accepting them as they transitioned. For example, Jordan expressed being estranged from the majority of their family, and Riley said that their family was ignorant to their experiences and there would likely be a negative

reaction should they try and discuss it. Participants mentioned the importance of peers as social supports, and the importance of being around similar and accepting individuals. Multiple participants also mentioned some issues with romantic relationships during transition, as the changes were overwhelming for their partners.

Discussion

This research project sought to learn from the perspective of transgender adults about their experiences of gender identity acquisition from childhood onward. Hearing the individual perspectives of the adults in this study gave valuable insights into the experiences of the transgender community and possible patterns that may occur in gender development. A similar study was conducted in 2018 by Budge et al., who interviewed transgender children and youth alongside their parents. Their research found six themes that relate to the experiences of transgender youth, which were then organized into a theoretical model (Budge et al., 2018). The themes discussed by Budge et al. (2018) were all represented in some way by the participants in the present study, and the symmetry between these two studies suggests the possibility for a more cohesive and modern theory of gender development that incorporates these kinds of research findings.

Many participants noted that, while they were aware that they did not identify with their assigned gender from quite a young age (a mean age of 8.5 years), they did not have the vocabulary to properly put a name to what they were experiencing. The first theme from Budge et al. is negotiating gender, and researchers state that “youth who were not yet adolescents tended to talk less about how they coped with complex gender-related processes, likely because they did not have as much life experience and also because they may not yet have the cognitive capability to understand these processes or the language to express their experiences” (2018). The adults in the present study supported this finding when they discussed their lack of access to language to define their experiences. In fact, it seemed that they fully understood these gender-related processes, but the absence of language to label these processes prevented them from comprehending their experiences in a healthy, complete context. This has implications for practice because education around gender identity is lacking in the primary grades. School systems and families should be providing this education.

Several participants noted they experienced poor relationships or rejection from their families. Miranda et al. (2016) noted that parental rejection puts adolescents at risk for maladjustment, and so educating parents on gender identity is crucial to prevent these outcomes. It seems that since parental support is not available for many transgender individuals, peer support is substituting for parental support for transgender people. Therefore, providing transgender people with support services that foster strong peer relationships will be important to promote well-adjusted young people. The only participant who did not mention peer support and explicitly mentioned not having family support had the most negative outlook on their experience as a gender non-conforming individual. This demonstrates the importance of social support for transgender individuals, be it from family, peers, or social services.

In the study findings, it was noted that the participants described three aspects of gender transition: internal transition, social transition, and physical transition. Previously outlined theories of gender identity did not support the idea of gender identity changing throughout the lifespan, notably Kohlberg and Slaby and Frey’s theories of gender constancy and stability (Ruble et al., 2017). It makes sense that these theories are outdated, since they were put forth decades ago, but there have not been any new theories to replace them. The gender identities and understandings of some participants in the present study was not consistent throughout their lives; participants changed their gender presentation, their labels, and some participants frequently experienced fluctuating internal senses of gender. Clearly

these theories are not accurate to modern experiences of gender for transgender people, and it should be determined whether they are even applicable to cisgender people.

Conclusions

As has been noted, young transgender people do not appear to have access to a vocabulary to describe their experiences until many years after they have begun to have them. This lack of knowledge can, as was demonstrated by the participants of this study, cause internal conflict and negative self-perception in young transgender people. Therefore, discussions surrounding gender identity and the vocabulary surrounding it should be happening much earlier. There needs to be parental education surrounding transgender identities, so that education surrounding gender identity can begin at home. If that is not possible, gender identity education should be incorporated into the health curriculum and include explanations of transgender identities, including nonbinary identities. This curriculum should be implemented in the window from grades 1-3, as, based on the interviewees, that is approximately when these feelings of gender begin to develop.

This and previous research indicate that past theories of gender identity development simply do not reflect current understandings of gender and queer theory. A new theory should be implemented, not only to help better understand the transgender community, but to try and understand the gender development of all children (at least in Western societies, as one theory may not suit the gender experiences of all societies/cultures). More research into the experiences of the transgender community will help provide insight into how gender manifests and solidifies or changes throughout the lifespan. This should include comparative studies between transgender and cisgender populations. A better understanding of gender development can help practitioners, families, and society at large better understand and support gender nonconforming people, as well as the experiences of individuals who go through a traditional gender development.

The main limitations of the present study were the sampling and the nature of the research design. Because there was only one researcher on this project, it was unfeasible to gather a very large sample size, meaning the experiences gathered are difficult to generalize to a larger population. Additionally, with a small sample size there may be an overrepresentation of a certain race, ethnicity, or other population, which may skew the data. Such demographic information was not collected as it was not relevant to the study; however, that means it is unknown whether there was overrepresentation of those groups. As well, because the participants were only sampled from the United States and Canada, the experiences of gender collected were specific to those two countries and cannot be generalized to others.

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Appendix A

What is your age?

How would you describe your gender?

When do you recall first feeling a sense of gender? Do you know what age you were?

When did you first label what your gender was/is separately from any assignment based on biology?

How did you feel about your gender when you first began to experience and label it?

Have your feelings about your gender changed or stayed the same since then?

If so, when did your understanding of your current gender identity first begin?

During these experiences of gender recognition, what action did you take, if any?

(Examples such as talking to somebody or changing the way one dressed can be provided if participant requires clarification).

How do you think these experiences affected you as an individual?

Gender differences at the service of capital: the working process of the Argentinian textile industry during the interwar period

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Abstract

*This work examines the increase in productivity of the Argentinian textile industry between the 1920s and 1930s from a perspective that places a strong emphasis on class and gender relations. The principal conclusion is that the productive process of the Argentinian textile industry was organized around gender differences, while class and gender were completely interwoven into the thought strategies of the textile bourgeoisie to increase productivity and relative and absolute surplus value. This paper is supported by a triangulation of primary sources from three perspectives: labourer (*El Obrero Textil*, the trade union press), management (*Anales de la Unión Industrial Argentina*, a journal) and institutional sources (reports from the *Departamento Nacional del Trabajo*, DNT), among others*

Keywords: *Work organization and class relations; political economy of gender; unpaid domestic work; Argentinian textile industry.*

No one knows better than the woman who must work and simultaneously manage her household, that with these salaries it is impossible to meet the most urgent needs; (...) the immediate and innumerable problems that affect women, among others, a better diet, clothing and education for her children³

1) Introduction: Framework and Methodology

This study examines the working process of the Argentinian textile industry during the interwar period and analyzes the endogenous causes for the increase in productivity within the industry. It seeks to provide a deeper analysis of how textile workers, both male and female, experienced this process from a perspective that includes gender relations as integral to the working process, due to the fact that the sexual division of labour is a fundamental driving force of capitalist development (Federici, 2010). The main hypothesis is that the increase in production levels in the textile industry during this period was based on the *specific exploitation of women workers* (including ethnic and age differences), and I argue that the working process must be understood through a consideration of diversity within the labour force.

In the interwar period, Argentina underwent a process of increased production in the existing industries in the country, particularly in the textiles, food, and chemical industries, three feminized sectors where working conditions were even more precarious than in others (Norando, 2020a). This increase in productivity affected working conditions, lowering wages and flouting the labour laws that protected workers at that time, such as maternity leave, the eight-hour work day and holidays, among others. In Argentina, this process affected women and girls much more than male workers (Norando, 2020b), while immigrant women were better paid than Argentinians as will be seen later.

¹ *El Obrero Textil (EOT)*, Year V, No. 24, Buenos Aires, December 1938, p. 4.

One fundamental idea is that gender relations constitute class relations, and that relations between the sexes are, as a whole, part of the social relations that have traditionally been denominated “capitalist”. “Diversity through class” (Zanoni, 2010) provides a key concept for understanding how inequalities of class, gender, age, and ethnicity intersect, and establishes a link between them.

As I have proposed in other studies, I believe that relations between the sexes constitute social class as well as its antagonistic relations with each other (Norando, 2020a, 2019a, 2018). Social class is gendered, it is a *gendered social class* (Norando, 2019a), and the two fundamental inequalities are class and gender inequalities. Thus, the mode of production is not only capitalist (in the traditional Marxist sense) but patriarchal-capitalist (Norando, 2019a). This is part of a broader perspective (Mitchell 1971; Hartmann 1980; Eisenstein 1978, Vogel, 1983; Cock and Luxton, 2013; Mezzadri, 2019; Mies, 2019; Norando and Wertheimer, 2019, Norando, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c) but is also debated by others (such as Bhattachayra, 2017, Fraser, 2017; Ferguson, 2019; Arruzza, 2017).

In general, both perspectives consider that within capitalism, social reproduction (Bhattachayra, 2017, Luxton, 2013) is fundamentally important and cannot be separated from productive relations, as is affirmed by the Social Reproduction Theory (Bhattachayra, 2017). However, I do not agree with this theory; like some authors (Mezzadri, 2019 and Mies, 2019), I consider that reproduction activities produce surplus value. My interest is to contribute to the line of research that gives importance to reproduction but clarifies how the unpaid and private domestic work of women workers (in this case, women workers in the textile industry) is an essential part of the productive system. A single system of exploitation and production encompasses unpaid domestic work and the work process in the workplace, is the factory. Other authors have analyzed the production-reproduction relationship, but instead of considering the tensions between social reproduction and production (Picchio, 2015), here I will make an analysis that clearly defines reproduction as an input for productive relations. This would constitute the specific exploitation of women (Norando, 2019b). Unlike approaches that consider different “inequality regimes”, I consider that the regime is one of exploitation and not of inequality, and that these inequalities are part of the patriarchal capitalist mode of production that exploits workers based, first, on gender differences and then ethnicity/race and age differences exacerbate this exploitation.

Gender relations addressed from the perspective of social reproduction explains elements of the working process that could not be understood otherwise, for example: categories, salaries, variations in productivity by gender, the different labour exploitation experiences of men and women, different roles in the workplace, etc., but mainly the way the female exploitation is structured. Women are proletarianized in a different manner than men and these practices give women a unique experience of their gendered social class.

This paper will describe conceptual elements that I developed in previous investigations concerning the analysis of Women’s History and the patriarchal capitalist relations of production among the textile working class during the interwar period in Buenos Aires, Argentina. However, this conceptual perspective and theoretical framework is useful for any labour sector and for society in general.

In addition, housewives are also part of this specific gendered exploitation, a subject which will be explored further in future research. These aspects of inequality are part of two gender-specific exploitations: the specific exploitation of *women*; and the specific exploitation of *men*. Here I study women-specific exploitation: women who are exploited from their place in social reproduction.

2) The work process in factories: the only place where male and female workers are subject to patriarchal capitalism?

2.1) Unpaid domestic work: a fundamental part of the working process in factories

One of the fundamental material pillars of the patriarchal system of capitalism is unpaid domestic work (Bhattachayra, 2017, 2019; Norando, 2018a, 2020, 2019a). “Housewife” was the central

female role in the Western world in the interwar period, 1918-1939. All women are housewives; even those who work outside their homes are still considered as such, because unpaid domestic work is what defines a woman's place anywhere (Dalla Costa, 1972). Women workers are born to do domestic and care work in addition to their jobs outside the home. And although, of course, there is a large group of women that can avoid wage work, women workers do not manage to escape unpaid domestic work.

As defined by patriarchal capitalist society, unpaid domestic work – the work of life reproduction – is “not work”; it is not considered valid work by capital because it does not produce actual goods for the market, thus it lacks exchange value, as is also traditionally argued by Marxist intellectuals (Artous, 1982; Seccombe, 1974, among others). Instead, unpaid domestic work produces use values that, when consumed by people, in turn produce a commodity—labour power. In addition, life reproduction (unpaid domestic work) implies giving birth. Argentinian women in the interwar period (as today) were obligated to give birth. To give birth is to produce a potential labour force, and with unpaid domestic work, this labour force potential is reproduced. None of this is paid, neither giving birth nor performing domestic work, but both are fundamental to patriarchal capitalism, and here they are considered work, in line with Mies (2019).

Like Mies (2019) and Mezzadri (2019), I believe these activities (domestic work and giving birth) do generate exchange value by producing humans (labour power) and services that later contribute to the reproduction of labour power, that is essential and valuable work for the system, even if it is done privately and in secluded and unpaid conditions (Rowbotham, 1977, Luxton, 2013, Norando, 2018a, 2020, 2019). Many authors argue that this kind of work does not exist on a social level because there is no contract that negotiates the conditions between two parties (Artous, 1982, Seccombe, 1974, among others). Women do it out of inertia, because cultural “nature” and patriarchal education dictate it, but here, I agree with Mies (2019) that these are not natural activities. And this work must be considered as such as long as there is no contract between parties as in other sectors (textile slave labour, for example).

My argument is that domestic work is perfectly compatible with the theory of exchange value (Marx, 2010 [1894]), although it is characterized as having residual pre-capitalist features. But it can be quantified, measured, calculated (as I have proved in numbers with present-day examples, Norando 2019a, Norando, 2019b), and it is socially necessary. It is work that becomes labour power that can be bought and sold, except that most women do it for free and in almost slave-like conditions. This work is also expropriated by capital, like any other pre-capitalist work adjusted by the patriarchal capitalism mode of production, such as clandestine textile workshops (using slave labour) or the trafficking of women, which is also based on slave labour. This work performed by women is also subject to the extraction of surplus value, in which gender difference plays a key role, and where pre-capitalist conditions make it difficult to perceive the mechanisms of exploitation (Norando, 2020a, 2019a, Norando, 2019b).

2.2) The textile working process: do the reasons for the increase in productivity lie only within the factories?

In the Interwar Period, there were 36,814 workers – male and female – in the textile industry. To approach the direct scope of the work process itself, I will begin with a description of the categories, work qualifications and salary differences that existed. Workers were distributed, according to their category, as follows: **foremen**, whose function was to direct the tasks of the following groups of workers; **officers**, who constituted what are commonly called skilled workers; **half-officers**, who held the place of semi-skilled workers; **helpers**, who were in charge of a particular task under the guidance or control of a qualified worker; **pawns**, who did not have a task in particular, they may have been needed in one area or another and they always had to be available; **subordinates**, among them messengers, porters, elevator workers, ordinance; **apprentices**, who, although they did not constitute a professional category, potentially embodied the various hierarchical gradations of the profession.

One important fact that I will now analyze is that women, being the majority in one of the highest categories of the industry, received a lower remuneration than the men who were pawns or subalterns, engaged in the lowest category. I am specifically interested in expanding the understanding of this relationship between sex-gender and salary, and will primarily introduce the relation between wages / sex / surplus value / cost of living, looking at a concrete example: the work process of the Argentinian textile industry and the experiences of the textile workers in the period under analysis.

All the categories of work were performed by both men and women, but in different proportions and receiving highly unequal remunerations. Women constituted 63.92% of the total workers in the industry⁴ – in round numbers 23,583 female workers⁵ – while males accounted for 13,281 persons,⁶ or 36.08%⁷ of the total workforce.⁸ My analysis of the DNT report revealed that the vast majority of female employees in the textile industry (94.74%)⁹ belonged to the category of qualified and semi-skilled workers.¹⁰ Males were distributed across several categories but the majority – 71.36% – were skilled and semi-skilled workers.¹¹ Yet, these 9,477 men¹² accounted for only 29.83%¹³ of total skilled and semi-skilled workers, considering that 22,295 skilled and semi-skilled workers were women.¹⁴

Examining the statistics of the DNT report, I found salary differences between men and women, but also that women accounted for most of the skilled and semi-skilled workers and, at the census date, their effective remuneration was 83 Argentinian pesos per month.¹⁵ By contrast, the pawns' effective remuneration was 92 Argentinian pesos¹⁶ and most of them were men: out of a total of 3,001 workers in this category,¹⁷ around 2,856 were male¹⁸ (95.17%)¹⁹ and 145 were female²⁰. In addition, 95.5%²¹ of a total of 200 subordinates were men²² and they earned an average of 119 Argentinian pesos,²³ 43.73%²⁴ more than the officers, of whom women were the majority.²⁵ These wage differences were not due to level of qualification but to gender-sex. In the words of the informant, "the person with a trade does not earn what a simple pawn does."²⁶

Women received a lower salary than the pawns and the subalterns because the patriarchal capitalist society makes the tasks developed by women acquire a character of invisibility, and therefore of devaluation (Artous, 1982). The normalizing that certain activities are masculine and others are

⁴Industria Textil. Capacidad normal de trabajo de los obreros de la industria textil, especialmente mujeres y menores. DNT, Buenos Aires, June 12, 1939, p. 3

⁵ Ibidem, p. 5

⁶ Idem

⁷ Calculation based on Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

⁸ Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit., p. 5

⁹ Calculation based on Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 3

¹⁰ Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. pp. 3, 5 and 8

¹¹ Idem

¹² Ibidem, p. 5

¹³ Calculation based on Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

¹⁴ Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

¹⁵ Idem, p. 8

¹⁶ Idem p. 8

¹⁷ Idem, p. 5

¹⁸ Idem

¹⁹ Calculation based on Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

²⁰ Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

²¹ Calculation based on Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

²² Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

²³ Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 8

²⁴ Calculation based on Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

²⁵ Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit., p. 8

²⁶ Idem, p. 8.

feminine (Queirolo, 2008) provides, in turn, a cultural justification for employers to use such strategies to increase productivity in the work process based on gender differences.

In this regard, the industry in question used mostly female labour for two fundamental reasons, first, because it was cheaper and, second, because weaving, spinning, etc., were considered natural activities for women and extensions of unpaid domestic work. As I said, this worked as a cultural justification, both for the low salaries that were paid and for the activity itself. Here I must highlight that both factors complement each other, a female workforce is cheaper precisely because their "natural" activities originate from unpaid domestic work, an invisible, inferior activity (Andújar, 2015, 2016). "Often the work of the house does not even seem like a task to women" (Rowbotham, 1977: 120).

Likewise, positions of hierarchy corresponded to men,²⁷ with women accounting for only 14.93%²⁸ of the total of workers and foremen in the better remunerated category (219 pesos).²⁹ In conclusion, the marginalization and segregation of female labour was one of the fundamental bases of the textile industry's work process, as gender inequality was a key catalyst to increase profits and, obviously, to increase surplus value.

So, why did female workers receive lower salaries than men, even though they were performing the same activities, and perhaps even more qualified ones? Why did female workers face greater difficulties supporting their children and reproducing themselves as workers? What is the relationship between salary and sex-gender difference? The answer is that unpaid domestic work is also part of the working process within the factory, because women's bodies contain an objectified labour power that is much more valuable than that of male bodies. This is because women are capable of giving birth and then are obligated to reproduce themselves and to reproduce the life of their child (future labour power). This shows that women were proletarianized as such, that their role as unpaid domestic workers determined their way of entering the labour market (Davis, 1981: 227), and hence, the way they participate in the work process (Norando, 2019d).

There are two other characteristics of the work process in the interwar period that deserve mention: the increase in the pace and length of the working day, and the introduction of new machinery and labour intensity. It is my argument that the combination of all these elements constituted a work process that was completely based on sexual differences, and that the productivity of the branch of industry increased because of them.

The driving force behind these changes was the appetite for greater productivity, the determination to find ways to incorporate less and less labour time into an ever-increasing quantity of products. This is deeply related to the working day, from which surplus value is extracted, so I have incorporated the notions of the sexual division of labour and social reproduction as an engine of change to achieve greater productivity. In the patriarchal capitalist mode of production, increasingly fast and effective methods and machinery are incorporated to dilute the workers' control of the labour process and reconstruct it as directed by the employer administration. It is in the first decade of the twentieth century, at the time the scientific-technical revolution emerged in the West – Europe and the United States – that the Argentine bourgeoisie, influenced by this process, raised the issue of directing the labour process as a whole, controlling each and every one of its elements, without exception and without distinction. In other words, to "improve the administration system",³⁰ to annul all fortuitous or accidental elements. The words of T. Santa María Heredia were clear in this regard, advising the industrialists of the Argentine textile branch,

The scientific method (...), imposes a regulation (...) at the same time as it controls, monitors, measures and analyzes them. (...)

²⁷ Idem, p. 5

²⁸ Calculation based on Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 5

²⁹ Industria textil. Capacidad normal..., op. cit. p. 8

³⁰ Anales de la Unión Industrial Argentina (AUIA), February, 1936, p. 1

*The industrial man (...) is interested in the cost being reduced and this can only be achieved if he tries methods of rationalization. (...) Precisely the Science of the Organization establishes effective controls (...) what do we understand by control? (...) From the purchases of raw materials to the technical capacity of the female worker.*³¹

3) Conclusion

On one hand, the main objective of this study was to demonstrate that the textile work process was gendered, marked by the implied differences between the sexes. These differences are used in patriarchal capitalist production to carry out strategies to increase productivity. Furthermore, through these operations based on sexual differences, wages were reduced in general (for men and women), thus increasing surplus value and profits. Salary is an essential issue for analysis. And in the case of women, as I said above, they do a job that maintains the entire patriarchal capitalist system because without their work nothing would be sustainable, and if it is done without any remuneration, then this non-salary deserves to be incorporated into the analysis when considering the productive process. In fact, here I have demonstrated that unpaid domestic work is fundamental to the working process within factories because it lowers general wages, and women's wages in particular. This is because unpaid domestic work produces valuable goods and services that are not paid by patriarchal capital. So, in both the period under analysis and today, they are part of the surplus value. The articulation and mechanism of operation by which this surplus value is extracted by the patriarchal capital can be observed in the mechanism of exploitation specific to women. The study of exploitation specific to men would also enlighten this process, as a subject of future research.

³¹ AUIA, February 1936. P. 7.

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Let It Go: A Critical Comparative Analysis of the Modern-Day Female Protagonist Based on Disney's Frozen and Frozen II

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative content analysis of the modern-day female protagonists represented in Disney's newest and highest grossing film series, Frozen and Frozen II. As one of the few major media companies that have captivated a global audience, Disney has supplied fantasy princess narratives for over 80 years. With the new addition of Disney+, classic and modern princess films alike are now available for instant streaming. As the sample represents the newest films in the post-transitional wave of the Disney Princess line, this study aims to reveal what messages are being projected to young, impressionable audiences around the world. Between the third wave of feminism and rising conversations of gender roles and communication, Disney Princess films in particular have been the subject of many conversations and criticisms. Using content analysis methodology with each film, the data identifies gender roles, conflict resolution, and common themes between the six main characters: Elsa, Anna, Kristoff, Olaf, the King, and the Queen.

Keywords: *Disney, Gender, Media*

Introduction

The growth of media has gained momentum since the control of broadcast media in the United States has been consolidated into the hands of six corporations, one of which is The Walt Disney Company (McChesney, 2000; W. F. X. T., 2020). This has scholars questioning the distribution of media and the influence of each company's agenda (England, 2011; Hine, 2018; Menise, 2019). After 97 years of business, Disney has an estimated net worth of \$140 billion (Bleznak, 2020). The Disney Princess line, which has been one of the longest-running collections of films for 83 years and counting, has a net worth of over \$3 billion globally for retail (Goudreau, 2012). From the *Frozen* merchandise franchise alone, Disney has brought in over 107.2 billion in retail sales (Horton, 2019). Disney is not just known for films they make, but their presence in marketing on anything related to children's merchandise (Azmi, 2018; England, 2011; Golden, 2018; Hine, 2018; Maity, 2014; Menise, 2019).

The influence of Disney Princess films in American and beyond has only grown since the introduction of Disney+, a subscription service that acts as an archive of movies, series, and short films. As these films continue to captivate a global audience, it is imperative to note the types of messages being delivered to vulnerable, developing children. Scholars suggest that this can have an effect on their perceptions of interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, family dynamic, even gender roles (Azmi, 2018; Gold, 2018; Hine, 2018; Hynes, 2010; Menise, 2019; Shannon, 2015).

The messages in these films and their presentation of traditional gender roles defy a modern understanding of women's roles. This research seeks to question whether Disney's representation of women in film has changed with societal and generational demands from the last decade, or if it has remained stagnant. In order to analyze the common themes that are represented in female protagonists within Disney films, the research explores the portrayal of beauty standards, cultural expectations, ethnic diversity, societal expectations, learned behaviors, and conflict resolution.

This study is a qualitative comparative content analysis of *Frozen* (2013) and *Frozen II* (2019) analyzing gender roles in female protagonists. Each film will undergo content analysis with predetermined coded categories focusing on Traditional Gender Traits. This study will analyze the progression of the six

main characters of the two films through these metrics in terms of character development, the interpretation of Disney's message, and the portrayal of the female protagonists. This particular study of a comparative content analysis between *Frozen* and *Frozen II* has not yet been researched by academic scholars and offers significant contribution to the Communication discipline. Finally, this work is foundational in what could become a series of conversations and expanding topics for future research

Methodology

This study is a qualitative comparative content analysis of the Disney Princess films *Frozen* and *Frozen II*. "Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 1980). Content analysis has been a proven method of research for this particular setting (Arnold, 2015; Davis, 2014; England, 2011; Garabedian, 2015; Hynes, 2010; Itmeizeh, 2017). This comparative content analysis study was strategically selected as it has not yet been analyzed. Other studies have either done a comparative analysis of two alternative Disney Princess films, or a collective analysis of films from 1937 to 2012 (*Snow White* to *Brave*). Each film will be analyzed through the same set of coded categories with corresponding operational definitions that fall under the grouping of Traditional Gender Traits.

Traditional Gender Traits (Male/Female):

Athletic (M): Physically strong, fit, and active, can accomplish a physically tasking goal. *Apologetic Language (F)*: The use of language with regretfully acknowledging or excusing an offense or failure. *Assertive (M)*: Showing confidence and forcefulness to a goal. *Avoiding Physical Contact (M)*: Character avoids physical contact with another character. *Brave (M)*: Courage; to face something that scares an individual and do it anyway. *Curiosity (M)*: An internal desire to know or learn something based on innate instinct. *Dependent (F)*: Leaning on others, requiring others to accomplish their set tasks. *Disclosure (F)*: Making secret or hidden information known to another individual. *Follower (F)*: A person that moves or travels by direction of a leader. *Gives Advice (M)*: Giving advice to others in conflict and resolution. *Helpful (F)*: To come along someone with the prime responsibility and sharing strengths to achieve a common goal. *Independent (M)*: Free from external control, not dependent on others for aid or direction. *Initiating Physical Contact (F)*: Character makes physical contact with another character. *Leader (M)*: A person with the primary responsibility of organizing, directing, and orchestrating. *Nurturing (F)*: To care and encourage the growth and development of another person. *Physically Strong (M)*: Having more or adequate strength to complete the task or goal at hand. *Physically Weak (F)*: Physically unable to accomplish the task at hand, or goal that requires strength. *Resolves Conflict (M)*: A person that uses critical thinking to relieve tension between groups, organizations, affiliations, or the problem at hand. *Submissive (F)*: Conforming to the authority and directions of others. *Takes Advice (F)*: Taking advice from others in conflict and resolution. *Talking About True Love (F)*: When the character talks about the nature of "true love".

This data will not only be utilized as a qualitative analysis but will act as quantitative data. This will serve as a measurement of comparison for the characters, analyzing their development or consistency between the original film *Frozen* and its sequel *Frozen II*. This study has three main research questions regarding the relationship between two films:

RQ1: What are the predominant themes presented by the female protagonists?

RQ2: Has Disney's definition of what it means to be a woman and her characteristics evolved with cultural change?

RQ3: Do female protagonists have more activity in the conflict resolution in the film's plot?

Data Results

Frozen	Elsa	Anna	Kristoff	Olaf	King	Queen
Traditional Gender Traits						
Nurturing (F)	4.55%	3.80%	12.00%	6.67%	18.18%	50.00%
Curiosity (M)			8.00%			
Helpful (F)		3.80%	2.00%	26.67%		
Disclosure (F)		5.06%	4.00%			
Leader (M)	4.55%	1.27%	16.00%	13.33%	18.18%	
Follower (F)		5.06%		13.33%		
Brave (M)		1.27%				
Athletic (M)		5.06%	2.00%			
Independent (M)	4.55%		2.00%			
Dependent (F)		3.80%				
Gives Advice (M)				6.67%	18.18%	
Takes Advice (F)	4.55%	1.27%			9.09%	
Gets rescued (F)	4.55%	2.53%				
Submissive (F)		5.06%				50.00%
Assertive (M)	54.55%	21.52%	18.00%	13.33%	27.27%	
Apologetic Language (F)	18.18%	24.05%	2.00%		9.09%	
Talking about true love (F)		2.53%	2.00%	6.67%		
Resolves Conflict (M)	4.55%	3.80%	2.00%	6.67%		
Physically strong (M)		3.80%	14.00%			
Initiating Physical Contact (F)		5.06%	14.00%	6.67%		
Avoiding Physical Contact (M)		1.27%	2.00%			
Total Male Trait Percentage:	68.18%	37.97%	64.00%	40.00%	63.64%	0%
Total Female Trait Percentage:	31.82%	62.03%	36.00%	60.00%	36.36%	100%
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%
Frozen II	Elsa	Anna	Kristoff	Olaf	King	Queen
Traditional Gender Traits						
Nurturing (F)	8.89%	27.27%	12.50%	12.50%	20.00%	14.29%
Curiosity (M)	17.78%	18.18%	6.25%	25.00%		
Helpful (F)			6.25%			
Disclosure (F)	2.22%	1.82%	25.00%		20.00%	14.29%
Leader (M)	15.56%	9.09%	6.25%	25.00%	20.00%	
Follower (F)		1.82%	12.50%	12.50%		14.29%
Brave (M)	4.44%	3.64%		12.50%		
Athletic (M)	6.67%					
Independent (M)	2.22%		6.25%			
Dependent (F)						
Gives Advice (M)						
Takes Advice (F)	2.22%					
Gets rescued (F)	2.22%	1.82%				
Submissive (F)	6.67%					28.57%
Assertive (M)	24.44%	25.45%	12.50%		40.00%	14.29%
Apologetic Language (F)	2.22%	1.82%				
Talking about true love (F)		1.82%				
Resolves Conflict (M)	2.22%	1.82%				
Physically strong (M)						
Initiating Physical Contact (F)	2.22%	5.45%	12.50%	12.50%		14.29%
Avoiding Physical Contact (M)						
Total Male Trait Percentage:	73.33%	58.18%	31.25%	62.50%	60.00%	14.29%
Total Female Trait Percentage:	26.67%	41.82%	68.75%	37.50%	40.00%	85.71%
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Discussion

RQ1: What are the predominant themes presented by the female protagonists?

There are a few themes that remain consistent throughout *Frozen* and *Frozen II*, the first being grief. There are no light-hearted complications in this film series: losing one's parents as they search out answers, the cost of losing friends, and the questioning of life circumstances that lead into the unknown. Within the two films, Disney presents an array of emotions between Anna and Elsa. The characters' lives are not "perfect". In fact, the trial of losing their parents brings Anna and Elsa together as sisters.

The second theme in this selection is strong family unit. Despite the grief that Anna and Elsa experience as children, they are drawn together and become each other's priority. This does not mean they always got along or see eye-to-eye. However, throughout both films, their actions demonstrate a sister's care.

The third theme is conflict resolution through sacrificial love. This is first seen when Anna sacrifices herself for Elsa to save her from Han's sword. Elsa later demonstrates this love in sacrificing herself to gain the truth of their family's past, a decision that reveals what must be done in order to right the wrongs of past generations. Additionally, this theme of sacrificial love appears when the Queen risks her own character to save the young King. She leaves her home and family behind forever in pursuit of saving the enemy that attacked her people.

RQ2: Has Disney's definition of what it means to be a woman and her characteristics evolved with cultural change?

Content analysis revealed that all of the women in both *Frozen* films, with the exception of the Queen, show a higher percentage of traditionally masculine characteristics. Elsa consistently demonstrates a higher percentage between both films. Anna has higher traditionally female characteristics in *Frozen*, but this is significantly exchanged for traditionally male characteristics in *Frozen II*.

Through this data, the depiction of Disney Princess line women has changed from the early films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. Women are no longer presented as submissive and demure; they have excelled in assertiveness and determination. Even Kristoff, the main male protagonist in the *Frozen* films, goes from having high percentages in traditionally masculine characteristics in *Frozen* to having higher traditionally female characteristics in *Frozen II*. This supports previous research findings of linguistic advancements of diversity in gender language, as well as dominant representation of values in beauty and expressing emotions in *Frozen* per the literature review (Arnold, 2015; Azmi, 2016; Heritage, 2016).

While there is a difference in gender communication and attributes between the main male and female protagonists in the *Frozen* films, there are still many consistencies within Disney's brand of princesses.

First, beauty standards are still a high priority for Disney princesses. Anna and Elsa are still two tall, thin, physically beautiful women. They have the same body type as Disney princesses since the 1930s, perhaps with the arguable exception of Moana. Disney's female protagonists still wake up with a full face of makeup (with the exception of Anna's hair ensemble in *Frozen*) and wear traditional female clothing with full-length dresses (with the exception of Elsa's pant suit in *Frozen II*). *Frozen* has been under the criticism of the "eyes bigger than waist" movement. This brings attention to not only how unrealistic Disney princesses' bodies are, but also a lack of diversity in sizes and shapes that are celebrated in modern culture today.

This topic leads to an even larger discussion concerning both male and female characters. The analysis shows that all four main characters (Elsa, Anna, Kristoff, and Olaf) display a higher frequency of their opposite traditional gender trait categories. Linguistic and verbal analyses reveal stark disparities against traditional gender identity through the nonverbal communication of clothes, hair, makeup, and body proportion. More importantly, differing interpretations can rely greatly on the ages of the audience

members. While children are usually more in tune with nonverbal communication and characterization through the physical representation, adults tend to understand the deeper undertones of verbal communication and meaning (Golden 2018).

Research shows that when a conflict between interpretation of verbal and nonverbal messages occurs, people are more inclined to trust the nonverbal communication (Burgoon, 2015). The values placed on nonverbal representation and aesthetics will rank as a higher importance and truth. Children are unlikely to detect advancements in the representation of male or female characters since the beginning of the Princess Line.

While adults may approve of the evolution of conversation, the assertiveness in women, and the helping words of men, children are still seeing the 1930s standard of women in which their value and identity is measured by the external, nonverbal communication through physical representation and dress. Through the Disney version of physical representation, with the exception of *Moana*, women are deserving of love, affection, and attention only when they are pretty. This projects the message that external beauty holds greater importance than heart, intentions, or character.

These physical standards as set forth by Disney are not only specific to female characters, but also to male characters. Men are continually portrayed as having large upper-body strength, biceps, broad shoulders, and thinner bottom halves. The consistency of beauty standards spans across decades of films, applying to both genders and sending a clear message that, above all, external aesthetics are of the highest importance.

While Disney has evolved in regard to modern linguistics, they have failed to bring needed change to the visual representation and expectations of both male and female characters. This should be examined further, especially regarding the potential of media effects on children.

Second, the female protagonists' roles have changed within the films. The female leader of the Northuldrans in *Frozen II* is the first representation of female leadership besides Elsa, Queen of Arendelle. Conversely, at the Coronation Ball in *Frozen*, there is not a single female leader or representative that comes from a different country to celebrate. Even at the end of *Frozen*, when Anna is left for dead by her fiancé, Hans, audiences see a room full of male leaders making decisions for Arendelle that include the execution order of Elsa.

Third, Disney included both a mother and father in *Frozen* and *Frozen II*. This was unusual in the Princess Line, as Disney typically has not included mothers in the plot line (*Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Little Mermaid*, *Pocahontas*, *Aladdin*, *Tangled*). However, the Queen is presented as little more than a highlighted extra in *Frozen*, uttering only three words and failing to contribute to the conflict or resolution. While the Queen contributes more to conflict resolution and offers more dialogue in *Frozen II*, it is minimal. However, the Queen is unlike her daughters, and scored consistently high traditional feminine characteristics.

Finally, Disney continues to promote the same expectations of romantic relationships between main protagonist characters. The true love scenario that occurs over the span of a few days has been a hallmark of Disney since the beginning. This is one of the main themes for Anna in *Frozen*, when she displaces the loneliness of being shut out from her family with the need for a romantic relationship with Hans. This progression leads to the main conflict, when Anna asks for Elsa's blessing on her marriage with Hans. *Frozen* flips the script on the immediacy of true love, which is reiterated with concern by Elsa, Kristoff, Olaf, and even Hans.

The scene of Hans' rejection of the true love ideology crushes the historical narrative of previous Disney films. Hans *verbally* tells Anna that he loves her the evening that they meet. Kristoff *shows* Anna that he loves her by his actions throughout the plot. It is a revelatory moment for Anna when she compares Hans' immediate declaration of love to Olaf's counsel that love is less about words, but rather the act of sacrificing for the other person.

While Anna and Kristoff do not get married immediately, the value of a romantic union at the end of the day remains. Disney, with the exception of *Moana*, has consistently concluded its princess films or series with the reuniting of the man and woman. Due to this clear consistency, it can be argued that Disney views the relationship status of female protagonists as a key value and characteristic of what it means to be

a woman. In other words, women receive heightened value as a person if they can attract the interest and commitment of a man.

RQ3: Do female protagonists participate more in conflict resolution in the film's plot?

One of the biggest questions in this research was the female protagonists' activity through the conflict resolution of the plot. There is a clear progression between the two films with both Anna and Elsa. First, in *Frozen*, Elsa actually causes the main conflict of the film, the eternal winter over Arendelle. While Anna runs after Elsa, rejecting Hans' assistance, Anna doesn't pursue the journey alone. If it weren't for Kristoff, Anna wouldn't have solved any main conflict in the film. What Disney seems to have done is akin to a parent doing their child's project but signing their child's name on the top of the page. While Anna appears to be the last piece in solving the major conflicts, she likely wouldn't have succeeded without Kristoff's leadership and insight. The argument is not against team collaboration, but in conveying that women can still not achieve conflict resolution in the very least without the help of a male protagonist.

This completely changes in *Frozen II*. Kristoff primarily provides transportation, as Elsa is the active voice in the navigation. In fact, the one praise that caught most viewers' attention is in the final scene where Kristoff and Anna are united while being chased by giants. He could have taken over the mission, developed his own plan, and executed it. Instead he comes beside Anna and says, "How can I help you?"

By the end of *Frozen II*, the message is clear that women no longer need men to save them, as has been apparent in other Disney Princess films. Instead, the film presents the message that women can save themselves and solve their own conflicts in their lives.

Conclusion

As a member of the Big Six, Disney films have had considerable reach not just in the United States but all over the world. Legitimate questions of media effects concerning the third wave of feminism has propelled the conversation of what Disney is communicating to their target audience through their films. While this study is not arguing the media effects of Disney films, it has sought to thoroughly identify the representations of the female protagonists, as well as the holistic messages and themes from each plot.

This study's collected data confirmed the need for further research to answer the question of whether these messages sway the minds of young audiences around the world. More importantly, do these messages affect children's understanding of gender roles, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relationships in their own lives? The research encourages further inquiry with the overall representation of the post-transitional Disney Princess films, for a more thorough understanding of the last ten years of film.

This analysis revealed the reverse gender traits by the end of *Frozen II* between a majority of the main characters. What remained consistent is the hierarchy of the elite and royal antagonists within the premise of these films, including their powers, access, birthright, and perception of other characters. While this study has only focused on the *Frozen* series, this can suggest a transition of female protagonists' representation from the first wave of original Disney Princess films. Elsa and Anna in particular have challenged the traditional representation and expectation of female protagonists in film and media. This suggests a move from stark polarization of gender traits to an androgynous model of character representation. While there has been an evolution of the linguistics of these films, the aesthetics and nonverbal communication showing the ideals since the beginning of Disney Princess history in the 1930s provides mixed messages with the verbal communication in the film. The *Frozen* series, if anything, has propelled the notion of letting go of the traditional female protagonist through verbal communication yet retained the antiquated aesthetics and values of historic Disney Princesses' visual representation.

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The Issue of Gender Inequality in Employment and Income of Female Workers During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Case from Vietnam

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Abstract:

Since its outbreak at the end of 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic has considerably damaged the health, economies, and societies of many countries in the world. Women with their physical and psychological characteristics, have become one of the most vulnerable groups when faced with the high risk of Covid-19 infection, job loss, and gender-based violence. As of December 2020, Vietnam had 32.1 million people aged 15 and over negatively affected by Covid-19, 69.2% of whom suffered a decrease in income, 39.9% of whom had either their working hours reduced or received time off work or were forced to resign or work on rotation. Additionally, the impact of the economic crisis on women is accompanied by typical Vietnamese social norms that burden females with familial domestic responsibilities in addition to making up a part of the labour force alongside men. In order to clarify the legal issue regarding the gender equality of female workers in employment and income in Vietnam, the article will focus on clarifying: (i) the status of the discrimination in employment and income of female workers during the Covid-19 pandemic globally and in Vietnam; (ii) Vietnam's efforts to improve policies on gender equality in employment and income for female workers before and during the Covid-19 pandemic; (iii) recommendations to ensure gender equality for women in these fields in times of crisis and in the future.

Keywords: women's right, right to work, discrimination, Covid-19, worker's rights

I. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant repercussions on the economic and labour market, affecting the supply of goods and services as well as negatively impacting consumer demand and investment. The initial impact of the crisis was the disruption to manufacturing, occurring first in Asia and then spreading to supply chains around the world, affecting employment in three main respects, in particular (i) the number of jobs (both unemployed and underemployed), (ii) the quality of work (e.g., wages and access to social security), and (iii) the effects on specific groups who are more vulnerable to adverse labour market conditions (ILO, 2020c). According to the ILO Report, the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in 81 million job losses in 2020. The crisis has had a far-reaching impact, with underemployment growing, with millions of workers suffering cuts to working hours or having no work at all. This Report also provides an initial estimate of the regional unemployment rate, according to which the unemployment rate could increase from 4.4% in 2019 to 5.2% - 5.7% in 2020 (ILO, 2020a, p.27). Due to social distancing orders and quarantine measures, many workers are unable to move to the workplace or perform their jobs, greatly affecting their income levels, especially female workers.

For developing countries in general and Vietnam in particular, female workers account for the majority of the working poor (ILO, 2021b). Female workers often have low income and unstable working conditions and are thus more likely to fall into underemployment or unemployment than male workers. Females work mainly in low-income or vulnerable occupations, making up the majority of the

group doing household work without any payment. They often work as domestic workers, street vendors, or entertainment industry workers.

Several gender equality studies have shown that the unequal distribution of unpaid care work and housework between women and men is a major barrier to gender equality and female empowerment. In Vietnam, with a remarkably high labor market participation rate, Vietnamese women face numerous, persistent inequalities in the labor market, having to work as well as bear heavier familial responsibilities than men. A new research report by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Vietnam shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only deepened existing inequalities but also created new gender inequalities. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, both women and men had relatively easy access to jobs, but in general, the quality of jobs for women was lower than that of men. Specifically, women spend an average of 20.2 hours per week on cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking and shopping, and taking care of the family and children while men spend only 10.7 hours on household chores. Nearly a fifth of men do not spend any time doing housework. Females's income was lower than males (with monthly wages being 13.7% lower in 2019) despite female working hours corresponding to male workers and the significant narrowing of the gender pay gap (ILO, 2021a).

In addition, according to Ms. Valentina Barucci, labour economist at ILO Vietnam, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant reduction in the total number of working hours of women, in the second quarter of 2020, only equal to 88.8% compared to the fourth quarter of 2019 (91.5% male). In the last 3 months of 2020, women worked 0.8% more hours than in the same period of 2019, with women working longer hours than usual in the second half of 2020 possibly to make up for the lost earnings in the second quarter. This shows that female workers are considered as one of the most vulnerable groups during the Covid-19 pandemic, making up the majority of the poor working group. Therefore, policies responding and supporting groups of workers who have lost their jobs or have had their working hours reduced, and especially disadvantaged workers, should take gender factors into account.

II. Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Labour and Gender Dimensions

A. *The Situation before the Occurrence of Covid-19*

During the two most recent decades from 2000 to 2019 prior to the occurrence of Covid-19, Vietnam's economy underwent a remarkable depletion in agricultural employment, decreasing by nearly half from 62.2% in 2000 to 34.5% in 2019 and no longer being the largest employer. Other economic sectors including the industrial and services sectors were 30.1% and 35.4%, respectively (GSO, 2019, p.26). According to a recent ILO study, although agriculture was not a female-dominated sector with 36.1% of female employment, female employees tend to be engaged more in the industrial and services sectors with approximately 36.8% and 25.4% of female employment in those sectors, respectively. Nevertheless, in comparison to male employment, there was still more female employment in agriculture, mostly in subsistence agriculture, with almost all of them in cultivation and livestock-related activities (ILO, 2021b, p.1; Le & Ngo, 2020, p.6). Despite male employment was likely to be in services and industrial sectors in general, female employment was majorly in production, manufacturing activities such as textiles, footwear, and sea food processing, hotel and restaurants, training and education, and health care and social work which were tremendously affected by the pandemic (Le & Ngo, 2020, p.6).

The rate of women participating in the labour force in 2019 was recorded as 71.8%, which was significantly higher in comparison to other countries in Asia and the Pacific (GSO, 2019, p.9; ILO, 2021b, p.02). Nevertheless, Vietnamese women workers cannot improve their economic mobility on an equal basis to men. Albeit the high labour market participation rate, the existence of the gender gap in labour force was still recorded. 47.7% and 65.4% of women were economically inactive for being own-account workers or engaged in unpaid family work, respectively. Together, women doing own-account jobs and unpaid household work outnumbered men by 10.7%. These female workers are in

weaker more vulnerable without independent economic resources such as stable jobs and access to social security benefits (GSO, 2019, pp.27–28 and 30; ILO, 2021b, pp.2–3).

Even though more women took part in the labour market, reducing the gender gap in labour market participation overall, the rates of women being own-account workers and contributing family workers are still remarkably high. Regarding earnings, men earned more than women in all economic industries (GSO, 2019, p.33).

In addition, there still exists a traditional perception of women's role in Vietnamese society. Conventionally, women take on the bulk of childcare responsibilities and housework. Women's hours spent on doing housework were recorded as 35 hours per week compared to 21 hours for men. Women generally dedicate more hours to childcare and unpaid household work than men by over 12 hours in an average week (ILO, 2020b, p.9). Women living in rural areas take on the extra burden of caring for children and the elderly and other household work (Cunningham et al., 2018, p.7; Le & Ngo, 2020, p.5). Additionally, women are prone to suffering oppressive practices at home and likely to be victims of violence. The risk of violence against women existed prior to the pandemic, however such risk has been exacerbated in recent times, with 39% of women reporting physical or sexual violence (UN Vietnam, 2020, pp.12–13).

B. Covid-19's Impacts through the Gender Lens

The Covid-19 epidemic has resulted in the global economic crisis and recession. As a developing country proactively participating in the global economy, Vietnam has also suffered from serious setbacks to the country's economic development during the pandemic. By the end of 2020, 32.1 millions of people aged 15 years old and over severely suffered from negative impacts of the pandemic including joblessness, reduction of working hours, income reduction and others. 68.9% of whom suffered a decrease in income, 39.9% of whom had either their working hours reduced or received time off work or were forced to resign or work on rotation. Approximately 14.0% of people were forced to temporarily stop or suspend production and business activities, with the affected areas being mainly accommodation and catering, manufacturing, wholesale trade, and sales which have high proportion of female workers (GSO, 2020, p.2). The service sector was hit hardest with 71.6% of affected workers. The industrial sector was the second hardest hit sector with 64.7% of affected workers and the agricultural sector came in a third place with 26.4% of affected workers (GSO, 2021a, p.2). As female-dominant industries were sharply on the decrease as a consequence of Covid-19, this has led to women losing their jobs and being exposed to financial distress while being laden with family duties. Moreover, it was more likely that women's careers were sacrificed for the sake of child care and the family (UN Vietnam, 2020, p.13).

Vietnam's labour market experienced a steep reduction of employed workers from 50.1 million to 48.1 million within the first two quarters of 2020 due to extreme surges in coronavirus infections (GSO, 2021b, p.4). Despite a slight recovery in the latter quarters thereof, it failed to regain the same level prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the employment growth first time since the 2010-2019 saw a considerable decline with only 53.4 million employed people and 1.3 million jobless people. Amongst 1.3 million people without jobs, women contributed to more than half (51.6%) with the majority of them of working age (76.2%) (GSO, 2021a, p.4), even though the Vietnamese Government has made strenuous efforts in taking numerous measures to pull the national economy out of recession in response to different outbreaks and waves of the pandemic. By the first quarter of 2021, as a result of the third COVID-19 outbreak, in contrast to the reduction in employed people numbers, a rise in the number of employed women was recorded, however, almost all of them were informally employed. Women were more likely to be engaged in informal economic activities than men (increasing by 2.5% points versus 1.2 % points). This showed how the Covid-19 epidemic has affected women's participation in the labour market more severely than men and aggravated the existing gender gap in the labour market participation. With fewer job opportunities than men, women were inclined to accept temporary informal jobs provided that they could earn money to ease their financial difficulties during the pandemic (GSO, 2021b, p.6). Even with recourse to informal jobs, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated

the situation. Under the effects of the implementation of drastic measures in response to the occurrence of waves of the pandemic, informal women workers such as waste recyclers, street vendors, and domestic workers experienced a sharp income reduction (Le & Ngo, 2020, p.6).

The impact of the economic crisis on women is additionally accompanied by typical Vietnamese social norms that burden females with familial domestic responsibilities in addition to making up a part of the labour force alongside men. In 2019, employed women spent an average of 38.8 hours per week on work (1.2 hours less than men), plus 23.5 hours per week on housework (12.7 hours more than men) (ILO, 2020b, p.9).

When schools close and social restraints are put in place, childcare responsibilities are primarily taken up by women and the hours women devoted to can amount to expense of paid work. This consequently leads to women having to make decisions about terminating their own employment which could further reduce their income (UN Women, 2020, p.18; UN Vietnam, 2020, p.11). The occurrence of the pandemic along with the abrogation of family responsibilities by men have widened the gender gap and created more tasks to women. It was reported that in the first quarter of 2021, the working hours per week that rural women engaged in subsistence agriculture spent on household work outnumbered men's by more than 8 hours (19.3 hours for women versus 11.3 hours for men) (GSO, 2021b, pp.12–13).

Besides, when working from home or staying at home due to social-distancing measures and shutdowns in the aftermath of the outbreak, women are more vulnerable to domestic violence including abuse, exploitation, gender-based and sexual violence and other harmful practices, which therefore cause more serious repercussions to their well-being. From a recent UN analysis, there was a two-fold increase in the number of phone calls to the gender-based violence hotline received by the Peace House Shelter in the lockdown period. Further, some women's ability to seek help due to abusive and oppressive domestic circumstances was constrained (UN Vietnam, 2020, p.13). According to the Report of UN Women studying the impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak on the gender dimensions in Asia and the Pacific, women's experiences of family violence was recorded as increasing and worsening during the pandemic. From the survey, it was reported that some women would rather be out in public and exposed to the risk of the Covid-19 infection than stay at home isolated with a violent and abusive partner (UN Women, 2020, p.32).

III. The Principles of Equality and Non-Discrimination as the Cornerstones under International Law

A. Reflection of Equality and Non-Discrimination Principles in Universal Human Rights Legal Instruments

Under the auspices of the United Nations, there exist numerous legal instruments aimed for gender equality and non-discrimination. The advent of the International Bill of Human Rights comprised of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) set forth the legal framework for equality of rights for women. The UDHR is the first human rights instrument desiring and promoting gender equality and non-discrimination by mentioning “without distinction” and “sex” (Friedman, 2006, p.479).

Although the UDHR is not considered a treaty as it is not legally binding and does not directly impose legal obligations on States, it is the principal instrument paving the way for the arrival of the latter Covenants including the ICCPR and the ICESCR. Adopting the same approach to the UDHR with the distinction of legal nature of legally binding, these Covenants require State members to guarantee and ensure equality and non-discrimination in enjoyment of fundamental rights for all people including women. These Covenants further underline gender equality by emphasizing States Parties' undertakings “to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights” (ICESCR, 1966, n.Arts. 2 and 3; ICCPR, 1966, n.Arts 2 and 3).

B. Interpretation of Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination under CEDAW

CEDAW is an all-embracing treaty which defines States' obligations to achieve the comprehensive objectives thereof, by way of, in particular, ensuring no discrimination in any form against women under the laws and enforcement with commitments by public and private actors, empowering women's "de facto" position, and addressing prevailing gender relations and the persistence of gender-based stereotypes (Cusack & Pusey, 2013, p.57) (CEDAW Committee, 2004, para.7).

1. Non-Discrimination

Definition of key terms, objectives of the Conventions, and States' general obligations are described under the first five articles of CEDAW. Based on the definition of discrimination under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), CEDAW broadly explains the term of "discrimination against women" as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (CEDAW, 1979, n.Art. 1). According to CEDAW Committee under its General Recommendation 28, "discrimination against women" is categorized by type including "direct discrimination" meaning "different treatment explicitly based on grounds of sex and gender differences" and "indirect discrimination" (CEDAW Committee, 2010, para.16).

The following Articles in Part II of CEDAW, from Article 7 through Article 16 thereof specify States parties' obligations in different particular areas that women are engaged in, including in political and public life; education; employment, health care; other areas of economic and social life such as family benefits, financing forms, and participation in all cultural life's aspects; legal justice, and others. Compared to the former Covenants, CEDAW is highly developed that it innovatively features the definition of discrimination and for measures to be take in various field in an entire instrument.

With the effort of providing comprehensive coverage, the CEDAW Committee adopts the wide-ranging interpretation of CEDAW "covering other rights that are not explicated mentioned in the Convention, but that have an impact on the achievement of equality of women with men, which impact represents a form of discrimination against women". Thus, repressive treatments or norms are featured that CEDAW has yet to clearly tackle.

2. Gender Equality

For comprehensive and effective implementation of CEDAW, the notion of equality under CEDAW is interpreted to comprise (i) formal equality, (ii) substantive equality, and (iii) transformative equality. (Cusack & Pusey, 2013, pp.63–65)

Formal equality (or *de jure* equality) *emphasizes* similarity in treatment between women and men, mainly pertaining to "content of laws and practices and their even-handed application" (Byrnes, 2012, p.54). Nevertheless, it is insufficient to spur forward governments' abolishment of unjust or prejudicial treatment between women and men under legislation as according to the CEDAW Committee, enhancement of women's position will not transpire "as long as the underlying causes of discrimination against women, and of their inequality, are not effectively addressed". (CEDAW Committee, 2004, para.10)

Substantive equality (or *de facto* equality) is concerned with how gender equality is safeguarded in the implementation and enforcement of women's rights under CEDAW. It is necessary for States parties to safeguard gender equality in other fields rather than laws, policies and practices "beyond a purely formal legal obligation of equal treatment of women with men". At this juncture, the CEDAW Committee clarified that States parties should facilitate "an equal start" for women and environment in which women are empowered "to achieve equality of results". (CEDAW Committee, 2004, para.8; Cusack & Pusey, 2013, p.64)

Transformative equality could be regarded as an integral part contributing to substantive equality. It concentrates on attending to gender-based stereotypes, ill-conceived conventions, and preconceptions no longer suitable and contravene women's rights. (CEDAW Committee, 2010, para.22, 2004, n.annex I [7] and [8]).

In the field of labour, ICESCR represents an important milestone in the realization of women's rights to employment. This Covenant acknowledges "the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work" for all workers including female workers and aims to ensure "fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work" (ICESCR, 1966, n.Art. 7). In addition, in light of the principles of non-discrimination and equality, Convention 100 concerning Equal Remuneration, adopted in 1951 and Convention 111 concerning Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), adopted in 1958, amongst ILO's fundamental instruments, provide legal protection for female workers.

IV. Vietnamese Legislation and Policies in Safeguarding Women's Rights in Employment and Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

Elimination of discrimination and maintenance of gender equality are the primary concerns of the Vietnamese Government. These are constitutionalized in the Constitution of Vietnam 2013, in particular (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2014, n.Art. 26):

"Male and female citizens are equal in all respects. The State has policies to ensure gender equality rights and opportunities. The State, society, and family create favourable conditions for women to develop in all respects and bring into full play their role in the society. Gender discrimination is strictly prohibited."

In the spirit of the Constitution, Vietnam has developed a comprehensive legislative framework with numerous laws concentrating on protection of women's rights at work have been passed. As Vietnam has proactively become a party to numerous human rights treaties for protecting women's rights and with the main focus on gender equality, on 29 November 2006, the National Assembly of Vietnam passed the Law No. 73/2006/QH11 on Gender Equality marking a milestone development on the issue of gender equality, which for the first time was legislated for in a single legal document. The enactment of the Law on Gender Equality indicates the Government's strong commitment to address gender inequality and discrimination in the national context in line with human rights standards. The Law on Gender Equality sets out gender equality as one of the objectives related to the socio-economic development of the country (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2006, n.Art. 4).

Ensuring gender equality in employment is the primary concern that the Vietnamese Government explicitly addresses in a separate chapter in the Labour Code. The Government sets out principles of State policies to ensure gender equality and elimination of discrimination in labour, in particular:

*"Ensuring equal rights for male and female employees in the workplace and ensuring gender equality and prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.
Encouraging employers to facilitate male and female employees to have regular employment, and to widely apply an employment regime based on a flexible timetable with part-time work and home-based work.
Taking measures for creating jobs, improving working conditions, raising professional standards, improving health standards, and strengthening the material and spiritual welfare*

of female employees for the purpose of assisting them to achieve their professional potential and to harmoniously combine a working life with their family life.

Reducing tax of employers employing multiple female employees in accordance with the law on tax.

The State has a plan and measures for arranging nurseries and kindergartens at locations with numerous employees, and the State expands various forms of training favourable to female workers in order for them to gain additional skills and trades and to facilitate employment suitable to their biological and physiological characteristics as well as to their role as mothers”
(National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019, n.Art. 135).

In the following Articles from Articles 136 to 142 of Chapter 10 of the Labour Code, the Government recognizes women's employment rights and imposes responsibilities on employers to ensure gender equality in all stages of employment including recruitment, arrangement of jobs and work, training, working hours, rest breaks and holidays and wage rates. Women's opinions must be taken into consideration during the decision-making process of matters relevant to their rights and interests. Considering the natural characteristics which women possess, the Government lays down criteria relating to standard working conditions and restrictions in employment, and confers specific responsibilities on employers to arrange facilities specialized for women to protect women's reproductive health and pregnancy, to guarantee women's jobs and other labour rights before and after maternity leave, and to encourage the construction and facilitation of facilities supporting women being mothers and raising children.

Facing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic with dangerous new strains and high levels of impact, according to the proposal of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Government has rapidly formulated a policy on measures to support people in difficulty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the Government passed Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP on 09th April 2020 (as later amended by Decision 154/NQ-CP dated 19th October 2020) which is expected to make a practical contribution to protecting workers, especially female workers, from the detrimental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to this Resolution, employees, working under the labour contract regime and compelled to suspend the labour contracts or take unpaid leave for one month or more because businesses are facing difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic without revenue or financial resources for salary payment, are financially supported by the Government by the amount of VND 1.8 million (equivalent to USD 78)/person/month. The support period, promulgated from 01st April 2020, does not exceed a period of three months, is calculated from the actual time of the labour contracts' suspension or the beginning of the unpaid leave, and conducted on a monthly basis depending on the actual situation of the epidemic (Government of Vietnam, 2020, n.Clause 1 Section II).

In addition, employees whose labor contracts or work contracts are terminated but are not eligible for unemployment benefits, and employees who do not have a labor contract and lose their jobs are supported by VND 1 million (equivalent to USD 43)/person/month on a monthly basis depending on the actual situation of the epidemic but not exceeding 3 months. The valid duration is from April to June 2020. (Government of Vietnam, 2020, n. Clause 4 Section II).

In addition, the Government also advocates tax reduction for businesses when employing many female workers (accounting for 30-50% of employees), personal income tax is reduced in proportion to the actual amount of extra money spent on female employees. Particularly for workers who are serving on the front lines of the epidemic, including medical facilities, field hospitals, and concentrated isolation areas (mostly women), the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor has decided to provide financial supports from VND 10 - 50 million/unit (equivalent to about USD 450 - 2100). According to Decision 2606/QĐ-TLĐ on emergency support for union members and employees affected by the Covid-19 epidemic during the 4th outbreak from 27th April 2021, employees in the area with labor

relations (including enterprises, units without a trade union) who are F0 are being treated for illness, do not violate the provisions of the law on epidemic prevention and control, receive maximum support. 3 million VND/person. Union members who are cadres, civil servants and F1 officials who have difficult circumstances must undergo medical isolation for 21 days at a concentrated isolation place under a decision of a competent state agency (not applicable to the form of medical treatment). Isolating at home, accommodation, business), does not violate the provisions of the law on epidemic prevention and control, the maximum support level is VND 1.5 million (equivalent to USD 65)/person.

V. Recommendations

Covid-19 is a crisis tremendously causing adverse impacts on different spheres of socio-economic development and worsen existing social issues which have yet to be tackled such as gender inequality in Vietnam. Evidenced by the statistics, the gender gap in employment in Vietnam has been widened due to the impacts of the pandemic. In light of the SDGs, with the aim of “leaving no one behind”, the Vietnamese Government should consider the status quo of female workers amidst the pandemic to come up with solutions to comprehensively address the existing issues.

To continue to better protect the rights of workers in general and female workers in particular in the face of the impact of the covid pandemic on employment and income, the authors propose the following recommendations:

First, the Government should urgently issue a resolution on measures to support people facing difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic to create a legal basis for financial support for female workers who have lost their jobs and lost their jobs and women workers in the informal sector. At the same time, promote the connection between supply and demand in the labor market, and activities to support job search for female workers. Specifically, ministries, branches and localities need to create conditions to continue to remove difficulties for production enterprises; in which, focusing on reforming processes and procedures so that businesses can access simple, convenient and timely support policies to stimulate the economy, as well as demand for labour.

Second, the Government should continue to implement synchronously and effectively appropriate mechanisms and policies, especially in finance, currency and social security to support people, businesses and employees, especially small and medium enterprises overcome the difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic, quickly recover and develop socio-economically. Implement the policy of exempting and reducing some tax obligations for a number of fields and subjects suffering heavy damage due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

Third, the Government should strengthen solutions to directly support workers who are not protected by the social safety net (informal workers), step up the implementation of unemployment insurance payment with the group of unemployed workers participating in social insurance; and strengthen vocational retraining and support unemployed workers to do other jobs.

Fourth, the State needs to develop policy responses to cope with potential job losses and a sharp increase in unemployment due to the impacts of the Covid-19 epidemic. This will create the initiative for state agencies to deal with the employment needs of the unemployed workforce in general and female workers in particular.

Fifth, continue to implement programs and strategies for gender equality and women's empowerment in different areas of life; gradually eliminate the gender gap in decision-making jobs/positions in society and the family; at the same time, strengthen campaigning activities to eliminate gender stereotypes so that women are truly empowered and have opportunities to develop in life.

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Addressing the Normative Gaps in “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness”

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Abstract:

*For this presentation, I will be focusing on an episode from the television series *Degrassi: Next Class*. In the *Degrassi Franchise*, *Degrassi: Next Class* is the fifth series. Although *Degrassi* is a Canadian television series, *Degrassi: Next Class* is interesting as Netflix became an online network for the show, leading to an increase in viewers. The episode, “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness,” focuses on three themes: self-pleasure or masturbation, feminism, and self-medicating. While these are important issues that need addressing amongst teenagers, each episode's length is only 23 minutes, which is not nearly enough time to address the three themes adequately. For this paper's purpose, I argue that hegemonic reception practices in theatre - or specifically television - and feminism, are limiting and isolating for audience members as the onus is placed on viewers to understand under-developed issues. By hegemonic reception practices, I am referring to the normative viewing practices in theatre, which consist of an act, an actor, and a spectator who draws supposedly intended conclusions. To support my argument, I will be presenting three points. First, the simultaneous combination of nonverbal and verbal elements facilitates the potential for the viewer to miss an aspect addressed. Second, introducing and presenting viewers to timely or pressing - and sometimes feminist - issues presumes some prior awareness of the subject. Third, television rooted in realism allows young viewers to learn about various social issues in an accessible manner; however, these issues become less informative when a limited screen time contains too many messages. Overall, I hope to identify and address the gap in reception practices in Canadian television in hopes of furthering the feminist educational project by bringing awareness to the uninformative blanks left unaddressed in realist drama.*

Keywords: *Feminism, Canadian Television, Gender, Reception*

Introduction

For this presentation, I will be focusing on an episode from the television series, *Degrassi: Next Class*. In the *Degrassi Franchise*, *Degrassi: Next Class* is the fifth series. Although *Degrassi* is a Canadian television series, *Degrassi: Next Class* is unique as Netflix became an online network for the show which led to an increase in viewers. With this network change, *Degrassi: Next Class* gained a US and international audience. My focus today will be on the episode, “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness.” Shortly, I will provide a brief summary of this episode for those who are new to *Degrassi* before I address my argument. But before I get into the summary, I want to share a clip, so everyone has an idea of the episode and the performances in *Degrassi: Next Class*. I also want to note that this clip is a promo, created as a means of giving the viewer insight for the next week's episode. *Degrassi* does not have trailers, so this was the best clip to provide you with an overall idea of the episode (see “*Degrassi: Next Class: #Butthatsnoneofmybusiness: Family Channel Promo*” for reference). Building off of the video clip, “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness,” focuses on three themes: self-pleasure or masturbation, feminism, and self-medicating. The 23-minute episode presents a debate over the definition of a ‘feminist’ and why someone, particularly a girl like the character Maya, should identify as a feminist. The show also illustrates a girl, Lola, learning to, as stated in the episode description, “love herself” through her close girl-friends and a doctor (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016). Additionally, the episode displays a creative writing student, Miles, who self-medicates for his anxiety under the guidance of his significant other with medication given to him and stolen from a girls’ locker room.

I know what you all might be thinking, those are important issues that need addressing amongst teenagers; however, 23 minutes is not a very long time to adequately address those three themes. I would have to agree. Taking into account the 1-minute theme song, and 1-minute of credits, the audience is left with 21 minutes to grasp the core messages presented regarding self-pleasure or masturbation, feminism, and self-medicating. For this presentation, I argue that hegemonic reception practices in theatre - or specifically television - and feminism, are limiting and isolating for audience members as the onus is placed on viewers to understand under-developed issues. By hegemonic reception practices, I am referring to the normative viewing practices in theatre which consist of an act, an actor, and a spectator who draws supposedly intended conclusions. To support my argument, I will be presenting three points. First, the simultaneous combination of nonverbal and verbal elements facilitates the potential for the viewer to miss an aspect addressed. Second, introducing and presenting viewers to timely or pressing - and sometimes feminist -issues presumes *some* prior awareness of the subject. Third, television that is rooted in realism allows young viewers to learn about various social issues in an accessible manner; however, these issues become less informative when a limited screen time contains too many messages.

To help support my argument, I will be drawing on Gayle Austin's first chapter, paying particular attention to sections, "Why This Book? And How?" and "Stages of Feminist Criticism." As well, I will build off of the questions asked by Jill Dolan, in her text, "Lesbian 'Subjectivity in Realism.'" Finally, I will be referencing Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." Overall, I hope to identify and address the *gap* in reception practices in Canadian television in hopes of furthering the feminist educational project by bringing awareness to the uninformative blanks left unaddressed in realist drama.

First Point: Verbal and Nonverbal Expectations

My intrigue for this analysis began with Gayle Austin's statement, "Plays allow the reader and audience to visualize, to fill in blanks and gaps. They provide the frameworks for productions that can bring out many of the issues feminism finds pressing" (1990, p. 2). When reflecting on this statement, I asked myself, what happens when the audience is asked to fill in the gaps or blanks when there is an abundance of material, both verbal and nonverbal, shared in a short period? Is it possible to successfully inform an audience while leaving them the ability to make their own conclusions? I think most, if not all of us, would answer yes to this question. However, I would like to bring identity politics into this conversation. While it is possible to successfully inform an audience and leave them to form their own opinions, it is important to consider certain identity characteristics, like age, when we think through the previous question. Before I continue, I want to state that my goal here is not to talk down or underestimate youth. Instead, I want to consider how dominant reception practices place unfair expectations on the viewer to see, hear and ultimately understand the various content presented to them.

It is not a surprise that *Degrassi* targets teenagers. The Canadian Encyclopedia notes that *Degrassi: Next Class* was revived with generation Z or post-9/11 youth in mind (Mullen 2018). The series aimed to preform realist depictions of teens while simultaneously responding to current issues (Mullen 2018). The problem with the performances in episodes, such as "#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness," is that they incorporate several issues that become overwhelming as the audience is forced to understand the verbal and nonverbal elements while concluding on the importance of the subject matter. This understanding is not always straight-forward. As Sue Ellen-Case argues, to be able to understand a topic, you must be aware of the elements associated with it (2001, p. 148). For example, to understand the representation of feminism in television, one needs to know the history of feminism, the stigma surrounding the term, and the way this concept functions in a patriarchal society. In "#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness," feminists are presented as a diverse group of feminine presenting students. Maya is asked to perform for the feminist club during their upcoming event to have one of the boy's bathrooms changed to a girl's bathroom. Maya initially does not identify with the cause

but sees the event as a gig where she can play her music. After the feminist club leaves the room, Maya's friend comments about the gig opportunity, to which Maya responds, "But for the *feminist* club?" (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016). When Maya's friend asks her what her issue is with feminists, Maya states that "they get angry over everything little thing" (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016).

Rather than addressing the stigma surrounding the raging feminist or feminist killjoy as Sarah Ahmed would assert, the audience is left to, as Austin states, "fill in blanks and gaps" (1990, p. 2). Including a feminist club as part of the high school dynamic of *Degrassi High* is an excellent way of contributing to women's representation in television while simultaneously providing an outlet to discuss pressing feminist issues (Austin 1990, p. 2). However, viewers, learning about feminism, are not made aware of the many elements of feminism. The conversation with Maya leaves the audience to view feminism as more of a joke, or annoyance, than something relating to social justice. Additionally, the head of the feminist club is a Muslim girl. The importance and necessity of diversity in feminism receives no mention in the episode. As such, the history of feminism, and white feminism specifically, is never addressed. This representation is an example of a non-verbal element in the episode. The combination of this non-verbal element (a Muslim girl who is the head of the feminist club who is accompanied by two white girls, who the viewer can presume are also members of the club) and dialogue ultimately limit an audience's understanding of feminism.

Due to the topic of feminism not being fully developed, the viewer is left wondering what feminism is, who identifies as a feminist, and if being a feminist means, you must be angry. Later in the episode, Maya is asked a couple questions about if she thinks men and women should be paid the same amount when completing the same job, if she thinks boys and girls should have the same education, and if she has noticed how boys and girls use the washroom lately (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016). When Maya answers in support of these questions, she is then *told* that she is a feminist. Not only do the past presentations of feminism limit the audiences' understandings, but the checklist of questions for 'what makes a feminist' ultimately isolates viewers who might not adhere to the check-list. Specifically, I am referring to the non-verbal checklist that implies you must be a girl to call yourself a feminist, or as Maya states, "feel like" a feminist (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016). This description places *Degrassi's* representation of feminism in a gender binary which presents girls as needing to ascribe to feminist notions and men as the opposite of a feminist.

I want to take this analysis further by considering Austin's statement, "A feminist approach to anything means paying attention to women. It means paying attention when women appear as characters and noticing when they do not" (1990, p.1). Taking into account the progressions in feminism since Austin wrote her chapter, I want to pay attention to gender, and the gender identities that appear while noticing certain bodies that are absent. In *Degrassi's* debate over the definition of a feminist, the characters never discuss or present as any gender outside of the normative gender binary - cisgender men and cisgender women. This presentation ultimately isolates audience members who might identify as a feminist but feel as though they lack visual or verbal representation in the show. For example, gender queer individuals face marginalization due to their continued invisibility and defiance toward the gender binary. Additionally, boys, who might identify as a feminist ally, are not offered this ally option and are instead solely positioned as being against feminists and are told feminism is something boys must handle. The responsibility placed on teenage viewers to draw conclusions is extremely problematic in *Degrassi* as the content presented is limiting, and the character identities are isolating for anyone who does not ascribe to, understand, or agree with the performance on feminism.

I want to pause here for a moment, and ask you all to reflect on the following question: When did you first learn about the term feminist or feminism? For me, it was in high school. I learned about

feminism as a theoretical lens, rather than a social justice movement. If, Ellen-Case's argument is correct, and there needs to be an understanding of the elements associated with a topic to understand its theatrical representation, then presuming a viewer contains a prior awareness of timely or pressing issues negates essential aspects in a discussion. For instance, during the time of the women's march, writers of *Degrassi* might presume teenage girls have a prior understanding of feminism. I am not arguing that teenagers do not have an awareness. Instead, assuming an audience has some previous knowledge of a subject allows for the withholding of critical elements in the performance.

Second Point: Pressing Issues and Prior Awareness

Another theme in the episode shows Miles struggling with anxiety which he identifies as being a result of his father. Miles feels he is unable to cope with his emotions, so he seeks medication from his girlfriend. When his best-friend catches Miles taking unprescribed medication, he warns Miles of the dangers of self-medicating and tells him to stop. Later on in the episode, Miles goes through withdrawal as he flushed all of his medication "cold turkey" (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016). Rather than seek help for his anxiety, Miles calls his girlfriend and demands more medication. His girlfriend has not filled her prescription so to hold Miles over they sneak into the girl's locker room during gym class to look for anxiety medication. This search is viewed as a sure thing after all, "Girls in grade ten gym, name a group of people with more anxiety?" (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016). Towards the end of the episode, Miles' mother finds out about the pills and unsuccessfully searches for them during which time Miles accepts that he will be a "disappointment" (#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness 2016).

The issue with the portrayal and representation of anxiety in "#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness" is that it presumes girls, grade ten girls to be specific, are the main group struggling with anxiety. Miles' character also presents the issue of self-medication, but the episode never addresses alternative ways to deal with anxiety or people to seek out to for help. While presuming the audience has some awareness of anxiety and the goal of this episode, I assume, is to create a conversation surrounding mental health, the realist depictions of Miles' self-medication never discuss, hints at, or displays a healthy way of responding to stress and anxiety. As Jill Dolan introduces in her work on lesbian realism, we need to consider the performance's readability which is inevitably complicated (1990, p. 41). Furthermore, as Dolan argues, we need to question the effectiveness of realism as a political strategy (1990, p. 41). If *Degrassi* is attempting to create a conversation surrounding mental health by presenting a realist depiction of Miles as a self-medicating teenager with anxiety, then it must consider the viewer's response to this topic.

The issue of mental health is never verbally addressed in the episode. Instead, in the last scene, Miles ingests more pills. As a result, the viewer never gains an adequate understanding of the issue. The viewer is made aware of the problem but is left to fill in the gaps on how to properly deal with the problem, either personally, with a friend, family member, or peer. If *Degrassi* wants to respond to current issues and create a conversation about mental health, then *Degrassi* should place that conversation within the 21 minutes of screen time, rather than presuming its realism's efficacy will provide enough of a representation to evoke social change (Dolan 1990, p. 41).

As Butler states, "the body *is* a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" (Butler 1990, p. 272). Taking Butlers statement into account, viewers, and teenage viewers especially, look at the bodies in television to make sense of issues. Butler's theorizations explain the enacted interpretations that are placed within preexisting directives in television episodes like "#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness" (1990, p. 277). If an audience follows hegemonic viewing practices that lead them to fill in the blanks throughout a performance, then the audience's interpretations are ultimately formulated out of their prior knowledge or instruction on a topic. As such, if the goal of "#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness" is to preform realist

depictions of teens while simultaneously responding to current issues, then the show must consider the ways that acting or acts bear meaning and shared experiences. However, this meaning, as Butler reminds us, is often concerning the taboo or social sanctions (1990, p. 272).

Third Point: Content vs. Time

Before I conclude this presentation, I briefly want to expand on the concept of time and realism in a performance. “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness” presents 21 minutes of screen time. 21 minutes is roughly the length of this presentation, give or take a couple minutes. Austin (1990) applies three stages to drama. First, working within the canon. Second, expanding the canon. Third, exploding the canon. *Degrassi* fits into the third stage and would be of interest as it presents dramatic concerns of realism by using non-verbal and verbal signs to resist dominant cultural narratives (Austin 1990, p. 18). However, these realist depictions only provide a glimpse of insight into an incorporated theme. In “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness,” the only arguably fully developed theme is self-pleasure. Lola learns about different tools, seeks guidance from friends and her doctor, reads the educational material, and confronts the double standard for masturbation amongst girls and guys, specifically illuminating the stigma for girls.

What I want to consider, in regard to the length of this episode, is what fascinated Austin. To be clear, I am referring to Austin's intrigue into what is left after a performance is over and forgotten (1990, p. 3). I want to build off of Austin's interest and ask: what becomes of the episode? What does an episode of *Degrassi* mean for teaching after the show has aired? The script and dialogue act as a blueprint for what the performance can be (Austin 1990, p. 3). However, when the script and dialogue leave gaps and do not fully address the incorporated themes, like self-medicating and feminism, what is left is a restricting maze for the audience to decipher, rather than a blueprint as Austin terms it. I want to note that I do not think that all short performances in television will inevitably be limiting and isolating to viewers, but rather, the amount of material shared within a timeframe needs to take into account the reception of viewers. As such, I argue it is more important to adequately address one theme, like self-pleasure, than try to incorporate many issues that are left undeveloped. As Dolan notes, the readability of the play is important in realism (1990, p. 44). The realist approach in “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness” is a great way of presenting on important issues that are often negated within dominant cultural narratives that view teenagers as being unequipped to handle “touchy” subjects. However, if too much material is placed within an episode, then realism fails to operate effectively, and the audience has the responsibility to decipher the intended purpose of the show.

Conclusion

Overall, I have argued that normative viewing practices for television can be isolating and limiting for audience members when ideas are incorporated but not fully developed. This argument is evident in the episode, “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness.” This is clear as verbal and nonverbal elements enable viewers to miss critical aspects about feminism, the incorporated issues presume some prior awareness on a subject, and the focus of three themes within a limited screen time leaves feminism and self-medicating to be underdeveloped. Reception practices in television must be taken into consideration if we hope to further address the feminist and liberal educational project by bringing awareness to the uninformative blanks left in realist drama. *Degrassi*'s longevity and success demonstrate the impact of a show. As *Degrassi* is one of the few popular Canadian television series, it is important to address the blanks left unaddressed in episodes like “#ButThatsNoneOfMyBusiness” if we intend on advancing Canadian television. What is left, after the episode has aired, is an understanding that students face challenges in their daily lives. Fully addressing these issues can ignite discussion and awareness that Canadian television desperately needs.

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Impacts of Confucianism on ensuring gender equality in Viet Nam: challenges and developments

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Abstract

Viet Nam is one of the Southeast Asian countries heavily influenced by Confucianism, which is characterized by the male chauvinism that undervalues the role of women in the family and society. However, the history of Viet Nam marked many significant changes, in the course of which Confucianism was replaced by liberal ideas from the West and Marx's socialist ideology. With the development of modern society, feminism, liberal ideas, and international standards on human rights strongly influence the development trend of Viet Nam. All these factors coexist in Vietnamese society and create conflicts to a certain extent.

From analyzing the influence of Confucianism in the course of Vietnamese history, the paper shows that Confucianism no longer has much influence in Vietnamese society today. Confucianism hardly affects the formulation of policies and laws on gender equality, but there are still specific Confucian influences in practice, especially the male chauvinism in the family and gender inequality in economics, labor, and workspace. From that, the paper points out the shortcomings and measures to promote the role of women in Viet Nam.

Keywords: *Confucianism, gender, equality, Viet Nam.*

Introduction

Among Southeast Asian countries, Viet Nam is a country heavily influenced by Confucianism, characterized by the male chauvinism, underestimating the role of women in the family and society. However, the history of Viet Nam marked many significant changes, in the course of which Confucianism was replaced by liberal ideas from the West and Marx's socialist ideology. With the development of modern society, feminism, liberal ideas, and international standards on human rights strongly influence the development trend of Viet Nam. All these factors coexist in Vietnamese society and create conflicts to a certain extent. So, how does Confucianism still affect modern Vietnamese society? How will gender equality be ensured and developed in Viet Nam?

This paper will begin by identifying the values of Confucianism; its impacts on awareness of the position of women in Viet Nam. The following sections will focus on analyzing the reconciling between feminism and Confucianism, thereby clarifying the extent of Confucian influence to formulate gender equality policies and laws and in practice in Viet Nam. Furthermore, the paper's conclusion will continue to discuss the need to change awareness on the position of Vietnamese women to improve gender equality in Viet Nam.

Method and Materials

This study uses a qualitative approach to collect and analyze literature to clarify the role and influence of Confucianism on gender equality. The qualitative methods provide appropriate tools for

exploratory research. The use of this method helps the researcher gain insight into the content to be studied. In addition, the authors use data collected and examined in documents, books, and articles, especially of international organizations. The authors also combine research through exchange and consultation with experts, researchers, and practitioners to get different perspectives and critical thinking on gender equality.

Results and Discussion

1. Confucianism and the position of women in Viet Nam

Historically, it can not be denied that Confucianism had a strong influence on some Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Viet Nam. In particular, Confucianism impacts gender equality in society because it emphasizes the importance of men and underestimates the role of women in the family and society (Madsen 2008).

Core Values of Confucianism

Confucianism is one of the primary philosophical schools of ancient China, founded by Confucius, which appeared in the Spring and Autumn period - Warring States (551 BC - 3 BC), of the Zhou dynasty (Li 2000; Kim and Sohn 2014). In the context of society's turbulence and challenges, Confucius explained socio-political issues and pointed out measures to address and re-establish the stability of society; His ideas were later used to govern the country during the feudal period of China (Littlejohn 2017).

According to Confucianism, "The Three Fundamental Bonds" and "The Five Constant Virtues" are the moral, political, and social standards that men must follow. The Three Fundamental Bonds presents three main relationships in society: the king-servant, father-son, and husband-wife relationship, in which the superior (king-father-husband) must have the responsibility of loving and caring, inferior (servant-son-wife). In contrast, the inferior has the responsibility to respect, be filial, and serve the superior. According to Confucius, if such a relationship can be maintained, the family will be happy, the king-people relationship is harmonious, and the country will be stable and peaceful (Ma et al. 2016). "The Five Constant Virtues" are the things that men must have in life, including benevolence (learn how to be human; love everyone and all living things), righteousness (behave in a way that is fair, right, and righteous), propriety (respect and gentleness with everyone), wisdom (knowledge, knowing how to see, distinguishing right from wrong, good from evil), and trustworthiness (trust, sincerity, keeping promises). A society that, according to Confucius, maintains "The Three Fundamental Bonds" and "The Five Constant Virtues" is a peaceful, prosperous society (Nawrot 2020).

In addition, women in society must follow "Three Obediences" and "Four Virtues." Accordingly, the "Three Obediences" are three things a woman must follow, specifically as follows: Obeying her father before her marriage, her husband when getting married, and being submissive to her son in widowhood. The "Four Virtues" refer to four basic standards of women, including diligent work (doing well, taking care of all the arrangements), good appearance (knowing how to be beautiful), speech (speaking politely, gentle), well-behaved (modest, respectful). The "Three Obediences" and "Four Virtues" are the essential Confucian norms of moral education used to evaluate women. Therefore, the limitation of Confucianism is that women are not considered independent individuals but are always dependent and submissive to the man in their families (Kim 2017).

In the past, "The Three Fundamental Bonds" and "The Five Constant Virtues" became the moral foundation for social and family behaviors, such as the way of governing to "rule the family," "rule the state." In the family, the decision-making power belongs to the father and the husband, creating the idea

of male chauvinism: "one boy means one, ten girls mean none." Therefore, it is decisive for a woman to have a son because the son is determined to be the person who lives with and takes care of his parents when they are old and sick and performs ancestor worship. A family without a son is a tragedy, especially in rural areas (Sekiguchi 2003; Sung 2003). In addition, the "Three Obediences" and "Four Virtues" set out the principles of women's behavior, according to which women must obey their father's instructions while at home; have the duty to take care of their husbands and parents-in-law when getting married; while they are in a subordinate position to men and have less autonomy. It can be said that Confucianism has contributed to the oppression of women, even though oppression of women is not the primary purpose of Confucianism. With the underestimation of the role of women, Confucianism considers women, in any form, a part of a different and lower social class than men (Mun 2015; Sung & Pascall 2014).

Confucianism views on the position and role of women in Viet Nam

In Viet Nam, throughout several thousand years of history, Vietnamese feudal dynasties used Confucianism to rule the country; that has had a substantial impact on Viet Nam's economic, political, and cultural life. However, the history of Viet Nam has seen more changes, leading to the disruption of Confucianism than any other Southeast Asian country. With the trend of globalization and integration, countries have developed and changed to ensure equal rights for everyone, in which the role of women is increasingly affirmed by society. Viet Nam is also in that trend so that Vietnamese women do not have to stay at home like before; they participate in social works and have equal status in society.

Confucianism heavily influences the feudal system in Viet Nam, so it is characterized by valuing men above women, arguing that men rule over women, and disregarding the role of women. In the feudal society, men had an important position and decisive voice in the family and society; Women were mostly stay-at-home, spending most of their lives taking care of their families (Gupta M et al. 2003). From the Confucian point of view, the family is the basis of society, but women's important position and role in the family are not recognized. Some terms used by Confucius to describe the above practice can be given: "Tại gia tòng phụ" (subordinate to the father when young), "Xuất giá tòng phu" (subordinate to the husband when married), "Phu tử tòng tử" (subordinate to the sons when widowed), "Trai anh hùng năm thê bảy thiếp" (a hero can have five to seven wives). These ideas have created discrimination in Viet Nam's feudal society, underestimating the role of women, causing them to suffer gender inequality. Male-dominant thoughts have not been completely erased in modern society (Van 2019).

Vietnamese feudalism began to collapse and was replaced by colonial rule when the French arrived in Viet Nam. With its strengthening of the patriarchal family, Confucian thought was challenged by education imported from France and the women's movement, which emerged primarily in the early 20th century. Liberal ideas helped gradually reduce stereotypes and discrimination against women that they suffered in the feudal period.

After the August Revolution in 1945, Viet Nam gained independence, officially recognized the equal rights of men and women, and helped women gain a new position in society. Moreover, with the war that occurred in 1945-1954 and 1954-1975, women went out, joined the war, on the front and in the back to support. Today, Vietnamese society has made remarkable development. Women are independent, have a balanced role in the family and society, are free from social barriers and stereotypes, and have many contributions to the socio-economic of the country. In particular, Marx's views on feminism contributed to the formation of feminism, primarily associated with revolutionary ideals. Women are no longer the ones responsible for taking care of the family (Duong 2001). Women and men are equal in sharing housework, educating children, and making important decisions together.

In addition, women actively participate in social work, business performance, and the political system (Quy 2013).

It can be seen that Vietnamese women today have an increasingly important position and are recognized by society. However, Confucian thought still exists in the community, especially in rural and mountainous areas, where social life is still difficult (UN Women 2015). Nevertheless, the general trend is that the more developed society, the more influential women play; They are half of the world, so they need to be valued and respected even more.

3. Reconciling Feminism and Confucianism?

If European countries are homogeneous in race, culture and religion, Asia is a "mixed hot pot." Asia is full of different races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. "Value Asia" is "value Asia" – or values in countries heavily influenced by Confucianism.

Confucianism has existed for too long enough to impose on the traditions and cultures of Asian countries conservative ideas and thoughts about the position and role of women. At the same time, the process of regionalization with the development of feminist movements blew a new wind on the value of equality in society. It creates a struggle and conflict between tradition and modernity, so-called "Asian values" and modern ideas of the feminist movement from the West. Even within the feminist movement itself, there are differences between Asian countries and where it is born. If feminist movements emerged to achieve political rights first in the western countries and then equality in economic, cultural, and social rights, then in Asia, some feminist movements are purely preoccupied with achieving a basic or minimal living standard.

Fung (2000) states that "Others have a few activists securing important positions in the political system, but their presence is more or less a sign or they are seen as representing other interests, the public declaration or market demand. The economic sustainability priorities of the feminist movements are reflected in many developing regions of Asia." In some cities of China, the feminist movement still actively puts women's jobs and economic autonomy at the top of the agenda, rather than fighting male tyranny by demanding participation in politics more broadly. It shows that there seems to be a separation of the economic sphere from the political sphere in the Asian context. This practice is creating different interpretations of the fundamental goal of feminism, and there seems to be an "avoidance" of feminist claims with traditional Confucian values in Asia (Fung 2000).

Viet Nam is not the only country in Asia making efforts to reconcile tradition and feminism. When Western liberal thought and feminism spread to Asian countries, along with the development of the economy, the movement of society in the context of globalization, Asian countries need to adapt between tradition and the influence of feminism. It is necessary to deal with the incompatibility between feminism and "Asian values" to a certain extent. Viet Nam also has to face the above problem, reconciling Confucianism with feminism in the country's specific context. Retaining the positive features of Confucianism and promoting new ideas of feminism can be an excellent way to help them work together in social life. However, it is not easy to reconcile in the actual and cultural context of Viet Nam.

In essence, women are the subject of the debate about "Asian values" through their motherhood. As PuruShotam (1998) says, "Asian-ness is importantly located in the normal family, the core of which is patriarchal." Such a family structure and form is in antiquity, is Chinese, ageist, sexist, and retains a powerful morality (PuruShotam 1998). However, feminism should be developed parallel and not too closely tied to the "Asian values" debate.

4. Confucianism and the formulation of gender equality policies and laws in Viet Nam

Since the independence claim in 1945, the Vietnamese government has constantly made efforts to reform the legal system and ratified international treaties on human rights to create a legal framework for discrimination against women in all fields. In formulating and implementing policies and laws, gender equality is always a priority for the Party and State (Loan & Laura 2017).

Viet Nam was one of the first countries to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 and ratified it in 1982. Over the past decade, the country has made considerable strides in reforming its legal and policy framework to guarantee equality and non-discrimination between women and men in line with CEDAW.

The Law on Gender Equality adopted in 2006 is considered landmark legislation in this regard. It defines gender equality and gender-based discrimination for the first time and sets out specific measures for achieving gender equality. The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, passed in 2007, is another significant legislation acknowledging violence against women by partners as a punishable offense. In addition to the enactment of these laws that specifically concern women's rights, notable efforts are being made to ensure that gender equality is promoted in all other laws. For example, the revised Labour Code, which came into effect in May 2013, added new provisions on non-discrimination and women's labor rights such as the prohibition of sexual harassment, the extension of maternity leave to six months, official recognition of the rights of paid domestic workers, and equal pay for work of equal value. The principle of equality is now enshrined in Article 26 of the 2013 Constitution: "Male and female citizens have equal rights in all fields. The State shall adopt policies to guarantee the right to and opportunities for gender equality" (UNFPA 2020).

It can be seen that Vietnamese laws are primarily consistent with international human rights standards. Special measures to promote women's equality are consistent with CEDAW as these initiatives seek to ensure women enjoy substantive equality (similar outcomes) as men do. The laws are also consistent with awareness-raising (information, education, and communication) obligations in CEDAW. However, some issues such as indirect discrimination and gender identity are not addressed.

The question is whether the provisions on gender equality can be translated into practice, thereby leading to achievements in promoting women's equal rights. The positive values of Confucianism that always put the family at the center of life will continue to be promoted in modern society. The conservative and stagnant ideas should be replaced by more modern values on human rights, including women's equal rights.

Viet Nam has indeed made significant progress over the last few decades in improving social life in general and reducing gender disparities in particular. Viet Nam is considered a country that has closed the gender gap the fastest in the past 20 years and is regarded by the United Nations as a bright spot in terms of gender equality in implementing the Millennium Development Goals. However, it is true that gender prejudice is still a problem that exists every day and is deeply rooted in the ideology of Vietnamese society for thousands of years. Of course, the current trend in Viet Nam is pushing the network further on gender campaigns to eliminate the gender gap in society, although this is not easy to achieve. However, international commitments on human rights are an international obligation and an essential need of countries in global integration (World Economic Forum 2020).

5. Influence of Confucianism on the implementation of gender equality in Viet Nam

It is undeniable that Confucianism has specific influences on the position of women in society. However, with the development of international standards on human rights, Viet Nam has changed and made many achievements in ensuring human rights and ensuring gender equality. The question is to what extent Confucianism still affects the promotion and protection of gender equality in Viet Nam.

Male chauvinism in the family

Despite remarkable achievements, Viet Nam still has a male-dominated ideology in sharing household chores and participation in socio-economic life (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2019). The happiness of a family is built on three basic foundations: economic development, raising children, and creating, maintaining, and developing good relationships with the community. Although women have increasingly asserted their roles and positions in the family's economic development, the idea that "men build houses, women make homes" still exists in modern society (UNFPA 2020).

Making a change in gender equality is still challenging to the Vietnamese government. The country has made significant achievements in gender equality but remains far from full equality as women's appearance to be dedicated and willing to sacrifice one. Women continue to be unpaid workers at home. The position of women in society is affected by socio-economic status resulting from discrimination between men and women. Plus, gender discrimination, along with Patriarchy in Confucianism, has been rooted from many years ago. Women need to work hard in both fields: family and society. They spend hours at workspace while being back home, and they still have the responsibility of being a wife, a mother, a helper, a financial manager, and a tutor. Such household things have wasted the amount of time and effort, and as a result, women have no time for self-care. It leads to the widening gaps between men and women in the society; therefore, promoting the idea that women can assume all responsibilities and perform well at the same time in society and the family can have the opposite effect, which contributes to reinforcing gender stereotypes (Vu & Pham 2021).

Gender inequality in economics, labor, and workspace

The participation of women in many fields, especially in the labor market, has increased significantly in recent years (World Bank 2012). Vietnam is one of the Southeast Asian countries with a relatively high female labor force participation rate in the labor market, about 70.9% in 2019. This rate was 47.2% globally, and the average rate of the Asian – pacific was 43.9%. There was a gender gap in the labor participation rate; however, the average rate was only 9.5% during the past decade compared to the ASEAN and global. Data from the 2018 labor force survey showed that nearly half of females chose not to participate in the labor market for "personal or family-related reasons"; meanwhile, only 18.9% percent of males (ILO 2021). Ms. Valentina Barucci – ILO Viet Nam's labor economist, cites: "Women inequality in terms of job quality and career goal also comes from their dual responsibility." Women spend twice as much as men do housework (Tuoitre 2021). The ILO (2021) also showed that women spent an average of 20.2 hours per week cleaning up the house, wash clothes, cooking, and doing other household jobs while men only have 10.7 hours for these jobs; moreover, nearly one over five of men who took the survey never spend times to do house job. Thus, despite having a tremendous female labor force participation rate, women in Viet Nam still face unequal opportunities in the labor market.

According to Dr. Chang Hee Lee - Director of ILO Viet Nam: "One of the main causes of inequality in the labor market is the traditional roles that women are expected to play, and social norms reinforce these expectations" (Tuoitre 2021). Unequal distribution of family responsibilities has a substantial impact on gender disparities in labor force participation rates. That is especially true for countries like Viet Nam, where Confucian thought exists and influences to a certain extent in social life (Vu & Yamada 2020). Viet Nam Labour Code 2019 aims to ensure the opportunity to narrow the gender gap between men and women by tackling gender equality. For example, bridging the retirement age gap or removing restrictions on women's participation in the workplace are changing effectively. Furthermore, the most challenging task that takes more effort to complete is changing behaviors and mindsets for all men and women in the Viet Nam labor market (Hanoitimes 2020, Tuoitre 2021). The

thought of male chauvinism and underestimating women, influenced by Confucianism, still creates specific barriers for women in Vietnamese society (Grosse 2015).

Conclusion

In contrast to many areas where much progress has been made, inequality against women persists in some areas, such as inequality in economic activities, gender inequality in income, and gender inequality in doing housework and taking care of the family. Progress in these areas is sometimes hard to see, even though Viet Nam has achieved positive results. So what is the cause? In addition to reasons related to institutions and policies, the convergence of many factors that prevent progress, the perception of women's status over many generations is a factor that has a strong impact and is not easily removed in a short time. Gender inequalities are long-lasting when deeply rooted in long-standing gender functions and social norms, such as who is responsible for taking care of housework or what is "acceptable" for women and men to learn, do, and desire. This inequality tends to recur from generation to generation (World Bank 2012).

In Eastern culture, women are considered to be the main ones responsible for household affairs. This pattern is shown more clearly after women get married and give birth. Regardless of income, women have to take charge of most housework and take care of the family, while men are mainly responsible for income. Even if women spend more time working outside than their husbands, they are still primarily responsible for taking care of the family and doing housework. That leads to disparities between women and men in time spent, limiting women's opportunities, affecting their leisure time and happiness (UN Women 2016).

What should be done to improve the situation and prepare for the future of gender equality? It is worth noting that the top priorities in policy development must be identified, especially the following four sectors: Reducing the gender gap related to human resources; Eradicating the income and productivity gap between women and men; Narrowing the right of opinion and expression between women and men; and Limit the repetition of gender inequalities across generations, whether they are inequalities in capacity, economic opportunity or roles (World Bank 2012).

In order to promote women's participation in today's social life, removing barriers, especially barriers of perception, culture, and customs, is an essential key to unleashing women's potential as they are a vital factor for the development of society. Women's second-class status and inequalities of opportunity have not historically been permanent. In removing these obstacles, on the one hand, it is necessary to change social relationships, social prejudices and build political institutions, an authoritative and progressive legal framework. On the other hand, it is necessary to change women's perspective, psychology, and actions. Women must overcome themselves, meet the requirements of modern society, and contribute to the development of society. The goal of a just society for women is not only for women but also for the sustainable development of the nation in the twenty-first century. This goal cannot be achieved without changing the gender prejudice of men in the family and society. A just society for women is a new height in awareness and implementation of social justice today. Changing perceptions and unfair behavior towards women requires drastic reforms in leadership and social management to achieve the goal of social justice.

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